From East to West: Learning, Knowledge and Personal Development through Migration and its Impact upon Return
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DECLARATION

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This PHD has marked one of the most significant rites of passage in my young life. I am so grateful for the opportunity it afforded me, both in terms of my professional and personal growth. Although it has been a long and arduous 4-year journey, I do not regret a day of it. How could I? For this Doctorate, as much as it was a research endeavor and thesis, was also a vessel that allowed me to expand my mind. I feel so privileged by the opportunity offered to me by the University of Surrey. Thank you first and foremost to the institution for granting me the faculty scholarship.

Without this generous material support, this journey would never have been possible. I am forever changed as a result of this process. It equipped me with tools and knowledge as well as words and practice. Seemingly endless at times, with draft after draft, chapter after chapter, circulated in flux between my supervisors and I. So many words and thoughts, that never made it into this final copy. But words and knowledge that have left their imprint and will forever alter my destiny.

This Doctorate also opened before me whole new worlds. These have led to opportunities that I could not have imagined, when I first began as a timid and curious student in 2013. It was a clarity which perhaps only truly set in, during the fieldwork process, when I spent a good year getting re-acquainted with my birth city. A capital and country my parents and I fled from as political refugees’ years earlier. It was then, crossing the Iron Curtain, that my own migration first began. Since, it has expanded into living, working and studying across 4 continents and 9 countries.

But it was the 72 voices, and countless more, that shared their stories, triumphs and tribulations with me during the fieldwork, that brought the countless migration theories to life. It was living in Slovakia, that I truly understood and finally saw the bigger picture behind this research. What began as a study of learning and knowledge, quickly expanded into what can only be expressed as a clash of civilizations and the transformation of a collective consciousness. Far over spilling the original research intention, I have since vowed to honor the knowledge the people of Slovakia have shared with me, and to continue researching and writing on this topic. Some of which will be commemorated in a soon to be released book.

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This is just the beginning...
Abstract

This research provided a theoretically-informed empirical exploration of the nature and significance of learning through the international migration experience. Furthermore, it explored how mobility contributes to the diffusion of new knowledge across socio-economic and national boundaries through return and circular flows. The context for the research was a post-communist, post-accession, transition economy located in the heart of Europe (Slovakia), but once part of the former Soviet-Bloc.

This study also provided the context to gauge the extent to which the tenet of ‘freedom of movement’, in the form of circular East to West migration flows, contributed to professional and personal development. The focus was the formal and informal learning made possible through the international migration experience. The researcher employed face to face interviews to gather in-depth qualitative data. A sample of 30 returned migrants were interviewed, supplemented by interviews with key informants from business, government and civil society sectors in Slovakia. In turn, four respondent groups were approached, which culminated with 72 study respondents in total.

The findings from the study revealed that international migration may be a context for accelerated learning, that contributes to professional but also personal development, in the form of hard and soft-skills acquisition, including key competencies such as enhanced confidence, independence and critical thinking. All of these attributes were identified to be in short supply in the post-communist labour market, and key to various transition issues, as addressed by the key informants.

Comparatively, this study built on the seminal work of Williams and Balaz (2008) on international migration and knowledge. These scholars argued that international migration is an important vehicle for the acquisition, and circulation, of tacit knowledge. Potentially migrants constitute sources of key know-how, in addition to acting as boundary spanning knowledge brokers, that help to connect regions and/or countries through their embedded and encultured knowledge of multiple contexts.

This study also built on Williams’ and Balaz’s (2008) theoretical perspectives, by focusing on international migration and knowledge, in addition to exploring the implications of this new learning on the individual. In the field of adult learning, knowledge is not just a brick by brick accumulation of information, but also highly personal. Therefore, knowledge is not just a process driven added-value for the individual, but may also be emancipatory. Therefore, this study explored how international migration can be a context for deep personal learning and not just professional knowledge acquisition. By applying Jack Mezirow’s (1991) transformative learning theory and linking the migration experience to a ‘disorienting dilemma’, this study concludes that international migration may contribute to transformative learning. The outcome can be the acquisition of a ‘more open, integrated and discerning’ meaning perspective.
WITHOUT FREE, SELF-RESPECTING AND AUTONOMOUS CITIZENS THERE CAN BE NO FREE AND INDEPENDENT NATIONS

- Vaclav Havel -
This study explores the role of learning, knowledge and personal development through international migration and return. More specifically, it examines how migration contributes to both professional and personal development, hereby conceptualized as instrumental and transformative learning. Furthermore, it examines how the corporal mobility of post-accession returned migrants contributes to the diffusion of such knowledge across political and socio-economic boundaries. Subsequently, the individual perspectives of the returned migrants are compared, to key-informants from business, government and civil society. Together they weave together an elaborate commentary on the skills, knowledge and contributions of returned migrants back into Slovakia. The four respondent groups allow for a more holistic and insightful understanding of how the tenet of freedom of movement, materialized in the form of East to West migration, contributes to brain training, and potentially brain gain through return mobility flows back East.

The relevance of this research is situated in the socio-historical context of the former Eastern Bloc and the Cold-War era of “political isolation and forcibly repressed spatial mobility” (Kaczmarczyk and Okolski, 2005: 6). EU membership has been a major ‘game changer’ in terms of liberalizing movement for Eastern European (EU-8) nationals. Essentially, before the dissolution of state communism, outmigration remained minimal. Those that illegally out migrated from the then Soviet invaded country registered at less than 1% of the Slovak population (Balaz and Kusa, 2012). Accordingly, “there was essentially no history of free migration between the Eastern and Western parts of Europe during the decades of separation of the ‘Iron Curtain’” (Zimmermann and Kahanec, 2009: 20).

Comparatively and in the post-war reconstruction era Western Europe began to experience a wave of mass-migration across the continent, as hundreds of thousands of labourers relocated from Southern to Northern Europe (King, 2002). However, Eastern European citizens were for the most part barred from travel, moreover, even after the collapse of the regime (1989) movement remained restricted – but this time in regards to the immigration policies of the recipient countries. Nevertheless, an increase in westward mobility was recorded. However, the largest wave of East to West flows occurred only after the 2004 EU-8 accession. This was a means whereby CEE nationals gained access to not only largely unrestricted mobility rights, but also barrier-free labour market access (although with some transition periods).

Consequently, human mobility, and circular and return migration play a key-role in transferring knowledge between Eastern and Western Europe (Williams and Balaz, 2008; Klagge and Klein-Hitpab, 2010). More specifically, migrants are potential boundary spanners (Tushman and Scanlan, 1981), that carry embodied, embrained, embedded and encultured forms of tacit knowledge across socio-economic contexts (Blacker, 2002). The capacity for knowledge transfers has been intensified not only by the political and economic merging of East and West (i.e. EU accession and Eurozone membership), but has been advanced by technological, organizational and infrastructural innovations, including low-cost airlines (Williams and Balaz, 2009).
These have all facilitated changes in the frequency and duration of mobility, creating opportunities for more intensive and immediate knowledge transfers (Dusczczyk, 2011; Zimmermann and Kahanec, 2009; Dobruszkes, 2009). In addition, globalization, the expansion of the knowledge-based economy, and the growing internationalization of labour forces has accelerated the need for learning and knowledge, as well as contributing to knowledge transfers and overspills. All the while, the internet has changed the need for face-to-face co-presence, and also the nature of networking (Amin, 2002).

Subsequently, Slovakia’s capital of Bratislava was selected as a case study for the purposes of this research, which investigated how the new knowledge acquired as a result of the international migration experience, was perceived and received from the perspectives of four respondent groups. More specifically it investigated the contribution that the return of skilled migrants makes in a post-communist, post-transition, newly ascended EU member country. Both in terms of their professional (instrumental learning) and personal (transformative learning) development. Furthermore, this study employed an intersectional analysis across a range of academic fields, which included: sociology, migration, social psychology, and management, with the aims to:

1. To explore the relationships between the theorizing of learning, knowledge, and knowledge transfers via migration.

2. To understand the significance of learning and knowledge acquisition as a result of mobility, in terms of how it contributes not only to professional but also to personal self-development.

3. To understand the motivations for return, and address the extent to which learning, knowledge and knowledge transfer inform these.

4. To identify the extent to which return migration facilitates knowledge transfer, and the diversification of the knowledge available to organizations.

5. To assess what are the barriers and facilitators in the knowledge transfer process? How far is knowledge and learning acquired elsewhere, transferable across socio-economic contexts through return migration?

The research methodology employed was a theoretically informed qualitative study, that employed an inductive approach, that was interpretivist (subjective) in orientation. The study was exploratory in nature, and one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were utilized to collect the primary data. In an effort to cross check the findings, and establish research credibility, a total of four respondent groups were employed. Where, the perspectives and statements of the migrants, the returnees, were compared and analysed in reference to the opinions of key-informants from business, government and civil society. The study goal was to
make a contribution to exploring and describing the specific experience of learning, knowledge, and knowledge transfers via East to West migration flows, in a post-accession freedom of movement European context.

Furthermore, the intended research contributions are as follows:

**Theoretical Contributions**

- This study contributed to theory building, in terms of exploring and elaborating on the relationships between learning, knowledge and knowledge transfer theories in the context of human mobility across the cycle of migration and return.

- This study linked research on knowledge management and transfer in organizations to studies of learning and knowledge transfer in migration. Furthermore, it innovatively linked transformative learning theory to the migration context.

**Empirical Contributions**

- Given that return migration is a relatively new phenomenon in the CEE context, this study explored the novelty and significance of knowledge transfers via return (and circular) migration following Slovakia’s accession to the European Union. Although there have been earlier studies of returned migrants (Balaz and Williams, 2004), these were completed in a different institutional context, and did not consider the role of the firm.

- Currently, there is a gap in the migration literature in terms of addressing firm level - managerial perspectives. This study addressed this, by comparing and contrasting the perceptions of migrants and managers, in an effort to better understand how knowledge is valued and received, in the context of return migration. This study is one of, and possibly, the first significant attempt to link studies of managers and migrants. Further complemented by additional interviews with key informants from civil society and the public sector.

- In addition, this study explored the individual value that migrants’ place on their learning and knowledge acquisition through international migration, and how this contributes to both their professional and personal self-development.
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Glossary and Abbreviations

CEE Central Eastern Europe
EC European Commission
EU European Union
FDI Foreign Direct Investment
IMF International Monetary Fund
NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO Non-Governmental Organization
OECD Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SME Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
UN United Nations
1.1 The purpose of the study
The purpose of this study was to explore how international migration contributes to learning and knowledge acquisition, focusing on how the mobility experience can enhance an individual’s knowledge base and contribute to both their professional and personal development. Moreover, the study explored knowledge transfer. It investigated the extent to which, and how, knowledge acquired in one context can be effectively transferred to another – via the corporal mobility of returned migrants, recognizing that it may be constrained as well. Thereby, it explored the extent to which East to West migration contributes to brain training, and later brain gain, when migrants return to their country of origin.

Returned migrants (returnees) formed the apex of this research project. This study sought to understand their perspectives and experiences, focusing on the role that learning, knowledge, and its transfer play, during the migration cycle. Nevertheless, King (2002) emphasizes that migration patterns can involve several ‘departure and return’ cycles (throughout an individual’s lifespan). He argued that the conceptualization of migration as a permanent - unidirectional phenomenon has been eclipsed by the emergence of new migration patterns. These are increasingly shorter, circular and more discontinuous across time and space. Migration trends following the expansion of the European Union have only confirmed these developments (Blanchflower et al., 2007; Favell, 2008b; Black et al., 2010).

Correspondingly, this research project was a theoretically-informed, empirically driven exploratory study that examined the dynamic of return migration and knowledge transfer. The significance of these knowledge influxes and their impact on the country of origin were analysed across four respondent categories, in an effort to gain insights into the phenomenon. Consequently, the individual perspectives of the returnees were compared to the organizational perspectives of the firm managers, as well those from government and civil society. Overall, the four respondent categories helped to diversify the data, increasing both the depth and the scope of the study, in addition to incorporating multiple layers for comparative analysis.

1.2 Presenting the research context

EU-8 accession and mobility
In May, 2004 Eastern European nationals acquired a new palette of political rights (Maas, 2007), when eight (8) former Eastern Bloc countries joined the European Union. This geographical expansion, also known as the eastern enlargement, represented the official political and
economic merging of East and West. Thereby altering past geopolitics (Cold War), and producing a newly united continent. Correspondingly, accession contributed to mass-scale mobility between Eastern and Western Europe, in what was termed “one of the most spectacular migratory movements in contemporary European history” (Kaczmarczyk and Okolski, 2008: 600).

Furthermore, the accession contributed to the emergence of new trans-European geographic mobility patterns. These were conditioned by the fact that only three (3) EU countries opened their labour markets to Eastern European nationals. Sweden, UK and Ireland were the first countries to provide them unrestricted labour market access. To emphasize, the U.K experienced its largest-ever influx of immigrants (migrants), while “Ireland was hit the hardest in proportion to its population, with an estimated 200,000 arrivals in a country of only 4 million” (Wagstyl, 2006). Moreover, both countries did not have large Eastern European immigrant populations before 2004, although the UK did have a larger Polish community following WWII. Nevertheless, the new mobility dynamics were also inspired by social networks and were circular, rather than unidirectional nature (Janta et al., 2011). This is because, post-accession migration flows took place in context of a shift in international migration towards more dynamic, short-term, circular, and return trajectories.

**EU-8 accession and employment**

European citizenship and the acquisition of political rights subsequently greatly reduced the ‘risks’ of migration. After May, 2004, and in succession to the transitory phasing period (which varied per EU country), Eastern European citizens were no longer required to go through embassies, visa queues, and health examinations to access the labour markets of their Western European counterparts. Subsequently, this eliminated the need for clandestine, irregular, or semi-legal migration strategies (Jordan and Duvell, 2003). Comparatively, Slovakia is the second largest contributor (after Poland) of EU-8 nationals living and working in the UK (Kurekova, 2011a). Approximately 10% of the country’s active labour force resides abroad, while roughly one third of the country’s university graduates out-migrate (Okólski, 2007; Kahanec, 2010; Kahanec and Kureková, 2016).

Furthermore, EU membership has enhanced the selection and quality of jobs made available to Eastern European migrants. This is partially attributed to the mutual education and skill recognition schemes mobilized by the E.U, but also in recognition to political rights. Accordingly, EU nationals living and working in another EU country are recognized as politically equal to native-born workers in terms of labour market access, and many benefits. Subsequently, these changes also have social implications; potentially they help to soften preconceived notions and stereotypes. Consequently, Eastern European nationals also have greater access to professional opportunities, as well as career upward mobility in other EU labour markets (Geddes, 2003). At the same time, this is not to make light of the massive and unexpected downward mobility the great majority of migrants experienced, to be more elaborately discussed in the following section (Markova and Black, 2007; Parutis, 2014; Rosso, 2013; Nowicka, 2014).

This is not to deny the fact that Eastern Europeans have worked in high skilled sectors in
Western European countries before 2004. However, the re-regulation of mobility within Europe has facilitated greater access to such opportunities. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge, that in reality - EU accession predominantly facilitated the mobility of low-skilled labourers. Moreover, empirical research confirms this point, illustrating that the great majority of EU-8 nationals working in the U.K are in fact employed in low-skilled service, hospitality, and manufacturing industries, but are not necessary low-skilled migrants (Anderson et al., 2006; Wills et al., 2006; Zaiceva and Zimmermann, 2008; Barrell et al., 2010; Janta et al., 2011).

EU-8 migrants have relatively high levels of education, when compared to the indigenous labour force. Scholars have observed that they experience gross employment and skill mismatches in Western European labour markets (Clark and Drinkwater, 2008). Drinkwater et al. (2009) found that Eastern European migrants earn the lowest of all immigrant groups in the UK. The vast majority collecting wages around the national minimum wage average at that time (approximately 6.00 GBP per hour). Furthermore, EU-8 migrants earn under half the earnings of migrants that come from English speaking countries (Kahanec et al., 2009). Therefore, although many Eastern European migrants are tertiary educated, as previously mentioned they are predominantly employed in low-skilled employment sectors. This raises important questions about learning and knowledge transfer.

**Mobility as an expression of freedom**

However, most importantly, it is critical to appreciate just how new the choice to ‘go’, (and ‘return’), truly is for Eastern Europeans. In the post-accession context, mobility is an expression of freedom - and it marks the first time that Eastern Europeans have attained the ‘green light’ to move as they please. Nonetheless, the transition towards freedom to movement was experienced more in terms of a gradient between the years of 1989-2004. Consequently, the metaphor of a traffic light is employed to illustrate the succession from lesser to greater access.

For example, the communist period could be classified as the ‘red light’ era, where movement to the West was almost completely restricted, by the totalitarian regime. Subsequently, the post-communist period saw the relaxation of outward mobility restrictions. Nevertheless, Eastern European nationals were dependent on the authorization of visas and work permits to go and live abroad. Hence, this period embodies the ‘yellow light’ phase. Finally, the post-accession era, embodies the ‘green light’ phase, whereby many post-Soviet Bloc nationals now have free and open labour market access to all EU member-states.

Nevertheless, some commentators argue that ‘choice’ in the migration context is a neoliberal construct (Mai, 2005). The question remains, to what extent do people really have choices, particularly when they are fleeing economically deprived regions? Furthermore, the systematic deskilling of tertiary educated Eastern Europeans in Western European labour markets brings attention to another dilemma (Favell, 2008b). Currently, substantial but uneven discrepancies continue to remain between their education levels and the nature of work they undertake (Pollard et al., 2008). Therefore, it can be argued that the verbiage of ‘choice’ should in fact be replaced with that of ‘decision’, in order to more accurately represent the structural limitations
that inform individual migrant agency.

However, in this case, it is important to consider the socio-historical implications of mobility freedom in the CEE context. Yes, migration is a decision that is conditioned by structural limitations. But, Eastern European nationals did not have the ‘choice’ to make such ‘decisions’ for themselves before 1989. Moreover, following the collapse of the regime, labour (and student) mobility was still restricted to varying degrees thereafter. In contrast, EU accession changed the playing field all together. Eastern European nationals now have the political freedom, via the tenet of freedom of movement, to choose mobility as an option. Therefore, I prefer to use the language of ‘choice’, in an effort to emphasize this distinction. Eastern European nationals now have the freedom to choose; their mobility is not denied to them by the regulatory frameworks of their country of origin, or by their EU country of destination.

Comparatively, I also argue that returnees are pioneers. Not only are they first generation to have access to freedom of movement, a stark contrast to the experience of their parents, but post-accession migrants also represent the first generation to return back to the former Eastern Bloc in critical mass. Currently, there is no mechanism that measures return migration in Slovakia; however, Balaz and Kusa (2012) observed that in 2009, following the world financial crisis, 60,000 returned migrants applied for unemployment benefits, citing another EU labour market as their place of prior employment.

It can be assumed that these statistics represents only a fraction of the real demographic. Nevertheless, they illustrate that return flows (in a country of 5.5 million) are occurring on a large scale. The significance of this return influx is all the more striking when compared to the Iron Curtain era of barred mobility. Consequently, returnees are breaking down preconceived notions, not only in terms of emigration being considered a unidirectional phenomenon, but also in terms of the benefits that Slovakia offers (i.e. why return?).

1.3 Knowledge and migration re-conceptualized

Furthermore, this thesis argues that international migration is a context for accelerated learning that contributes to new knowledge acquisition. Comparatively, the shift towards knowledge-based economies draws attention to the growing importance of knowledge. Knowledge is viewed as the key component to firm competitiveness (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995), and the underlying driver for productivity and economic growth (Malmberg and Maskell, 2002). However, to date, a substantial gap remains between the migration and knowledge management literatures (Williams, 2006). In general migration is viewed as a source for substitute human capital. However, it is rarely explored as a vehicle for new learning and knowledge acquisition. Nonetheless, management theorizations on knowledge, illustrate that knowledge is more than just information (Cowan et al., 2000). Moreover, despite difficulties in measurement, it is generally assumed that a great majority of knowledge is tacit (un-codified) and cannot be easily transferred through documents (Polanyi, 1967).
Comparatively, tacit knowledge is also socially situated; it is remarkably sticky in nature (Duguid, 2007). Consequently, human mobility is a highly significant means to acquire and transfer tacit knowledge across distances. Williams and Balaz (2008) argued that as migrants’ lives span transnationally, they gain familiarity between two or more socially situated environments, thereby functioning as potential knowledge brokers translating knowledge. Consequently, human mobility has significant implications for knowledge and learning, in addition to knowledge transfers which benefit “non-migrants in areas of origin and destination” (Williams, 2006: 604).

Furthermore, international migration not only contributes to instrumental learning, in terms of human capital, skills and tacit/ explicit knowledge acquisition, but also to transformative learning - via the development of emancipatory / critical knowledge. The latter contributes to individual perspective transformation, by offering the potential to become “critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships” (Kitchenham, 2008:109).

Consequently, by applying Mezirow’s (1971) theory of transformative learning to the migration context, I hope to illustrate how geographic mobility can contribute to deep learning and personal self-development. Likewise, Mezirow conceptualized learning according to two domains: instrumental and communicative. Instrumental learning embodies learning how to perform at something, while communicative learning entails learning how to understand what is being communicated. More specifically, learning how to think for oneself, instead of passively accepting the knowledge of others (banking model of education) (Freire, 1970).

1.4 Implications for brain training and brain gain

Building on the discussion above, it is evident that human mobility can play a key role in the knowledge transfer process. Consequently, this thesis re-conceptualizes the brain drain vs. brain gain debate towards one of brain re-distribution (Lowell and Findlay, 2002). Thereby, emphasizing the value of different types of migration patterns and their potential economic and human capital outcomes. Accordingly, East to West migration can provide a means for brain training, via exposure to new learning experiences, while contributing to brain gain through return and circular flows (Williams and Balaz, 2005). This is all the more significant in context of Central European countries, whereby, Eastern European migrants can represent agents of change, breaking down barriers at home and abroad.

Correspondingly, for a country such as Slovakia, that has become accustomed to losing its most talented and capable workforce via permanent emigration (brain drain), EU membership offers labour migrants more options. Subsequently, high skilled movers are simultaneously potentially able to acquire new training and knowledge in other countries, while (at least in the short term) alleviating unemployment rates back home (Balaz and Kusa, 2012). This benefits the sending country not only in terms of reducing the burdens on the state (high unemployment), but also through “the positive development dynamics initiated by the movement of talented individuals who circulate money and networks within the new Europe” (Favell and Nebe, 2009: 183).
Furthermore, it is implied that at some point these migrants will return home, thereby contributing to brain circulation, as they disseminate their new knowledge, talent and capital to the benefit of the East, and Europe as a whole.

Nevertheless, this view is countered by the argument that it is the most capable and talented individuals that out-migrated (Borjas, 1994), potentially resulting in tremendous human capital losses for the source country (Grubel and Scott, 1966). Furthermore, there is the possibility of non-return, particularly when highly skilled individuals integrate into the destination labour market, and effectively match their skills with appropriate employment (Salt, 1992a). Finally, addressing the social realities of deskilling and job tracking discussed above (Favell and Nebe, 2009), it is interesting to explore the value of this learning and new knowledge when the migrants return back East. But that poses further questions about the types of knowledge obtained in a number of arenas, and not only at work, and the economic value of these on return (Williams and Balaz, 2005).

In addition, the degree to which returning international Slovaks bring back knowledge and skills that is of value in a labour market where locals lack similar competencies, is analysed through the perspective of companies operating in Slovakia. Comparisons are sought in how the knowledge absorption capacity of local and foreign businesses inhibits the knowledge and skill transfer that returnees brings (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990). Evidently, the successful reintegration of return migrants is dependent on their positive reception in the economy, namely the companies that employ them. Which is why return migration does not always lead to positive return experiences. The lack of jobs available as well as the lack of positive feedback from employers and colleagues in the country of origin can lead to repeat out-migration. Post-accession migrating Slovaks, armed with international degrees and cosmopolitan capital, are not dependent solely on their domestic labour market. Their ameliorated migration competencies also make repeat migration easier and more accessible (Palovic et al., 2014).

Therefore, in addition to understanding how migration contributes to new learning and knowledge acquisition, this study will empirically investigate how this knowledge is perceived and received (valued) back in the country of origin. Consequently, it will explore whether the relaxation of constraints on work and travel, have contributed to brain training via knowledge transfers facilitated through the corporal mobility of return migrants.
1.5 Research rationale
The researcher’s rational is informed by a three-fold perspective which includes personal, social and academic motivations. The researcher’s personal experience as a Slovak migrant is the starting point for the research interest (for a more extensive reading on her positionality, please see the methodology chapter). More specifically, she has accumulated extensive migration experience in the European Union, having lived, worked and studied in the Netherlands and the U.K for over ten (10) years. This has provided her with rich-first hand experiences of the post-accession East to West migrant experience. Moreover, the researcher was living and working in London during the peak of the post-accession East to West migration wave (2007-2008).

With mobility patterns becoming increasingly more diverse across time and space (King, 2002), Drinkwater et al. (2009) observed that many migrants are amongst the most economically vulnerable population in the labour market, particularly during times of crisis. Comparatively, socio-economic fluctuations have an immediate impact on mobility flows, not only by reducing migration inflows, but also by accelerating migration outflows (Green and Winters, 2010).

At the same time, Williams and Balaz (2008) reformulated the significance of knowledge acquisition in the international migration arena, expanding the debate beyond the usual conceptualization of human capital and skills. Towards the notion of competencies, and later knowledge. Comparatively, this study explored the significance of this type of new learning from the domain of the individual (personal significance). It built upon the researcher’s Master’s Dissertation conducted at the University of Amsterdam, which initially introduced her to the value of informal learning and personal self-development in the migration context.

This thesis sought to explore this dynamic further, investigating how these new learning encounters contribute to both professional (instrumental learning), as well as personal (transformative learning) knowledge development. This study innovatively linked theories on learning, knowledge and knowledge transfer in the context of human mobility (migration). It was one of the first of its kind, in terms addressing the perspectives of managers and returned migrant in knowledge transfer. In addition, it provided a snap shot of how international migration contributes to brain training and potentially brain gain, through the migration and return cycle.

1.6 Study aims
In context of the growing internationalization of labour forces, this thesis focused on the role of human mobility in contributing to learning and knowledge acquisition, as well as knowledge transfers and overspills, taking Slovakia’s capital of Bratislava as a case study. Currently, Bratislava represents the most innovative region in the country, in addition to being the
economic, social and cultural centre of the nation. The capital receives a disproportionate amount of the country’s FDI (Balaz and Kusa, 2012); it has the largest cluster of multinational corporations, in addition to the largest concentration of high-skilled human capital endowments (Kurekova, 2011a).

Moreover, this thesis innovatively employed an intersectional analysis that explored and elaborated on the relationships between migration, learning and knowledge transfer from several different fields, including the economics and sociology of migration, the psychology of learning, and management theorization on knowledge transfer, as well as the absorptive capacity of the firm.

Henceforth, in an effort to address the above research aims, this study relied on empirical data gathered from the interview collection process. As a result, a total of four (4) respondent categories were interviewed: returnees and key informants across business, government and civil society.
1.7 Thesis outline and chapter summaries

Chapter #1
Introduction to the Research

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the study to the reader, and engage them with the purpose, context and significance of the research project. Correspondingly, the chapter discusses the study aims and objectives, in addition to presenting the research questions, which cater to each respondent category: returnees, managers, and key-informants. Furthermore, the empirical layout is discussed, in terms of the methodological approach being an exploratory, qualitative study that will address the complete migration cycle. It will explore the significance of knowledge and learning through both departure and return axis’s: 1) learning and knowledge acquisition through migration 2) the implementation (or transfer) of that knowledge upon return. Additionally, the chapter concludes with the research contributions, and individual chapter summaries.

Chapter #2
The Nature of Knowledge

This chapter introduces a discussion on the theorization of knowledge, predominantly building on management literature conceptualizations. Essentially, this chapter argues that knowledge is more than just information, rather it embodies both explicit (codified) and tacit (un-codified) dimensions. Tacit knowledge represents knowledge that has yet to be formalized (it remains unsaid) and can be further conceptualized as ‘know-how’, in contrast to ‘know-what’ which is more explicit in nature. Comparatively, explicit knowledge is acquired through documents, theories, books, while tacit knowledge is acquired through experience; it represents knowledge-in-action. Moreover, tacit ‘knowing’ is often socially-situated, and subsequently requires corporal co-presence to transfer or share.

Chapter #3
Knowledge and the Individual

This chapter moves the discussion of knowledge towards the domain of the individual. It builds upon human capital theories, which conceptualize knowledge as capital that is embodied in the individual. Furthermore, it explores this capacity in a migration context, illustrating that individuals utilize a costs-and-benefits analysis, relocating to new labour markets based on increased returns for their human capital (defined as education, work experience and skills). Consequently, the discussion evolves towards the aggregate effects of human capital gains and losses, via immigration and emigration (brain gain vs. brain drain). There is also a focus on the re-
conceptualization of migration as a much more dynamic phenomenon involving several ‘departure and return’ cycles, and subsequently expanding the discussion towards brain re-distribution, including brain-training, brain-circulation and brain-gain through return migration influxes.

Chapter #4:
Knowledge and the Firm

This chapter continues with the discussion of knowledge, this time exploring its significance from the perspective of the firm. Knowledge is an integral component of firm competitiveness; it is the key driver to both productivity and economic growth. Moreover, with the increasing expansion of the knowledge-based economy, firms face the increasing necessity to expand their knowledge base. Nevertheless, organizations have a tendency to get locked-in their current knowledge structure, and subsequently follow a path-dependency model of development. Accordingly, if firms want to expand their knowledge base, they must invest in increasing their absorption capacity (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990). Nonetheless, creating and sourcing new knowledge, remains a resource consuming effort. Consequently, firms use recruitment practices to attract and retain knowledge; correspondingly migrants are a great source of knowledge diversity. However, firms need to learn how to recognize, capture, transfer – and finally apply their knowledge.

Chapter #5
Knowledge and Transformative Learning

This final chapter of the theoretical literature review explores the significance and impact that knowledge and learning have on the individual. Comparatively, the earlier chapters addressed the value of instrumental learning, in terms of professional development via the acquisition of new tacit and explicit knowledge, in addition to human capital and skills. However, this chapter explores the significance of new knowledge and learning from the domain of the personal. Exploring how such experiences contribute to self-development, and ultimately a transformation of meaning-perspectives (i.e. towards a more open, discerning and integrated meaning perspective). Consequently, this chapter builds upon Mezirow’s (1971) theory of transformative learning, in an effort to understand the difference between instrumental learning; learning to perform at something, and what Mezirow’s refers to as communication learning; learning to understand what is being communication. Further conceptualized as a hierarchy of reflection, including content (what), process (how) and premise (why) reflection.
Chapter #6

The Research Context: Slovakia

This chapter provides the social, historical, political and economic background of the country that will inform the research environment for this study. Slovakia is a transition economy that ascended to the Europe Union in 2004. Following the collapse of communism, the 1990s marked a very turbulent decade, which included record high unemployment, wide corruption scandals, and the crony privatization of national resources. Moreover, the country became politically isolated from the West, and was infamously dubbed the ‘black hole’ of Central Europe. However, the 2000s saw an abrupt turnaround, with macro-economic transformation and extensive modernizations. Currently, Slovakia offers a fully-fledged market economy, and is considered a “top reformer and one of the most investor-friendly countries in Central Europe” (Jakubiak et al., 2008: 30). Finally, Slovakia has one of the highest post-accession outmigration rates of the EU-8 countries (Barrell et al., 2007). Currently, close to 10% of its active labour force resides abroad, while, according to an earlier estimate, roughly one third of the country’s university graduates out-migrate (Balaz and Williams, 2004; Kahanec and Kureková, 2016).

Chapter #7

Methods and Methodologies

The methodology chapter explains the process of data collection. The discussion begins with a methodological overview; it addresses the philosophical and methodological underpinnings that inform the study. Consequently, this research project builds upon an interpretivist epistemology, which is exploratory in purpose and inductive in approach. This study utilizes a qualitative design which incorporates one-on-one interviews. All interviews are transcribed and coded by the researcher, and the data is triangulated across the four (4) following respondent categories, returnees and key-informants from government, business and civil society.

Chapter #8

Findings – Business Key-Informants

This chapter is cast within a discussion of transformation and emergence. The business respondents discuss the added-value of return migration and knowledge transfer in a post-transition and post-accession context. Two predominant contribution streams are identified and these include both a practical and strategic added-value. The ‘practical’ added value of return migrants refers to real time economic needs. On the other, the ‘strategic’ added value of return migrants refers to the future growth needs of the Slovak economy. Accordingly, returning migrants, armed with expertise know-how and international experience have the potential to not only meet current knowledge and skill-gaps, but also help local businesses scale up into the
global economy. Comparatively, return migrants may offer a more cost-effective labour market solution to recruiting ex-pats in terms of harnessing competitive skills and knowledge.

Chapter # 9
Findings – Government Key-Informants

In this chapter, the present is juxtaposed to the past in quotations that provide a dynamic historical analysis of a country in transformation. The government respondents explore the phenomenon of outmigration and return as a vehicle for knowledge transfer. A need which has only been intensified by the social, economic and political merging between East and West, as a result of the Eastern enlargement of the European Union, in addition to advances in technology, infrastructure, transport and travel, as well as globalization. The respondents identify that through living and studying abroad, migrants can gain access to mature market economies, enhancing their knowledge of free enterprise as well as the democratic process. Upon return, they may disseminate that know-how by seeking employment in domestic and international firms, as well as circulating their new-found perspectives with family, friends and other extended social networks.

Chapter # 10
Findings – Society Key-Informants

This chapter builds off the in-depth economic and political overview of the two previous empirical chapters and follows a similar thematic pattern. Concerns about post-transition knowledge and skills gaps are expressed. Likewise, the human capital training of yesterday is compared to the human capital needs of today. In an open and globalized market, particular focus is paid to the soft-skill training provided for by the international migration experience. The enhanced confidence and ‘can-do’ attitude that some returnees bring back is noted, alongside their new skills, know-how and global perspectives. Finally, this chapter explores whether returning international Slovaks have to potential to become leading change makers in the post-communist context.

Chapter #11
Findings – Returnee Perspectives

Although not exclusive to the migration experience, mobility puts individuals into contact with systems of difference, but also systems of power. Correspondingly, moving across culture, language and geography can be challenging and requires adaptation. This chapter argues that international migration is not only a vehicle for accelerated learning, but also transformative learning (Mezirow, 1971). Moreover, certain life experiences may have a more profound impact than others. These provoke gaps in understanding that encourage reflexive but also reflective
thinking; the latter is critical to emancipatory knowledge development, which is different from instrumental knowledge such as process-driven know-how. Of course, migration and return may not be positive and emancipatory for some individuals. Acknowledging the limitations of this empirical study, this chapter nevertheless concludes that some of the more skilled returning international Slovaks have the potential to become leaders, in an environment where locals lack international exposure, business know-how, but also soft-skills, because they come back with greater self-knowledge, materialized in the form of enhanced confidence, communication and critical thinking abilities.

Chapter #12
Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter concludes the thesis. It provides an overview of the study and examines the extent to which the research objectives were addressed. In addition to offering a critical reflection on the limitations of the research, this chapter also dives deeper into the transformative nature of the international migration experience. It argues that the return of international Slovaks is critical to the transfer of not only hard-skills, but also soft-skills into Slovakia. Competencies such as communication, critical thinking and creativity may be sought after in every workplace, but they are particularly needed in the transition economies of Central and Eastern Europe.

Although not the initial focus or intention behind the study, this thesis observed, that it was the transformation of mind-sets and not just skillsets that were discussed by the four respondent groups in the data collection process. Correspondingly, Mezirow’s transformative learning theory, which was initially utilized to demonstrate the transformative dimension of learning through the mobility context, provides a useful theoretical framework to illustrate how perspectives change and/or mind-sets. The return and successful re-harvesting of international talent, a signpost for a more independent and critically reflective workforce, may be a vehicle that helps post-transition and post-accession economies leap frog years of linear development and scale up more effectively into global supply networks.
2.1 The nature of knowledge

To begin with, knowledge is a very ‘elusive’ concept that is difficult to define. Moreover, knowledge, which at its very core is only meaning-making, varies across context. In response, the notion of knowledge has been contemplated by humanity for many centuries. In the western tradition, the quest for absolute truth dates back to the works Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (Williams and Balaz, 2008). Comparatively, defining what makes up knowledge is a quest that continues to date. The traditional take on ‘knowing’, is that it is “devoid of emotion, bodily interference and political commitment” (Hinchliffe, 2000: 576). To have knowledge is to ‘know’ something, and this knowing is produced by thinking and reflecting (McDermott, 2000). Therefore, knowledge is assumed to be a neutral production that is acquired by reasoning on the observable nature of phenomena. This produces what Plato terms a justified true belief; that is knowledge which is scientifically verified, valid and factual (Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997).

Later, the school of empiricism challenged these rationalist values, by claiming that knowledge is in fact produced from sensory experience (Locke, 1775). Empiricists argued that knowledge is not innate to the individual; rather it is acquired through the process of living. The human senses play a key role in receiving, as well as interpreting meaning, because to live is to learn, and to learn is to know. Consequently, all knowledge begins from experience (Kant, 2007). More recently, the debate of knowledge has spilled over into other disciplines such as cognitive science and human neurology. These fields are pushing the frontiers of our understanding of knowledge, by combining phenomenology with human biology, in an effort to understand - how we know, what we know (Varela et al., 1991; Liberman, 2000).

Consequently, knowledge remains a very complex and ambiguous concept. Nevertheless, it is an integral resource to our human experience. Knowledge is crucial to the all forms of human activity. Development, innovation and growth would not be possible without knowledge. Moreover, knowledge builds upon knowledge; to learn is to know more. Therefore, our understanding of what constitutes as knowledge, and where it comes from – is also evolving. Nevertheless, what we can argue is that knowledge is acquired through experience and learning (both in the formal and informal sense). By acquiring more information, understanding and skill, we push the boundaries of what we know further.

By applying management literature to the research, this thesis takes a more focused approach on the conceptualization of knowledge. This is in response to the aims of this research, which
seek to explore the value of knowledge in the migration context. More specifically, how migration facilitates the acquisition of different forms of knowledge. Building on the understanding that knowledge is more than just information (Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Cowan et al., 2000). Knowledge, unlike information, cannot be easily transported on paper across contexts, it needs to be translated (deciphered), to be understood. Consequently, more knowledge is needed to unlock the meaning of the information. In response, this chapter will produce a conceptualization of knowledge that builds upon how such knowing is formed, captured and utilized (Nonaka and Takeushi, 1995; Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Seely-Brown and Duguid, 2005).

2.2 Data, information, explicit and tacit knowledge
In the business literature, the process of knowledge acquisition is often correlated to an accession chain, which rises between data, information and knowledge (Ancori et al., 2000). Accordingly, Spek and Spijkervet (1997) explained that “data are understood to be symbols which have not yet been interpreted” (p.13), and knowledge is formed by transforming quantitative data into qualitative information. Comparatively, it can be argued that knowledge is an enhanced state of information (or, ascribed information).

![Knowledge Pyramid](https://example.com/knowledge_pyramid.png)

Figure 1 Knowledge Pyramid (Source: modified from Hey, 2004:3)

What is more, knowledge can also vary in structure; it can be both formalized and un-formalized in nature, meaning that knowledge can also be tacit in dimension. Polanyi (1958) originally introduced the concept of tacit knowledge, arguing that some aspects of knowledge remain in articulable. In his much-quoted aphorism, he stated that “we can know more than we can tell” (Polanyi, 1967:4). Or, more directly – we know more than we can say, interlinking the concept of tacit knowledge to a state of ‘knowing’. Correspondingly, the concept of tacit knowledge had an
enormous impact on the scientific community. Duguid (2005) observed that the framework appealed to varied fields and disciplines “including linguistics (Chomsky, 1965), physics (Ziman, 1967), philosophy (Fodor, 1968), political science (Oakeshott, 1967), the sociology of economics (Coats, 1967), and economics (Richardson, 1972)” (p. 111).

Furthermore, tacit knowledge can also represent the ability to be able ‘to do’ something, without necessary being able to explain ‘how its done’ (Nelson and Winter, 1982; Bryant, 2003). Yang (2004) explained that it encompasses a “familiarity that has yet to be articulated” (p.242). Or, an aspect of knowledge that is un-translatable, because if one was to do so, some of the original meaning would inevitably be lost. A swimming analogy is utilized to illustrate this point, it marks the difference between giving someone a ‘how to swim’ operations-manual, versus teaching or ‘showing them how to swim’. Evidently, this links back to the understanding that not all knowledge is embraced (conceptual and cognitive abilities), rather some forms of it are also embodied (sentiment and sensory information). Therefore, tacit knowledge is acquired through observation, and not only rational understanding.

How is tacit knowledge acquired?
The acquisition of tacit knowledge involves both logical deduction and intuitive interpretation. The learner must make use of both his/her conceptual and sensory skills while acquiring it (Hodgkin, 1991). In particular, tacit knowledge is gained via demonstrations, lectures, workshops, and conversations. In consequence, the transfer of tacit knowledge normally requires corporeal co-presence. That is close, fluent and trustful (none compromising) relations between the contributor and the recipient (Lundvall, 1988; Rodriguez, 2002). Consequently, physical co-presence is still essential; tacit knowledge remains uncodified, unless one is able to meaningfully interact with others and translate it. Moreover, the process of de-codification is costly. The transfer of tacit knowledge requires time resources, not to mention similar levels of (explicit) knowledge, in order to make sense and process the incoming information.

Accordingly, ‘knowledge translation’ is a popular euphemism used to explain how tacit knowledge is transferred (or, shared). The analogy of translation highlights the personal and social nature of such transactions, but also addresses their limitations, as some meaning inevitably gets ‘lost in translation’. On the other hand, explicit (already codified) knowledge is acquired in a more formal and systematic manner, that is also significantly less costly. Yang et al. (2009) explained that explicit knowledge “can be put into words, written down, modelled, and relatively easily transferred” (279). Examples of explicit knowledge include theory, encyclopaedias, operation manuals, text books, how to guides, patents, copy rights, publications, and other such written documents. Essentially, explicit knowledge is articulated (written), and hence easily transmittable through non-face to face contact (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995).

Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that tacit and explicit knowledge is in fact complimentary, rather than diametrically opposed (Mokyr, 2002; Lo, 2003; Strambach, 2004). Firstly, explicit knowledge is more than just information, rather it represents the framework through which information and data is interpreted. Duguid found that “uncodified knowledge
provides background context and warrants for assessing the codified” (2005: 112). While Senker (1995) distinguished, that explicit knowledge must be first - tacitly understood, in order to be made sense of; “hence all knowledge is either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge” (p.426).

Moreover, Ryle (1984) differentiated the two categories into ‘know-that’ (explicit) vs. ‘know-how’ (implicit). His argument being that know-that, does not make know-how possible. To clarify, know-that represents propositional knowledge, such as true beliefs or other forms of declarative knowledge, like Bratislava is the capital of Slovakia. Whereas know-how represents practical knowledge, that is knowledge acquired through personal experience (Brockmann and Anthony, 2002), such as knowing how to ride a bicycle, or tie a shoe-lace. The key distinction being that know-that, represents knowledge that has not yet been put into use. Duguid further exemplified,

“the ability to read gives any competent users of a language access to knowledge codified in that language. But access to that explicit knowledge does not confer the ability to put it into appropriate use. Tacit knowledge, which confers that ability, is, by contrast with the explicit and codified, remarkably sticky” (2005: 114).

‘Sticky’ refers to the difficulty of transferring and translating tacit knowledge (know-how) outside of its socially situated context (Morgan, 2001; Gertler, 2003). On the other hand, ‘leaky’ alludes to the more direct, sometimes unexpected outflow, of explicit knowledge. For example, key knowledge which leaks beyond the borders of firm, effecting innovation in other companies. Furthermore, although explicit knowledge can be exceedingly leaky, it may be difficult to unlock outside of its original context. For example, an idea or process which works effectively in one company may not transition effectively into another (Zeigler, 1985; Lecuyer, 2000). Therefore, knowledge is viewed as both ‘leaky’ (Wernerfelt, 1984; Liebeskind, 1996) and ‘sticky’ (von Hippel, 1994; 1999; Szulanski, 1996) as a result.

By and large, tacit and explicit forms are not only interdependent and complimentary, but dynamic and interchangeable as well (Lo, 2003; Strambach, 2004). Nonaka and Takeuchi explored the transfer of knowledge between Japanese firms, and demonstrated how tacit to explicit (and vice versa) transactions were made possible through social interaction. In response, they produced the following knowledge convergence model (see figure 2) which illustrated the malleability of knowledge, according to four (4) categories: 1) internalization (explicit to tacit), 2) externalization (tacit to explicit), 3) combination (explicit to explicit), and 4) socialization (from tacit to tacit).
Tacit knowledge - beyond Polanyi

Lundvall and Johnson (1994) and Lundvall (1996) stressed the importance of the four types of knowledge in what they called a ‘learning economy’. The learning economy is a post-Fordist interpretation of the modern economy, which is increasingly ‘knowledge-based’ (Brophy, 1996). In the knowledge economy, the acquisition of knowledge is viewed as not only crucial to the organization, but also to the individual; correspondingly, the capacity for learning “tends to become even more important” (Lundvall and Johnson, 2000: 14). Comparatively, the responsibility of enhancing one’s knowledge base becomes increasing more individualized. Individuals can increase their employability, by engaging in lifelong learning practices (Jarvis, 2004; Watts, 2006).

In addition, Arrow (1962, 1994) argued that know-how was not only embedded in individuals, but also organizations, and regions as a whole. He asserted that tacit knowledge could be acquired both in socially situated and collective forms; that is from the region (i.e. Silicon Valley), or the group/organization (i.e. workshop, or company). Furthermore, Blackler (2002) contributed that knowledge has both generic and socially situated strands. Correspondingly, reviewing the literature on the sociology of knowledge, he categorized tacit knowledge into four main types: embrained, embodied, encultured, and embedded knowledge (Blackler, 2002).

More specifically, Blackler (2002) argued that embrained and embodied aspects refer to knowledge that is embedded in the individual. Embrained knowledge represents conceptual skills and cognitive abilities, while embodied knowledge emphasizes sentiment, learning by doing, and sensory information. In contrast encultured and embedded knowledge pertain to knowledge that is found outside of the body and embedded in the social context. Encultured knowledge is centred on shared meaning and understanding that is acquired as a result of the socialization processes, while embedded knowledge is based on organizational routines and technological competence.

Again, it is important to understand that all four forms of knowledge are strongly linked and intertwined. Nonetheless, Blackler’s (2002) typology offers a useful analytical tool that highlights the diversity and socially situated nature of different forms of tacit knowledge. In particular,
Williams and Balaz (2008) have argued that Blacker’s (2002) typology of knowledge is useful in understanding the transfer of tacit knowledge in the migration context. Furthermore, they assert that the transfer of tacit knowledge remains an area that is neglected by both migration and knowledge management literatures (see, chapter #3 for a more in-depth discussion).

Limitations to tacit knowledge
The criticism of the theory of tacit knowledge is related to the fact that the concept is often too ambiguous; it is very difficult to define and measure (Lam, 2000). Cavusgil et al. (2003) observed that detailed research into tacit knowledge is still lacking, because “previous studies are mostly descriptive in nature” (2003: 7). Conversely, others argued that the tacit dimension only represents an aspect of knowledge that is ‘not yet’ codified, rather than uncodifiable by nature (Cavusgil et al., 2003). However, these authors reproduced the dominant framework of modern science, which assumes that knowledge is objective and depersonalized - the very perspective that Polanyi critiqued:

“that tacit thought forms [are] indispensable part of all knowledge, [and] the ideal of eliminating all personal elements of knowledge would, in effect, aim at the destruction of all knowledge” (1966: 11).

The shortcoming with Polanyi’s model is that “he said little about the processes of acquiring or learning tacit knowledge” (Taylor, 2007:61). In response, Styhre (2004) argued that tacit knowledge has been utilized too often as a ‘catch-all phrase’ representing any form of knowledge that has not yet been formalized. On the other, Blacker’s (2002) typology deconstructs the concept further into different categories of tacit knowledge. Comparatively, Styhre (2004), building on the philosophy of Bergson (1988, 1998, 1999), conceptualized knowledge according to both ‘intuitive’ and ‘intellectual’ aspects. Thereby, arguing that both aptitudes coexisted in the intellectual capabilities of the human mind, but are nevertheless, expressed via different modes of thinking.

On the other hand, others argue whether tacit knowledge still provides the competitive edge that companies are looking, given the changing nature of the global economy. This is tied to the rise of globalization, information technology, the knowledge-based economy, and the internationalization of transportation and communication systems, which have all shrunk distances and accelerated knowledge transfers (Gertler, 2003). In fact, Amin (2002) argues that these trends have actually shrunk the local-global binary; eroding preconceived borders and increasing international standardization.

Consequently, as the world becomes increasingly smaller – and arguably more similar - , cleavages in tacit knowledge appear to become less substantial. Rather the playing field becomes more even (Friedman, 2005), as individuals have access to a similar tacit knowledge base across geographical and cultural lines. Nonetheless, Maskell and Malmberg (1999) address the limitations of modern technology, arguing that “still, certain types of information and
knowledge exchange continue to require regular and direct face-to-face contact” (p.180). Although some areas have accumulations of tacit knowledge (i.e. Silicon Valley), or have effective learning-environments which facilitate the transfer of tacit knowledge.

2.3 Situated learning
On the other hand, knowledge is also a product of context, it is socially situated. Williams (2007: 31) argued that individuals must gain “place-specific knowledge if they are to valorize fully other forms of knowledge”. That is, in order to translate and apply one’s explicit skills (Chiswick and Hatton, 2003), one must also have access to embedded and encultured (tacit) knowledge (Blacker, 2002). Furthermore, tacit knowledge acquisition is a social process, which is acquired in a socially situated environment. Brown and Duguid (1991) conceptualized this in terms of ‘situated learning’, which occurs in a localized time and space context.

Thus, tacit knowledge is acquired on a learning-through-interacting basis, which is facilitated through physical co-presence. Hence, knowledge is related to spatial proximity, and is also context dependent. Furthermore, as discussed above, technology and globalization trends have only accelerated these transfers. Amin and Cohendet (2004) have argued that some forms of tacit knowledge can be transferred electronically. Particularly since internet networks have resulted in ‘cyberspace’ becoming the new ‘situated learning’ grounds (virtual communities of practice).

Therefore, the authors have argued that tacit knowledge can be gained, not only through ‘localized-socially situated’ relationships, but through ‘distanciated’ ones as well. Consequently, the authors reject the ‘outdated’ association of tacit as localized, and explicit as global. Nonetheless, Amin and Cohendet do not deconstruct tacit knowledge into multiple forms – as does Blacker (2002) (i.e. embodied, embrained, embedded, encultured). Some types of tacit knowledge (embedded and encultured) are more difficult to transfer, than others (embodied and embrained) (Williams and Balaz, 2008). Furthermore, it is believed that trust facilitates knowledge transfer (Dhanaraj et al., 2004; Li, 2005) – which will be discussed later in this chapter. Hence, there is also the separate question of whether co-presence is necessary for building trust?

Nevertheless, Poon et al. (2006) argue that Amin and Cohendet (2004) have re-conceptualized the tacit-explicit discussion away from the local-global binary. Instead, they have replaced the “dualistic distinction [with] a more dynamic framework where tacit and codified knowledge serve as both inputs to, and outputs of, each other” (p.544). To put differently, the authors have questioned “the distinction between place defined as the realm of near, intimate and bounded relations, and space defined as the realm of far, impersonal and fluid relations” (Amin and Cohendet, 2005: 469). As a consequence, knowledge – including the tacit form, is shared through relational associations that are close in nature, despite occurring across distanciated learning grounds.
2.4 The movement of knowledge

Historically, knowledge transfers were accomplished along the lines of face-to-face contact, predominantly in the format of story re-telling. During such encounters, information was dispatched, ideas were exchanged, and innovation was sparked. The invention of writing, and later the printing press, provided for a significant evolutionary jump; knowledge could now to be codified. As a result, explicit knowledge was transferred at greater speeds to an ever-larger audience (Williams and Balaz, 2008). Today, advancements in transportation and communication systems, as well as the rise of the information age, have accelerated knowledge transfers between individuals across distances. The following section will explore the knowledge transfer process, focusing on how knowledge is shared and created between participants. The factors that facilitate or inhibit such interactions will be investigated. In conclusion, the influential role of human mobility on knowledge dissemination will be discussed through the experiences of boundary spanners and knowledge brokers.

The transfer of knowledge

Knowledge transfer is the act of transferring knowledge from one individual to another. Moreover, the dynamic of knowledge transfer “allows for individuals and/or organizations to access and utilize essential information, which previously was known intrinsically to only one or a small group of people” (Graham et al, 2006: 15). Markedly, the codification of tacit knowledge into its explicit form is the most cost effective method, making new knowledge accessible to wider range of people at a much higher speed (Maskell and Malmberg, 1999).

Moreover, the process of transferring knowledge entails the responsibility of being able to explain the idea, in an effort to effectively share it with others. This includes being able to break it down, using language, concepts and frameworks that are understandable to the recipient. Therefore, knowledge is essentially translated between people. Czarniawska (2009) further demonstrated:

“The concept of translation works exactly because it is polysemous: usually associated with language, it also means transformation and transference. It attracts attention to the fact that a thing moved from one place to another cannot emerge unchanged: to set something in a new place or another point in time is to construct it anew” (p.425).

Furthermore, Czarniawska argued that “ideas travel from less satiated to more satiated environments’, so another physical metaphor is necessary, that of ‘critical mass’” (2001: 125). The influence of critical mass on innovation adoption was explored by Rogers (1962, 2003). He conceptualized that the process took place over several phases of negotiations, which occurred across the following five (5) groupings: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. He found that ideas were not only transferred inter-personally within the group, but also inter-relationally across groups. This succession followed a domino effect, whereby the absorption of the idea by one grouping, influenced the readiness to receive the idea by the next. In addition, Gladwell (2000) argued that idea diffusion was marked by a ‘tipping point’, whereby
ideas become common, following an S-shaped curve to development (see Figure 3). Comparatively, his analogy can also be applied to the notion of knowledge transfer.
enabled people ‘get ahead’, rather than just ‘get by’. Consequently, bridging social capital is more functional in leveraging new knowledge into the community or kinship network.

Knowledge transactions and trust
Furthermore, trust plays an integral role in mediating knowledge transactions, because it encourages co-operation amongst people. Putnam (1993) identified trust as an imperative component of social capital; environments that lacked trust eroded social ties, and subsequently hampered learning. Although some researchers have argued that trust is a precondition to the formation of social capital (Fukuyama, 1995), and others have declared it to be a consequence of social ties (Woolcock, 1998; 2001), the field of organizational management, views them as mutually reinforcing (Adler and Kwon, 2000). Ultimately, trust facilitates co-operation amongst strangers, it “creates as sense of community, making it easier for people to work together” (Williams and Balaz, 2008: 70). Consequently, physical proximity and the frequency of interaction facilitate trust (Maskell and Malmberg, 1999).

In response, knowledge transfers are also dependent on benevolence. That is, behaving in a manner that does not compromise the knowledge transfer experience. As any form of co-learnings “requires openness on the part of all those involved” (Williams, 2008:26-27). Moreover, Levin and Cross (2004) further conceptualized ‘trustworthiness’ according to both benevolence-based and competence-based trust. The authors noted that ‘benevolence-based’ trust was a necessary precondition for all knowledge exchanges. However, ‘competence-based’ trust was integral to tacit knowledge transfers. For co-learning to transpire, the knowledge seeker must value the knowledge competency of the knowledge source (Li, 2005).

On the other hand, Kane et al. (2005) categorized it, in terms of a causal relationship between perceived trust and risk factors:

“Recipients of knowledge transfer risk harming their performance because the knowledge may not be performance-enhancing. Therefore, recipients must make decisions about whom to rely on for knowledge, and trust is likely an important determinant of that decision” (p. 58).

A risk-based view of knowledge transfer is popularized in managerial literature (Das and Teng, 2004). Feelings of distrust between participants negatively influence knowledge outcomes, making such transactions unproductive and costly (Dhanaraj et al., 2004). Thus, trust between the source and recipient alleviates the costly burden (time, effort, money) of having to re-verifying the knowledge exchanged. Finally, when knowledge transfers occur in environments that lack benevolence, learning is thwarted at the most basic level, because knowledge seekers feel inhibited to seek help, and develop their understanding (Shapiro, 1983; Emerson, 1962).

“By seeking help, one increases dependence on another person, which in turn decreases the help seeker’s relative power in relation to the prospective helper. Both of these
processes—acknowledging incompetence and increasing dependence on others—puts the help seeker in a relatively powerless, one-down position” (Lee, 1997: 339).

Power relations (disequilibrium) between social groups further heighten such tensions. In general, trust is embedded in common social norms; people who engage with such norms (in-group members) trust each other. However, frictions can easily arise across social, economic and cultural differences (out-groups). Furthermore, social prejudices (racism, xenophobia) can create large rifts between communities, thus impeding future co-operation. Jenkins (2004) explored the influence of social identity on knowledge transfer. He categorized barriers to knowledge transfer according to three tenets: ascription, acceptability and suitability. Ascription referring to the socially ascribed characteristics of the individual (who they are), suitability referring to achieved characteristics (such as the acquisition of embedded knowledge), while acceptability encapsulating the outcome of the former two (Blackler, 2002).

Consequently, Kane et al. (2005) found that knowledge was easier transferred within ‘in-group’ members; all the more so, by those who shared a super-ordinate social identity. In contrast, individuals with inferior social status (i.e. race, class, gender) experienced heightened barriers when transferring knowledge. Furthermore, the authors found that these barriers remained erect, even when the out-group members provided knowledge that was of superior quality, to those of the in-group (Kane et al., 2005). This draws attention to the impact of social identity; evidently recipients are less likely to trust the value of incoming knowledge when it comes from sources they do not hold in esteem (‘competence-based’ trust). Inadvertently their ‘esteem’ is controlled for by social norms. Consequently, knowledge transfers are constrained by social hierarchies, as well as in-group vs. out-group social identities. However, group membership, in addition to the position within a group, is dynamic; individuals can move from periphery to the core, or vice versa.

The structural properties of social networks - weak ties vs. strong ties:
Furthermore, the structural properties of social networks also influence knowledge transfer. Granovetter (1973) conceptualized knowledge circulation through a dyadic model of weak and strong ties. Strong ties represent tight-knit, cohesive social relations that existed between smaller groups, often from the same social background. On the other hand, weak ties represent looser, infrequent, and more distant relations. Correspondingly, Granovetter observed that strong ties led to idea lock-ins. They promote the circulation of already embedded network knowledge; re-enforcing redundant forms, while inhibiting the recognition of new knowledge (Burt, 1992).

Furthermore, deeply imbedded social networks (such as kinship and family relations) not only stifle innovation (Fukuyama, 1995; 1999), but help perpetuated social inequalities, due to their limited access to new information and modes of thinking (Portes, 1998). On the other hand, weak ties provide a new platform all together. They connect individuals across groups and contribute to the most innovative knowledge transfers (Putnam, 2000).
2.5 Knowledge brokers and boundary spanners

Finally, the transfer of novel forms of information and knowledge across socio-economic and geographic contexts involves a complex negotiation process. This includes social networks, translation, reflexivity, and most importantly corporeal mobility. Consequently, it is people – and not machines, or manuals that transfer tacit knowledge across distance, and some individuals are more influential than others.

Another concept that is important in discussing knowledge transfer is that of boundary spanning, initially popularized by Tushman (1977), in the context of the organization.

“Boundaries can be spanned effectively only by individuals who understand the coding schemes are attuned to the contextual information on both sides of the boundary, enabling them to search out relevant information on one side and disseminate it on the other” (Tushman and Scanlan, 1981: 291-292).

Correspondingly, boundary spanners are individuals that access, translate, and disseminate external knowledge - internally, and vice versa, across multiple peripheries (Wenger, 1998; Meyer, 2010). One example of boundary spanners, are what Saxenian (1999) termed the ‘new argonauts’, the highly skilled individuals that shuttled information, knowledge, and networks between the Silicon Valley (USA) and Hinshu (Taiwan).

Correspondingly, boundary spanning – knowledge brokers function as intermediaries ‘in-between worlds’ (Bielak et al., 2008). Johri (2008:8) exclaimed that they are “the human face to the process and idea of knowledge transfer”. However, knowledge brokering involves “far more than simply moving knowledge—it also means transforming knowledge” (Meyer, 2010: 120). For the reason that physical, cultural, and social boundaries represent major barriers and constraints. Moreover, these can lead “to misattributions and breakdowns in communication and collaboration” (Johri, 2008: 7).

In an effort to circumvent these barricades, knowledge brokers seek out ways to find “alignment between perspectives” (Wenger, 1998: 109). They function as ‘linguistic creators’ translating ideas into ‘plain language’ (Kramer and Wells, 2005), utilizing both verbal and nonverbal means of communication to do so (Tushman and Scanlan, 1981). Furthermore, Meyer (2010) noted that knowledge brokers not only translate knowledge, but also enable its usability in context. When knowledge has been “de- and reassembled” (p.123), it also becomes more usable, accountable and robust. Nonetheless, Johri (2008) stipulated that knowledge brokering is for the most part an informal, unplanned, and subsequently also unrecognized practice.

Conclusion

Knowledge is an elusive concept that has perplexed humanity for centuries. The more modern take on knowledge is that it can be understood as a pyramid, whereby primary data becomes information, before it is extrapolated into the form of knowledge. Accordingly, knowledge is information with greater meaning ascribed to it. This takes us straight back to ancient Greece,
and the great thinkers of the European enlightenment, who identified knowledge to meaning generation, that is justified to be true through thinking and evidence (Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997).

This chapter has focused on a different layer of knowledge, more specifically on its explicit and tacit dimensions. Explicit is knowledge that is found in codified form, such as written manuals, encyclopaedias, procedure manuals, rule books and the like. On the other hand, tacit represent personal and often difficult to express knowledge (Polanyi, 1958). Furthermore, it is acquired in a situated fashion.

Tacit knowledge is often socially and culturally localized and it can only be transferred through peer learning, conversation or physical co-presence. Evidently, not everything that is known can be said. Ultimately, knowledge is a thought form rather that a statement. For this reason, there knowledge transfer is social in nature. Social status and trust between in-group members can greatly accelerate the knowledge diffusion process.

At the same time, weak ties are essential when sourcing new and novel forms of knowledge. Strong ties, although beneficial for bonding and meeting everyday survival needs, often result in the circulation of redundant forms of knowledge. Comparatively, individuals that have a tacit understanding of two or more contexts or socially situated environments have the potential to function as boundary spanning knowledge brokers. They help to facilitate knowledge transactions and transfers across time, space and most importantly difference. They also help to bring in new and novel forms of knowledge while bridging once removed people and regions.
3.1 Human capital theory

Human capital theories have been very influential in migration studies, because they provide an explanatory framework as to why people move across international boundaries (Williams, 2009). This framework builds upon the neoclassical economics approach to labour migration (Smith, 1776). Human mobility is rationalized in terms of a cost-and-benefit analysis, where individuals move in an effort to secure the highest returns on their human capital (Sjaadstad, 1962; Becker, 1964). In neo classical theories, international migration is motivated by wage differentials (wage-gaps) between source and destination countries, or as Todaro (1969) explained, by anticipated, rather than actual earnings. Human capital theories build on this by focusing on the returns to different types of human capital.

However, mobility also incurs significant costs; these can be material in terms of resources, time and effort, as well as psychological (Sjaadstad, 1962), because migrants embark on a process of adaptation, which includes “cutting old ties and forging new ones” (Massey et al., 1993: 434). Accordingly, the social and emotional ramifications of relocation can outweigh the benefits of increased earnings. Nonetheless, human capital theories provide a useful framework in describing why people do, and do not migrate. In addition to conceptualizing the role of knowledge, learning and skills in the migration experience. The following section will discuss the three main components of human capital theory, before moving the discussion towards skills, and later knowledge.

First and foremost, it is important to define what human capital actually means. Essentially, it refers to the knowledge stock an individual acquires and carries with him (Meyer, 2001). This is gained through different means of personal investment that contributes to the acquisition of “knowledge, skills, and competency” (Kwon, 2009: 2). Unlike social and financial capitals, which are located outside of the individual, human capital is an embodied aspect (Becker, 1964; 1994). Moreover, there is a positive correlation between labour, human capital and financial returns (Robertson, 2010), because human capital contributes to the flow of income (Stark, 2005).

Furthermore, an individual can mobilize his and her human capital through migration (Chiswick, 1978). Labour migrants move in response to labour market needs. Human capital theories argue that migrants relocate according to where the highest net returns (to human capital) can be achieved. Consequently, human capital theories place migration in an agency context, arguing that more talented individuals are also more likely to move. The rationalization lies in the belief that individuals with higher levels of education have better abilities, and opportunities, to make use of their knowledge and skills in the labour market.
To put this differently, the rewards to specific human capital in different countries are considerably greater for those with higher level skill. Moreover, individuals with greater human capital investments, including formal education, can usually more effectively negotiate their entry into foreign labour markets. Because, high-skilled individuals “possess the human capital attributes that give them strength in any immigration market” (Salt, 1992a: 1088). Consequently, unlike the low-skilled, they encounter less labour market vulnerability and can buffer some risks associated with the migration investment (Bauer and Zimmerman, 1999).

However, in spite of the market assumptions behind the neoclassical migration model, which argues that it is relatively easy to move, the reality is that migrants still face significant barriers when transferring their human capital across contexts (i.e. national boundaries). Chiswick (1978) attributed this to an initial knowledge gap that remained between migrants and natives, in the destination country. This materializes in terms of migrants earning less than natives, despite having matching socio-economic characteristics, and sometimes even greater knowledge and skills (Dustmann et al., 2003).

This knowledge gap is attributed to social, cultural and linguistic cleavages that existed between the source and destination countries. Moreover, in order to close these gaps, migrants must undergo a period of adjustment (Massey et al., 1993). However, this process is also internal, and may include feelings of identity-loss, grief, frustration and other psychological hardships (Sjaadstad, 1962). Accordingly, Chiswick (1978) emphasized, that migrants must acquire nationally-specific human capital, in order to effectively utilize their knowledge capital from their source country. However, none play a more important role than the acquisition of language capital (Chiswick and Miller, 1995). Language skills, or lack thereof, most directly affect labour market participation.

Additionally, Dustmann (1999) pointed out “that language fluency is negatively and significantly affected by the migrant’s return propensity” (p.312). If the motive for migration is short-term, migrants are less inclined to invest their time, effort and resources learning the language of the host country. For example, he found that Polish seasonal labourers working in Germany were less inclined to learn German, due to their high return propensity (Dustmann, 1993). Furthermore, Chiswick and Miller (1995) explained that language acquisition is also correlated to economic incentives, as well as lack of exposure.

However, economic returns can also be realized upon return, in the migrant’s home country (Dustmann, 1999). For example, the English language is a ‘ground-floor’ language (van Parijs, 2000) in terms of critical status and world language dominance (Balaz, and Williams, 2004). English-language fluency is an internationally recognized skill asset that has high economic value. Therefore, even short term migrants may decide to invest in language learning – not so much for the returns in the destination, as in the country of origin after their return. Correspondingly, Williams and Balaz (2005) observed that language learning plays a critical role in migration decisions, and explains why migrants are attracted to particular destinations over others.
Finally, human capital theory argues that with the acquisition of language capital, in addition to nationally specific knowledge, migrants’ earnings can grow, and begin to more appropriately match their human capital levels. Correspondingly, various empirical studies have confirmed this learning curve (Chiswick, 1978; Chiswick et al., 2002, 2005; Borjas, 1994; 2000; LaLonde and Topel, 1997). Furthermore, once migrants assimilate, they can not only catch up to, but actually tend to surpass the earnings of the native population. Eckstein and Weiss (2004) attributed this development to their greater propensity to continue to invest in their human capital development. They attributed the desire to try harder, to the fact that migrants initially encountered substantial barriers that resulted in having their human capital initially under-utilized. In response, migrants implicitly understand the value of human capital acquisition, and its effects in terms of labour market outcomes.

**Human capital theory and return migration**

The dilemma for human capital theory is that if individuals earn more over time as they acquire nationally specific human capital, why should they return before retirement age. Every year that passes they gain higher wages that help to compensate for the low wages when they first worked abroad. Dustmann and Weiss (2007) provide an answer to this dilemma. They attributed return migration to the following three rationales: 1) preference for consumption in home country; 2) greater purchasing power afforded to the migrants through currency convergence; and 3) the prospect to utilize their new knowledge and skills more effectively upon return.

It is the third point that most keenly relates to the human capital model. It suggests that migrants may go abroad – solely with the intention to acquire new human capital, which they can more effectively utilize upon return. Cerase (1974) attributed this to a perceived knowledge gap in their country of origin. Migrants embark abroad to accumulate new forms of human capital, in the aspiration to reach higher wage premiums upon return. Nonetheless, he also acknowledged that return flows were attributed to the migrant glass ceiling, whereby migrants returned home because they had reached the utility of their human capital abroad.

However, the value of human capital also fluctuates according to time and space; it is dependent on the expansion and contraction of the labour receiving job market. For example, following the collapse of state communism, the former Eastern Bloc observed an influx of return migration (Rudolph and Hillmann, 1998; Golinowska, 2004; Fihel et al., 2006; Klagge et al., 2007; Klagge and Klein-Hitpab, 2010). This was attributed to the knowledge gap, between the planned and market-based economies. Consequently, the human capital of Western trained individuals became highly sought after, and rewarded.

Furthermore, Okólski (2006) observed that their knowledge influxes “influenced in a significant way the rejuvenation of entrepreneurial spirit in CEE” (iii), in terms of the transfer of managerial and organizational skills, as well as corporate culture know-how. However, since then, the CEE economies have gained considerable ground. The cleavage between East and West has become shallower. There is no longer a stark shortage of Western market knowledge and language
abilities. Consequently, return migrants may more effectively utilize their human capital through self-employment activities upon return (Dustmann and Kirchkamp, 2002).

Limitations to human capital theories

Human capital theories assume a linear relationship between wage differentials and human capital surpluses between labour rich and capital rich countries (Bauer and Zimmerman, 1999; Massey et al., 1993; Borjas, 2008). They posit out-migration in terms of positive self-selection, which is driven by economic motives. However, the migration investment is presented in a decontextualized space, which is seemingly devoid of social, political and historical influences. Furthermore, they do not explain why people do not move – despite the lure of higher wages. This is relevant, because although international migrants number in the millions, they represent less than 3% of the global population (Dewey, 2005). Accordingly, only a small minority of the world’s population actually relocate to a different country (Williams and Balaz, 2008).

Secondly, the theory cannot explain why migration continues to occur despite no, or even decreasing wage differentials. This could be partially attributed to time-lags; new incoming migrants assume the economic conditions to be better than they actually are. However, it further draws attention to the fact that social, historical and political factors also influence migration decisions. For example, Carrington et al. (1996) observed that during the post-racial segregation era in the U.S (1915-1960), southern black migrants continued to move north even after the wage gap diminished. Hence, it is obvious that non-economic factors also influence migration investments, and quality of life, in addition to well-being are integral to the decision-making process. Possibly they continue to do so, driven by social networks rather than economic prospects.

Agency vs. structure

Comparatively, although migrants can express their individual agency, and up and move in search of better employment opportunities, they nevertheless move within social and institutional systems which rank the value of knowledge and skill according to a hierarchy that is highly exclusive (Dustmann et al., 2003). Consequently, these discrepancies are amplified at the junctions of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, class and gender. Friedberg (2000) observed, that the more distant the culture of the migrant, the greater the prejudice encountered.

This materializes in terms of the lack of recognition of foreign acquired human capital, and may extend to the complete nullification of foreign attained diplomas and job experience (Duleep and Regets, 1999). Examples of immigrant medical doctors working as cooks, or foreign trained engineers working as cab drivers have been documented (Chica, 2010; Fang and Goldner, 2011). Correspondingly, some countries have begun implementing degree recognition schemes that are more inclusive but, nevertheless, migrants cannot necessarily rely on the equal recognition of their human capital, in reference to the indigenous workforce (Borjas, 1994; Duleep and Regets, 1999).
Moreover, Williams (2008) stated that skills, which form the recognition base of human capital, are ultimately socially constructed. They reflect the market interests of the dominant group. The demand for skills is correlated to labour market shortages. Furthermore, the insertion of high skilled labour into low skilled positions is a gain for businesses, in terms of superior work quality at cheaper costs. Consequently, social practices, including prejudice and discrimination, track elements of the migrant population into downward occupation mobility (Dustmann et al., 2003; Janta, 2009). Evidently, human capital theories do not address these dynamics, and rather represent an overtly functionalist view to labour migration.

3.2 Skills
Skills, which play an integral role in human capital theories, are habitually classified under employable human capital. They are often measured in technical, quantifiable terms that consist of a junction of formal education and labour market experience. Correspondingly, skills signal potential workforce abilities. Nonetheless, the notion of skill is very difficult to define (Noon and Blyton, 1997). Some argue that “those who have completed tertiary education are considered to be ‘highly skilled’” (Csedo, 2008: 804). While others conceptualize them as general labour market information, which include an individual’s “destination language proficiency, occupational licenses, certification or credentials, as well as more narrowly defined task-specific skills” (Chiswick et al., 2005: 488). Furthermore, skills also encompass social abilities (‘soft skills’), such as communication competencies and emotional capacities, although capitalist societies tend to favour and recognize technical skills (‘hard-skills’) more (Reich, 1991; Nonaka and Johansson, 1985).

In the mobility context, technical skills are easier to transfer across distance. Moreover, skill transfer is also conditioned by the structure of the profession. The IT field is a notable example: computer programming language is heavily coded, and thus easier to utilize across contexts (Williams and Balaz, 2008). On the other hand, certain professionals are more nationally-bound than others; a notable example is the field of law. Legal qualifications are often relative to the institutional and legal framework of the specific country where they were attained. Therefore, in order to practice law abroad, migrants are encouraged (or even required), to attain host country specific accreditations.

Valorisation of skills – a social process
Consequently, skill recognition must be negotiated (Csedo, 2008). Chapman and Iredale (1993) conceptualized wage outcomes to a two-step process, encompassing both formal and informal skill recognition. More specifically, social acceptance is conditioned by the: “1) formal acceptance by a body (registration/licensing body, etc.), or 2) informal acceptance by an employer or employing body of a person’s qualifications and/or skills” (p.360). Furthermore, exploring the significance of the latter, Csedo (2008) found that “the recognition of foreign credentials depends considerably on the individual migrant’s ability to signal the value of their qualifications, experience and skills, in specific social contexts” (p.807). This also relates to
Jenkins’ (2004) notion of ascription, suitability and acceptability (discussed above), and how an individual’s socio-biographic characteristics influence the social reception of their knowledge and skills.

Today, knowledge intensive industries encompass a significant portion of employment opportunities in G-7 countries (U.S., Japan, France, Germany, Italy, UK and Canada) (Brophy, 1996). High skilled workers are prized as valuable human capital, they are viewed as an integral element to a firm’s and country’s economic success (Salt, 1992a). Moreover, the need for skill has contributed to global talent wars; whereby countries - not just companies compete to attract and secure the most competitive (skilled) workforce (Williams and Balaz, 2008).

In response, the labour market has become more segmented (Piore 1979; Sassen 1991), and the recruitment of migrant labour is increasingly restricted to high skilled labour quotas (Wickham and Bruff, 2008; Ciupijus, 2011). Immigration policies are explicitly designed to sift between these two categories (Salt, 1992a); skilled migrants are rewarded with fast-tracked visas, residency permits and even citizenship (Peers, 2009), while unskilled migrant labourers are often pushed into irregular migration and asylum/refugee channels, and into the informal economy. Nonetheless, there is also a need for low-skilled (i.e. cleaners) to medium-skilled (i.e. plumbers) labourers, some of whom are required to provide services to the highly skilled workers. Accordingly, Sassen’s (1991) dual migration theory links highly and less skilled migration to global cities in the modern economy.

Of course, in reality we also have those who are neither highly-skilled or lower-skilled but instead somewhere in between the two working categories. These are termed by Conradson and Latham (2007) ‘middling transnationals’ and include teachers, nurses etc. However, as discussed above, the recognition of skill is nonetheless a social process, that is controlled by dominant norms. Jordan and Duvell (2003) argued that this favouritism runs along the lines of the dominant social hegemony. Whereby, high skilled, white, workers with first-world citizenship are treated as inherently superior to their natural subordinates in the global south – unskilled, non-white, and from the third world. In the East to West labour migration context, Ciupijus (2011) observed a similar disequilibrium. Accordingly, he contends that the education credentials of many Eastern Europeans were often overlooked, or completely nullified.

Csedo (2008) attributed this to the presumed knowledge gap between educational standards across countries, or regions (East and West). Consequently, migrants had to try harder to break through the foreign labour market. Furthermore, barriers were circumvented by acquiring additional human capital training (Friedberg, 2000; Eckstein and Weiss, 2004). This included host country education credentials (i.e. post graduate degrees) as means to gain access to higher occupational mobility, and break through the migrant glass ceiling (Favell, 2008).
3.3 Brain mobilities: aggregate human capital redistributions

Brain drain
Much of the literature on high skilled labour migration has focused on the flow of labour from developing to developed countries; characterizing the relationship as one of loss. The outflow of skilled labour is referred to as brain drain for the country of origin (Grubel and Scott, 1966). It is evident that the loss of human capital via the large-scale emigration of talented persons can have a detrimental effect on the country of origin (Bhagwati and Hamada, 1974). To stress the magnitude of these developments for developing nations, Lowell and Findlay (2001:3) found that “losses of ten to thirty percent of the tertiary educated subpopulation” could be recorded.

Correspondingly, this builds upon the understanding that migration is a highly selective process, and human capital theories predict that individuals with greater levels of human capital have a higher propensity to migrate (Borjas, 1994). Moreover, building on the understanding that knowledge is embodied (Meyer, 2001), when individuals relocate, they do so with their knowledge in tow. Consequently, the global struggle over human resources (human capital), denotes a win-loss dichotomy between countries.

Brain drain theory assumes that countries of origin, which produce and invest in the human capital levels of their citizens ‘lose’ (brain drain), while their wealthier counterparts ‘win’ (brain gain) (Bhagwati and Hamada, 1974). Subsequently, those with the brain gain, cream off the talent and skills of imported workers, at a subsidized cost (Stark et al., 1997). Considering that human capital, like financial capital, is a key determinant for economic growth (Romer, 2001), this can have serious consequences on national developments, whereby “poor countries will [continue to] experience brain drains unless active preventive measures are taken” (Salt, 1992a: 1106).

On the other hand, there has been an increasing shift in the nature of international migration (King, 2002). Dustmann and Weiss (2007) argue that the notion of brain drain is outdated, because migration is less likely to be permanent. Indeed, the increasing circular migration and a growing number of transmigrants challenge the notion of brain drain (Lowell and Findlay, 2002). Furthermore, an increased phenomenon of high skilled migration across developed countries has been observed since the 1980s (Findlay, 1988). This has contributed to the re-conceptualization of the brain drain framework, towards one of brain exchange (Johnson and Regets, 1998; Findlay 2001).

Towards brain-redistribution
Furthermore, Lowell and Findlay (2002) advanced a more apt conceptual frame, reformulating the notion of brain drain towards a typology of brain re-distribution (brain gain, brain drain, brain waste, brain circulation, and brain overflow). Thereby, emphasizing the value of different types of migration and their potential economic and human capital outcomes (Williams et al., 2004). Brain waste refers to the tracking of high-skilled migrants into low-skilled jobs, their human capital is wasted. Brain circulation refers to the itinerant nature of labour trajectories, their
Human capital is circulated (Regts, 1997). Brain overflow encompasses an oversaturation of domestic human capital levels. Finally, there is another notion, and that is brain training. Brain training most commonly refers to student migration, whereby individuals depart as unskilled and return home with enhanced human capital levels (Williams and Balaz, 2004).

Williams and Balaz (2005) question “the assumption that skilled workers who take unskilled jobs abroad constitute brain waste”, arguing that such experiences contribute to the acquisition of “nonoccupationally specific competences, such as language or communication skills, which can be valorised, especially through return migration” (p. 440). Furthermore, Zimmerman and Kahanec (2009) postulated that prospects of brain drain, via migrants permanently settling out of country, could be alleviated by the potential of such individuals acting as intermediaries between their host and source countries.

Furthermore, this can be linked to the literature on Diasporas. In fact, Vertovec (2004) argues that many migrants actually choose to live transnationally. By living their economic lives between two or more places, they give birth to a range of complex social, political and economic relations across international borders. Transnationalism re-conceptualizes the notion of immigration, demonstrating how “emigration does not necessarily mean definitive departure in the minds of migrants themselves” (Brettel and Hollifield, 2008: 17). Instead, by utilizing their embedded know-how from two different environments (Blackler, 2002), they are able to leverage their skills into entrepreneurial activities that travel across international boundaries (Faist, 1997).

**Brain circulation and intra-company mobility**

Intra-company mobility is one area of research that has actively explored the notion of brain circulation (Chiswick and Miller, 2006). Consequently, the study of transnational company transfers is one area of research that merges migration and management literatures (Williams and Balaz, 2008). Intra-company mobility represents the transfer of usually higher-level management and professionals. The mobility of corporate transferees is utilized to circulate knowledge between and across the global organization of the company (Findlay et al., 1996).

Furthermore, the growing complexity of firm and business practices has resulted in an increasing need for specialized knowledge, innovation and the diversification of skills (Sassen, 1991). Such developments have been complemented by advancements in technology and the global expansion of air travel, which have significantly contributed to increased international mobility – particularly, for knowledgeable workers (Thompson et al., 2001). In the 1990s, Salt (1992a) predicted that this form of international movement would only amplify “especially between the rich, more developed states” (p.1106). Correspondingly, the studies on transnational elites in the global cities have already confirmed this trend (Beaverstock and Smith, 1996; Beaverstock, 2005).

Evidently, intra-company mobility represents a means to circulate knowledge internationally, and help employees acquire new understanding and skills. Furthermore, the circulation of brains and talent has become a standardized practice in certain professions, including the sciences.
finance, IT, academia and even sport (Saxenian, 2002). Consequently, the transnational mobility of employees, via multinational companies, represents a considerable portion of global migration movement (Mahroum, 2000). International experience is looked at as a prerequisite of sorts for individual career growth within certain fields (Lowell and Findlay, 2001; Beaverstock, 2005).

Moreover intercompany transnational mobility is an evolving practice, which continues to diversify in its direction and flow. Given the increasingly interconnected nature of the global economy, these transfers are not only limited to European and North American corporations in developing countries. But, rather include the presence of new players, such as Korean corporations in Central and Eastern Europe (i.e. Kia Motors Slovakia, Samsung Electronics Slovakia), or Chinese multinationals in Africa. (i.e. China National Petroleum, China Railway Construction) (Corkin and Burke, 2006; Soviar, 2009).

3.4 Knowledge: beyond human capital and skills
Williams and Balaz (2008:x) argue that “migration is more than just a source of substitute human capital, it can be a source of diversity and creativity”. That is the mobility experience, provides for a unique opportunity for the acquisition of knowledge, while return migration facilitates the transfer of it - back home - in so far as all knowledge can be transferred between places (Klagge and Klein-Hitpab, 2010). However, migration studies have exceedingly focused on human capital and skills, rather than knowledge (Williams et al., 2004; Williams, 2009).

Moreover, although some studies have touched upon the significance of knowledge in the mobility context, they have done so in terms of high-skilled, inter-company transfers, placing emphasis on workers, rather than migrants (Beaverstock, 2002; 2005). Furthermore, they have not directly explored the use of mobility to acquire and transfer different types of (tacit) knowledge, despite the fact that tacit transfers are at least partly dependent on co-presence, and human mobility facilitates this contact across distances (Williams, 2009). As a consequence, this section will almost exclusively draw on the work of Williams (2006; 2007a; 2007b) and Williams and Balaz (2004; 2005; 2008), who were the first authors to substantially explore, and link the gap between migration and knowledge management literatures.

Migration and knowledge re-conceptualized
Globalization processes have transformed the nature of human mobility and, by extension, the potential for knowledge creation, transfer, and overspills. The resulting institutional, economic, social and political changes, such as the expansion of the European Union into Eastern Europe, have contributed to knowledge impacts, in terms of increased mobility outflows (out-migration), in addition to increased mobility inflows (return migration). Furthermore, they have accelerated the potential for more circular and repeat migration.
In addition, the propensity to acquire and share knowledge has been accelerated by IT and transport innovations (low cost airlines) (Dobruszkes, 2009; Duszczyk, 2011). In turn, knowledge transactions occur at ever higher frequencies (Favell, 2009; Williams and Balaz, 2009). Moreover, human mobility is increasingly viewed as a platform for learning. Its value is more socially recognized, both in terms of inter-company transfers and language and education exchanges. Essentially, international mobility is becoming more and more common. In response, King (2002:101) building upon Berger’s (1984) statement, argues “that migration is the quintessential experience of our time, even more so at the dawn of the new millennium”.

Accordingly, Williams and Balaz (2008) argue that international migration facilitates the transfer of ‘situated’ tacit knowledge across barriers and boundaries. Corporeal mobility puts individuals into face-to-face contact that would have otherwise remained removed via national, social and cultural differences. Furthermore, corporeal mobility facilitates the acquisition of situated knowledge, in addition to promoting new learning experiences. Henceforth, migration contributes to both the creation and transfer of knowledge. Consequently, the current understanding of the role of knowledge in the migration context is inadequate. Rather, the role of knowledge in mobility must be appreciated more holistically.

Addressing the knowledge limitations of human capital and skill theories, Williams and Balaz (2004; 2005) initially directed the debate towards social competencies. They utilized Evans’ (2002) starfish model to demonstrate the array of softs skills that migrants acquire, through their mobility experience. These included improved communication abilities, greater independence, and increased self-confidence, all themes that emerged in multiple studies. More surprisingly, skilled migrants whom participated in low-skilled employment abroad, still identified positively with their migration experience in terms of learning. Consequently, the notion of competencies, acknowledged the significance of learning and knowledge acquisition that lay beyond formal qualifications, and (explicit-only) knowledge gains.

Thereafter, the authors further conceptualized the debate towards one of knowledge, more specifically situated, tacit knowledge. By applying Blacker’s (2002) typology of embodied, enbrainied, encultured and embedded knowledge (see discussion in chapter #2), Williams (2006; 2007a; 2007b; 2008) was able to identify the different forms of tacit knowledge that could be acquired and disseminated through geographic mobility. In response, Williams and Balaz (2008) identified enbrainied (conceptual and cognitive skills) and embodied (practical, observed and sensory understanding) knowledge to be more spatial fluid.

On the other hand, they argue that embedded (organizational and institutional understanding) and encultured (socialization) knowledge are much more ‘sticky’ due to their context specific nature (see discussion in chapter #2). Nevertheless, the authors propose that mobility across social, economic and geographic contexts provides a rich groundwork for making comparisons. Hence, it facilitates reflexive thinking. As a result, migrants are potential knowledge brokers, which due to their specific positionality between two or more contexts, can more effectively translate knowledge internationally (Williams, 2007b).
3.5 Migrants as knowledge brokers

Moreover, when migrants represent knowledge brokers they function not only as the physical carriers and translators of knowledge, but as sources of new perspectives, know-how, and innovation, both personally, and via their different networks in the two different, socially situated environments. What is more, knowledge is continuously transmuted through its utilization. As a result, everyday social interactions result in intended and unintended knowledge transfers and overspills (Williams, 2006): migrants’ experiences of such interactions are invariably varied. Most commonly, geographic mobility facilitates the transfer and translation of tacit knowledge through the process of socialization (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Furthermore, return migration increases the potential for knowledge diffusion, because migrants are familiar with the native society, and also trusted as cultural insiders (Williams and Balaz 2008; Klagge and Klein-Hitpab, 2010).

Furthermore, migrants also represent key pillars, or ‘pipelines’, that help to unite previously unconnected boundaries by expanding the geographic horizons of social networks and communities of practice (Klagge and Klein-Hitpab, 2010). Correspondingly, migrants “can draw on these to access new and different sources of enculturated and embedded knowledge” (Williams, 2006: 592). Furthermore, as discussed in chapter #2, social networks - in the form of weak ties, are quintessential in facilitating access to non-redundant knowledge. Finally, migration (geographic mobility) helps to ‘renew’ trust in such relations; keeping social networks secure through periodic ‘face-to-face’ contact (Williams and Balaz, 2008).

Furthermore, Williams distinguished that “migration also reshapes distanciated relationships” (Williams, 2007a: 35), thereby re-configuring the local-global binary. Thus, migration not only renews trust, but subsequently shapes, transforms and reformulates local and global social networks. Nonetheless, it may also weaken pre-migration networks, as the original members may feel left-behind. Or, they may lose touch with their native community and the way things work at home (Guarnizo et al., 1999). Nevertheless, migrants have the potential to bridge regions through their mobility, and connect networks that would have otherwise remained separated by social, economic and political cleavages. Correspondingly, Klagge and Klein-Hitpab (2010) argue that “in addition to their own skills, experiences and knowledge, [m]igrants can also provide linkages ‘pipelines’ to firms” (p.4).

On the other hand, migration scholars have been exploring how return migration contributes to national development since the 1970s (Piore, 1979), but more recently since the seminal work of Van Hear and Nyberg Sorensen (2002; 2003). A range of colourful perspectives have informed the debate (Black et al., 2003; Castles and Delgado, 2008; de Haas, 2010). The spectrum travels between those that favour the positive contribution of migration both in destination and source country versus those that oppose such claims as lacking in reliable data (Castles et al., 2008). This sensitivity is further heightened by the descriptive nature of qualitative research. The agency vs. structure debate also resurfaces in the discussion (de Haas, 2012). The extent to which
migration can contribute to accelerated development, is also dependent on structural limitations, which vary according to the socio-economic context of the country as well as its political climate (de Hass, 2010).

Although the positive impact of financial remittances has been well documented throughout the migration literature, in terms of leveraging much needed capital into the hands of cash-poor families in emerging economies (Cordova, 2006), there is less of a consensus, as to the value of the social capital that return migrants bring with them. This is further constrained by the receptivity of the environment and the successful assimilation or re-assimilation of returned migrants.

Cassarino (2004; 2008) argued that in order for return migration to have a positive impact on development, many steps have to be implemented in the source country. This involves policy planning and government resource allocation, as well as encouraging the positive self-initiative of the individual return migrants. Cassarino, like Saxenian (2006), argues that development is not a haphazard process, but rather a product of meticulous effort and teamwork from both sides of the equation. The successful re-integration of migrants who have returned back home, also depends on the openness of the locals, bringing to attention the importance of social inclusion and re-assimilation policies (Nadler et al., 2016).

On the other end of the spectrum, there has been a wave of critique as to the overly optimistic interpretation of migrants’ impact on development over the past two decades (de Haas, 2010). Scholars argue that the neo-liberalism and by extent neo-optimism agenda vis a vis migration, carries hidden political and economic agendas (de Haas, 2012). According to de Haas, the key scholar on the topic, neoliberal ideologies do not acknowledge enough of the structural constraints that migrants face. However, brain drain literature does, and numerous studies posit how sending economies lose out. When domestically educated human capital floods out of the country, the phenomenon can contribute to regional underdevelopment, due to the lack of access to strategic knowledge and skills, i.e. doctors and engineers (Hayes, 1991).

Comparatively, the literature on social remittances runs parallel to that on international migration and knowledge (Williams and Balaz, 2008). It also provides some insights into how migrants’ social capital, categorized as know-how, know-who, in addition to skills and ideas helps to drive local development (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011). Levitt’s (1998) research demonstrates how the ideas and values of transnational migrants can influence institutional and behavioural changes in both source and destination labour markets. This happens through circular migration flows, that are initiated by, at times, casual and routine visits back home, such as family and holiday visits.

These are critical in maintaining bonds but also prove that outbound migrants are not cut off from their native environment. On the contrary, the study of social remittances demonstrates how ideas and not just capital can travel with the migrants as they live and work across two or more national contexts. What is more these ideas spill beyond the confines of the migrant
community, and have the potential to also affect and influence the mind-frame of non-migrants both at home and abroad (Lacroix, 2010). The literature acknowledges that social remittances are changing the development landscape. It is based on the development of a scholarly debate that acknowledges that migrants are vessels of not just capital but also knowledge, skills as well as ideas (Levitt, 1998; Levitt 2001; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011; Levitt and Rajaram, 2013). This is because migrants are inevitably influenced by the environment they settle in and remit that know-how back home (Levitt, 2001). The transfers of these ideas and values between and across sending and receiving countries also contribute to the dissemination of a global culture.

Conclusion
This chapter explored knowledge in the context of migration. This is predominantly measured according to human capital, often signalled by education in addition to skills and competencies. International migration is seen as key vehicle in the circulation of knowledge, from the perspective of sourcing knowledgeable workers. This practice has in part been effectively mobilized by multinational corporations that needed to transfer workers across their parent and daughter companies, in addition to securing guru as well as just in time employees (Barley and Kunda, 2004). At the same time and more remarkably, international migration is seldom explored as a vehicle for knowledge acquisition.

The great majority of migration and management literature takes a much more utilitarian perspective on human mobility. It focuses on migration being vehicle to distribute brains and bodies from surplus, to in demand labour markets, thereby contributing to the mechanics of supply and demand. On the contrary, this chapter argues for a reconceptualization of brain drain to brain redistribution and ultimately brain gain. Migrants that travel across time and space, encounter different learning experiences that can enrich their knowledge base, in the form of hard-skills, but also soft skills.

It is the acquisition of the later, that can greater enhance their performance as a result of augmented confidence and improved communication abilities. When migrants return back, they may function as knowledge brokers that catalyse new growth and innovation in their native environment, rather than just substitute human capital. More specifically, their value-added ability to broker knowledge transactions across differing environments should be acknowledged. The chapter concludes that migrants and in particular return and circular ones, are indispensable to business growth and bridge building across cultural, linguistic or national differences.
Knowledge and the Firm

4.1 Knowledge and the firm

Much of the literature on migration and knowledge transfer, particularly in the East to West context, focuses on the experiences of migrants and their economic activity in the West (Williams and Balaz 2005). However, in light of recent (post-accession) trends towards more short-term, circular and sequential migration, it is interesting to explore the significance of knowledge transfer (via returned knowledge flows) from the perspective of recipient organizations in the Eastern Europe. Thus, this chapter will spotlight the role of the firm in the knowledge circulation process, a neglected research area. Through an interdisciplinary analysis between migration and management literatures, this section will explore how human mobility can facilitate knowledge transfer, as well as contribute to the diversification of the knowledge available to organizations.

In the modern economy, knowledge is exploited for its economic value; it is viewed as the key component to firm competitiveness (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Consequently, in order to stay economically competitive, firms must continuously upgrade their knowledge base (Porter, 1990). As a result, organizations become key “sites of invention, innovation and learning” (Amin and Cohendet, 2004: 2), because, knowledge is not only a key resource, but the underlying driver for productivity and economic growth (Malmberg & Maskell, 2002). Moreover, Williams and Balaz (2008) argue that organizations are also the central and direct recipients of knowledge in the modern economy. Additionally, through their everyday practices, they create (i.e. patents), utilize and transfer knowledge further (Nonaka et al., 2000).

The information technology revolution is the engine that propelled the knowledge intensification of the global economy. Correspondingly, industrial practices have become less-production-based, and more knowledge centred (Druker, 1993). This has contributed to the rise of the knowledge-based economies, which the OECD defines as: “economies which are directly based on the production, distribution and use of knowledge and information” (Brophy, 1996: 7). Although all organizations are still knowledge dependent (Williams and Balaz, 2008), some are more knowledge-intensive than others. Currently, knowledge intensive industries continue to expand, including from advanced capitalist to emerging market economies (Alvesson, 1995).

The OECD observed that “more than 50 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the major OECD economies is now knowledge-based” (Brophy, 1996: 9). The reason being, is that knowledge-intensive firms (and industries), which rely more heavily on the use of technology and high-skilled labour, also yield larger returns. Furthermore, knowledge seems to continuously grow, and the need for it continuously expands. Nonetheless, Arrow (1962) originally explained that knowledge stocks are never reduced through use; in essence knowledge is a non-
depleteable resource. Nonetheless, knowledge is not generated cost-free. Mokyr (2002) pointed out that the creation of knowledge is “not negligible, in terms of time, effort and often other real resources as well” (p.7). Likewise, Masell and Malmberg (1999) identified it as a gradual process that seldom leads to dramatic changes.

4.2 Firms, knowledge and networks
Correspondingly, firms not only create knowledge, but they also draw on a range of other external sources to access it (Amin and Cohendet, 2004). Learning within the firm is best understood as a composite of different network processes that are both internal to, and external from the organization (Bathelt et al., 2004). Moreover, network information pooling, is one of the most natural means of knowledge acquisition. In essence, Simons (2006) observed that “people in a network share a common interest, exchange ideas, and help each other” (p. 200). Therefore, knowledge is first and foremost produced, exchanged, and circulated socially (Coe and Bunnell, 2003). For the most part, knowledge is a social phenomenon, and learning is a relational practice.

Corresponding to the above argument, knowledge is also a socially embedded phenomenon (Granovetter, 1985). Furthermore, it is both tacit and explicit in structure (Nonaka & Takeuchi 1995). Therefore, as discussed in Chapter 1, not all knowledge is transferable. Moreover, tacit understanding is often needed to unlock explicit meaning. In response, Senker (1995:4) argued that “all knowledge is either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge”

Furthermore, tacit knowledge is exchanged inter-personally, through “conversation, demonstration and observation” (Brophy, 1996: 39). Evidently, physical proximity facilitates knowledge sharing. Wolfe (2006) observed that when individuals work together physically, they “develop a common base of tacit knowledge” (Wolfe, 2006: 9). This further assist knowledge transfer, because so much of what is being communicated is not expressed verbally. Nonetheless, knowledge is also shared relationally, and this need not occur in the same spatial context. Amin and Cohendet (2004) found that members of a community of practice, share a common tacit base, and can subsequently translate knowledge even at a distance. Correspondingly, Williams and Balaz (2009) argued that, in reality the local and the distanced blend together, as “most firms probably draw on several overlapping multiscalar networks” (p.684), in an effort to source and diversify their knowledge base.

4.3 Firm absorption capacity
However, in order for knowledge to be shared, it must first be valued. That is, knowledge must be recognized, to be received. Consequently, Van der Heijden (2002) summarized that “expertise can only exist by virtue of being respected by knowledgeable people in the organization” (p.565). Upon which, Williams and Balaz (2005) further articulated, “knowledge only acquires economic value when, or because, it is recognized by others” (p.460). Accordingly, the recognition and
implementation of outsider knowledge is “critical to the innovation process” (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990: 2). However, knowledge transactions are controlled by a firm’s absorption capacity. Cohen and Levinthal (1990) explained that if,

“a firm wish[e]d to acquire and use knowledge that [was] unrelated to its ongoing activity, then the firm must dedicate effort exclusively to creating absorptive capacity (i.e., absorptive capacity is not a byproduct)” (p. 24).

In other words, innovation is dependent to the firm’s ability to assimilate and exploit new knowledge. However, “the production, acquisition, absorption, reproduction, and dissemination of knowledge” (Gertler, 2003: 76) is controlled by the firm’s learning potential. Consequently, previous knowledge determines the search for, and recognition of, new forms of knowledge. Cohen and Levinthal (1990) illustrated this in terms of what is effectively a path-dependency model, whereby organizations have a tendency to get ‘locked-in’ their current knowledge base.

Conversely, knowledge assimilation is dependent on the firm’s ability to process and combine new incoming knowledge, in relation to its existing practices (old knowledge). That is, if organizations want to access new and innovative forms of knowledge, they must explicitly invest time, and resources to expand their knowledge base. Zahra and George (2002) further differentiated organizational learning according to four (4) capabilities: “knowledge acquisition, assimilation, transformation, and exploitation” (p. 188). Nonetheless, potential knowledge innovation capacity is controlled by past acquisition capabilities.

Management literatures have most actively explored the importance of organization learning (Uzumeli and Nemhard, 1998). Furthermore, they have concluded that learning is not a solely a by-product, rather explicit efforts must be initiated to promote innovation (Maskell and Malmberg, 1999). Correspondingly, organizations must engage in processes of ‘unlearning’ in an effort to make room for new – incoming knowledge. However, unlearning previous ways of doing things does not occur overnight, rather change is a gradual process. On the other hand, Imai (1986) observed that a state of crisis can trigger accelerated organizational transformation. In crises, firms and individuals inevitably become more open to knowledge that is non-path dependent, in an effort to construct solutions. Nevertheless, organizational learning is always a resource consuming effort, whether the cause be - an economic crisis, or the search for more enhanced competitiveness and profitability.

4.4 Firms and knowledge recruitment
Accordingly, firms use recruitment practices as another method to attract and retain knowledge. This is in addition to using employee mobility as a means to circulate and distribute knowledge throughout the organization. As discussed in chapter #1, knowledge is both socially situated and individually embedded (Blackler, 2002). Consequently, employees are a vital source of human capital, not to mention networks and knowledge for companies. Furthermore, international migrants are potentially a source of novel forms of knowledge.
Barley and Kunda (2004) articulate that migrants fulfil essential knowledge roles within firms, and play a key function in trans-national knowledge exchanges. Accordingly, organizations source knowledge in response to their varying resource needs, which the authors conceptualized according to a three-layer hierarchy. These include the hiring of gurus, hired guns, and warm bodies. ‘The hiring of gurus’ represents strategic recruitment, whereby organizations explicitly seek out key knowledge that is missing in the local labour pool. In contrast, ‘hired guns’ and ‘warm bodies’, represent sources of ‘just-in-time’ knowledge and labour, which are equally integral to the organization.

Comparatively, ‘bounded’ labour mobility, geographic movement that occurs within the framework of the firm, provides another platform for firms to transfer knowledge via their employees. Much of the literature on the mobility of the highly skilled is explored from the bounded context (Salt, 1992; Beaverstock and Boardwell, 2000; Morgan, 2001). Furthermore, bounded careers offer “far more structured opportunities for co-learning and knowledge transfer” (Williams, 2005: 18). At the same time, boundary less mobility, which is more akin to free agent migration, represents a significant means for extra-local (extra-firm) knowledge circulation (Batheil et al., 2004). Likewise, inter-regional and inter-national moves are mobility modes which facilitate the transfer of unusual forms of knowledge.

Most interestingly, Williams and Balaz (2008) argue that it is “firms rather than territories are most directly engaged with the economic outcomes of emigration and immigration” (199). Henceforth, mobile individuals (migrants) can be viewed as potential knowledge spill over agents (Bergman and Schubert, 2005). They directly or indirectly promote the circulation of knowledge to other individuals, firms and even regions. Furthermore, international migration experience, can signpost individual’s learning competencies, much like higher-education. Likewise, Williams and Balaz found that successful migration was a symbolic asset in regards to the labour force. Accordingly, migration demonstrates a certain “openness to experience factor” (Williams, 2005: 12), that denotes the individual’s flexibility and willingness to learn (new things).

In addition, Harvey (2009) observed that certain sectors were more mobility friendly than others (i.e. finance and academia). More specifically, certain professions promoted and rewarded international experiences and work placements. To demonstrate, Harvey noted “that British lawyers were expected by their firms to work abroad as a strategic policy to promote knowledge transfer and diffusion in branch locations in other global cities.” (2009: 502). Not to mention, that return migration flows greatly contribute to the transfer of knowledge between developed to developing economies (Klagge and Klein-Hitpab, 2010). Saxenian (1999) demonstrate the significance of new knowledge influxes to regional upgrading in her Silicon Valley (USA) and Hinshu (Taiwan) comparison. Nonetheless, Zhou (2005) argues that the regional impact of human capital and knowledge transfers remains under investigated.
4.5 Return migration and knowledge transfer
Correspondingly, Klagge and Klein-Hitpab (2010) argue that “migrants can also provide linkages or ‘pipelines’ to firms” (4), in terms of human capital and skill transfers. However empirical studies which explore the effects of return migration in relation to the firm are still lacking. Nonetheless, migrants have been noted to have an “impact upon the economic development of the country in which they reside” (Harvey, 2009:497). Moreover, they have the potential to impact the knowledge capacity of organizations, via the influx of their non-local human capital (Tripl and Maier, 2010). To enumerate, Williams (2009) argues that migrants are more than just labour substitutes, but rather constructive sources of knowledge, resources and networks (Williams, 2009).

Furthermore, firms are foremost the direct recipients of such knowledge transactions, they play key role in the brain circulation process (Keren and Ping, 2003; Faist, 2008). However, factors in the home country can positively or negatively influence return migration and knowledge flows. Moreover, “knowledge does not simply translate into action” (Williams et al., 2004: 43), rather efforts must be mobilized to facilitate such influxes. In an effort to promote return migration, some national governments have mobilized special efforts to promote homecoming. Countries such as China, India, South Korea, which have traditionally suffered from brain drain, are now making explicit efforts to draw back their diaspora from abroad. In the CEE context, there were efforts made by the Polish government (2007/2008) to encourage return migration (i.e. ‘Projekt 12 Miast – 12 cities Project’) (White, 2011). Increasingly, governments and businesses alike are trying to tap-into the human capital, skill, and knowledge potential of emigrants.

Knowledge exchanges and power asymmetries
Although the acquisition and transfer of knowledge is undoubtedly important, new knowledge must be first recognized, to be made use of (Van der Heijden, 2002; Yang, 2003). This is dependent on the firm’s ability to accept and absorb ‘external reference standards’ (Earl, 1990; Cohen and Levinthal, 1990). Nevertheless, knowledge transfer is not limited to the organization as a whole. At the very core, knowledge transfer is enacted at the level of the individual.

As a result, individual dynamics come into play, particularly, power relations which can greatly impede the knowledge transfer process. Maskell and Malmberg (1999) explained that new ideas “might jeopardise the interests of some individuals or larger groups with the power to prevent or impede the process” (Maskell and Malmberg, 1999: 179). Evidently, power holders that benefit from the current structures (status quo) may seek to protect their vested interests, even hampering future growth, in an effort to keep things the way they are. Consequently, knowledge transfers can be ‘blocked’ at the level of the individual (Foster, 1965; Cerase, 1974; Guarnizo et al., 1999).

However, knowledge transfer is also influenced by culture. Environments that appreciate openness and diversity yield more positive results, than those that are more traditional, and inverted. The latter are substantially more closed to innovation and change. For this reason, Williams and Balaz (2008) argued that “organizations need to maximize connectivity and
openness amongst workers to leverage migrant knowledge transfers” (p.1926). The degrees of openness and tolerance within an organizational culture set the pretext for how new knowledge is received. Nonetheless, failed attempts at knowledge sharing between individuals can have an off-putting effect. Van Woerkom (2003) argued that “if knowledge, insights and visions are not being shared, the organization will not benefit from it, and the individuals will be frustrated in their attempts to change work practice” (p.377). Consequently, individuals will feel less inclined to share their ideas, and potential capacities will slowly erode.

In the context of this thesis, it is evident that return migrants – who seek to transfer knowledge across socio-economic contexts will no doubt encounter considerable barriers in the knowledge process; knowledge transfers are bounded to firm absorption capacity (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990), regional dynamics and individual and group power asymmetries. This research gives rise to an important question; can firms in Slovakia actually retain and effectively utilize their potential brain-gains? Zweig (2006:79) summarized this dilemma by stating: “getting people to return is one thing; getting them to stay is another”. For the most part, this remains an important question for Slovakia. If knowledge transfers do not succeed, do returned migrants -pending their life trajectory and age category - re-migrate again in search of more receptive and rewarding environments? Moreover, is re-emigration stimulated due to unreceptive knowledge exchanges back home?

Conclusion
Knowledge is indispensable to firm growth, because knowledge is what drives business and innovation. Even though knowledge builds upon knowledge and it can never be depleted through use, knowledge can become outdated. Moreover, knowledge is not generated cost free. Firms must invest time and resources to help drive knowledge expansion, most notably through research and development but also human resource recruitment. Comparatively, firms also utilize immigration as a means to source new knowledge, including attracting new brains from out of country.

Advanced economies have benefited tremendously from this practice, often triggering the well-known brain drain debate. At the same, return migration can be a vehicle to help restore some balance (Klagge and Klein-Hitpab, 2010). The recruitment of outbound expats is also viewed as a cost-effective process by many companies. Developing economies also need top notch skill and the recruitment of expat, although non-native workers can be expensive. Firstly, the workers must be attracted to the destination labour market, which can include significant geographic displacement. Secondly, expats are outsiders. They do not necessarily share cultural or linguistic ties with the destination environment. Therefore the retention of this workforce is likely to be more problematic, than that of native return migrants. Returnees already speak the local language and already have kin and friendship networks established in the country, which can facilitate the integration process.

Evidently, the successful re-harvesting of return migrants and subsequent knowledge flows is of course constrained by the receptivity of the firm environment and knowledge absorption
capacity of the given business sector (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990). It is evident, certain industries are more open to such transactions, most notably the IT sector, which is one of the most innovative and forward moving industries. If companies want to make the most of the new incoming knowledge, they must invest time, effort and capital to create space for it. Change is often necessitated through need, either in the form of maintaining competitiveness or because the current knowledge utilized is no longer sufficient. Once again, new knowledge is often sourced from outside the firm, in the form of new hires.
5.1 Transformational learning and migration – an introduction:

“Learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity. It is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but also a process of becoming” (Wenger, 1998: 215).

Learning is a fundamental aspect of the human experience. To live, is to learn. It is both an inevitable and undeniable fact of life, because “no need is more fundamentally human than our need to understand the meaning of our experience” (Mezirow et al., 1990: 11). Furthermore, whether it occurs formally through institutions (school, workplace, firm), or informally through life experiences (society, family, relationships), evidently learning transforms us. It changes our “behaviour, knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs” (Merriam et al., 1996: 1). Consequently, learning challenges are self-concept, identity and perspective, ultimately contributing to growth, change and an enhanced state of self-awareness.

Intrinsically, certain life-events can heighten the necessity for learning, or as Mezirow et al. (1990) explained, intensify the desire to make meaning (sense) out of our experience. These ‘trigger’ events usually pertain to experiences that “force people to face something different from what they had faced before” (McCall, 1997: 62). They represent a divergence from normative expectations, and are interpreted as disorienting dilemmas. Consequently, they provide rich grounds for introspection, and often necessitate some form of change as a result: be it in thinking, approach, or perspective.

I argue that international migration represents a significant life experience, which marks an important biographical turning-point in an individual’s life. Through corporeal mobility, individuals are transplanted across geographic, cultural and social space (Musella et al., 2011). This provides rich grounds for learning, as migrants “encounter and explore something essentially new in their social world and their biographical identity” (Schutze, 2008:23). Moreover, the significance of learning in the migration context has been explored in a multitude of studies (Sjaadstad, 1962; Chiswick, 1978; Salt, 1992; Massey et al., 1993; Dustmann et al., 2003). However, these have mostly focus on learning acquisition in terms of human capital, language, and skills.

However, this thesis argues that international migration is also a catalyst for accelerated learning, including transformational experiences. Migration contributes to learning which is not only instrumental, in terms of professional development, but, also transformative, in terms of personal development. In the latter, learning is an experience of identity, and a process of

5.2 An introduction to transformative learning theory
Transformative learning theory has been one of the most widely discussed theories in adult education over the last three decades (Cranton, 2006). It represents the seminal work of Jack Mezirow, who sought to produce a new learning theory which explored the effects of what he termed ‘deep’ learning. His theoretical approach originated from his empirical research of women returning to work and higher education in the 1970s. Accordingly, transformative learning marks the transition from passive acceptance of knowledge towards individual agency. More explicitly, it marks the transition from perceiving the self, according to other people’s expectations, towards seeking validation from within. This occurs through a process of identity shedding, as Mezirow (1978) further expands:

“by becoming aware of hitherto unquestioned cultural myths which they have internalized, women come to find a new sense of identity within a new meaning perspective which can lead to greater autonomy, control and responsibility for their own lives.” (p.102)

The conceptualization of learning as a transformative experience helps to “explain how adults change the way they interpreted their world” (Taylor, 2008: 5). The culmination being the transformation of meaning-perspective, defined as “one’s personal, private, subjective outlook” (Mezirow et al., 1990: 364). Meaning-perspectives are acquired through socialization, and subsequently vary according to socio-economic and cultural context. Nevertheless, they are transformed through a disorienting dilemma, and resolved “through exposure to alternative perspectives” (Mezirow et al., 1990: 364).

Nevertheless, transformative learning is not an automated process and should not be taken for granted. Rather, it is a learning domain that is complex, multifaceted, and ‘uniquely adult’ (Mezirow, 1981). Moreover, it is presumably constantly shifting, and depended on context. Just as certain life events can trigger reflections, towards an expanded state of consciousness. Likewise, others can have the opposite effect, resulting in growth-inhibiting outcomes and development backsliding (Merriam et al., 1996).

5.3 The three (3) key influences on Mezirow’s theoretical framework
The following section will build on the work of Kitchenham (2008), who compiled the below chart (see Figure 4), in order to illustrate the key academic influences on Mezirow’s theoretical framework.
The Influences on Mezirow’s Early Transformative Learning Theory and Its Related Facets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Transformative learning facet</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kuhn’s (1962) paradigm</td>
<td>• Perspective transformation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Frame of reference</td>
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<td>• Meaning perspective</td>
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<td>• Habit of mind</td>
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<td>Freire’s (1970) conscientization</td>
<td>• Disorienting dilemma</td>
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<td>• Critical self-reflection</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Habit of mind</td>
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<tr>
<td>Habermas’s (1971, 1984) domains of learning</td>
<td>• Learning processes</td>
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<td>• Perspective transformation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Meaning scheme</td>
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<td>• Meaning perspective</td>
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Figure 4 Mezirow’s Theoretical Influences (Source: Kitchenham, 2008: 106)

Kuhn (1962)
Mezirow’s notion of perspective transformation draws on Kuhn’s (1962) conceptualization of scientific innovation through paradigm shifts. According to Kuhn, a paradigm represents a scientific worldview utilized by a community of practice. This view is assumed to be correct, until new experiences begin to poke holes in old ways of knowing. Furthermore, as scientific thought advances, more and more holes become apparent. Thus, the taken-for-granted way of knowing (paradigm) enters into a state of disequilibrium, because the theory no longer accounts for the new reality. Kuhn referred to this as the crisis’ state in knowledge development. He associated scientific innovation to a ‘revolutionary’ process, whereby old paradigms are replaced by new ones – out of necessity. Furthermore, the shedding of old paradigms, always results in a superior form of knowledge to its predecessor.

Habermas (1971; 1984)
Following the work of Kuhn (1962), Mezirow’s framework was also heavily influenced by the work of Habermas (1971; 1984). Habermas conceptualized knowledge into three co-existing paradigms: objectivist, interpretivist, and critical. The objective paradigm corresponds to positivist science, and views knowledge as objective and existing outside of the individual. In contrast, the interpretivist paradigm conceptualizes reality as socially constructed. Knowledge is a construct that is relative to context. Lastly, the critical paradigm deconstructs knowledge
completely. Knowledge is viewed to be ideologically distorted, and corrupted by power (Yang, 2003). Correspondingly, Habermas (1971; 1984) differentiated them into the following three (3) learning domains: technical (objective), practical (interpretivist) and emancipatory learning (critical).

Mezirow expanded on Habermas’ notion of critical knowledge and emancipatory learning, by applying it to the individual domain. In effect, he related perspective transformation to “the emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships” (Kitchenham, 2008:109). Furthermore, he collapsed Habermas’ three (3) learning domains into two distinct modes of learning: 1) instrumental and 2) communicative. Hereby, arguing that “we learn differently when we are learning to perform than when we are learning to understand what is being communicated to us” (Mezirow, 1990: 1).

Consequently, ‘instrumental learning’ represents logical-linear thinking. It relates to learning that occurs within meaning-schemes. This includes cause-and-effect relationships, task-oriented learning, as well as learning how to-do, or perform at something. On the other hand, ‘communicative learning’ represents a deeper form of learning. It is characterized by a self-reflective approach, which involves critical reflection and learning through meaning-perspective transformation. For that reason, communicative learning is of greater significance to adult learners (Mezirow, 1991).

What is more, critical reflection in the sense that Habermas (1984) and Mezirow (1990) utilize this term, “is not concerned with the how or the how-to of action but with the why, the reasons for and consequences of what we do” (Mezirow, 1990:9). This is akin to Argyris and Schon’s (1974) theory of single-loop and double-loop learning. Thus, communicative learning (or, emancipatory learning – as defined by Habermas) is akin to double-loop learning/thinking, in the sense that solutions are sought outside of the system that created the problem. As a result, underlining assumptions, values and beliefs systems are questioned. In contrast, instrumental learning, or single-loop learning/thinking seeks to solve a problem from within the same conventional framework (or, perspective/paradigm) that it originates from.

**Freire (1970)**

As a learning theory, Mezirow’s conceptualization of transformative learning is most similar to Freire’s (1970) notion of ‘conscientization’. Comparatively, both frameworks are centred on the role of the individual and how “the learning experience grows from and through them” (Stein and Farmer, 2004: 1999). Furthermore, according to Mezirow (1994), conscientization is “a description of the same learning process as perspective transformation” (p.232). Freire (1970), related it to a process of consciousness-raising, whereby an individual “develops a critical [self] awareness” (p.19), by learning how to think for himself, instead of accepting the values of others. Correspondingly, when individual learn to think critically, they acquire a new level of social and political awareness.
Moreover, Freire contrasted this form of learning to the ‘banking model’ of education, or the ‘spoon-feeding’ of uncritical knowledge by the education system. Consequently, conscientization represents coming into one’s own self-awareness. He argued, that as individuals become more conscious (self-aware), they also begin to engage with process as well as discriminate knowledge more critically. Furthermore, they become attentive to the role of power and exploitation in the social sub-text (subliminal meaning), and thus learn to better deconstruct – the power disequilibrium of ‘neutral’ knowledge.

Finally, Freire related the process of (individual) conscientization to that of social transformation. In effect, he politicized self-awareness, because “reflection and action are both contained in praxis and cannot be isolated one from the other” (Newman, 1994: 237). To emphasize, this marks the greatest distinction between him and Mezirow, who argued that social change need not evolve from individual transformation (Mezirow, 2003). Instead, Mezirow conceptualized transformative learning as deeply personal learning experience, rather than an education philosophy that could help promote social change.

5.4 How does transformative learning occur?
As discussed above, transformative learning is prompted by a state of crisis, which brings to light “how and why our assumptions constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world” (Mezirow, 1991: 167). Furthermore, this disjuncture between normative expectations provides grounds for new meaning making:

“Changing social norms reinforce our need to critically examine the very paradigms through which we have been taught by our culture to understand our experience. This process of critical self-reflection has the potential for profoundly changing the way we make sense of our experience of the world, other people, and ourselves” (Mezirow et al., 1990: xiii).

Moreover, O'Sullivan (2003) related it to an irreversible shift in consciousness. Transformative learning occurs when an individual is able to transition past previously preconceived ‘cultural, social and natural limitations’ towards a more cognitively enhanced state of awareness. Together with learning how to negotiate one’s own meanings-schemes and meaning-perspectives, an individual becomes a more autonomous thinker (Mezirow, 1997). Thereby, beginning to form and shape his own identity, rather than uncritically (unconsciously) accepting the social realities imposed on him (Mezirow, 1997). On the other hand, Mezirow et al. (1990) acknowledged that although all learning entails change, not all change signifies transformation. Inevitably, learning can be just instrumental, as opposed to emancipatory.

According to Mezirow, the ‘disorienting dilemma’ is the antecedent to transformation learning. It is often a cataclysmic event (Taylor, 1998), but can also arise more moderately, due to a “growing sense of dissatisfaction with one’s old meaning structure” (Malkki, 2011: 208). Nonetheless, it arises as a result of a discrepancy, when old ways of knowing no longer make
sense (Mezirow, 1990). However, the transition from dilemma to transformation still remains unclear (Taylor, 1998). Furthermore, given the fact that real-life crises are extraordinary events that are volatile in nature – they can also negatively influence the individual (Brookfield, 1987). Furthermore, this can result in great psychological and emotional discomfort. Taylor (2007) explained that when old assumptions, habits and belief systems are overturned, an individual must “live with some discomfort while on the edge of knowing, in the process of gaining new insights and understandings” (p.187).

Another important facet of transformative learning is that of reflection. Primarily, reflection is utilized as a tool for understanding. By applying reflection to our thinking, we learn to compare and contrast our experience. However, Mezirow et al. (1990) argued that “simply reflexively drawing on what one already knows in order to act is not the same thing as reflection” (6). In turn he differentiated between reflexivity and reflection, building yet again on the work of Jurgen Habermas (1971). Consequently, he categorized reflection according to three forms: content reflection (technical learning), process reflection (practical learning) and premise reflection (emancipatory learning). Premise reflection being the key to emancipatory learning and critical knowledge development (Kitchenham, 2008). Hereby, Mezirow et al. (1990) further expanded:

“[By] becoming reflective of the content, process, and especially the premises of one’s prior learning is central to cognition for survival in modern societies. It is the way we control our experiences rather than be controlled by them, and it is an indispensable prerequisite to individual, group, collective transformations, both perspective and social” (Mezirow et al., 1990: 375).

Consequently, premise reflection is critical to asking ‘why’ questions, rather than only making ‘what’ and ‘how’ inquiries. It encompasses a form of self-introspection that encourages an individual to question their own belief systems, assumptions and social constructs, paying attention to how they think, act and feel (Mezirow, 1991; 1995). By asking questions such as ‘why am I thinking what I am thinking?’ individuals begin to deconstruct knowledge and decipher how their values are shaped by those of their family, society and culture. Consequently, Hoyrup (2004) summarized that “reflection in this way is a kind of meta-thinking where we [begin to] consider the relationship between our thoughts and understandings and our actions in a context” (p.442).

Consequently, it is through the process of self-reflection that an individual is able to deconstruct their previous meaning-perspectives, or networks of arguments (Mezirow et al., 1990), and build a more inclusive and enhanced understanding. It marks the transition from being an object of knowledge (or other’s people’s knowledge), towards becoming an agent of one’s own thinking (Mezirow, 1991; Freire, 1970). Furthermore, by learning how to identify how our taken-for-granted norms “have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world”, we learn how to “reformulate these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective” (Mezirow et al., 1990: 14).
5.5 Critiques of transformative learning theory

The most immediate criticism of Mezirow’s theory is the assumed positive growth outcome as a result of a disorienting dilemma. It is evident, that any state of crisis can be an epochal event, which may have severe and irreversible negative consequences on the affected individual. Likewise, Merriam (2001) argued that “certain life experiences can act as barriers to learning” (5). Moreover, a negative interpretation of a ‘disorienting dilemma’ may results in feelings of disempowerment, whereby individuals are made aware of the problem, without necessarily understanding how to tackle it.

Consequently, negatively internalized life crises can contribute to “growth-inhibiting outcomes such as anger, distrust, intolerance, or a constricted worldview” (Merriam et al., 1996: 1). Moreover, an individual may become further resistant to change. Choosing to instead accept the way things are (status quo), because change may be too costly in terms of material, social and psychological penalties. On the other hand, Merriam and Clark (2006) identified that “when the threat to the self is reduced, the process might reverse itself toward more growth-oriented outcomes” (p.30).

Furthermore, Mezirow’s theory is surprisingly devoid of emotion. He outlines transformation to be a fundamentally rational and analytical process that occurs in the cognitive dimension (Mezirow, 2000; Lange, 2004). However, “a crisis is an emotional chaos [...] and therefore the emotional dimension should not be ignored” (Malkki, 2011: 211). Boyd (1989) related the process to that of emotional grieving, while Merriam (2004) conceptualized it as equally intuitive. Evidently, the transformative experience lies beyond the cerebral (Dirx, 2001, 2008), and “the field has fully acknowledged that we need to look past a purely cognitive, rational explanation of these learning experiences” (Stein and Farmer, 2004:205). This draws a parallel to the discussion on the nature of knowledge (see chapter #2), and the tacit (embodied) and explicit (cerebral) aspects of it.

Likewise, Mezirow’s theoretical framework is also devoid of social context. According to Taylor (2007), the author pays “too much attention to the individual and not the individual within his or her socio-cultural context” (Taylor, 2007: 185). Newman (1994) reviewed that Mezirow does not “impel the learner actively into the flow of social history in the way Freire argues that conscientization will” (p.240). Nonetheless, Mezirow (1989) stated that transformative learning and collective social action need not necessarily represent a linear relationship.

Furthermore, Mezirow acknowledged that learning was often promoted in terms of utility. He stated that individuals are taught how to solve production problems (content and process learning), rather than to search for individual meaning. Comparatively, “cultures where the objective is to perpetuate a religion or a regime or to produce a docile workforce, critical reflection and discourses are commonly limited “(Mezirow, 1991: 188). Nonetheless, Mezirow (1991) argued that learning cannot be un-learnt. Moreover, although the learning process is
lifelong (Stein and Farmer, 2004), Mezirow argues that there are particular peaks that induce significant – transformative learning, and therefore shape future learning and changes.

5.6 Transformative learning in the mobility context
Travel literatures, as well as intercultural studies, are two fields of research that have explored the role of transformative learning in the mobility context. Travel affords encounters with the unknown, and corporeal mobility puts individuals in contact with alternative cultural paradigms and world views. Comparatively, travel promotes deep self-introspection. Kottler (1998) argued that there is “no other human activity that has greater potential to alter your perceptions” (p.14). Or, travel – along with other significant life events (see Mezirow’s disorienting dilemma) can function as a catalyst for deep self-introspection. Consequently, it is through experiences that most diverge from our normative expectations, that “it becomes possible to see the inadequacies of one’s own society [or, one’s own thinking] more sharply” (Turner and Ash, 1976: 49).

Correspondingly, travel contributes to culture shock, which Adler defined as “a set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual reinforcements from one’s own culture to new stimuli” (1975:13). Furthermore, the notion of culture-shock is akin to Mezirow’s ‘disorienting dilemma’. Turner and Turner (1969) found that when individuals embark on a journey, they part with the familiar and mundane, and enter the territory of the unknown, which is both threatening and exciting. Consequently, both experiences can trigger deep learning and self-reflection, and provide “a rich and unique opportunity for transformation of consciousness” (Ross, 2010:60).

Conclusion
This chapter explores knowledge from the perspective of learning. It deconstructs knowledge and argues that knowledge is both process-driven (operational) and well as personal (emancipatory and transformation) experience. This is because there is no more fundamental human need than to understand our experiences or attribute meaning to these. Life can be a continual canvas of new experiences and therefore new learning. When old knowledge is no longer sufficient to understand new incoming data, the need arises to create new meaning. The gap between the known and unknown world can cause some disequilibrium. However, sociologist argue that it precisely this state of discomfort that generates some of the most profound paradigm shifting new knowledge generation (Taylor, 2001).

The chapter also explores the personal nature of this knowledge acquisition. It argues that knowledge is not just a brick by brick accumulation of information that is absorbed and later activated in task orientated nature. Rather, it argues that knowledge also changes individuals. The acquisition of new knowledge is not just an external experience, it can change the way we perceive and experience the world and also ourselves. In relation to this, this thesis addresses whether international migration is a context for accelerated learning that contributes to both professional as well as personal development and growth.
Transformative learning theory defies the disorienting dilemma as a life event that is out of the norms, often destabilizing, and challenges the status quo and comfort zone of the individual. The international migration experience can catalyse similar feelings of disorientation. Through the mobility experience, an individual’s comfort-zone is often challenged, by the simple fact of moving across country, culture and language. This can be a disempowering experience, where migrants transition not only across systems of difference but also systems of hegemony. Racial stereotyping and others forms of discrimination often contribute to job tracking and glass ceilings (Janta, 2009). This is the negative take on the international migration experience. On the other hand, the mobility across cultures can be empowering. The experience may also provide access to new perspectives, mind-sets and ways of existing in society.

However, when the migrant transitions from the known world of their source country and into the unknown world of the destination context, some discomfort can be experienced. This can cause psycho-emotional stress, not least in form of culture-shock (Kim, 1988:56). In addition to being a mechanism, that can act as a confrontation and challenge pre-existing beliefs. On the other hand, transformative learning theory argues that the disorienting event is imperative to the transformative learning experience. Only by challenging pre-existing knowledge beliefs can potentially catalyse a paradigm shifting experience.

At this point it is critical to acknowledge that transformative learning does not equal enlightenment. Transformative learning contributes to an enhanced meaning perspective, one that is more open, discerning but also builds on the existing knowledge (or perspectives), that is integrated. According to Mezirow, his theory demarks a consciousness expanding experience, one where the individual transitions from lesser into greater thought independence and critical thinking. At the same time, this does not mean that transformative learning always takes place. The individual can also feel psychological stunted by the challenge, and therefore regress to an even more closed meaning perspective, than had existed previously.

In the remaining chapters, this thesis will empirically explore the ideas introduced in the literature review. Starting with exploring and elaborating the relationships between the theorizing of learning, knowledge, and knowledge transfers via human mobility. As was already stressed, knowledge is an elusive concept. At the same time, it is integral to firm but also to individual growth and development. What is more, most knowledge is not explicit, but rather is tacit. An understanding that is embedded in place, culture, but also the mind and the body (Blackler, 2002). This literature review explored how human mobility is a vehicle that can greatly facilitate the acquisition of tacit knowledge because it relocates human beings in new places, both geographically and institutionally.

Moreover, human mobility also puts human beings in touch with different people. That is people that were socialized in a different place, language and culture. This can give rise to different and new perspective and beliefs but also skillsets. Travelling from emerging to advanced economies
can augment exposure to more competitive knowledge via the acquisition of new process and best practices. It is a method of quantum leaping standard knowledge development, which is much more path dependant in nature. Particularly in an Eastern Europe context, the post-accession economies were once Soviet Bloc countries that were communist in ideology and practice. Therefore, all European countries east of Germany and Austria were largely removed from international trade (and associated knowledge flows), while private enterprise was destroyed in favour of collectivization and totalitarian control.

It is evident from the literature review that international migration from developing to developed societies accelerates the acquisition of new and more competitive knowledge. At the same time, return migration is a means to facilitate knowledge transfer ‘back home’ (Klagge and Klein-Hitpab, 2010). Returned migrants are particularly useful agents for knowledge dissemination across contexts. Knowledge, no matter how useful, often cannot just be copied and pasted across two or more differing environments. The new knowledge must be adapted to the pre-existing knowledge base, which is why scholars argue that knowledge must be translated. Accordingly, knowledge brokers are individuals that understand the coding skills, i.e. tacit knowledge base of two or more environments. They can therefore help to find alignment between the meaning perspectives of both cultures.

The new incoming knowledge can be received and integrated, or else it can be perceived as a threat, or perhaps simply not recognized as an added value. This is because knowledge must be first recognized to be received. Certain industries are more innovation dependent and therefore more adaptable to new ideas and practices. The information technology sector is a case in point, in comparison to legal practice. For the latter, knowledge transfer is further constrained by the professional guidelines. The legal systems are different between the United Kingdom and the rest of Continental Europe, in addition to each country having its specific laws and regulations. Nonetheless, new knowledge is integral to firm growth and development. If companies want to stay competitive they have to source new knowledge – and international migration can be an important source for this.

Firm absorption capacity is critical to maximize the usage of new knowledge (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990). One of the main ways in which big companies source such knowledge is via research and development. Companies also source new knowledge through human resources. Head hunting is a common practice, in addition to moving employees across the multinational company infrastructure. Advanced economies have particularly reaped the benefit of positive immigration policies, as migrants have proven to be not only useful as substitute workers but as sources of creativity and new perspectives. In the context of return migration, returnees are valuable assets that can bring back competitive knowledge, in the form of new processes but also languages (Klagge and Klein-Hitpab, 2010).

Their return proves useful to companies also as a more cost effective human resources solution. Sourcing similar know-how, through expatriate management can prove costly. Return migrants have already taking care of the logistic barriers, they have chosen to come back based on their
own freewill. Their retention probability is also higher, as are already familiar with the local language and culture and have social networks already in place. Therefore, the remainder of this thesis empirically explores how and why return migrants can be a source of added value to a post-communist, post-accession emerging economy. Furthermore, it explores how international migration can be a context for accelerated learning that contributes to the acquisition of professional (instrumental) knowledge, as well as person (transformation/emancipatory) knowledge. The latter is critical to soft-skill development, which is attractive to those employers who are seeking more independent and critically reflective workers.
6.1 A brief history of Slovakia in transition
Following the collapse of communism in 1989 (‘Velvet Revolution’), “East-Central Europe has witnessed a series of transformations that have resulted in the region’s geopolitical and geo-economic repositioning within Europe” (Smith, 2002: 647). The planned economy literally collapsed overnight, with a significant time lapse before the institutions of a market economy could be created. Additionally, in 1993 the dual-state nation of Czechoslovakia collapsed (‘Velvet Divorce’). Correspondingly, Slovakia became an independent nation for the first time in history; the country had no prior experience of self-governance, or democracy. Teich et al. (2011) emphasized that “the history of the Slovaks developed within the framework of the Kingdom of Hungary until 1918, and then within Czechoslovakia [thereafter]” (p.1). In response, the country had to embark on a process of nation building, and consequently experienced a much more tumultuous journey than its neighbour, the Czech Republic. The Czech Republic was larger (double the population of Slovakia), economically better off (more industrially advanced), and democratically more mature - in terms of having a more established national identity and previous experience of autonomy.

The collapse of state communism produced harsh labour market shocks, and the Slovak economy underwent a deep recession. As CEE economies were re-integrated into global markets, significant institutional asymmetries emerged, which resulted in wide-scale job destruction. Not to mention a pandemic of record-high unemployment rates across the region. Furthermore, the 1990s were marked by wide scale political transformation, in response to neoliberal pressures from the EU. However, as old systems and institutions were dismantled, new regulatory systems, including banks etc., were not yet in place (Williams and Balaz, 1999). This contributed to an institutional void, and crony and political capitalism emerged in its place.

Subsequently, Slovakia’s wild corruption scandals (Meciar government 1992-1998) led the country into political isolation (Kurekova, 2011a). The international community characterized the country as a laggard economy with low transparency and rampant corruption (Jakubiak et al., 2008). Furthermore, in 1995, the European Council expressed concern about its ‘state of democracy’. Consequently, the country was “excluded from the ‘first group’ of post-communist states to start detailed negotiations” (Henderson, 2002: xii) towards EU accession. Instead, Slovakia was considered a potential candidate of the second wave, on par with Romania and
Bulgaria. In like manner, Slovakia was further excluded from joining NATO in 1997, becoming the only visegrad-4 (Czech, Hungary, and Poland) to be rejected.

However, the late 1990s and early 2000s, saw a political and economic turnaround (Dzurinda government 1998-2006). The new government proved to be a radical opposite of the previous administration. They began immediately initiating the numerous fiscal and structural neoliberal reforms that had been put ‘on hold’ during the Meciar era. As a result, the country went through a period of extensive modernization. On the whole, the business environment improved substantially, and the country quickly transitioned towards a fully-fledged market economy (Jakubiak et al., 2008).

This critical and dramatic change in trajectory was also recognized by the international community. Correspondingly, “Dzurinda’s second term w[as] related to overwhelming popular support for EU and NATO accession” (Jakubiak et al., 2008: 17). Moreover, by the early 2000s - and only a few years post-neoliberal restructuring, “the Slovak Republic was branded a top reformer and one of the most investor-friendly countries in Central Europe.” (Jakubiak et al., 2008: 30). Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that although taxation became more favourable for big-business, the new government still lagged behind in tackling issues of wide-scale corruption.

Nonetheless, in May 2004, Slovakia along with seven (7) other former Eastern Bloc countries joined the European Union in what became known as the ‘Eastern Enlargement’ (Kahanec, 2010). The merging of East and West was celebrated as “a milestone in the history of European integration” (Verdun and Croci, 2005: 1). By and large, the extension of European membership made possible a new political, economic, and social integration of Europe across the expanse of the continent. Correspondingly, Slovakia joined the Eurozone in January 2009. It was the second accession country to adopt the Euro currency, after Slovenia which joined first in 2007 (Kurekova, 2011a). Furthermore, only three accession states (Slovenia, Slovakia and Estonia) have thus far made the currency transition, with both positive and negative outcomes, as the 2008+ crisis has demonstrated.

6.2 An overview of Slovak economic development
It is important to recognize, that the post-communist CEE environment is a specific regional context that is different from the traditional developing nation model. In effect, CEE economies are not developing, but rather middle income, much more similar in structure to advanced capitalist ones. Correspondingly, Kurekova (2011) argues that “the CEE region is at present simultaneously a global economic semi-periphery and a regional political core (EU membership)” (45). Moreover, the region has a strong industrial foundation, in addition to basic infrastructures and state provisions.
Nonetheless, as discussed above, Slovakia underwent a massive transition from planned to market economy which completely re-orientated its product and export markets. Although the Slovak economy was already heavily industrialized during state communism - they were “major producers of steel, arms, machinery and automobiles” (Jakubiak et al., 2008: 20) - its export markets were predominantly East-oriented (Soviet Union) (Kurekova, 2011a). After the collapse of the planned economy, a massive industrial transformation ensued. Correspondingly, old sectors were either assimilated into new ones, while many were abandoned altogether.

Consequently, the vast privatization of states enterprises ensued. This marked the most dramatic outcomes of the economic transition (Nielsen et al., 1995). Before 1989, the notion of private ownership was limited. After the communist collapse, a massive public to private transfer occurred. Williams and Balaz (1999) assessed that by 1995, six (6) years after transition, approximately 75% of the Visegrad-Four countries’ (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland) GDP was already in the hands of the private sectors. Nonetheless, this transition was plagued by wide-scale corruption, reflecting the CEE’s weak regulatory systems (Jakubiak et al., 2008).

Accordingly, Williams and Balaz (1999) observed that the privatization of national property rights did not occur without power asymmetries. This bottleneck was intensified due to a general lack of experience (communist legacy), but more importantly due to asymmetric information flows. Although it is important to acknowledge that these varied in terms of differences of scale. The privatization of small scale enterprises, were mostly based on small scale expertise. However, the privatization of large scale industries, such as the energy and transportation sectors, was mainly tied to political connections and political capitalism (Smith, 2002). Consequently, privatization contributed to the emergence of the first significant social-economic divisions in the CEE. By the end of the 1990s, the relatively level distribution of wealth had “been replaced by a new rich and new poor structure” (Williams and Balaz, 1999: 26).

**Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)**

At the same time, privatization also provided for the influx of foreign direct investments. Moreover, foreign investors were viewed as key contributors to the influx of not only capital, but also technology, and knowledge (and know-how) into the CEE (Bohle and Greskovits, 2006; Liebscher et al., 2007; Nowak and Steagal, 2001). Consequently, FDI assisted with the economic modernization of institutions and industries, aiding their integration into global supply networks. Balaz and Kusa (2012) acknowledged that FDI was one of the key drivers of economic development in Slovakia, while Mickiewicz et al. (2000) argued that most economic recoveries in CEE countries have been FDI assisted.

However, due to its laggard modernization, Slovakia only began to attract substantial FDI in the early 2000s (Bandejl, 2008). It was only after the country began initiating neoliberal reforms, that it began to draw the attention of the international business community (see discussion above). These included the creation of generous company subsidies, as well as tax incentives. In particular, multinational corporations were lured by the country’s low tax rate, which was
slashed from 40% to 19% in 2004 (Jakubiak et al., 2008). Since, Slovakia has become one of the largest recipients of FDI amongst the Visegrad-4 countries (Jakoby et al., 2004). However, because the majority of the funding “has been generated by multinational companies” (Balaz and Kusa, 2012: 11), the Slovak economy is one dimensional in structure, and overwhelmingly dependent on foreign investors. Much less attention has been given to building national capacities, or helping to develop an innovation-driven economy.

**Human capital**

The growth in Slovakia’s inward foreign investment is strongly related to Slovakia’s human capital; that is, access to cheap, skilled and productive labour. For example, Jakubiak et al. concluded that “the production of a mid-size car is on average 23 percent cheaper in Eastern Europe than in Germany” (2008: 23). Moreover, labour in Eastern Europe is less inclined to go on strike, and more likely to stay dedicated to the job (employee loyalty). This is attributed to cultural factors (collective vs. individualist society), in addition to economic constraints (lack of employment opportunity). Furthermore, CEE economies offer investors access to a well-trained labour force, hereby “inherited from the old regime’s relatively good education systems, high literacy rates and strong basis in vocational training” (Kurekova, 2011a: 84).

In fact, CEE education levels are similar to those of advanced capitalist economies (Nesporova, 2000). This proved to be a major strength in the transition process (Arratibel et al., 2007; Aslund, 2007), and a significant draw for FDI investors (Janicki and Wunnava, 2004; Jakubiak et al., 2008). Comparatively, in 2003 Slovakia ranked second – after Korea - in terms of the national percentage of high school graduates, consisting of 94% of the total population (Wagner, 2006). Furthermore, interest in higher education has increased after 1989, and the education sector has grown exponentially since.

This was contrary to trends in Western Europe, where Zgaga (2006) observed that numbers stagnated and even reversed, while enrolment in higher education “achieved the highest peaks in Central and Eastern Europe (with the exception of Bulgaria)” (2006: 2). To demonstrate the significance of this influx, by the late 1990s “the number of university graduates had increased by 65 percent [in Slovakia]” (Malova and Lastic, 2000: 100). Nonetheless, the education sector is beset by many problems, and some scholars have argued that its expansion has occurred at the expense of quality (Kurekova, 2011a).

Furthermore, foreign direct investors have “uncovered a shortage of adequately qualified labour in the country” (Jakubiak et al., 2008: 23), and are subsequently demanding new forms of human capital from the local workforce. These shortages are partially attributed to time lags in the adjustment of the Slovak education system, which continues to “provide more encyclopedic than practical knowledge” (Londak and Londakova, 2011:350). More specifically, Nesporova (2000) outlined that the “deficiencies in skill production were present not only in curricula but also in teaching methods based on rote learning” (p.81-83).

On the other hand, foreign employers (such as IBM, DELL, Henkel) are seeking out new qualities – skills that are more closely related to the capitalist ideals such as independent thinking and
leadership, in addition to knowledge of foreign languages (Kurekova, 2011a). Comparatively, this is a gap that both national and EU governments are hoping to merge, particularly via the development of more effective research and development programs (R&D), as well as university and industry partnerships.

**Regional disparities**
Slovakia embodies vast socio-economic regional inequalities; the Eastern part of the country was more heavily hit by the restructuring process. Moreover, the modernization of the economy has not harmonized these differences, but rather exaggerated them. The fiscal restructuring has slashed government subsidies (Manning, 2004), while job creation has remained minimal, as FDI influxes have remained asymmetrical, predominantly favouring the Western part of the country. As a result, economic prosperity is concentrated within the immediate vicinity of the Bratislava capital region.

This is partially attributed to its location at the crossroads of Central Europe (Henderson, 2002). Bratislava is well connected to its neighbouring capital cities, which span relatively close geographic distances: Vienna at 64km (40miles), Budapest at 250km (155miles) and Prague at 320km (200 miles), all of which are easily accessible via road, or high speed trains. In addition, the capital which has the country’s best Universities, offers employers a concentration of enhanced human capital endowments (Kurekova, 2011a). For these reasons, foreign investors have been generally hesitant of expanding beyond the Western region (with the notable exceptions of U.S Steel in Kosice, and Kia in Zilina). To summarize, regional inequalities remain a structural challenge for the future of the country.

**6.3 Pre-and post accession migration in Slovakia**
During the communist regime, any form of mobility (internal, external, leisure, work) was heavily restricted and controlled by the state. To emphasize, “there was essentially no history of free migration between the Eastern and Western parts of Europe during the decades of separation by the ‘Iron Curtain’” (Zimmermann and Kahanec, 2009:2). Furthermore, departure from the county was illegal. As a result, emigrants were asylum seekers. Comparatively, outmigration rates remained minimal, less than 1% of the total Slovak population, out-migrated (post-1965) (Balaz and Kusa, 2012). The authors attributed this to public loyalty “towards the ruling communist regime, due to rapid increases in the living standards in period 1960-1980” (2012:4). Consequently, the lack of mobility during the communist era only further emphasizes the social significance of return migration in today’s post-accession context.

After the collapse of the communist regime, movement across borders became liberalized - in theory. However, in practice, mobility remained a costly and bureaucratized process. Slovaks needed visas to work abroad, and moreover residence permits were very difficult to obtain. At the same time, different strategies were implemented by labour migrants to circumvent these barriers (Jordan and Duvell, 2003). Traditionally, the countries that immediately bordered East
Central Europe remained the most prominent labour migration destinations (Fihel and Okolski, 2009). A ‘cross-border’ migration dynamic emerged, one which was often short-term and seasonal in nature, not to mention clandestine, and irregular.

This included labour migration that was usually disguised as tourism (Fihel, 2008). These strategies were mobilized as source for substitute income, and/or to ease the consequences of unemployment at home (Fihel and Okolski, 2009). Consequently, tourist visas, which were often three (3) months in duration, were abused for work purposes (Wallace, 2000). Correspondingly, student mobility was another important vehicle for migration. EU student mobility schemes, such as the popular ERASMUS program, facilitated trans-European mobility during the pre-accession period (Rivza and Teichler, 2007). Correspondingly, student visas were also utilized as a decoy for irregular labour migration. Finally, a considerable outflow of migration also occurred via au-pair visas. Williams and Balaz (2004) noted that Slovak nationals were one of the largest recipients of au-pair work permits in the UK.

**Push and pull factors**

The inclination to migrate abroad is always based on numerous push and pull factors. Most evidently, the exceptionally high levels of unemployment in Slovakia illustrate the most common ‘push’ factor. As discussed above, there is a mismatch between available skills and labour market needs. Moreover, young graduates encounter many difficulties when transitioning from education into the workforce. The lack of appropriate jobs available is further amplified by the general lack of affordable housing (Pichler-Milanovich, 2011), which is especially acute in the capital, Bratislava.

To emphasize, the neoliberal reformulation of the welfare state, and the privatization of the housing market, has visibly reduced access to the public housing market in the CEE (Lux, 2010). This has contributed to acute housing shortages across the region, as only a small portion of such facilities remain. Consequently, multiple generations often share one dwelling, in an effort to meet material needs. Furthermore, migration is utilized as a resource strategy, “working abroad is believed to increase their ability to secure (= buy) separate housing” (Balaz and Kusa, 2012: 31) upon return back to Slovakia.

Correspondingly, the wage-gap between Eastern and Western Europe continues to remain one of the most significant ‘pull’ factors of migration. In general, Slovakia has low nominal wages in comparison to Western Europe. Moreover, although Bratislava and Vienna are the two closest national capitals in Europe, differences in remuneration rates remain extreme. According to the Slovak trade and investment bureau, the average Slovak monthly salary is less than 1,000 Euros per month (SARIO, 2016), while the Slovak minimum wage is €435 per month (Liptakova, 2017). However, these numbers hide considerable regional discrepancies, and do not take into consideration the high unemployment rates outside of the Bratislava region. The neighbouring capital of Vienna registers wages that are as much as five times higher than those in Slovakia (Eures, 2014).
However, outmigration cannot solely be attributed to economic rationales; rather, there is also a non-economic dimension to human mobility (Arango, 2000; Halfacree, 2004). Moreover, non-economic motivations are significant pull factors, which include reasons such as language learning, cultural travel, adventure and other lifestyle factors (O’Reilly and Benson, 2009). Additionally, the assertion of low-cost airlines in the CEE territory has greatly reduced migration costs, making long-haul (trans-European) travel more accessibly, thereby encouraging shorter term and repeat migration (Balaz and Kusa, 2012).

**Post accession migration**

In May 2004, Slovak nationals become European citizens, gaining the ‘right’ to travel, work, and reside anywhere within the European territory. EU accession, “opened gateways for new migration trajectories” (Zimmermann and Kahanec, 2009: 4). Nevertheless, only three countries (EU-3): Sweden, U.K and Ireland fully liberalized their labour markets to EU-8 nationals, inevitably affecting the geography of migration routes. In contrast, the other EU-15 nations applied for transitional periods, closing of their labour markets for EU-8 nationals for varying lengths.

Markedly, Austria and Germany opted to keep their labour markets closed for the longest allocated time (legally permitted). In total, they postponed entry for seven (7) years, utilizing the maximal three transitional phases of: 2-years, plus 3-years, plus 2-years. However, since May 1st, 2011, Slovak nationals (along with the other EU-8 countries) now have full labour-market access to all EU member states, including all EU-15 countries.

Moreover, the influx of East to West labour flows also positively affected the recipient markets. To enumerate, Britain recorded its largest-ever in-migration wave (Salt and Rees, 2006; Drinkwater et al., 2010). Moreover, the vast majority of EU-nations found employment in their destination labour markets. Kurekova (2011a) observed that 84% of EU-8 migrants who registered in the U.K were employed. This represents a very high employment rate, even taking into account age considerations, and overall is approximately 9% higher than the U.K born average.

Overall, although increased migration numbers were witnessed across the accession countries, migration patterns nonetheless varied nationally (Zimmermann and Kahanec, 2009). Slovakia, Poland and the Baltic countries registered the highest out-migration rates out of the EU-8 nations (Barrell et al., 2007). Relative to its population, Slovakia was the second largest contributor (after Poland) of EU-8 nationals living and working in the UK (Kurekova, 2011a). Overall, it is estimated that 5.6 percent of the total Slovak labour force works abroad (Euractiv, 2011). However, in terms of the active labour force – this number is viewed to be much larger, and closer to 10 percent. Correspondingly, Williams and Balaz (2005) identified that approximately one third of Slovakia’s tertiary educated out-migrate.

At the same time, migration patterns have also changed. Instead of being one-directional and permanent in nature, migration is becoming a more temporary, short-term and circular
phenomenon (King, 2002; Dustmann et al., 2003; Drinkwater and Eade, 2007). Moreover, Balaz and Kusa (2012) observed that changes in the economic and political environment, as well as technological advances, have contributed to an increase in ‘long-haul’ circular migration. Previously, circular migration patterns were observed with the neighbouring countries of Austria, the Czech Republic and Hungary, with the Czech Republic being the most popular labour market destination due to language and cultural similarities, in addition to bi-lateral labour agreements.

Accordingly, the liberalization of job markets further re-oriented migration flows from internal (within country) to external ones (Western Europe). Slovak migrants from the more economically disadvantaged Eastern part of the country opted to bypass Bratislava, in favour of, say, London, in the hopes of securing higher returns on their migration costs. Moreover, before the arrival of low-cost airlines, Slovak migrants would mostly commute by buses. However, low-cost travel is now the most popular means of transport for long-hauls; currently Ryan Air connects Bratislava with both London Luton, and London Stansted airports multiple times daily.

**Slovak migrant profiles**

In general, post-accession migrants are often represented as young (under 35), educated (tertiary level), single (no dependents) and able bodied. Moreover, their migration is based on an independent decision making process, rather than a family strategy. Consequently, remittances are often spent in terms of consumption, and not monthly payments sent back home to their families. However, Kurekova (2011a) illustrated that there are in fact two dominant profiles of Slovak East-to-West labourers. These include both ‘choice’ and ‘hardship’ migrants, the former representing those whom leave in search of ‘better work’, while the latter refers to migrants who leave in search of ‘any’ work.

Moreover, Kurekova observed that the outflow of ‘choice’ migrants even increased with the improvement of the Slovak economy. In fact, ‘choice’ migrants had access to jobs in their home country, but the labour market remained a mismatch to their education and skill levels (limited growth opportunities). As a result, they utilized migration as a ‘delay strategy’, postponing their labour market entry at home, in search of ‘better’ jobs, and new learning opportunities abroad. On the other hand, ‘hardship’ migrants represent a different education and age profile all together: most have secondary education levels, vocational training, and are typically closer to middle-age. More importantly, these individuals often migrate West as part of a survival strategy, to diversify family income. In effect, they have been pushed out of the local labour force as a result of market forces and structural re-orientations. They do not have stable jobs (if any), and leave abroad in search of short-term and seasonal work.

The majority of Slovak migrants working in Western Europe in the immediate post-accession area were in fact employed in the low-skilled positions, predominantly hospitality and manufacturing sectors (Wills et al., 2006; Zaiceva and Zimmermann, 2008; Barrell et al., 2010; Janta et al., 2011). Moreover, their mobility track mostly resembled deskilling. Currently, substantial but uneven discrepancies continue to remain between their education levels and the nature of work they undertake (Pollard et al., 2008). Moreover, Slovak migrants, along with
other EU-8 nationals are underrepresented in higher qualified positions (Balaz and Kusa, 2012). Markedly, EU-8 nationals earn the West of all migrant (immigrant) groups in the U.K (Drinkwater et al., 2009), collecting “well under half the amount earned by those [migrants] from English speaking countries” (The Economic Impact of Immigration, Report of Session, 2008: 136).

However, the overrepresentation of Eastern European (EU-8) migrants in lower sectors of the British economy could be attributed to their limited English language skills and access to nationally specific human capital. In addition, to the short duration and newness of their migration, in terms of adjustment time need to acquire nationally specific human capital. Moreover, Janta et al. (2011) observed that employment in the hospitality sector was utilized as a migrant strategy, easing access to earnings, while migrants improved their language and local knowledge. Correspondingly, the hospitality and manufacturing sectors are viewed as quick-fix solutions to employment and cash flow, while these same industries rely on access to cheap, flexible and seasonal (migrant) labour.

Post-accession migration outflows were significant. However, the government responded to this outflow of human capital with relief, rather than concern. Balaz and Kusa (2012:32) conclude that “international labour migration has not been considered a threat, but rather a solution for employment problems by Slovak public and policy makers”. As mentioned earlier, migrant profiles are predominantly young, working age, and tertiary educated which indicates that it is the loss of the university educated that is most striking. According to the OECD, Slovakia has one of the highest student emigration rates in the European Union (Balaz and Kusa, 2012).

In comparison, the Polish government offers a diverging example; it is one of the few EU-8 countries that has significantly sought to draw back its migrant diaspora from abroad. This was informed by economic logic, as the Polish labour market began to register acute labour shortages. Consequently, outreach strategies were mobilized at a state level. This included the implementation of various programs such as: support grants for business start-ups, a national online job-centre, and information booklets about re-integration practices (Fihel, 2008).

Furthermore, the government took an active transnational role, by seeking to not only support return migration, but also facilitate outreach and networking in transnational communities (Szewczyk and Unerschuetz, 2009). On the other hand, the Slovak government is still lagging, despite similar migration numbers. Balaz and Kusa (2012) critique is that “the Slovak Republic is unprepared to deal with issues of emigration and return migration” (p.25).

**Return migration**

The global economic crisis (2008-2009) contributed to return flows across the continent (East to West/ West to East). In the case of Poland “in 2008-2009, a significantly lower emigration of Poles was recorded and also an increase in the number of workers returning to Poland” (Duszczyk, 2011: 2). Although though there is no mechanism that measures return migration in Slovakia, Balaz and Kusa (2012) were able to observe that the numbers were quite substantial. In 2009, 60,000 returned migrants applied for unemployment benefits, citing another EU labour
market as their place of prior employment. Furthermore, it can be assumed that these statistics represents only a fraction of the real demographic. Judging from various newspaper sources such as the Slovak Spectator, BBC, The Guardian, SME, and by permitting to make a reference by proxy (Poland example), the global economic crisis resulted in a new wave of return migration back to the former Eastern Bloc.

These findings illustrate that the financial crisis contributed to significant return migration back to the former Eastern Bloc. Hence, for the first time in its recent history (post-1945), Slovakia experienced a large wave (critical mass) of returnees. Moreover, the dynamic of return – represents a unique and novel social occurrence. In effect, the concept of the ‘returnee’ is a relatively new phenomenon in all CEE countries. Building on the fact, that prior to 1989, excluding a few selective years of more relaxed regulation, movement to the West was banned by the Communist regime. Moreover, those who left were categorized as ‘political traitors’, making return close to impossible (Krasnov, 1985). Furthermore, the 1990s proved to be a turbulent time for the post-transition CEE countries; mobility was once again restricted, but this time due to visa requirements, as well as the overall economic disequilibrium between East and West.

However, EU expansion completely changed the playing field, as EU-8 nationals became the “newly freed ‘free movers’” (Favell and Nebe 2009: 183) almost overnight. As a result, Eastern Europeans gained access to barrier-free (relative to the EU-3 countries) political and economic access to the West. Moreover, unlike in the communist era, migrants were not forced to sever their ties with their country, community and family – out of fear of prosecution. Rather, migrants can now relatively easily maintain them, facilitated no doubt by accelerated travel (low-cost airlines) and technological advances (internet, satellite, Skype), in addition to globalization trends. Finally, returnees are coming back with new abilities that can potentially benefit the Slovak economy. These include new skills and knowledge, in addition to languages, and enhanced competencies such as self-confidence, independence, and emotional-intelligence (Williams and Balaz, 2004; 2005a; Williams, 2005; 2006a; 2007a).

Nonetheless, the media has paid very little attention to the mass dynamic of outmigration, and later even less attention to the phenomenon of return migration. However, drawing on the researcher’s Master’s Dissertation (Palovic, 2012), it was evident that increased returns were observed in the media, and two predominant informal returnee discourses emerged. The first one was nationalist in orientation; it viewed migration as unpatriotic. This perspective was justified according to the view that Slovaks should believe in their country, and contribute to its improvement, instead of taking the easy route and ‘fleeing’ to the richer West. This ideology was no doubt a remnant of the communist legacy.

In contrast, the second informal discourse viewed Slovak returnees as ‘losers’ It was built on the assumption that the phenomenon of return migration was one of failure (Cerase, 1974). Correspondingly, the Slovak migrants that returned were those that had had failed to ‘make it’ abroad. In effect, they were pushed out of their respective foreign labour markets, and were
coming back to ‘beg for jobs’- now that Slovakia was ‘good enough’ for them. Consequently, both discourses do not view return migration in a favourable light. However, not everything was so pessimistic, and the majority of the young, educated and employed population interviewed, associated return migration with ‘choice’. However, it is important to clarify that the above commentary draws on a relatively small interview sample, in addition to observations made from the media.

Moreover, they affirmed that the reversal in migration trends confirmed that living conditions were improving, or were perceived as improving, in the country. Markedly, these young stayers did not associate returnees as being locked-out, or out of the loop with Slovak society or social networks. Rather, they perceived returned migrants to be at an advantage, because they were coming back with new skills and knowledge, including language abilities that were in short supply back home. Correspondingly, Williams and Balaz (2004; 2005) in their studies on return migration in Slovakia concluded with similar findings. Moreover, the stayers were aware that return migrants, as Slovak nationals, could potentially access a higher rank of positions at home – then they ever could abroad, because certain roles were implicitly reserved for the local-natives only (migrant glass ceiling) (Zanoni et al., 2010).

**Conclusion**

This chapter mapped out the key parameters of a post-communist, post-accession, rapidly emerging transition economy in the heart of Europe. A brief overview of Slovakia’s history expanded into a snapshot of the country’s economic strengths, predominantly in relation to the automotive sector and others sub sectors of advanced manufacturing. However, this manufacturing strength was, swiftly followed by the growth of Slovakia-based, global shared services ICT sector companies that provide back-end administration and customer service support for an international consumer base. This is associated with Slovakia’s principal economic strength being its human capital. A large portion of the Slovak labour force is tertiary educated, but an even more substantial percentage is semi-skilled and secondary educated.

What is more, Slovakia inherited a strong industrial infrastructure from the communist regime. The country specialized in artillery production, and after the post 1989 economic collapse and end of the Cold War, these industries lost a large part of their markets. However, the labour force was quickly snapped up by the incoming foreign investors, such as Volkswagen, Peugeot, Kia and most recently Jaguar Landover. This process has been regionally uneven and the Bratislava region has received the bulk of the foreign investment. Close to 90% of the GDP produced in the country is exported, not only in the form of products but also services, which makes Slovakia a very internationally dependent economy.

Finally, this chapter concluded with an overview of Slovak migration history. Over the longer term, Slovakia had traditionally been a country of emigration, and proportionally the second largest after Ireland in Europe (Balaz and Kusa, 2012). Human mobility was constrained with the introduction of communism and the borders to the West were virtually completely sealed.
following the Soviet-led Warsaw pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. Once the Iron Curtain collapsed, outmigration once again began. However, due to immigration and visa restrictions, many Slovaks who left the country chose to stay abroad and naturalize into a foreign citizenship. This began a long and extensive brain drain, whereby Slovakia lost some of its brightest talent. However, post-accession the growth of circular and return migration flows have potential to mediate this trend. Likewise, these new mobilities have potentially positive implications for knowledge transfer into the Slovakian context.
Chapter 7

Methods and Methodologies

7.1 Methods and methodologies

“Methodology refers to the ways we inquire into the world in order to build knowledge about it” (Punch, 1998: 170)

The following chapter will provide an overview of the methods, including the philosophical and methodological underpinnings that inform this study. The research approach, purpose, and design will be discussed, in addition to the data collection methods and analysis techniques. Furthermore, potential ethical dilemmas will be addressed. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a methodological summary of this research project.

7.2 Research philosophy explored

Ontology and epistemology are two conceptualizations of knowing that influence the research philosophy. They illustrate “the relationship between knowledge and the process by which it is developed” (Saunders et al., 2007: 102). Consequently, the research philosophy informs the way that knowledge is interpreted by the individual researcher. It reflects how they understand the existence of reality. To demonstrate, ontology refers to the nature of knowledge, and objectivism and subjectivism are the two opposing ontological perspectives (Payne and Payne, 2004). As such, reality (and knowledge) is either interpreted to exist outside the individual, or it is a social construct that is interpreted from within. Finally, social realism combines these. Reality is interpreted as existing out there, but can only be understood by individuals as being socially constructed (Cruickshank, 2007).

Epistemology refers to how that knowledge is formed (the way of knowing), more specifically what is deemed acceptable knowledge in the discipline (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The two opposing ends on the epistemological spectrum are: positivism and interpretivism (Creswell, 2009). Positivists believe that social reality is observable, it can be measured (with the five senses), utilizing similar methods to those found in the natural sciences (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Subsequently, the researcher’s role is one of a neutral observer, whom collects documents, and interprets the phenomenon in a value-free manner (Saunders et al., 2007). Thus, reality is both tangible and quantifiable; human behaviour can be measured and modelled, and findings can be replicated. Therefore, positivists often employ quantitative data collection methods (to gather such information), and conclude their findings with generalizations, laying out prepositions that are applicable to the larger human population.
On the other hand, interpretivists view reality as socially constructed. They understand knowledge to be grounded in experience (Punch, 1998). Additionally, they radically question the notion of objective (impersonal) knowledge (Gray, 2009). Instead, they conceptualize knowledge to be value-laden, rather than objective and neutral. Furthermore, knowledge is bound to power; it represents the interests of those in power (status-quo). Secondly, knowledge is constantly changing; social reality is non-static, it is created and re-created through social interactions (Weber, 2001). Thirdly, knowledge is context dependent, as “no knowledge is produced in a vacuum, and there can never be a view from nowhere” (Waugh, 1999: 5-6). Consequently, every researcher influences his or her findings according to their personal value-set (Remenyi, 2012).

For this reason, interpretivists believe that there is no simple objective means of undertaking research, rather the expert learns along, or together with, the respondent (Punch, 1998). Thus, the researcher is in fact seen as a co-creator to the data collection process (Renzin and Lincoln, 1994). All findings are inevitably coloured according to the individual’s own perspective. Interpretivists argue that social reality cannot be interpreted with the five senses alone, rather the role of emotion; feelings and intuition are equally interpretative. Hence Saunders et al. (2007) emphasized that an empathetic stance is essential for qualitative research.

For this reason, most interpretivist studies employ qualitative methods. Qualitative research techniques are effective in providing inferences into social world of the respondents, in addition to providing in-depth insights (Gray, 2009). Subsequently, the researcher can begin to construct an understanding based on the respondents own words and meaning construction (Creswell, 2009). Consequently, interpretivist studies do not produce generalizations. In fact, Saunders et al. argued that contextual insights from the field would be “lost if such complexity is reduced entirely to a series of law-like generalisations” (2007: 106).

Nevertheless, qualitative interpretivist studies tend to be more ambiguous in nature; emotions, feelings and interpretations are difficult to standardize and measure. Learning how to interpret the inner world of the respondents - from their point of view brings into question whether one individual can truly understand the subjectivity of another. The researcher must acknowledge the limitations about what can be said, and what cannot be said from the data. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that qualitative research should be no less rigorous than quantitative research, hence the importance of laying out a clear methodology.

**An interpretivist philosophy**

This study employed an interpretivist epistemology. The researcher views social reality to be fluid, ever-changing and contextual dependent. Moreover, she understands that there is no – single one objective reality, but rather a multitude of social realities that are as varied as they are numerous. Thus, in order to understand the inner world of the respondents, it is most important to get acquainted with their context, and develop an understanding of their world-view and self-concept. For this reason, qualitative interview methods were utilized to gain access to such interpretations.
Furthermore, interpretivists are concerned with addressing the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of a social phenomenon, and not just the ‘what’, ‘when’ and ‘where’ of social reality (Gray, 2009). However, such notions are difficult to quantify, hence they can only be understood by watching, asking and examining alongside the respondents (Wolrott, 1992). This is crucial in reference to the researcher’s study aims, which were very much centred on the lived experiences and meaning construction of the respondents, particularly for the returnee migrant category. Where themes such as deep learning, knowledge, transformation, and empowerment were addressed.

7.3 Fieldwork as exploration: an exploratory purpose and an inductive approach to research
Saunders et al., (2007) explained that there are three dominant types of research purposes: explanatory, exploratory, and descriptive. In the first place, explanatory studies seek to explain a phenomenon, they identity causal relationships between variables (Creswell, 2009). For example, an explanatory study will seek to test a hypothesis, and subsequently explain the links (or lack thereof) between theory and practice. Comparatively, this study was exploratory in nature, because it investigated the social, personal and knowledge implications of learning through migration.

Furthermore, although the study did not engage in theory testing, the fieldwork was nevertheless theoretically informed. The researcher remained open minded throughout the data collection process, and also allowed for insights to emerge organically. Keeping in consideration and observing a dialogue emerge between theory and empirical research. Correspondingly, this study employed an inductive approach in data analysis. Seeing that deductive approaches are better for fact-checking and theory testing, making them more appropriate for explanatory studies and quantitative research in general (Gray, 2009).

7.4 The research context
Slovakia was selected as research country for the following multiple considerations. First, the EU’s freedom of movement conditions applying to new Member States has transformed the country’s potential for cross-border human capital and knowledge transfers (Maas, 2007). As a result and secondly, Slovakia has one of the highest per capita emigration rates in Central Eastern Europe (Barrell et al., 2007).

Thirdly, the nature of human mobility, and by extension of knowledge transfers and overspills, has been transformed by IT and transport innovations such as low cost airlines, creating new opportunities for innovative forms of knowledge transfers (Duszczyk, 2011; Zimmermann and Kahanec, 2009; Dobruszkes, 2009; Favell, 2009; Williams and Balaz, 2009). However, similar infrastructure and transport developments can be observed across the EU-8 countries, and especially in Poland (White, 2011).
Fourthly, the Slovak economy has been transformed by transnationalization and structural reforms, creating new opportunities for highly skilled workers, especially those with international experiences. Moreover, it has experienced one of the most significant economic transformations amongst the Central Eastern European economies, being the second to become a member of the Euro (Jakubiak et al., 2008).

Lastly, as most of the available studies on the post-EU Enlargement migration tend to study Poland (White, 2011). This research focused on a country much less examined, in the context of recent return. Therefore, the Slovak national context added to the study originality.

Moreover, Bratislava - the national capital, was selected as the primary location for the study for two reasons. It represented the research setting that best facilitated access to the study respondents (Spradley, 1980), in terms of being the main draw for skilled returned migrants. It also hosted the largest concentration of key-informants, from government, business and civil society sectors. In addition, it was more realistic for logistical purposes, given the limits of the researcher’s travel budget. At the same time, the researcher acknowledged that the conditions and experiences of post-accession return migration and knowledge transfer were likely to be different in other parts of the country, particularly the East, which registered a disproportionately higher unemployment rate.

7.5 In focus: high-skilled migrants
According to migration theory, talented individuals are more likely to be positively selected to migrate abroad (Borjas, 1999; Csedo, 2008). Smith and Favell (2006) identified that much of the engineered policies of the European Union, “tend to favour the way of life of mobile, well-resourced and well-educated Europeans” (p.72). Accordingly, high-skilled individuals are more likely than low-skilled individuals to be positively selected to work in another EU country (Tassinopoulous and Werner, 1998). Henceforth, “the share of tertiary-education EU movers is about twice as large as that of nationals” (Favell and Nebe, 2009: 16). However, as mentioned before, it is important to recognize that education credentials do not necessarily correlate into employability (Brown, 2003), nor do they automatically translate into skills (Williams and Balaz, 2008).

Nevertheless, education is a benchmark tool. In the migration context, it is often utilized as a surrogate measure of an individual’s human capital capacity, or more specifically, their labour market utility. In response, this study mirrored these developments, focusing exclusively on the experiences of highly skilled returned migrants. Accordingly, tertiary educated individuals are assumed to have a greater capacity to not only absorb new knowledge (building on their already enhanced knowledge base), but to also utilize it on a more influential scale, in terms of having access to managerial and director positions. Nevertheless, the researcher acknowledged the limitations of exclusively focusing on those that are highly-skilled, as all migrants are knowledgeable (Williams and Balaz, 2008). Moreover, every industry is knowledge dependent, although to greater and lesser intensities.
7.6 Interview sample
This study mobilized semi-structured interviews across four (4) respondent categories, which include: returnees, and key informants from business, government and civil society (see Figure 5). Correspondingly, the key-informant categories were employed to cross compare the data of the returned migrants. Moreover, given the lack of migration research on firm and managerial perspectives on the added value of hiring returned migrants, this study was innovative in its empirical contribution.

Sample - Returned Migrants
The main focus of the study was based on collecting primary data on the individual experiences and perspectives of returned migrants. Tongco (2007) argued that in the absence of reliable population lists, it may be necessary to employ purposive sampling to secure interviews. Consequently, a total of 30 respondents were selected via the snowball method, for one-on-one interviews, circa 60-90 minutes in duration. Furthermore, respondents were selected from multiple entry-points in order to secure a more diverse sample; these include companies, social organizations, ex-pat groups, NGOs, as well as friend and acquaintance networks.

Returned migrants were selected according to the following criteria: 1) have spent a minimum of 12 months abroad in another EU country after Slovakia’s accession to the European Union, 2) be between 20-40 years of age, that is the first generation to have access to freedom of movement upon graduation, and 3) have obtained a minimum of a university Bachelor’s education degree, in order to qualify as tertiary educated.

The fieldwork nevertheless demonstrated that most returnees had already participated in several departure-and-return cycles in their young life-spans already. These included shorter-term motilities such as university exchanges and working holidays outside of Slovakia, even prior to completing their university education in Slovakia. However, this study exclusively sought out respondents that departed from Slovakia for a minimum of 12 months in duration, across any single sojourn., with the aim to find employment in a Western European labour market after EU accession (post-2004). Of course, the researcher acknowledged that this period was arbitrary, but it did at least correspond to widely used international statistical definitions for migration.

Sample - Key Informants
Fetterman (1998) argued that key-informants are often used in ethnographic studies to enrich the data, by providing enhanced cultural descriptions of a social phenomenon. Moreover, in migration studies, key informants are often interviewed to gain access to expert knowledge (Klagge and Klein-Hitpab, 2010). The purpose of the key-informants sample was to develop a more holistic understanding of how the new and incoming knowledge made available through return migration flows was valued.

In terms of securing access to key-respondents across the three sectors, the researcher engaged with multiple commercial and professional associations. Business respondents were selected
from both domestic and international companies in order to gain access to a wider perspective, and to account for possible differences that could arise between domestic and international firms. These included companies, such as Slovak based global multinationals in the ICT sector as well as Slovak SMEs and one Slovak multinational.

Moreover, as they were not the central focus of the study, interviews with key-informants were slightly shorter in duration, circa 30-60 minutes than those with returned migrants. This was also in response to the time constraints, considering the high-profile nature and senior level positions of some of the respondents, particular from business and government. Likewise, the aspiration at the beginning of the fieldwork process was to interview a total of 15 respondents per each key-informant category. However, post-fieldwork completion the numbers were slightly more varied. A total of 16 ‘business’ key-informants were interviewed, in addition to 11 ‘government’ key-informants and finally a total of 16 ‘civil society’ key-informants altogether.

7.7 A qualitative approach to data collection – respondent interviews
In general, quantitative studies rely on the numerical representation of the data. On the other hand, in qualitative studies the value of the data, is found in the word form (Bryman and Bell, 2007), but may also include observational findings, in addition to visual and other sensory analyses. Moreover, qualitative data is valued for its depth; it provides much deeper insights into the reasons behind human actions (Wolcott, 1982). Comparatively, qualitative data can be gathered utilizing various modes, including transcripts, recordings, notes, observations and audio-visual resources. However, one of the most effective ways of gathering qualitative data is through conversations (Punch, 1998).

Moreover, Atkinson (1998) addressed the value of story-telling in the research context, arguing that “there may be no better way to answer the question of how people get from where they began to where they are now in life than through their life stories” (p. 20). In effect, narratives are one of the most common and organic ways of communicating these lived experiences (Vasey, 2010). Consequently, interviews are a useful method of gaining access to these narrative insights (Bryman and Bell, 2007). They allow the researcher to gain an understanding into the reasons behind people’s actions (Gray, 2009). Moreover, interviews are one of the most widely used methods for data collection in migration studies (Ryan et al., 2009; Klagge and Klein-Hitpab, 2010; Sporton, 2010).

Comparatively, qualitative interviews were mobilized for this study, and represented the main source of data collection, across the four (4) above mentioned respondent categories. There are several different types of interviews that researchers engage with; these include topical interviews, life histories, in addition to three (3) types of qualitative interviews. These included open-ended, semi-structured and structured interview formats (Creswell, 2009). This study mobilized semi-structured interviews, which unlike the open-ended approach; actually, followed a broad structure in terms of topics to be covered. Unlike, structured interviews, which follow a
strict, pre-defined format, and may include predefined responses as well (Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

Nonetheless, the interview data collection process is controlled by access, consequently the researcher constructed a recruitment and selection plan. In ethnography, this is referred to as immersion into the field, and there are numerous factors that can either enhance or deter this process (Amit, 1999; Creswell, 2009). The most immediate are time and money but trust is also integral. If the community does not trust you, they will not grant you access.

Consequently, a great deal of negotiation must take place (Harrington, 2003), in order to secure access. Moreover, rapport – or trust must be established between the researcher and respondent. A lack of trust, will result in a lack of access, therefore producing poor or insufficient data (Burgess, 2011). Barriers that inhibit trust are often correlated to perceived degrees of separation; such as differences across race, nationality, and culture (not to mention, class, gender and sexual orientation).

The researcher employed certain strategies to overcome these limitations. She lived in the capital city for a one year period, from summer 2014 to summer 2015. By living in Bratislava, the researcher was embedded in the local context. As a fluent Slovak speaker and Slovak national she was thus able to secure additional in-group status among the respondents. By living in the country for that one year period, she also gained greater access to country specific know-how. This proved critical in exposing her to both formal and informal social networks.

In addition, the researcher also made use of her first-hand experience of conducting ethnographic fieldwork for her Master’s Dissertation at the University of Amsterdam (Palovic, 2012). This study, conducted only several years before her PhD, gathered data across multiple respondent categories - also in the country of Slovakia. Nonetheless, the researcher recognized that despite past research success, being a member of the study community, ethnically, nationally and linguistically, also had its drawbacks. The potential disadvantages, were more explicitly addressed in the section below (see, limitations section 7.15).

7.8 Interview sample chart
The initial target interview range for this empirical study consisted of 75 one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured, interviews across the four respondent categories. In the end a total of 72 respondents were interviewed. Nevertheless, in addition to the multiple source categories and high respondent numbers, the researcher also observed the saturation principle for all four respondent groups. Punch (1998) explained that “theoretical saturation is reached when further data produces no new theoretical development” (p. 220). Correspondingly, a saturation point was reached during the fieldwork process, whereby clear and recurring themes could be observed in the data, per respondent category.

In addition, the researcher aspired to achieve an equal proportion of male and female respondents – for the return migrant category. This goal was achieved; however, the numbers
were much more skewed in preference to the male gender, particularly for the business and government key-respondents’ categories, whereby most managerial and senior level positions were occupied by males. On the other hand, civil society numbers were somewhat more balanced, but still favoured male respondents, who remained in majority.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Sample</th>
<th>No. of Interviews</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Migrant Group:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returnees</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key-Informants:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Society</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5 Interview Sample Chart
(Source: Author)

7.9 Pilot study
A pilot study was mobilized prior to the 1-year fieldwork process, in order to fine tune the interview schedule. The researcher conducted four (4) in-depth interviews, one for each respondent category, in the case study country. After which, each interview was coded and transcribed, and further systematically analysed. This allowed the researcher to see, whether the interview questions elicited insightful understanding from the respondents. Furthermore, she examined if the questions were not too leading, as the goal was to let the respondents speak for themselves, and not to pigeon-hold them into predefined answers that the researcher wanted to hear (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Finally, upon completion, the researcher constructed a pilot study report, that was subsequently discussed with the thesis supervisors and some alternations and improvements were made to the interview schedule.
7.10 Sample construction and interview schedule

Over the course of the one-year fieldwork period, interviewees were approached using multiple entry points. The researcher utilized social media sources, such as LinkedIn, Meetups and even Facebook. In addition, she also approached non-governmental organizations such as LEAF, SAPIE, NEXTERIA, Start-up Awards, as well as governmental institutions such as the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Embassy events also proved useful as excellent networking sites, and the researcher participated in such functions for the Canadian, American and Austrian Embassies based in Slovakia.

Last, but not least, personal acquaintance networks were also utilized to reach out and make initial contact with prospective respondents. This allowed for a snowball method to be actualized during the fieldwork immersion period. Ultimately, new connections, led to more new connections. Respondents either directly recommended the names of additional returnees to approach, or companies and institutions to target. In some cases, personal introductions were made, either via phone or email. This proved most effective, as the researcher was introduced to the new respondents as a trusted source. Moreover, the researcher also provided ample room for serendipity. The researcher was open to making spontaneous contact with strangers at coffee shops, public events and private social engagements, explaining her research interest and desire to connect with returned migrants. These multiple entry points helped her to draw respondents from a wide professional spectrum, as reflected in the key-informants selected across business, government and civil society.

For the most part, contact was initially established via electronic form, such as via an introductory email. This proved to be more effective after having made initial contact in person. Not everybody approached responded to the researcher, and an even smaller portion agreed to being interviewed. The response was still relatively high, approximately 70% positive, and reflected in the large 72-person respondent sample. Moreover, many of the respondents interviewed from government and business were in high profile positions, which included 4 ambassadors, in addition to the Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vice President of the EU Commission and former Deputy Prime Minister.

These interviews were conducted in multiple locations, the greater majority took place in cafes, restaurants, offices and in some cases the personal homes of the respondents. This proved very useful to the researcher, as it allowed her to further develop her understanding of the research context. Only one, of the 72 interviews, was conducted over the phone, and this was with the Vice President of the EU Commission. An additional two interviews were conducted in New York City; these were serendipitous encounters, that were unplanned for, but nevertheless proved very useful for the study. For example, in New York, the researcher interviewed the Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was in the city for the UN Summit. This was in addition to an internationally successful Slovak business leader, based in New York, who was also actively engaged in Slovak philanthropy.
From the standpoint of business key respondents, a balance between domestic and international companies operating in Slovakia was strived for. However, several of the exclusively Slovak businesses approached declined participation in the study. Their primary reason being that they did not have anything to comment on, considering that they did not have any experience with returned migrants. They therefore did not feel comfortable making commentary on the subject of the research. On the contrary, many of the international ICT multinationals were keen to discuss the importance of the international migration experience with the researcher.

All interviews followed a semi-structured interview format that employed an interview schedule (for a full sample, per respondent category, please see the appendix section). Once again, these questions served as signposts for major themes to be explored in the interviews. They were not followed verbatim and the researcher opted for a more flexible approach once in the interview. Nonetheless, certain themes were discussed consistently.

For the return migrant respondents, these included, the drivers for outmigration, selection of destination country, where they were employed abroad and whether they were professionally satisfied. In addition to their perceptions on the international migration experience, their positive and negative assessments of life abroad and what did they learn from their stay outside of Slovakia. Whether international migration plays an important role in the gain of new knowledge and skills was also discussed. In addition to the extent to which migration contributes to personal learning and the exploration of the self.

The themes of transformation and empowerment were delicately discussed and only if the respondents indicated that they were willing to explore such topics. Not all respondents were willing to talk intimately and emotionally about their international experience, which went hand in hand with any discrimination or racism they may have experienced as well. The latter part of the interview explored the return migration experience, including some of the challenges the migrants faced when integrating back into the Slovak workforce.

Motivations for coming back were discussed, in addition to perception of them by their family, colleagues and locals. Barriers to knowledge transfer and idea diffusion were explored as well as how and if they overcame these challenges. In general, return migrant respondents proved keen to discuss their lives abroad and also at home with the researcher. They were excited by the prospect of being able to exclusively talk about their migration experience as well as vent some of their frustrations upon return.

On the other hand, the key-informants’ interviews were distinctly less personal and emotional than those with the returnees. Although many of these respondents, had their own personal experiences with international migration, the purposes of these interviews were not to discuss it per se. Nevertheless, and in many cases, the respondents’ personal experiences of migration were brought up in the interviews. The key informant interviews were valuable because they allowed the researcher to make cross-comparisons. In the key-informant interviews, the knowledge contribution of returnees was explored vis a vis the Slovak labour market. At the
same time, challenges were also addressed, such as re-integration into the workforce, as well as returnee expectations, in terms of salaries and social and professional acceptance.

A critical area of the research study needs to be noted. This is the selectivity of the respondent sample, which did not reflect the researcher’s study intention, but rather manifested organically as a result of the research criteria and fieldwork process. Since this study focused on high skilled migrants, returnee respondents had to be tertiary educated at the point of departure from Slovakia. This meant that the majority of the respondents had completed a Master’s degree, considering the framework of the Slovak education system. In general, students in Slovakia are tracked straight through a four-year university program, that ends with a Master’s degree, rather than just a Bachelor’s degree as is more standard in the Western context.

What is more, several of the respondents opted to continue their higher education abroad, which resulted in an initial sample of returnees that was very highly educated and included several PhD and post-doctorate respondents, from world leading universities. Based on the reinforcement inherent in the snowball interview method, the researcher ended up, for the most part, with what could be termed an elite group of returned migrants. This was also reflected in their professional drive and exceptional career growth upon return to Slovakia. Representing some of the country’s best talent, they moved up the professional ranks quickly, particularly those employed for the Slovak government.

Therefore, although the researcher secured multiple initial entry points to gain access to a wide-ranging category of returned migrants across different levels of the professional spectrum, the majority of returnee respondents were probably disproportionately elite, even within this context, in their education and professional status. This was also exaggerated by the fact that the study was based in Bratislava. The national capital being the wealthiest part of the country and home to the most expansive professional opportunities. The researcher also acknowledged that less elite migrants, could have been less interested in participating in the study, perhaps because they considered they had failed in relation to their return and integration aspirations. In contrast, those that already experienced some degree of professional success upon return, were more likely to be interested in sharing their story.

Furthermore, key-informants, which were selected according a more open ended research criteria, also reflected an elite bias. This was partially attributed to the high-profile nature of the senior decision making positions they represented. Key-informants also demonstrated a positive bias towards the international migration experience. Many had in fact participated in various bouts of international migration throughout their own careers. The researcher recognized that the principle of resonance could be applied to the fieldwork experience, as those key-informants with international migration experience were potentially more attracted to participate in the study. That being said, having an international education or professional experience is not unusual amongst those in such senior professional positions.
7.11 Coding and data analysis

Given the fact that the researcher was a native Slovak speaker, all interviews were conducted in Slovak, with the option to transition into English, should the respondents be a non-Slovak speaker or feel inclined to do so. Some of the returned migrants interviewed preferred to speak about their international experience in the English language, and this preference was respected. Some key informants were also expats and therefore spoke in English with the researcher. Furthermore, all interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and translated, from Slovak into English were needed. Then, the analysis phase began.

Finding coherence and contrast in this rich, highly textured material is the purpose of the research process (Bryman and Bell, 2007). It is the job of the researcher to evaluate and synthesize the data (Saunders et al., 2007). Accordingly, Strauss and Corbin explained that every piece of data should be examined and the researcher should always inquire “what is this piece of data an example of?” (1990: 62). For the purposes of this study, the researcher employed a systematic analysis approach, paying particular attention to key-themes that emerged from the data, in addition, to any key words and expressions.

Consequently, patterns were identified, as well as similarities and differences that arose across the four respondent categories. Evidently, through reflective analysis, “concepts are developed inductively from the data and raised to a higher level of abstraction, and their interrelationships are then traced out” (Punch, 1998: 201).

At the same time, the researcher acknowledged the advantages but also the drawbacks to utilizing computer software. Therefore, she manually coded all the interviews, because she understood that the data across the four respondent categories had to be interpreted more holistically. In other words, the researcher was aware, that if she coded the data using a predefined electronic template, she risked losing some of the value of the narrative. Hence, she also opted to analyse and categorize the interviews according to hand coding methods.

Consequently, and for the purposes for the study, thematic analysis was utilized. Similar to grounded theory, thematic analysis allowed for a flexible, data-driven inductive approach to data analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) “thematic analysis is ‘a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data’” (p.79). This method proved useful for the researcher, considering the flexibility needed in employing a thematic analysis across such a vast data set.

Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a useful guideline, which was built on a very personal approach. The researcher initially familiarized herself with the data by conducting the interviews in person, and later transcribing them. By continuously reading and re-reading the data, thematic patterns began to emerge. These were then categorized into initial codes, key themes the researcher identified as occurring repetitively.

In addition, the study also observed migration drivers, including ‘motivations to leave’ and ‘motivations to return’. What is more, for the latter category, the following sub-codes were utilized: ‘patriotism and nation building aspirations’, ‘career development’, ‘family reasons’ and ‘opening own business’. Evidently, the researcher also observed that there was overlap sometimes between different categories. Hence, some codes belonging to ‘motivations to leave’ also appeared in the category entitled: ‘motivations to return’ (i.e. career opportunity belonged both to ‘motivation to leave’ and also to the category: ‘motivation to return’).

Furthermore, different codes were identified for the key informants across government, business and civil society. These included codes such as ‘added-value of return migrants’, ‘international exposure’, ‘international languages’, ‘competitive industry knowledge and best practices’, ‘international networks and international friends’, ‘new values and habits’, ‘thinking global’, ‘communist past and geopolitical isolation’, ‘new skillsets’, ‘new mind-sets’, ‘knowledge transfer’, ‘transformative learning’, ‘key competencies: comfort-zone, communication, confidence, critical thinking and creativity’, ‘barriers upon return’, ‘critical mass and returnee support’, ‘lack of opportunity and being pushed out again’.

Finally, relationships across the four categories and their ensuing codes were also explored. Similarities and differences, were mapped out for analysis purposes. The primary focus being the perceptions, as to the added-value that returnees bring back to Slovakia through the complete migration cycle.

7.12 Research credibility: data reliability, validity and trustworthiness
In addition to analysing the data, researchers must also verify their findings (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Hence, it is important to establish research credibility, as any scientific study requires some form of accountability. As such, the data must demonstrate to be both reliable and valid (Creswell, 2009). Saunders et al. (2007) defined reliability according to “the extent to which [the] data collection techniques or analysis procedures will yield consistent findings” (p.149). Moreover, reliability can be measured by assessing for the following three criteria: 1) is the study replicable 2) would others make similar observations, and most importantly 3) was the data collection and data interpretation process transparent (Saunders et al., 2007).

Nonetheless, the first two criteria are invalid for qualitative ethnographic studies, because social situations are context-specific. Furthermore, individual interpretations are also subjective, in addition to being influenced by the socio-economic and cultural background of the researcher
(Brewer, 2000). However, a clear documentation of “how sense was made from the raw data” (Saunders et al., 2007: 149) is essential, when accounting for observer bias. Thus, it is important to maintain a chain of evidence throughout the analysis process. Consequently, the researcher must demonstrate how his or her conclusions were drawn, making use of interview excerpts to back up his statements and arguments.

Qualitative researchers emphasize the importance of data trustworthiness. This is measured by several components including (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability and (d) confirmability (Creswell, 2009). These alternative measures nevertheless allow the data collected through the fieldwork process to be quality controlled. Qualitative researchers also apply methodological triangulation, multiple respondent categories and member-checks so as to account for data credibility and trustworthiness (Padgett, 1998). In order to maintain the trustworthiness of the research the researcher strived to maintain high credibility and objectivity throughout the fieldwork process. Correspondingly, the research involved self-reflection on her own personal biases and she tried her best not to let these interfere and bleed into the data analysis, so as to maintain research rigor and responsibility (Johnson and Waterfield, 2004). However, according to the methodology literature, particularly that on grounded theory, member checks are typically one of the most popular methods to employ to increase trustworthiness (Gilgun, 1994). In this study, an additional three key-respondent groups were utilized, as per the focal research group (the migrant returnees), so as to help balance the researcher’s personal views and maintain researcher objectivity.

7.13 Ethics

In general, qualitative research is a more intrusive mode of inquiry, requiring more effort, time and contact with the research setting (Creswell, 2009). Hence, ethical issues play a more important role in the data collection process. A safe and ethical approach to research “means that you have to ensure that the way you design your research is both methodologically sound and morally defensible to all those who are involved” (Saunders et al., 2007: 178). To begin with, the researcher understood that she was representing the university during the entire fieldwork study. She therefore took great care to maintain a professional and respectful rapport with all respondents.

Moreover, in order to avoid any confusion, her role and research interests were disclosed from the beginning. All interviews were audio-recorded, but the respondents had the option to opt-out of the audio recording process at any time. Moreover, the researcher maintained the confidentiality and the option of anonymity for all the study respondents. Most key respondents were identified by their name in this study, because their positions were relevant to this research, and they also consented either by signing a consent form or by verbally agreeing. Those that did not feel comfortable, were categorized as ‘anonymous’ in this thesis. Finally, all respondents were informed that they could withdraw from the study without giving a reason.
7.14 Positionality

For the purposes of this study, the researcher built upon the familiarity of her own culture (Burgess, 2011) in order to gain deeper insights and understanding into the social world of the study respondents, in particular the returnees. Not only is the researcher a member (ethnically, nationally and culturally) of the community she studied, she is also intimately familiar with the international migration experience. She has spent close to a decade living, working and studying in the EU. She was a resident of both the UK and the Netherlands, but has nevertheless also remained closely engaged with her native Slovakia throughout.

Nonetheless, the researcher also embodies a complex identity and biography. In addition, to being a Slovak native and national, she is also a second-generation Canadian. Although born in Slovakia, the researcher was raised and received her primary socialization in Canada. Correspondingly, the researcher utilized her dual, hybrid-identity, throughout the fieldwork experience. Moreover, she viewed this mixed biography as an advantage, because it granted her a simultaneous insider and outsider perspective on the Slovak migrant experience. Furthermore, this specific positionality also enhanced the researcher’s reflexivity, because it allowed her to employ both emphatic understanding, as well as de-novo sensitivity to the fieldwork experience (Spradley, 1980).

The researcher’s hybrid Slovak-Canadian identity proved advantageous in some cases and disadvantageous in others during the fieldwork process. Although she spoke fluent Slovak, the researcher did not grow up in Slovakia during the post-communist context. She therefore did not share the same social upbringing as the interviewed respondents. Unlike them, her primary, secondary and tertiary education were received in Canada, followed by the United States, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. This produced a social distance in shared experiences with those interviewed, although complimentary commonality was found with those that also studied in one of the above-mentioned countries. Furthermore, her international identity was a novelty in some instances and it opened doors that may otherwise have remained closed, given Slovakia’s tight knit social circles. These are networks that she was not privy to, due to her family’s relocation abroad from a very young age. What is more, being simultaneously a cultural insider as well as a cultural outsider stimulated social interest in the community and proved beneficial to gaining outlier contacts and access to high profile respondents from across the social spectrum, including the Deputy Prime Minister of Slovakia and the Vice President of the European Commission, in addition to a plethora of professionally self-realized returned migrants, also referred to as migrant elite.

7. 15 Limitations

Although the interview method is an effective tool for gaining deep insights into the social world of the respondents, there are nevertheless limitations in regards to how much useful data can be gathered from relatively short (60-90min), one off interviews. Consequently, the researcher was careful to not claim too much about immersing herself into the respondent’s social world. Secondly, as an insider she faced the potential dilemma that the migrant respondents may not have felt comfortable to disclose personal and in-depth details of their (migrant) lives, out of
inhibition and embarrassment. This could be attributed to the fact, that the researcher and respondents were both from the same community.

Moreover, in reference to the researcher’s simultaneous outsider perspective, she was also aware of the fact, that there were culture insights that she may not have accessed, considering that she did not grow up in Slovakia, and therefore did not receive her primary socialization in the country. Furthermore, the researcher also acknowledged that some respondents may have felt uncomfortable discussing certain emotional issues with her, particularly in regards to some of the migrant hardship and discrimination experienced, because they could consider that she did not face these same issues as a native English speaker abroad.

Accordingly, and despite the drawbacks and limitations, the researcher sought to maintain an open and emphatic understanding to the study respondents throughout the researcher process. She was open and sensitive to the migrant experiences and did not judge them, even if they differed from her own understanding – of the Slovak East to West migrant experience. Subsequently, the researcher was conscious so as to not impose her own perspective during the fieldwork process and during the one on one interviews conducted. Nonetheless, she also acknowledged that researchers too are social beings that are equally prone to their own preconceptions, stereotypes and social paradigms. In response, the researcher strived to make her positionality clear to the reader throughout this thesis and subsequently collected and analysed the data as transparently as possible.

Conclusion
This thesis employed a qualitative study, which was inductive in approach and interpretivist (subjective) in orientation. Exploratory in purpose, this study utilized interviews to collect primary data. The data collection process took advantage of the researcher’s close ties to the study context. As a Slovak national and native speaker, she secured in-group access to the study respondents. At the same time, her hybrid-identity of being simultaneously a Canadian citizen, also proved advantageous when securing access to non-Slovak and Slovak respondents alike. This was in addition to, granting her a distinctive simultaneous insider and outsider perspective in the data collection and data analysis process.

Consequently, a large data set was collected, culminating with a total of 72 study respondents. This included a total of four respondent categories in an effort to cross check the findings and establish research credibility. The perspectives and statements of the returnees, were compared and analysed with reference to the opinions of the key-informants, individuals selected from business, government and civil society. These functioned as member checks, which allowed the researcher to process the data more holistically. As noted above, the ‘elite’ nature of migrant respondents, and the international experiences of many of the key informants, may have framed their opinions.

Due to the extensive and elaborate data collective process, the researcher was able to explore, categorize and describe the value of learning, knowledge, and knowledge transfers by the
respondents made possible through the post-accession East to West return migration experience. Moreover, by employing in particular the managerial perspectives of the business sector key-informants, the researcher was able to compare return migrants and manager perspectives, as to the added-value of the international experience in a post-accession labour market.
8. 1 Introduction

This chapter explores the perspectives of the economy sector. It employs the voices of firm managers, in addition to company owners, founders and CEOs. The focus of this chapter is to explore the value of employing returning international Slovaks (returned migrants) in a post-accession transition economy.

Cast within a discussion of transformation and emergence, the respondents discuss the added-value of return migration and knowledge transfer. Their commentaries provide perspectives on Slovakia’s economic transition from planned to market economy over the past quarter of a century (post-1989). The value of the returning, internationally enhanced human capital is explored vis a vis the country’s integration into the global economic networks and overall transition process.

Two predominant contribution streams are identified and these include both ‘practical’ and ‘strategic’ labour market values. The ‘practical’ added value of returned migrants refers to real time economic needs. Slovakia is the biggest recipient of FDI in the CEE (Jakubiak et al., 2008). These companies are drawn to the region, due to the country’s relatively low cost and productive labour force.

Government schemes, also play a role, especially regarding the incentives they provide to MNCs. Shared service centres are encouraged to employ a minimum of 60% university educated employees. As a result, these companies recruit a large portion of the Slovak tertiary labour force. Moreover, the MNC shared-service sector currently employs over 70,000 employees in Slovakia (SARIO, 2016). Fieldwork evidence indicates that a substantial portion have some form of international migration experience. In turn, returnees armed with world languages and cosmopolitan know-how well match the MNCs’ corporate employee skill profiles.

On the other hand, the strategic added value of return migrants refers to the future development needs of the Slovak economy. It has been argued that return migrants, armed with expertise know-how and international experience have to potential to not only meet current skill-gaps, but also help to drive business growth (Collet and Zuleeg, 2008). Correspondingly, the attraction of Slovak professionals from abroad is viewed as a viable economic strategy by many local and international businesses based in Slovakia. Some companies even target returned migrants as a more cost-effective labour recruitment strategy to hiring ex-pat management. The main argument being that non-native managers are less inclined to stay on in the country, and are therefore more costly to retain.
8.2 Management Respondents Breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ESET</td>
<td>SK</td>
<td>IT</td>
<td>CEO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>IBM</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>IBM</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Google</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>HP</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>AT&amp;T</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>KPMG</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>DELL</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>EFMA</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>ADIDAS</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>LENOVO</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>QUALITY UNIT</td>
<td>SK</td>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>MARTINUS.SK</td>
<td>SK</td>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>THE SPOT</td>
<td>SK</td>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>NEXT LEVEL</td>
<td>SK</td>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>VUB BANKA</td>
<td>SK</td>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6 List of Participants – Business Key-Informants
(Source: Author)

The biographical break-down of the manager respondents is as follows, a total of 16 manager key-informants were interviewed, only two of which were women – working in the HR subdivisions of IBM and AT&T respectively. A total of 11 companies were multinational corporations, only one of which was Slovak owned – the antivirus company ESET; Slovakia’s most successful business export to date. Moreover, an additional five Slovak businesses were interviewed, four of which were small to medium sized enterprises, while one was a Slovak bank.

Substantively, five of the 16 managers interviewed were foreign expats currently working and living in Bratislava. An additional five Slovak managers also identified with having worked, studied or lived abroad. The remaining six were categorized as Slovak stayers; individuals with no migration history in their biography. The majority of managers interviewed (10 persons out of
had foreign experience, as defined in this research. The researcher acknowledged that their personal experiences of migration may have coloured their views in regards to the contribution of returned migrants. However, having international experiences, both in the forms of education and professional experience, is characteristic of senior management in such companies.

8.3 The Emergence of the Tatra Tiger in the CEE
Slovakia is a transitioning high-income open market economy that is a member of global institutions such as the OECD, WTO, NATO and the EU (Balaz and Kusa, 2012). It was one of the first CEE countries to adopt the Euro currency (2009), and remains the sole Eurozone member of the Visegrad-4 Group (Czech, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland) (see Figure 7). Historically, located at the buffer-zone of the former Iron Curtain, Slovakia has emerged as a strong regional leader at the junction of East and West. KPMG partner, an expat based in Bratislava, summarizes the major economic transitions since the collapse of the communist regime.

“Phase #1 consisted of the influx of the major corporate brands— the Pepsis and the Cokes so to speak. Phase #2 encompassed the large scale selling-off, or privatization, of state owned resources, including the major manufacturing factories and production centres. Phase #3 observed a maturation of this process, via the merger and acquisition of smaller-scale, but established Slovak businesses, while the 1990s brought an end to the privatization era altogether. Phase #4 we have observed the establishment of large corporate service and car manufacturing hubs.” Partner KPMG / Expat Resp. / MNC / Finance Sector

Slovakia is the overall fastest growing member of the Eurozone for the past decade (2004-2014), and the country has grown strongly since joining the European Union (Ernest and Young, 2015). It was awarded the best conditions for doing business in the CEE (for that same time period) and Slovakia ranks 37th overall in global rankings, according to the World Bank Doing Business Report (SARIO, 2016). As a result, the country is commonly celebrated as the Tatra Tiger and a country to watch in CEE business circles.
Slovakia: East-West Eurozone Gateway
(Source: Jacobsen and Palovic, 2016)

*Slovakia is located at the heart of Europe, in the above map, it is the only country in blue in the Central Eastern European portion of the continent

This success is a combination of several key factors, including the country’s: 1) strong industrial heritage, 2) developed infrastructure, 3) qualified human capital, and 4) strategic geographic location at the centre of Europe. These have made it an attractive destination for foreign investment. However, it was not until the election of the progressive Dzurinda government (1998-2006) and the implementation of economic reforms that the Slovak economy really began to take off. A competitive corporate flat tax rate of 19% (today, 22%), in addition to favourable policies and cash grants were also significant draws for foreign investors (SARIO, 2016).

As a result, Slovakia became a top regional reformer and one of the most investment friendly countries in the CEE (Jakubiak et al., 2008). AT&T HR Manager, who lived abroad as a nanny in the UK during the pre-EU accession period, expands as to why Slovakia became a popular Greenfield investment destination for foreign multinationals.

“Slovakia is in a very good position. Not only is our geographic position within the centre of Europe favourable, our labour pool is exceptional as well. Our people have a solid technical education, and can speak foreign languages fluently. The low salaries are, of course, a key factor in retaining these investors in our country.” HR Manager AT&T/ Expat Resp. / MNC / ICT Sector

Correspondingly, the country thrives on an open market economy that is export dependent (Balaz and Kusa, 2012). The largest foreign investment led industries pertain to assembly manufacturing (automotive and electronic) and professional services (international outsourcing business centres). Currently, automotive production encompasses the largest single aspect
(40%) of the Slovak economy (Perrault-Carré, 2015). This sector builds upon the skills and infrastructure inherited from the Cold War defence industry (artillery machinery), in addition to steel and automobile production (Jakubiak et al., 2008). This is both a strength and weakness, as economic vulnerability arises from over-specialization, which in Slovakia’s case is relatively cheap, semi-skilled manufacturing.

CEE economies offer investors good access to a well-trained labour force and Slovakia is no exception (Kurekova, 2011a). The country inherited relatively good education infrastructure from the communist regime. Due to ideological preferences, this included a solid foundation in technical knowledge and training. Today, the region is renowned for its technical universities and computer programming (IT) (Kogan, 2008). Moreover, Slovakia has one of the highest secondary education rates in the OECD. Approximately, 77% of the total population has graduated from high school, while 16% have obtained a university degree (SARIO, 2016).

The high level of education among employees in some sectors is evident in the majority of manager narratives. Dell Manager, a foreign expat, who has been residing in Slovakia for the past decade, shares his views on education being the most important source of competitive advantage.

“Slovakia has a large amount of university graduates, way more than South Africa. In my country, universities are very expensive, so, they are attended only by a few. But, here and I mean everybody has a degree. What they are missing is job experience.” Manager DELL / Expat Resp. / MNC / ICT Sector

Evidently, the abundance of well-qualified human capital has been a major driver for attracting foreign operations into the country (Janicki and Wunnava, 2004). Companies that are looking to lower costs and optimize performance are well aware that human resources are integral to business operation. Comparatively, the cultural proximity of Eastern Europe (Hofstede, 1983), in comparison to the more culturally removed Asia or South America, makes it an attractive, as well as relatively safe Greenfield investment destination.
Student to Graduate Slovak University Ratio per Academic Year
(Source: SARIO, 2016)

Approximately 65,000 tertiary graduates enter the Slovak labour market every year (see Figure 8). Correspondingly, Slovakia has the highest proportion of tertiary educated populations in the CEE (SARIO, 2016). The driver behind the high enrolment rate is partially attributed to cultural and employability factors. The privatization of the education system resulted in a mushrooming of educational institutions in the country.

Slovakia, which has a population of 5.5 million, registers 36 higher education institutions, whereas the UK, with a population of 64 million, has 150 registered higher education institutions (Paton, 2014). Evidently, demand is high as degrees are correlated to employability, for example secondary data illustrates that only 16% of individuals without secondary education find long-term employment in the country, versus 75% of university educated persons (SARIO, 2016).

The most common foreign languages taught at Slovak secondary schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9 Percentage of Pupils Studying Foreign Languages in Slovak Secondary Schools
(Source: SARIO, 2016)

Today, English (92%) and German (50%) are the most common taught languages in Slovak schools (see Figure 9) (SARIO, 2016). Good knowledge of international languages is directly tied
to employability, at least for MNCs who export their services internationally, making communicating in a non-Slovak language a necessity.

“If you want to work in Bratislava, you have to speak English. Even if you are talented, educated and eager – you will not have much opportunity. It’s unfortunate if you do not have luck with languages.” Manager IBM / Slovak Resp. / MNC / ICT Sector

The above discussed, strong educational foundation and good language skills of the local labor market, is further appealed by the country’s demographic youthfullness. Slovakia (20.4%) has one of the youngest populations in the European Union, second in numbers only to Cyprus (22.7%) (Eurostat, 2015). Accordingly, employee profiles reflect this trend, particularly in the private sector. Foreign employers, due to their demand for specific skills, capture a large percentage of this population. This is attributed to the language skill gap, as a result of the Iron Curtain. Prior to 1989, the education model reflected Soviet ideals. Russian, rather than English, was taught in schools, particularly after the 1968 Soviet led Warsaw-Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia (Applebaum, 2012).

“A vast amount of employment opportunities were made available on the market when IBM first established its headquarters in Slovakia. The great majority were filled by young people whom were skilful in the English language. The drawback of the older generation was that those aged 40 years and over, were not guaranteed to speak foreign languages well.” HR Manager IBM / Slovak Resp. / MNC / ICT Sector

IBM is an American company and their primary language of operation, including for internal communication systems, is English. The HR Manager’s career trajectory reflects the importance of global language skills for the company. Originally a non-migrant Slovak stayer, she nevertheless grew up in a bilingual household because her family’s German lineage. It was her foreign language abilities that landed her a spot as one of the first 12 employees hired by the MNC. Due to her linguistic fluency in the German language, she was immediately sent to Germany for on-site training.

Another interesting trend she observed was the fact that due to the language gap, many of the company’s first employees had experience from abroad in the informal employment sector, which often included childcare services. Prior to EU accession, Slovaks were the highest recipients of au-pair visas in the UK (Williams and Balaz, 2004). This was due to immigration and visa constraints. Those that wanted to acquire English language capital would go abroad as tourists or students or au pairs, and engage in the informal or private care economy, as a point of entry into the foreign labour market.

Over a quarter of a century has passed since the collapse of the Iron Curtain and although the integration between Eastern and Western Europe has been remarkable, certain socio-economic cleavages continue to remain between the two hemispheres. Wages in Eastern Europe are significantly lower to their Western European and global counterparts, which is reflected in the
regional purchasing power (Balaz and Kusa, 2012). According to the OECD, Slovak people earn far less than the global average (KPMG, 2015).

Moreover, even with the introduction of the Euro currency, Slovakia continues to be a low-cost investment destination. The average monthly wage is 837 Euros per month, while the hourly pay rate is just over 2 Euros per hour (SARIO, 2016). Evidently, FDI influxes have raised salary standards with the influx of manufacturing and professional jobs, particularly in the Western part of the country. However, a secondary story line is also apparent vis a vis the country’s neighbours. Although Slovakia’s mean average wage is still lower than the Czech Republic and Poland, it is slightly higher than Hungary and substantial so in comparison to Bulgaria and Romania (see Figure 10).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Czech</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>Bulgaria</th>
<th>Romania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average monthly wage (EUR)</td>
<td>837</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social security paid by employer</td>
<td>35.20%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>17-48%-20.14%</td>
<td>28.50%</td>
<td>31.40%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total monthly labour cost (EUR)</td>
<td>1,132</td>
<td>1,219</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1,043</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>783</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10 Average Monthly Wages across the CEE in 2014 (Source: SARIO, 2016)

Remuneration rates also vary strongly across region and industry. The highest paying jobs are located in Bratislava and the greater Bratislava region in general. The western part of the country, offers investors excellent infrastructure, as well as some of the best performing universities. In turn, it is no surprise the region receives the highest proportion of foreign investment. Moreover, salaries for international companies are higher than domestic ones.

“In the retail banking sectors, graduates with a university degree are hired for positions that pay on average 600 euros per month” Manager VUB Bank / Slovak Resp. / Banking Sector

“The salaries for entry-level positions, which require no prior experience, range from 1,200 to 1,500 Euros per month, the salaries of course increase per experience and skill level.” Manager HP / Expat Resp. / MNC / ICT Sector

The difference between international IT companies and domestic ones is striking. Evidently, for
international companies, Slovakia is still cheap – vis a vis the Western labour market. However, it is also very attractive because Slovakia offers high labour productivity. Slovakia ranks in the top 10 of OECD countries in terms of pay and productivity ratios (World Economic Forum, 2011). It is also a regional leader in the CEE. The country consistently outperforms its neighbours in labour productivity per hour worked (see Figure 11).

![Figure 11 Labour Productivity per Hour Worked](Source: Eurostat, 2013)

In summary, it is the culmination of multiple factors, including Slovakia’s good infrastructure and strong manufacturing sector, abundance of tertiary educated human capital, favourable corporate policies and strategic geographic location that have all contributed to its emergence as a leading CEE economy (Jakubiak et al., 2008). However, none would have been possible with the large and very significant impact of foreign investors. The following section will explore the role of global companies in helping to accelerate the country’s economic development.

**8.4 The Game-Changers: Foreign Investors and Emerging Skills Shortages**

To date, Slovakia is the only CEE economy in the Eurozone. The Euro currency has increased transaction transparency and therefore increased investment trust in the region. KPMG a financial service provider, has witnessed the bourgeoning of the country into a key manufacturing and outsourcing centre, as expanded upon below.

“Slovakia is a key regional cog. Many of the major global investors have re-allocated major portions of their supply chain here.” Partner KPMG / Expat Resp. / MNC / Finance Sector

Currently, Slovakia is the number one car producer in the world (per capita), with a production output of close to 1 million cars per year. The arrival of Germany’s Volkswagen (1991), one of the largest foreign direct investments in Central Europe at the time, spearheaded the resurrection of the automobile industry (Dobosiewicz, 1992). France’s Peugeot-Citron (2003) and South Korea’s KIA (2004) followed suite at the turn of the millennium. The most recent member to join the team is the UK’s Jaguar Landover (2015), although now owned by Tata Motors an Indian company since 2008, it is still internationally recognized as a British brand. JLR will be the fourth multinational to establish an automotive manufacturing centre in the country.
The increasing influence of foreign investors across the CEE follows global trends and the “progressive shift towards services at the expense of manufacturing” (OECD, 2008:8). Correspondingly, the erection of new global outsourcing hubs in the form of technological and shared-services centres marks a new phase of economic maturation and labour market professionalization in Slovakia. Structural changes which have without a doubt been accelerated by the country’s membership into the European Union and Eurozone family.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Investor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>US Steel, Emerson, DELL, Whirlpool, IBM, HP, Johnson Controls, AT&amp;T, Accenture, Getrag Ford, Honeywell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Siemens, Volkswagen, T-Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Yazaki, Mitsui Sumitomo, Sony, Panasonic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Samsung, KIA Motors, Hyundai Mobis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>PSA Peugeot Citroen, Alcatel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Soitron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>AU Optronics, ESON, Foxconn, Delta Electronics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12 Major Foreign Investors in Slovakia  
(Source: SARIO, 2016)

The influx of Greenfield investments was a major catalyst in the global integration of the Slovak economy into international supply networks. This transition occurred over a succession of phases, from privatization to the establishment of corporate outsourcing hubs. However, socio-economic differences created specific contextual challenges, namely in terms of knowledge, language and skills gaps. What is more, there are 35 established shared-services/technological centres operating in Slovakia (SARIO, 2016). Employees perform a range of back office functions, including administration, accounting, logistics, human resources and customer service related jobs.

Adidas CEE Manager, a German expat living in Slovakia, is actively engaged with the Bratislava business community. A keynote speaker at the 5th Anniversary of Nexteria, a business NGO that looks to develop local management talent, he is well acquainted with the pros and cons of the local labour market.

“In the 1990s there was vacuum of skills. When foreign companies moved in – they had no one to manage them. Back then, people could quickly move to the top of the career ladder – without necessarily being equipped with the right qualifications or skill criteria.
Just speaking English or German was sometimes enough.” Manager Adidas / Slovak Resp. / MNC / Other

Moreover, he attributes current skill gaps to a legacy issue of the communist regime and the Iron Curtain. Which kept Eastern Europe in isolation from Western labour markets and therefore hampered the development of internationally competitive knowledge and skills. Comparatively, several of the study respondents discussed how expatriate management was brought in, to help facilitate the on-boarding process of MNCs. In international Greenfield investments, “expatriates are often used to set up operations, transfer knowledge and train local managers” (Harzing, 2002: 221). Comparatively, Bratislava has witnessed a burgeoning of a small, albeit critical foreign ex-pat community (Durianova, 2006).

“If you do a market overview, you will notice that almost all the big corporations, especially the banks are run by foreigners.” Manager VUB Bank / Slovak Resp. / Banking Sector

This lends credence to the understanding that foreign investors contribute to national economic development, not just in terms of job creation and new technology, but also through the transfer of best practices (Nunnenkamp, 2004). This includes the grooming of local management talent under expatriate corporate parenting, as well as raising the general employee profile through exposure to a new international business culture, spearheaded by the use of the English language.

“The salaries are a given, but it’s so much more than that. These firms brought with them a different world view– from economics to technology.” Manager HP / Expat Resp. / MNC / ICT Sector

Evidently, the value of MNCs facilitating knowledge transfer into developing economies is contested (Narula and Dunning, 2000; Buckley and Ghauri, 2004). All the more so because the status and significance of Slovak management vis-a-vis the global company structure remains disputed. Most decision-making positions remain located at company headquarters and therefore not in Slovakia, this was a view shared by the majority of the respondents.

At the same time, this bottleneck can be attributed to several key-factors including, language, knowledge and skill barriers. In addition to development and infrastructure time-lags. Nonetheless, time proves to be an essential parameter in helping to merge these divides. The more time companies spend in Slovakia, the more they become embedded in the local environment, and the more Slovak employees ascended up the employment hierarchy.

“In the beginning, the up-line management was all foreign. It was natural, because we could not source the senior knowledge locally. That is why - until recently, we had no Slovak managers in the company. However, over the course of the past 12 years, the population has matured. In fact, it might be hard to find a foreigner, in management
Although cost-efficiency and productivity are the primary drivers for investment, a knowledge and economic maturation process also occurs. As local employees get more familiar with the working practices of foreign employers, so does the trust of foreign employers in the competencies of the domestic labour force. This does not mean that the ability of Slovakia to remain a competitive destination is not threatened with the introduction of cheaper EU destination labour markets, namely Romania and Bulgaria.

Nevertheless, the country’s over decade long post-accession good performance offers investors a good track record for further investment opportunities. However, its innovation and research and development sectors remain underdeveloped, and consequently underexploited. The latter is not attributed to a lack of brains, but rather infrastructure. More interestingly, some respondents argued that Slovakia could promote itself as a low-cost innovation market.

“As the more automated production processes continue to flow east, this region offers untapped business potential. Increasingly, foreign companies are transferring-in more knowledge intensive process.” Manager Adidas / Slovak Resp. / MNC / Retail Sector

In summary, the innovation sector, including tech starts-ups, are key in helping Slovakia move up and into a higher-value-added goods and services economy. This includes making strategic investments and initiatives, which include increasing university and industry partnerships, supporting research and development, as well as cultivating a start-up ecosystem (Mckinsey and Company, 2013). All of which are practices that are currently taking place today – albeit in their early formation, as result of government, business and civic collaboration and programs.

8.5 Return Migration: The Value of Skilled versus Unskilled International Experience

The acquisition of human capital through return migration is viewed as a viable business strategy (Klagge and Klein-Hitpab, 2010). There is an economic added value of such influxes, and the researcher employs a dual-stream framework of ‘practical’ and ‘strategic’ capital to illustrate this point. The ‘practical added value’ refers to meeting immediate and real time human capital needs. Particularly in regards to skill-matching employee profiles of international investors, including shared services and technological centres. Correspondingly, it refers to the use value of ‘any’ international experience, usually resulting in the acquisition of English language skills and cosmopolitan know-how.

On the other hand, ‘strategic added value’ refers to the potential human capital contribution of return migration to the future growth needs of the Slovak economy, by infusing the environment with new knowledge, creativity, innovation and competitiveness. That is, the influx of employees with skill-sets that contributes to key competitive advantage, in terms of knowledge, creativity, innovation and competitiveness. All of which offer the highest value added to local businesses (Wright et al., 1994).
However, the distinction between skilled versus unskilled returning human capital is multifaceted in the case of Eastern Europe. Post-accession migration data demonstrates uneven discrepancies between migrant education levels (university educated) and their employment streams abroad (Pollard et al., 2008). EU-8 nationals working in the UK, have a higher employment rate than the UK-born average (White, 2011). However, the majority are employed in low-skilled positions, predominantly in hospitality and manufacturing sectors (Janta et al., 2011).

Newly arrived migrants often experience job-tracking, in addition to immigrant glass-ceilings (Burrell, 2003). However, the conditions that drive migrants to leave also influence their labour market point of entry abroad. For ‘hardship’ migrants, international migration is a survival strategy to diversify the family income. For ‘choice’ migrants, international migration is potentially a delay strategy, postponing their labour market entry at home (Kurekova, 2011a).

“There are two types of Slovak migrants abroad. The high potential ones that go abroad to seek new opportunities – they are eager to learn a new language and experience a different culture. The other category corresponds to individuals that leave because they were not able to find employment domestically.” HR Manager Lenovo / Slovak Resp. / MNC/ ICT Sector

Correspondingly, choice migrants leave in search of better jobs, in addition to new learning opportunities abroad, whereas hardship migrants leave in search of any jobs (Kurekova, 2011a). Evidently the choice vs. hardship distinction is far more nuanced, individuals also cross borders between them, or change in orientation while abroad. These are all factors that must be considered. The economic value of practical vs. strategic value added human capital is dependent on the needs of the organization. Evidently, managers in search of specialized knowledge, or strategic human resources, have a bias for professional international experience in target industries.

“I am not talking about the Slovaks that return to work at the shared service centres. I am talking about the top layer – the zero to one percent. That is the last place we want to see them end up [shared service centres]. We need our best to come back, so they can help make a change in our country.” Country Manager Google / Slovak Resp. / MNC / ICT Sector

Google manager runs a small operation in Slovakia, and the positions he hires for are senior roles that are strategic and knowledge intensive in nature. Whereas managers, such as those working for shared service centres, are hiring in much larger numbers – and are in search of different skill criteria altogether. NextLevel Pharma manager, whose company revenue is made almost exclusively outside of Slovakia, needs employees with specific skills, namely English language capital.

“When you move abroad, you are forced to learn English quickly. The difference is really
apparent in comparison to those that learned the language from the television. You can instantly hear it in their sentence structure and vocal ticks.” Founder/ Manager Next Level Pharma / Expat Resp. / SME / ICT Sector

Therefore, any international experience is a positive marker for him, as it indicates English language fluency as well as international exposure. Williams and Balaz (2008) found that the international migration experience was a sign-post indicator for ‘openness to learning’, which employers found useful. Moreover, the soft-skill acquisition of competencies such as confidence and enhanced communication abilities was also valued, as discussed by the EFMA manager below, whose company provided international financial conferences. Here, he echoed the views of the majority of respondents who worked predominantly with an international customer base. For the most part, they explicitly appreciated the value of ‘any’ international experience due its mind opening effect.

“When you go abroad and start your life from scratch. You develop your personality – you become stronger. When I see this kind of experience on a CV, it demonstrates to me – that they have an ability and willingness to learn.” Manager EFMA / Slovak Resp. / MNC / Finance Sector

Nonetheless, the acquisition of strategic market knowledge, versus practical market knowledge was evidently viewed as economically more viable still. Correspondingly, CEO of Martinus.sk expands on this discrepancy, arguing that for business enhancing roles, professional international experience was preferred.

“Of course, there is a huge difference in the type of experience abroad. Someone with service industry experience can return with a broader view of the world. But, someone with corporate world – or management experience can come back with concrete processes. Gaining such experience from a much larger market is invaluable. Working abroad as a waiter, you still get exposed, but evidently it is a completely different story.” CEO Martinus.sk / Slovak Resp. / SME / Retail Sector

Overall, skilled vs. unskilled international labour market experience was preferred. However, it was not always necessary as per the position being hired for. The value of strategic versus practical added value knowledge was linked to the industry and seniority of the position abroad. Individuals with work experience in IT and finance were sought after for their know-how of more mature markets, particularly in regards to Slovakia’s tech focused start-up sector. However, a consensus also remained among managers regarding the applicability of such knowledge to job opportunities at home, in addition to the issue of remuneration.

Individuals with ‘any’ international experience, which for the most part represented low to mid-skilled employment in hospitality and tourism sectors abroad, resulted in the acquisition of a more generic skillset that was nevertheless still appreciated. Moreover, returnees who experienced deskilling abroad, were able to professionalize their employment-track upon return.
The brought back added value being international language skills, cosmopolitan know-how and greater self-actualization for domestic and foreign employers at home. At the same time, the majority of the business respondents represented MNCs and had personal and positive experiences with international migration. Therefore, it is acknowledged that this may have informed their opinions.

**Digging Deeper into Soft-Skills: What Migrants Have to Offer Companies?**
This thesis explores to the extent which international migration is a context for accelerated learning, resulting in the acquisition of both system-knowledge and self-knowledge (Habermas, 1984), or professional and personal learning. The above discussion briefly explored the former, in relation to skilled and unskilled labour market experience abroad. In summary, professional experience contributes to the acquisition of strategic system knowledge, while ‘any’ international job experience contributes to practical system knowledge. Moreover, both domains refer to the acquisition of explicit and tacit knowledge, made possible as a result of technical and practical learning abroad.

However, there is another dimension of knowledge that management respondents identified in returnees, regardless of the labour market trajectory they experienced. This pertained to the acquisition of self-knowledge or critical knowledge (Habermas, 1984). The analysis of the interviews indicates that in some instances emancipatory learning, or transformative learning, occurred as a result of migrants’ belief-systems and meaning perspectives being challenged through the corporal mobility experience (Mezirow, 1981). The interviews suggest that contextual contrast gives birth to reflexive, but also reflective thought processes (Cunliffe, 2002). By learning how to challenge and transform their normative belief-systems, management respondents identified that returned migrants were more critically reflective workers as a result.

Transformative learning theory is the conceptual framework mobilized in this thesis to theoretically explain how some individuals transitions from lesser to greater self-agency in response to the migration experience. Mezirow linked it to a process of identity shedding (Mezirow et al., 1990), whereby individuals are prompted - through a disorienting dilemma to question their normative beliefs (Taylor, 2008), and thereby acquire greater self-knowledge (Habermas, 1984). The following discussion explores how a process of transformative learning can occur through the human mobility experience, catalysed first and foremost, by a disorienting experience that contributes to the expansion of one’s comfort-zone, according the business key-informants. Managers often utilized a ‘growth through challenge’ analogy to explain this transition, as illustrated by Dell manager who compares the migration experience to a self-reliance building experience.

“When you leave your home country – you leave behind your comfort zone. You suddenly find yourself at a distance to your immediate support network, your family, your friends – and you have to start fending for yourself. It’s a really big shock.” Manager DELL / Expat Resp. / MNC / ICT Sector
The comfort-zone model, argues that an individual’s psychological boundaries are challenged through an experience of discomfort, or stress (Brown, 2008). These triggers a form of acute learning that may have otherwise remained dormant - had it not been prompted, as illustrated in the excerpt below.

“They have been thrust into different environments and had to sink or swim, as a matter of survival. This experience gives them more confidence; in general, they feel more comfortable in their own skin. As a result, they can adapt and work through situations that may have paralyzed them before.” Founder/ Manager Next Level Pharma / Expat Resp. / SME / ICT Sector

Evidently, exposure to a new culture, language, and institutional system can trigger the need for adaption, and sense-making. The expansion of an individual’s comfort zone occurs, when they are able to rise to the challenge and overcome their fears (Luckner and Nadler, 1997), or in other words, adapt to the new circumstance. Although these are general statements, broad theoretical insights are nevertheless reflected in the views and experiences of most of the managers interviewed.

“When we interview them, we are able to just see that they have been abroad. It does not need to be in the western country. It might be an eastern one as well. It does not matter. The point is that as soon as a person crosses the borders of his small town, he changes and we can see it. It opens his eyes, it broadens his horizons.” HR Manager IBM / Slovak Resp. / MNC / ICT Sector

Nonetheless, not all learning results in the acquisition of knowledge that is transformational in nature. Some forms can be purely technical or pragmatic in quality, as opposed to paradigm shifting (Kuhn, 1962). This marks the distinction between technical and practical vs. emancipatory learning (Habermas, 1984). The former is accumulative, while the latter has the potential to challenge and enhance one’s self-knowledge, as illustrated in the following extract by Google manager.

“As a new comer to the culture you are forced to think about these things very actively. You are an outsider. You do not speak the language the same way. You don’t share the same cultural childhood. You cannot experience the same jokes as your peers. You find yourself in a much weaker position. This is extremely helpful, because you acquire a new understanding. Empathy is probably the best word for that.” Country Manager Google / Slovak Resp. / MNC / ICT Sector

The intimate experience of moving across power-dynamics, from in-group to out-group power status, was the trigger experience that caused him to step back and question his world outlook. By coming into personal contact with global hegemonic power structures, the Google manager was forced to re-evaluate his status quo perceptions and thereby enhance his emotional intelligence and understanding of minorities all together.
“You gain the perspective of a minority. You are exposed to a situation you would not encounter back home. Its dramatic. You suddenly realize you are not one of the majority. You are tested and challenged by that. You are challenged in a way that is almost uncomfortable.” Country Manager Google / Slovak Resp. / MNC / ICT Sector

This chapter is about industry views of returned migrants, and not about the experiences of some managers as migrants – as expressed above. However, these experiences do of course influence their view of migrants and their personal stories inevitable infuse the interview process. Frequently, managers used their personal experience of international exposure to illustrate their points as to the value of migration. Moreover, the great majority elaborated on the informal, rather than formal learning value of the experience. For example, the topic of return migrants expanding their personal comfort-zones was brought up by the majority of respondents.

8.6 The Arrival of a Critically Reflective, Internationally Competitive Labour Force

Under communism, Slovakia’s heavily industrial economy was dependent on rote learning. In general, learners were fed knowledge by the teacher in a passive classroom setting (Schöpflin, 1990; Tibbitts, 1994). Akin to the banking model of education (Freire, 1978), independent and critical thinking were discouraged in favour of the cult of the collective (Henderson, 2005). Adidas manager further expands on this limitation in terms of knowledge and skill gaps in the Slovak labour market.

“Making mistakes is actually part of learning. This is the opposite of what Slovak youth are taught in school. They are not allowed to speak up, let alone asked for their feedback, impressions or concerns. The teachers continue to feed the illusion that things are either black or white. But, the reality is – that there are many shades in-between.” Manager Adidas / Slovak Resp. / MNC / Retail Sector

Communist values were in essence binary to the more capitalist ideals of independence, critical thought and action (Kurekova, 2011). As a result of the centralization of power by the state, Slovakia did not have an effective civil society. In consequence, democrat ideals such as active citizenship and civic dialog were not cultivated (Varga, 1992). Moreover, exposure to international markets and private enterprise were virtually non-existent. During the communist era, which saw the collectivization of private assets, the entrepreneurial spirit and drive was also subsequently discouraged (Kirschbaum, 2005).

Subsequently, the individual and individualism were also suppressed. Concepts such as individual agency and civic ownership were therefore foreign until the fall of the regime and the dissolution of the Iron Curtain. International migration experiences, according to the business key-informants, offered their employees another perspective. This included exposure to democratic and free market western societies. In turn, managers acknowledged that returnees came back with a greater sense of individualism and thereby self-agency and ownership.
“It’s about reclaiming ownership. In Slovakia, people are not used to solving their own problems. They expect the politicians to solve them. They do not believe that they can have any impact on change themselves.” CEO ESET / Slovak Resp. / MNC/ ICT Sector

The general lack of critical thinking and independence found in the Slovak labour force poses a problem to cultivating a start-up ecosystem. Currently, most key-informants agreed that entrepreneurial drive and initiative was still in rehabilitation. In addition, the general economic volatility as a result of the regime change made the population more risk-averse in general.

“In Slovakia, there is a fear of failure. It’s a cultural factor – if you compare it to Ireland. It builds on a natural inclination in the psyche: I don’t want to try, because I don’t want to fail. This is all the more understandable when you don’t have material security.” Partner KPMG / Expat Resp. / MNC / Finance Sector

Evidently, cultural and institutional legacies can hamper the modernization process (Schwartz and Bardi, 1997). However, other developments can help catalyse or accelerate growth. This thesis explores that international migration is one such vehicle. A context for accelerated learning, it allows individuals to acquire vital business knowledge of more advanced markets, in addition to developing more critical thinking, as expanded on in the excerpt below.

“When people go abroad their thinking is challenged. It’s a confrontation of sorts. Through exposure to another culture your attitude changes, you discover a different approach is possible.” Founder/ Manager The Spot Innovation Hub / Slovak Resp. / SME / IT Sector

In addition to the acquisition of explicit and tacit knowledge (Williams and Balaz, 2008), individuals have the potential to become more self-aware as a result of their mobility experience. The latter contributes to a greater sense of independence and critical thinking, or self-knowledge acquisition (Habermas, 1984), as illustrated in the following example.

“They are more open, flexible and willing to learn – analysing problems for themselves without asking me all the time ‘what should I do?’” Manager HP / Expat resp. / MNC/ ICT Sector

Overall, as the needs of the Slovak economy become more knowledge complex, so does the need for dynamic workers. This includes employees that are pro-active in their quest to find solutions and expand business growth. The IBM HR manager, who has been with the company for over a decade, describes how she perceives the difference between employees with and without international experience.

“After interviewing hundreds of people, I can just see it. I am not a psychologist, but I can see that a person who studied or worked abroad just behaves differently. It is a signpost
that he knows how to take care of himself – how to organize his life; he travelled and had to depend on himself.” HR Manager IBM / Slovak Resp. / MNC / ICT Sector

Mezirow linked the transformative experience to a process of identity shedding (Mezirow et al., 1990), whereby individuals are prompted through a disorienting dilemma - to question their normative beliefs (Taylor, 2008). In turn, a more open, inclusive and discerning meaning perspective is created (Mezirow, 1978).

8.7 The Transfer of Knowledge across Borders
When migrants move across time and space, they transition through political, economic and culture boundaries. Correspondingly, they acquire new socially situated skills, knowledge, and networks. Google Manager explains how exposure to new, embedded environments, allows migrants to acquire best practices, which increases their confidence in knowledge transfer upon return.

“They come back with a more positive mind-set, which builds upon their knowledge of actually seeing how things can be done.” Country Manager Google / Slovak Resp. / MNC / ICT Sector

Therefore, return migrants bring back business intelligence and world perspectives (IOM, 2003), which are not only a value to the local labour market, but also society at large. Inadvertently, migrants share their experiences with non-migrants through everyday conversations and actions, thereby facilitating knowledge transfer both inside and outside the workplace. Correspondingly, business and government alike have become engaged in the diaspora dialogue, in an effort to capitalize on this know-how. According to the Adidas manager, return migration is a key strategy to upgrade the skill and knowledge levels of the Slovak labour market.

“The quickest option is to attract proven leaders to return. In-bound mobility or the return of highly regarded professionals, offers an opportunity for locals to learn from them on the job, thereby providing an opportunity to pass on their experience and capabilities into the domestic labour market.” Manager Adidas / Slovak Resp. / MNC/ Retail Sector

However, it is not just the acquisition of hard-skills that is celebrated by management respondents. Soft-skills, such as communication-abilities, confidence critical thinking and independence were also recognized.

“They have a different approach to work. When young people understand that they can succeed abroad, it raises their confidence that they can also succeed at home.” Manager EFMA / Slovak Resp. / MNC / Finance Sector

However, the need for strategic knowledge, in addition to practical know-how and soft-skills, is explicitly sought after by local businesses as well. As more and more Slovak companies look towards scaling-up into the international market, skill shortages become apparent. These are
further widened as a result of the country’s good economic performance and increasing integration into global structures. Correspondingly, employers are having a challenging time finding the appropriate talent locally, to compete internationally.

“It is very important to have international exposure and experience. Especially if you have a global product and this was our ambition from the very beginning. We are a global company, with global needs – including global experts. We actually have to hire from outside the country to source the relevant knowledge” CEO ESET / Slovak Resp. / MNC/ IT Sector

In fact, the anti-virus company ESET – Slovakia’s first multinational, is an excellent example of return migration and successful knowledge transfer. The company’s current North American CEO is a returned migrant from the United States. It was his international know-how, global business expertise and connections that helped the transition of a once little known, regional IT company into global prominence.

Hiring Slovaks with international experience, connections and the right English accent is a strategy that local companies, looking to pitch to global consumers have begun to implement. Individuals with international experience and English language fluency are positioned as spokespersons to better present the product, as discussed by the founder and manager of a start-up incubator.

“In Slovakia, we don’t learn how to present ourselves. It was never part of the curriculum; this is a huge gap in our education system. The most successful Slovak start-ups needed to hire Slovaks with international experience to take their product global. As a result, they were able to transition into bigger markets” Founder / Manager The Spot Innovation Hub / Slovak Resp. / SME / IT Sector

Correspondingly, cosmopolitan know-how and English language capital are intricately bound to competitive advantage. People need to have an understanding of the world out there, in order to be able to sell to it.

“International insight gives you a better chance at competing. What we may perceive as a market gap in Slovakia, may not necessarily resonate globally. Therefore, we need to understand different cultures, mind-sets, and attitudes.” Founder/ Manager The Spot Innovation Hub / Slovak Resp. / SME / IT Sector

Moreover, the ‘born-global’ business culture spearheaded by the tech start-up movement, demonstrates that good grasp of the English language is integral to selling on an international market place. IT CEO, whose Slovak business is operated in English, and sells to an international clientele, discusses the importance of real-time business development, and avoiding language induced time lags.
“A business owner should not aspire to only be successful in the local market. For this reason, we must produce our content and products in English. Translating our pages from Slovak wastes time. The innovation technology market simply moves too fast.”
Manager Quality Unit / Slovak Resp. / SME / ICT Sector

Furthermore, as the internet levels traditional bureaucratic obstacles, the flagship successes of Airbnb or Uber demonstrate how business can have no boundaries. Correspondingly, Martinus.sk CEO discusses the importance of Slovakia’s global success, and the need to create a strong international brand.

“The next step is for Slovakia to make a world class contribution. But, maybe that is something that can come from abroad, when you stop looking at things just in terms of your local market – but start to view opportunities in terms of the whole world.” CEO/ Manager Martinus.sk / Slovak Resp. / SME / Retail Sector

This echoes a dominant theme in the data, whereby the management respondents identified the value of returnees ‘seeing’ how things work out there, only the build confidence in their ability to realize a similar vision back home. Thereby, having proof of what can, and has, actually worked elsewhere. Correspondingly, literature in international development demonstrates that return migrants “come closest to the ideal of the ‘innovator’, their skills and investment behaviour are most likely to have a positive influence on their community.” (Papademetriou, 1991: 215). KPMG managing partner echoes these sentiments below.

“The corporate world recognizes the value of Slovaks coming back from abroad. They have the potential to become leaders. They come with a more mature ability to make decisions and have the confidence to follow through on them.” Partner KPMG / Expat Resp. / MNC / Finance Sector

Furthermore, in light of the entrepreneur agenda and the desire to transition from a local to a global market, returned migrants are armed with strategic and practical human capital that can help accelerate the process. However, as illustrated in the case of Taiwan (Saxenian, 2006), specific social, structural and economic adjustments - in addition to a critical mass of return migrants must be attained in order to achieve favourable results. Nonetheless, the results demonstrate that business key-informants do recognize the added value of international exposure.

Conclusion

The interviews suggest that return migrants come back with knowledge that is both a practical and strategic added-value to companies operating in Slovakia. The former encompasses ‘any’ international experience, including low-skilled work experience from abroad, which contributes to the acquisition of cosmopolitan know-how as well as enhanced world language abilities. The potential strategic contribution refers to the acquisition of professional experience or expertise knowledge, that is of high added-value to the longer-term company development.
The practical added value of returning international Slovaks was notably appreciated by the international MNCs businesses operating shared service centres in the country. With an international consumer base, their job profiles sought employees with foreign language abilities predominantly. On the other hand, Slovak businesses were more interested in ‘strategic’ added value employees. That is people that had target industry knowledge and could transfer their international know-how into the domestic company, so as to help it grow and expand internationally.

The manager key-informants also acknowledged that returnees came back with not only market know-how and business intelligence, but also enhanced self-knowledge that materialized in the form of key competencies such as expanded comfort-zones, increased confidence and communication abilities, as well as greater independence and critical thinking. These soft-skills were identified as critical in helping Slovakia to transition from an advanced manufacturing economy to a more knowledge-based one. Return migrants were considered to have helped to raise Slovakia’s overall business consciousness, by encouraging more global thinking in the local, non-migrant population.

Nevertheless, some limitations to the analysis need to be noted. Out of the 16 business respondents interviewed, 13 were from international or internationally oriented companies. Moreover, the large majority of business respondents had lived, studied or worked abroad at some point during their biography. An additional 5 were foreign expats, living in Slovakia. Therefore, the personal biographies and international experience of the key-informants, may have coloured their perspective in terms of the positive recognition value they allocated to the international migration experience.
Chapter 9
Government Sector
Key-Informant Perspectives on the Value of Return Migration

9.1 Introduction
This chapter discusses the perspectives of the government sector. It employs the voices of respondents from the policy and politics arena, including those employed in and around the domestic and international state sectors. The focus of this chapter is to explore the value added of returning international Slovaks (returned migrants) to the Slovak economy, the nature of their contribution, and the obstacles they face and overcome.

The government key-informants consist of high profile Slovak individuals in strategic positions of political influence, in addition to foreign ambassadors (and vice-ambassador) from the United States, Great Britain, and Austria. In the interviews, they explore return migration to Slovakia, expressing and exploring their opinions and perspectives on the value of freedom of movement, learning and knowledge transfer in an emerging economy.

Throughout the chapter, the present is juxtaposed to the past in quotations that provide a dynamic historical analysis of a country in transformation. The phenomenon of outmigration and return is generally recognized as a vehicle for knowledge transfer. In general, the key-informants suggest how returning Slovaks may contribute to, on the level of the individual, the social, economic and political merging between East and West. A convergence process that they identify to having been intensified as a result of the eastern enlargement of the European Union. In addition to advances in technology, infrastructure, transport and travel, as well as globalization in general.

According to the interviewees, by living and studying abroad, migrants may gain access to mature market economies, enhancing their knowledge, skills and languages in both explicit and tacit forms. Upon return, there is potential for them to disseminate that know-how by seeking employment in domestic and international firms, as well as circulating their new-found perspectives with family, friends and other extended social networks. However, this does not discount that migrants face barriers upon reintegration into their source country. Knowledge transfers can be facilitated through corporeal mobility, but are nevertheless also constrained by context. This has implications for any government which seeks to maximize the benefits of return migration.
### 9.2 Government Respondents Breakdown

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Position and Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Michael Roberts</td>
<td>British Ambassador to Slovakia (2007-2010)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Karla Wursterova</td>
<td>Executive Director of ViseGrad Fund (2012–2015)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Michal Wlachovsky</td>
<td>Slovak Ambassador to Britain (2011-2015)</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Juraj Droba</td>
<td>Slovak Politician</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Miroslav Lajcak</td>
<td>Minister of Foreign Affairs</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Ivan Stefanec</td>
<td>Member of the European Parliament</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Daniel Lipsic</td>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister (Former)</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Regina Rusz</td>
<td>Austrian Vice-Ambassador to Slovakia</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Matej Sapak</td>
<td>State Counsellor Ministry of Finance (2009-2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Maros Sefcovic</td>
<td>Vice President of the European Commission (Energy Union)</td>
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Figure 13 List of Participants – Government Key-Informants  
(Source: Author)

A total of 11 government respondents were interviewed, of which two were women. Moreover while eight held various governmental or political positions in Slovakia, including numerous high-level functionaries, such as European and Slovak members of parliament, a state minister, the former deputy prime minister as well as the vice-president of the European Commission (Energy union). A total of three were foreign ambassadors (and vice-ambassador) from important trade partnership countries, including Britain, the United States and Austria.

It should be noted that all eight Slovak government key-respondents completed part of their university education abroad. They held degrees from some of the world’s most prestigious education institutions, ranging from Moscow (Moscow State Institute of International Relations) through to Boston (Harvard Law). Their own international migration biographies can be expected to inform their personal views and commentaries as to the added value of the international migration experience. Comparatively, all 11 respondents had international
experience as part of their CV. Their opinions were investigated so as to shed light on the value of international migration and return from the perspective of the government.

9. 3 A Region Playing Catch Up: Knowledge and Skill Gaps Post-Communism Society
This research is situated in the socio-historical context of the demise of the former Eastern Bloc, the Cold-War era of “political isolation and forcibly repressed spatial mobility” (Kaczmarczyk and Okolski, 2005: 6). Post 1989 changes, in general, and EU membership in particular, have been a major ‘game changer’ in terms of truly liberalizing movement for Eastern European (EU-8) nationals across Europe. Daniel Lipsic, the Harvard trained (former) Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Justice, Minister of Interior contextualizes the significance of the European re-integration process.

“Although we are 25 years after the Velvet Revolution, Slovakia remains a country that is still influenced by its former regime. If you are locked-up in a small country like Slovakia, you inevitably think that the outside world is the same. When people gain experience in a society that was not controlled by communism, they acquire a valuable comparison. Those that gain world-scope are a great added value to our society.” Deputy Prime Minister (Former) Daniel Lipsic

Inevitably, the political climate of the source country can also influence the propensity to return. Saxenian (2006) found that Iranians and Vietnamese out-migrants were less inclined to engage in with homeland, than Taiwanese or Indians, in response to the political climate in their home countries. Miroslav Wlachovsky, the Slovak Ambassador the UK, explains how the EU tenet of freedom of movement has transformed not only mobility access, but also the reasons why individuals choose to engage in the migration experience in the first place.

“There is a huge difference in migration before-and-after Slovakia joined the EU. In the past, Slovaks who left – migrated because of duress, due to famine, wars, communism, the Soviet occupation and so on. They were forced to move. They fled. Today Slovaks move across Europe because they can. They use it as an opportunity to explore the possibilities of single market. Some move for education. Others, to get a better job. But, all in all the young people are definitely making use of the freedom of movement.” Slovak Ambassador to the UK (2011-2015) Miroslav Wlachovsky.

East European nationals (EU-8 nations) have been one of the continent’s most mobile populations following the opening of borders in 2004 (Favell and Nebe, 2009). East to West migration flows have taken many forms, including student mobility (King et al., 2010). Young Slovaks are one of the highest contributors to student mobility in the European Union (Balaz and Kusa, 2012). Correspondingly, brain training in the form of international population exchanges, is indirectly supported by two European Union exchange programs that target youth: Erasmus and Leonardo Da Vinci. Although these programs existed prior to 2004, they nevertheless aided EU-8 nationals to find university or traineeship positions in EU-15 markets. US Ambassador to
Slovakia, Theodore Sedgwick, emphasizes the importance of such human capital training in today’s globalized market.

“Slovakia is an export driven economy. A lot of Slovaks don’t understand the value of being in the European Union. But, over 85% of the goods and services produced in the country are exported out. This says a lot. The Erasmus program is a good example. Securing an international education is useful, given the export driven economic focus of the region.” US Ambassador to Slovakia (2010-2015) Theodore Sedgwick

It is important to recognize that for 4 decades’ Slovak nationals were socialized according to the ideology of communism and the demands of the planned economy. Following the end of the Cold War, and the victory of democracy and capitalism over communism and central planning, a knowledge and skill gap became apart across the CEE. Slovak Ambassador to the UK, Miroslav Wlachovsky expands on this dynamic for the reader.

“The 40 years of communism propagated a culture that was in opposition to the West. The UK and US stress a different set of values, such as the ability to learn, to improve your individual performance, to compete, to express your opinion, to present yourself. In our country, we were conditioned to be the exact opposite. We were not encouraged to ask, we were encouraged to follow. Today, we need people who are curious, who are able to ask, who are able to present themselves, to question things. Basically, we need our people to be more innovative, more open.” Slovak Ambassador to the UK (2011-2015) Miroslav Wlachovsky.

Here, a clear link can be observed with the business key-informants (see previous chapter), who shared very similar views. Both groups pointed out that the Slovak schooling system was lacking in developing critical thinking among pupils. It is interesting to observe, also from the perspectives of government key-informants, that international migration, or travel beyond the borders of Slovakia, is seen as important vehicle for learning.

In fact, during the 1990s various initiatives were set up by foreign donors to also help facilitate democratic exposure and learning. The George Soros Foundation is one example. Part of its agenda, was a scholarship fund that gave opportunities to selected students to go and study in the United States. The same could be said for private foreign investors. Several foreign companies new to the region, helped to establish education and training programs for locals, in addition to offer scholarship to study in the States. Ivan Stefanec, the former country manager of Coca-Cola and Slovak representative to the EU Parliament, discusses how his own career was catalysed as a result of one such mobility scheme.

“In CEE, there was good technical knowledge and talent, but not enough managerial skills. We lived behind the Iron Curtain, we were not taught certain things. These foreign employers wanted to help prepare people who had some local expertise, but provide them with Western education.” Slovak Representative to the EU Parliament Ivan Stefanec
However, these exchanges facilitated the education and training of a select group of individuals, people who were anticipated to return to Slovakia and help drive the new market economy. Likewise, the Slovak government developed a similar program. The Milan Stefanik Fund facilitated the placement of talented Slovak students to top international institutions. Matej Sapak, a former state counsellor at the Minister of Finance, studied at Harvard as a result of this very program. When he returned from the United States, Matej alongside a team of fellow internationally trained staff, helped to draft the country’s new knowledge economy strategy. Unfortunately, in his view, the initiative was never implemented as a result of the collapse of the liberal government, the Radicova government collapsed in 2011.

“The knowledge economy strategy for the Slovak government was a roadmap for the potential third Dzurinda government [which never materialized]. It was a vision for what needs to happen for our country to start moving forward. That is moving away from a high-value manufacturing and service economy, towards an innovation-based one. It was to build on the series of economic reforms that were carried out by the first and second reform governments, which created incentives for foreign investments, all based on access to a cheap and high quality labour force. This created employment and economic output, and stimulated growth towards a booming economy. The focus being car-manufacturing and multi-national service centres for accounting and customer support. The problem being that it still does not bring the highest value added. [In Slovakia] we do not actually design cars, we assemble them. We do not innovate high-tech components, we just import them.” Advisor to the Minister of Finance (Former) Matej Sapak

Evidently, the skills and knowledge needed for an innovation economy are different from those needed to assemble cars and perform back-end administrative office services for multinational corporations looking to outsource their customer services to Slovakia. Correspondingly, many government key-informants, just like the previous business key-informants, verbalized the importance of enhancing the human capital development of Slovakia, in the hope of creating a higher value added economy. The Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs, Miroslav Lajcak contextualizes the significance of international exposure vis-à-vis the region’s socio-historical isolation.

“One of the greatest advantages of us being in the European Union is the opportunity for our people to go out. To see different lifestyles, societies, and working methods. I would say that Slovaks in general lack self-confidence. When they go abroad, they can better compare. They bring back to Slovakia new working methods and working styles. They gain not only skills, but confidence.” Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajcak

Learning through observing, corresponds to Polanyi (1958) notion of tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge refers to the absorption of information through seeing how it’s done, used, and applied, versus conceptually understanding it through written words in a book. A popular analogy is that of a medical student reading about how to perform a surgery, versus actually
performing the surgery in person, alongside an experienced practitioner. This marks the division between the explicit and tacit forms of knowing. Minister Lajcak, in the above quote, refers to the competitive advantage of gaining tacit understanding of how a market-economy really operates. Slovak politician, Juraj Droba a beneficiary of the George Soros Foundation which paid his way to study abroad, unsurprisingly also expands on the value of international exposure. In the below excerpt, he argues why international experience is an added value. Living abroad gave him the point of comparison, as the Minister alluded previously, that allowed him to better evaluate the pros and cons of Slovakia vis-à-vis another culture.

“I never had a chance to really ‘see’ the world until I lived abroad. Prior to that, my only exposure to the West was through holidays. Although in the beginning, I felt underprivileged, that I had a lot to catch up. I soon discovered that my knowledge from home was actually on par and even advantageous at times. Living abroad also taught me that Slovakia is not such a bad place after all. I first went through an initial phase of complete admiration for everything [foreign]. I wished that Slovakia could be like that one day. After a while, you realize that economic prosperity is nice, but there are other things to life.” Slovak Politician and Member of Parliament Juraj Droba

However, even under the communist regime, international exchanges and circular mobility were utilized as a means to training and knowledge distribution. Back then, the mobility was Eastward with the Soviet Union being the prized destination. Former Deputy Prime Minister, Daniel Lipsic expands on how many of Slovakia’s top ministers and current business leaders, were graduates from universities in Moscow. At the time, the Moscow School of Diplomacy was an elite university that produced many Soviet bloc leaders, much akin to its western counterparts Oxford and Harvard.

“During the forty-years of Communism the best were also sent abroad. However, the mobility was Eastward between the countries in the Iron Curtain. The Slovak diplomatic corps are graduates of the Moscow School of Diplomacy. Our current Minister of Foreign Affairs is a graduate, in fact almost all of the Ministry’s former Ministers. However, I would not compare that mobility to the mobility that is taking place today. Those that moved around then – were preselected to become the country’s new elite. However, scientific mobility was also encouraged by the regime. Technical fields were devoid of ideology. Therefore, scientific cooperation was encouraged across the Communist countries.” Deputy Prime Minister (Former) Daniel Lipsic

The fact remains that, although mobility was allowed, it was miniscule in number. Only certain individuals, such as pre-selected students, athletes, scientists and politicians were allowed access to migration. Citizen travel was heavily controlled by the state apparatus (Kirschbaum, 1995). Today, mobility in the European Union is far more democratic and universally accessible. The tenet of freedom of movement has not only made foreign labour markets accessible, but also their higher education institutions to EU-8 nationals. This is significant, considering only one of Slovakia’s 35 Universities is ranked in the top 500 of world rankings, as the Slovak Ambassador
points out.

“First of all, it’s about better education. If you look at five hundred universities in the world, most of them are in the West. Only one of our Slovak universities is ranked in the top 500 of world rankings. Second, they gain working experience in an international environment. They get in touch with higher working standards. Third, they gain experience in another culture and country. This is another university in a way.” Slovak Ambassador to the UK (2011-2015) Miroslav Wlachovsky

The majority of the government key-respondents viewed international migration as a vehicle for educational training. Where international Slovaks learn new skills and knowledge through exposure to new teaching methods and student diversity. Yet, the question remains, what happens when international Slovaks return home? In the following section, the government key-informants address the opportunities and challenges of bringing new and different knowledge across differing socio-economic and national contexts.

9.4 Circular Migration and the Great Return Home

In general, the key-informants recognized that the new knowledge acquisition from abroad must also be paired with knowledge transfer in order to have a personal and professional impact on the native society. However, as addressed by the literature, such transactions are challenging (Williams and Balaz, 2008). Moreover, most knowledge transfers occur in an unplanned, organic, and person to person manner that is often unrecognized (Johri, 2008). Member of parliament, Juraj Droba expanded how returnees’ personal stories served as a vessel for tacit knowledge transfer.

“The value is in the stories that they bring back. When our young people come back, they teach by example. They share their experiences, their pictures, and show people that there is a world worth exploring. They demonstrate that it makes sense of go abroad and experience a different way of life.” Slovak Politician and Member of Parliament Juraj Droba

As discussed above and also observed in the responses of the business chapter, international migration is seen as a positive sign-post in an export driven economy. Many returned migrants come back with languages, best practices and know-how from mature market economies, thereby, enhancing the local labour pool with both strategic and practical knowledge, that is locally still in short supply. Evidently some industries, sectors and specializations are more receptive to this international know-how than others.

“Getting a broader perspective is crucial. But, the key is to find a way of how to use that experience to improve things at home – like in your personal field of professionalization. There are many start-ups and established companies that have achieved success as a result of this, particularly, in the field of technology. Certain sectors are capable of absorbing more. ESET, Slovakia’s antivirus company is a fine example. They were able to
succeed and expand internationally by making use of such knowledge.” Deputy Prime Minister (Former) Daniel Lipsic

This draws on the distinction whether absorption capacity varies according to the domestic vs. international orientation of the company or sector operating in Slovakia (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990). Local businesses that rely on the domestic labour market evidently tend to consider that they have no need for international experience, given that their primary focus is the Czech and Slovak market. What they require is specialized knowledge of local conditions, fine-combed expertise of national laws and regulations, as well as social nuances and relationships in their field and sector. On the other hand, organizations that work with an international cliental, are more likely to benefit from employees that have a more international friendly skill set. For example, Vice President of the European Commission Maros Sefcovic, lends commentary on how international mobility has actually enhanced Slovakia’s scientific community.

“We can clearly observe the benefits in the scientific community. By going abroad and working in partnership with different institutions, our scientists learn how to more effectively apply for grants. When they return, this has an immediate effect and improvement on scientific research in Slovakia.” Vice President of the European Commission (Energy Union) Maros Sefcovic

In the above statement, the Vice President of the EU points out that countries such as Slovakia can now acquire that knowledge and become more competitive on the European academic market, as a direct result of return migration. On the other hand, others argue that the loss of the nation’s talented far outweighs the gains made possible through return mobility flows (Lowell and Findlay, 2002). One major area of concern is the large export of the Slovak university population. The advisor to the Minister lends more commentary on the phenomenon below.

“Our most capable people are demonstrating one-way mobility. Once they get a great education abroad, they use that occasion to stay on. It’s our best students that leave and this undermines Slovak Universities. They are losing the top of their class to foreign institutions.” Advisor the Minister of Finance (Former) Matej Sapak

This view was echoed by many of Slovak government key-informants, who expressed concern over the large out flux of university educated natives. Comparatively, the US Ambassador to Slovakia echoed these concerns, arguing that it would be useful for Slovakia to implement recruitment practices or open immigration policies in order to help alleviate, and to some extent balance out, the loss of such substantial human resources.

“Evidently, it is often the most talented that leave. Slovakia needs to do a better job keeping track of these people. Currently, the country has a lot of high tech companies that are globally expanding and employing Slovaks with international know-how could be useful.” US Ambassador to Slovakia (2010-2015) Theodore Sedgwick
At the same time, the British Ambassador championed the value of return migration flows as a win/win for both countries. According to his views, Eastern Europeans win by finding employment opportunities abroad, at the same time EU-15 labour markets benefit from the influx of new labour. All the while, mapping and identifying future talent that can help to drive British investment in the CEE region.

“The business entrepreneurial instinct inculcated in the UK is being transposed to Slovakia to mutual benefit. There are many examples of Slovaks being picked up, and turned around, and sent back to their home country to help develop British investment in a Slovak way, in a Slovak culture. By setting up a branch in Slovakia, they can operate at much lower costs than anything in the UK and set up extraordinary niche British investment.” British Ambassador to Slovakia (2007-2010) Michael Roberts

The above statement is an excellent example of bounded as opposed to unbounded forms of international migration (Williams and Balaz, 2008). Moving on behalf of the interest of the company is common in expatriate mobility (Beaverstock, 2005), but not for most EU-8 migration (Janta, 2009). All returnees interviewed for this study, returned back to Slovakia based on their own initiative, and not through some company package. However, the risk of relocation may be partially alleviated by the marketability of their internationally enhanced skill-set, as recognized by the Vice President of the European Commission below.

“There those that come home, have a natural advantage to their career in Central Eastern Europe. For example, Slovaks in Brussels are fluent in English and French, in addition to their native language. In turn, there are very few people on the planet that can match that same skill-set. When they return, they can look to leverage that knowledge in their country, region, or local community.” Vice President of the European Commission (Energy Union) Maros Secovic

Global corporations based in Slovakia greatly benefit from the return of international Slovaks. Likewise, MNCs shared service centres are a major source of employment in the professional sector, they currently employ over 70,000 employees (SARIO, 2016). The higher wages are a major draw for returning international Slovaks, in addition to the opportunity to continue working in an international and English speaking environment. The drawback being that returning international migrants continue to work for international, rather than domestic employers, which has a negative impact on the local knowledge transfer process as addressed by the Advisor to the Minister.

“People who return from abroad tend to find employment in the usual suspects, the financial big-four, in addition to IBM, DELL, HP, LENOVO etc. They create value for mostly foreign companies operating in Slovakia.” Advisor the Minister of Finance Matej Sapak (former)

Human capital theory contends that migrants look to leverage the highest net returns on their human capital investment (Borjas, 1994), therefore it is logical for returnees to seek out the
highest remuneration on their investment in having migrated abroad. However, Maros Sefkovic perceived return to MNCs as a positive sign, because he recognized that the low local wages could be a deterrent for many.

“The multinational companies operating in Slovakia have been quick to implement this talent. Many returned migrants find employment in this sector. I don’t see anything wrong with that. The companies are employing the people and they are also creating new values, habits, as well as paying taxes. In comparison, return migrants are not keen to work in the civil service. Remuneration rates are a factor, you would really have to be a strong patriot to come back and do that.” Vice President of the European Commission (Energy Union) Maros Sefkovic

Furthermore, knowledge transfers are not only limited due to monetary constraints, or the international vs. domestic facing nature of the receiving organization. Rather, they are also conditioned by social interactions (Yang et al., 2009). This is influenced by social capital, for example, when migrants go abroad, they first participate in low-skilled jobs until they learn the language and the culture as well as expand their social network. After which they can find more appropriate employment and higher wages, that better match their education credentials. Returned migrants do not face the same obstacles, because they are native to the source country. Nevertheless, it may take them time to acclimatize to working in Slovakia, or to reactive and expand their Slovak social network so as to facilitate access to those better jobs (Williams and Balaz, 2008b).

9.5 Social Challenges and Knowledge Transfer in a Post-Communist Environment

The country’s re-integration back into Europe as a result of EU accession has helped to establish Slovakia’s social, economic and political ties with the west. Nevertheless, the influence of the country’s past continues to effect behaviour norms, values and world outlooks. This discordance, is further heightened by tensions experienced across generations, the youth who grew up with the freedom to travel and those whose mobility was constrained by the Iron Curtain. Slovak representative to the European Parliament, Ivan Stefanec explains further below.

“We feel the heritage of past. We were a nation which was geo-politically isolated. It influenced the minds of the people. Most Slovaks, especially from the rural parts, have never been abroad. We have this fear of the unknown because of it.” Slovak Representative to the EU parliament Ivan Stefanec

In addition to the socio-cultural reasoning as to why new knowledge may be rejected, there are also individual interests that must be recognized. The literature demonstrates that there is a social component to knowledge transfer process that can hamper progress (Maskell and Malmberg, 1999). Some people may feel threatened by the new incoming knowledge. Others, may prioritize the status quo over change, as argued by advisor Sapak.
“People like their comfort. Even if it is highly competitive knowledge they may take it as an attack on their identity. Or you may force them to work harder. It goes back to our communist heritage. I think it comes from a sense of being left behind. It’s a dissatisfaction and resentment that a lot of people feel.” Advisor the Minister of Finance (Former) Matej Sapak

One argument that is worth considering is that rejection is only one end of the spectrum, or one aspect of the returnee experience. This is also partially conditioned by the returnee’s ability to communicate the use value of the new knowledge and therefore champion its transfer to the new context. As expanded on by the Slovak Ambassador.

“There are people in Slovakia who will basically put a wall in front of you. But that is minority, actuality. Obviously, it is something you remember, because it is so shocking to be rejected. But it is still only a minority and slowly, but surely, these people with better communication skills, will be able to communicate their ideas to others. They can teach by example. This is also the better way to learn.” Slovak Ambassador to the UK (2011-2015) Miroslav Wlachovsky

The ability to express oneself, or communicate, is often related to confidence. According to the empirical data, many return migrants self-identified as having enhanced their confidence levels as a result of their international experience (see Chapter 11). The general lack of confidence, was attributed to a legacy issue of the Slovak education system by the Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs, who argued the country is still in the process of reform after the collapse of the communist regime.

“Our education system offers good quality, but the focus is on absorbing information. It doesn’t place much attention on developing a personality – like the ones from the West, which encourage people to express themselves, make arguments, and fight for an opinion. Recently, I was vacationing in Greece and I spoke with an owner of a local restaurant that employed Slovaks from one of our hospitality training schools. He told me, they are great employees, hard-working, disciplined – but not self-confident. So, they are in the back in the kitchen, cleaning dishes and such. They are good, even better than the others, but, because of this lack in their personality, he cannot put them in a more front-facing role.” Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajcak

Although there are vast differences in educational philosophies among democratic societies, there are nevertheless considered to be certain values and habits that are starkly different between communist minded and democratically minded societies, including the concepts of individuality and self-responsibility. The Slovak Ambassador to the UK expands on this division in his historical analysis below.

“In the period of 1940-1989, the state was responsible for everything. From the moment, you were born to the moment you will die, the communist state would take care of
everything. This bubble disappeared after 1989 and overnight people were faced with their own freedom. Some managed it better and some of them managed it worse. That is part of the responsibility. Some of them saw it as an opportunity, they created enterprises, they went abroad to study, others sat back and blamed the state.” Slovak Ambassador to the UK (2011-2015) Miroslav Wlachovsky.

However, according to some of the respondents, the lack of individual agency predates the communist era. In fact, it goes back to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the succession of foreign regimes that followed its collapse in the 20th century. It is critical to remember, that it was not until 1993 that Slovakia became an independent country, as further explained by member of parliament Juraj Droba.

“It’s convenient to blame somebody else. But, this mentality has a historical background. We were always ruled over by an outside power. We never had the opportunity to make our own choices. Somebody always made the decisions for us. This legacy carries forward.” Slovak Politician and Member of Parliament Juraj Droba

Once again, a recurring theme throughout the interview data across all four respondent categories, was how the international experience encouraged the development of more independent thinking and self-agency. The Slovak Ambassador frames the transition experience, in terms of a mind-set shift.

“When you do not run your things, you can always blame somebody else or something else for whatever happens to you. And that is where this culture is coming from. I think there is a shift. And I feel that shift. It might be a little slow for my taste, but it is there. People who have lived abroad understand that you create your opportunity.” Slovak Ambassador to the UK (2011-2015) Miroslav Wlachovsky.

Likewise, the individual experience of coming into greater self-sovereignty as a result of the international migration experience can be conceptualized as a similar mind-set transition. The empirical evidence from the return migrant respondents suggests that those that have been abroad have greater independence and self-confidence (see Chapter 11). It is for this reason, that employers appreciate the value of non-occupationally specific ‘any’ international experience, as already discussed by the business key-informants (see Chapter 8). At the same time, this refers to the temporary migration experience. There is a danger that if such temporary jobs abroad become permanent, migrants may somehow become trapped in those positions in the long term (Janta et al., 2011). The advisor to the Minister, comments on the positive nature of the short-term mobility experience.

“The international experience can help people understand what it means to strive. Why is it better for service centres to hire somebody who has been making beds for a year in the UK, as opposed to somebody who came fresh out of university? I suspect that there is a
second reason, which is that they have demonstrated a degree of independence and drive.” Advisor the Minister of Finance (Former) Matej Sapak

This is not to say that people have not self-actualized before, during and after the collapse of communism. However, due to the geographic isolation of the previous regime, as well as the strong state censorship, many Eastern Europeans did not have exposure to international markets, private enterprise and individual expression during that period. As a result, some people suffer from low-self-confidence vis a vis the west. This self-perception is not always justified or accurate, as explained by the US Ambassador Theodore Sedgwick.

“I often see a lack of self-confidence among Slovak people. When I go around the country, people say, how we can compete with the world, we are just one small land-locked country. But, what I have noticed is the opposite. Slovakia is much more important than the size would suggest. Many of the MNCs are elated with their performance. They often tell me, we love Slovakia, we just wish there were more Slovaks. The people often present themselves as pessimistic and gloomy. But the reality is that they work [well]” US Ambassador to Slovakia (2010-2015) Theodore Sedgwick

However, this can quickly change when Eastern Europeans gain first hand exposure to the West and learn that the grass is not always greener on the other side. That although the West may be materially prosperous, life is not always easy, as individuals face many of the same personal and professional obstacles on both sides of the former Iron Curtain. Building upon this knowledge, the starkest difference can often be observed through the capacity of self-confidence, as expanded on by the Vice President to the European Commission and equally, the European member of parliament.

“You can see the difference in mind-sets very quickly. If you compare those that have lived abroad, to young people who never had a chance to go. I would say it’s in the self-confidence” Vice President of the European Commission (Energy Union) Maros Sefcovic

“Slovaks who lived abroad are more confident. There is almost no exception. They gain much more self-confidence, because they have to rely on themselves. Traditional, we are in a culture that is still quite collective.” Slovak Representative to the EU Parliament Ivan Stefanec

The following section will explore the importance of key competencies such as independence and agency, as well as the above-mentioned self-confidence, in developing a healthy and well-functioning entrepreneurial ecosystem. As mentioned in the business key-informant chapter above (see Chapter 8), the Slovak start-up agenda has been on the forefront of both business and government.
9.6 Self-Confidence and the Entrepreneurialism Agenda

The values of entrepreneurialism, including independence and initiative, are in many ways foreign to the domestic environment which favoured collection action and centralized decision-making. Correspondingly, first-hand exposure to how entrepreneurialism works, via more mature markets, offers Slovaks a valuable point of comparison. Such experiences can not only increase self-confidence levels, but also confidence in how SMEs can successfully operate in a free market economy, explains British Ambassador Michael Roberts.

“Entrepreneurialism is about the ability to stand on your own two feet. In contrast to the communist legacy, when you did only what you were told. People in Slovakia need more initiative – returnees bring back the initiative. They see it in the UK. You see what is possible and that you can be a part of it. You can instigate something new. You can add value. I think this culture is not typical in universities in Slovakia, which are more about conforming and box ticking.” British Ambassador to SK (2007-2010) Michael Roberts

Once again, the laggard nature of the Slovak education system was addressed, a concern that many key-informants shared. Accordingly, the entrepreneurialism agenda still struggles in Slovakia, once again due to this legacy. In the views of most policy makers, as well as the European member of parliament, the need for Slovaks to become more entrepreneurial goes hand in hand with the needs of a maturing emerging economy.

“Currently the CEE region is much more open than some Western European economies. Many have still protectionist policies. Because of the transition, we bypassed many of these barriers. Our whole economy has benefit from this openness. The same goes for entrepreneurs. They too can benefit from more openness.” Slovak Representative to the EU parliament Ivan Stefanec

According to the respondents, returnees are identified as one vehicle that can help enhance Slovakia’s development. However, the Foreign Minister also observed that returnees demonstrate a capacity to isolate themselves, vis-à-vis the Slovak stayer population. This behaviour can greatly decrease the propensity for spill over knowledge transfer with the locals. Hence, the majority of government key-informants believe that successful knowledge transactions will be ameliorated with the return of a critical mass of international Slovaks from abroad.

“These people that do come back must not be a small number of individuals, or else the change will never happen. It must be a critical mass. Networking is critical to their success, but they must not isolate themselves from the rest of society. It’s important to transfer their knowledge and habits.” Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčak

In fact, as propagated by the EU entrepreneurial agenda, returned and circular migrants help to champion pro-European values (Favell and Nebe, 2009), as well as help to elevate the consciousness of the country from that of regional isolation towards international integration.
Nevertheless, a tipping point (Gladwell, 2000) must be reached if the incoming knowledge is to have any greater social impact. The Slovak Ambassador argues that the returnee agenda should be prioritized as it is in the national interest, considering the amount of money the state spent educating these out-migrants in the first place.

“The Slovak government has invested in their elementary and secondary education, which was no small cost. Then they leave, they go to another country, study, and most stay on. But, some return, and we should be very happy about that. From the position of the state, this represents a return on investment.” Slovak Ambassador to the UK (2011-2015) Miroslav Vlachovsky

The narrative of change making is often associated with returned migrants. According to the Minster of Foreign Affairs, returning international Slovaks bring back key know-how, however they also have to look for ways to actively share this knowledge, if it is to have an impact.

“They help to modernize our society. The ones that know will help to transform the overall awareness of the society. But, they need to speak up. It’s important that these people do not keep their knowledge and understanding just for themselves. They need to spread it.”
Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajcak

For example, Karla Wursterova, the director of the Visegrad fund refers to her personal experience of studying diplomacy in Paris, to illustrate how returning international Slovaks bring back key know-how that is beneficial to, in this case, Slovak institutions.

“I studied diplomacy in Paris. It was a very good experience, from the formal learning in the classroom, to the informal learning with my classmates from all over the world. I gained knowledge of doing processes, but also of doing things differently. I saw the possibility to be more practical, and to do things in a different way. It was a huge motivation; I learned I would like to change something in Slovakia” Director of Visegrad Fund (2012–2015) Karla Wursterova

The lacking of self-confidence in Slovak human capital was a reoccurring theme in the government key-informant interviews. Comparatively, the majority of government key-informants noted that returning international Slovaks came back with not only professional, but also personal development. The international migration experience proved useful as a self-reliance building exercise, that in some cases raised migrant confidence levels. Correspondingly, those that returned were more inclined to act on opportunities at home. In addition, to taking up challenges that inevitably arise when transferring knowledge across two different socio-economic and national contexts.

Conclusions
In the above chapter, government key-informants discussed how returning international Slovaks may assist with Slovakia’s transition process. According to some of the respondents they may act
as bottom up agents of transformation, helping to marry some of the top down post-transition structural and institutional transformations through the influx of their new skillsets and mindsets. That is, knowledge and tools acquired through their international exposure to societies and institutional systems that were not under the direct influence of communist regimes.

The key-informants also openly critiqued the Slovak education system and in general the lower confidence levels of Slovaks vis-à-vis their western peers. Correspondingly, international migration was identified as one vehicle, that was beneficial in gaining access to hard, but also soft skills through formal and informal learning abroad. According to the key-informants, international exposure not only facilitated the acquisition of foreign languages and competitive best practices, but also greater independence and self-confidence levels amongst the returnees. These soft-skills, were identified as lacking in the Slovak labour market, but at the same time critical to the cultivation of a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Consequently, brain drain was perceived as a loss, particularly in regards to the government’s, and thereby the Slovak taxpayers’ investment in the future human capital of the country. This was especially pertinent, bearing in mind that the government paid for the migrants’ primary, secondary and for the most part tertiary education. Consequently, the return of Slovakia’s outbound human capital, demonstrated a positive return on investment, according to some of the respondents. Their views mirrored those of the business key-informants discussed earlier (see Chapter 8), in terms of appreciating the economic value of international exposure and language learning, facilitated through international migration. Particularly, when juxtaposed to the present-day knowledge and skill gaps identified in the Slovak labour market.

Overall, the transfer and dissemination of globally enhanced knowledge, skills and languages was viewed as critical in helping Slovakia become a more knowledge intensive and internationally competitive economy. The fact that Slovakia was removed from international markets for over 4 decades, in addition to Slovak not being an internationally competitive language, further stressed the importance of acquiring international know-how and foreign languages. However, given the large size of the Slovak diaspora, government respondents also acknowledged the importance of mobilizing initiatives that were focused on engaging with, attracting, retaining and eventually capitalizing on Slovak international talent abroad, as well as those that return.
Chapter 10

Civil Society Sector
Key-Respondent Perspectives on the Value of Return Migration

10.1 Introduction
This chapter explores the perspectives of the civil society sector. It employs the voices of civil society key-informants. The focus of this chapter is to investigate the contribution that returning international Slovaks (returned migrants) bring to the Slovakian context. It builds off the in-depth economic and political overview of the two previous empirical chapters (see Chapter 8 and Chapter 9) and brings things full circle on behalf of the key-informants. Together, the two previous key-informant chapters provide insights into the business and political (institutional) context of a post-transition economy. However, the mapping of a context is incomplete without incorporating the most fundamental dimension, a country’s society, which is the purpose of this chapter.

The society sector, whose voices range from academics, to journalists, to community activists to NGO founders, follows a familiar thematic pattern. Concerns about post-transition knowledge and skills gaps are expressed. Moreover, the human capital training of ‘yesterday’ is compared to the human capital needs in today’s open and globalized Slovak market. The society sector respondents stress the value of soft-skills, key competencies such independence and confidence that returnees bring back, in addition to a positive ‘can-do’ attitude. In turn, civil society key-informants suggest that returnees can more easily identify gaps in the market, as well as catalyse knowledge transfer and the introduction of new ideas in the Slovak context. Based on their personal international experience, exposure and training, some respondents even suggest that returnees have the potential to act as leaders, enacting change from the bottom up in a post-communist environment.
### 10.2 Society Respondents Breakdown

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<td>Illah Van Oijen</td>
<td>Community Activist, Co-founder, Dobre Trh NGO</td>
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<td>Zuzana Kusa</td>
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<td>Simon Smith</td>
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<td>Michal Kovacs</td>
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<td>Board Member, British Czech and Slovak Association in the UK</td>
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<td>Karen Henderson</td>
<td>British Political Scientist, Professor at a Slovak University</td>
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<td>Simon Grueber</td>
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<td>Henry Kallan</td>
<td>International Hotelier, Executive Committee American Fund for Czech and Slovak Leadership Studies</td>
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<td>Natalia Kiskova</td>
<td>Board Member, Ay Ti v IT NGO, Daughter of Slovak President Kiska (2015 - )</td>
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Figure 14 List of Participants – Civil Society Key-Informants
(Source: Author)

The biographical break-down of the society respondents is as follows, a total of 15 key-informants were interviewed, four of whom were women. With a primary focus on the civil society, NGO founders and directors were given prominence. However, the informants also included academics, journalists and community activists. The daughter of Slovak President’s Andrej Kiska was also approached. Actively involved in the IT sector and start-up community, she
is also a returned migrant from the UK. She commented on her father’s (the President’s) migration journey and how living abroad in the United States exposed him to new learning experiences. Upon return, he amassed entrepreneurial success by making use of this knowledge, which is why he champions the international experience and return. Moreover, three Slovak-Americans were interviewed that also enriched the data with different perspectives on the emigrant experience. Nevertheless, even while abroad, all three retained strong ties to the region and were actively involved in Slovakia, and in two cases, also in the Czech Republic.

Professor John Palka was a Slovak emigrant and grandson of one of Czechoslovakia’s first Prime Ministers, Milan Hodza. Dr James Ragan was born in the United States, the son of working class Slovak migrants, who later befriended the late Vaclav Havel, then President of the country (at the time still Czechoslovakia) and began what would be a 20+ year summer teaching career at the prestigious Charles University in Prague. Finally, Henry Kallan was an economic migrant who left for the United States following the Soviet occupation of Slovakia (1968). Since, he has become an international hotel magnate who actively engages in philanthropy in the region, particularly in regards to leadership development in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

The society section represented the most internationally varied respondent group. A total of six respondents were none Slovak, one of which was living in the UK, but on the board of the British Czech and Slovak Association. He also had direct experience with knowledge transfer, following his posting in Czechoslovakia after the collapse of the regime and ensuing the post-communist privatization of state-run banks. The reason for the foreigner-heavy respondent cluster was attributed to the fieldwork limitations. At the time of the data collection, respondents with an international background expressed an openness and willingness to participate in the study. Other Slovak-native civil society respondents were approached, but the opportunity to conduct an interview was denied. Several of those approached explicitly stated that they had nothing to add to the discussion, because returning international Slovaks were not a topic they encountered in their daily lives. This was recognized as a research limitation.

10.3 Denied Information Access: Knowledge and Skill Gaps Post-Transition

The civil society key-informants offer the reader the most holistic overview of Slovakia’s transition over the past quarter of the century. They anchor the East-West knowledge and skill gaps, not according to the needs of the firm, or adaptation to institutional changes, but, rather, from the perspective of a society amidst massive social change. There is no denying that the 20th century proved to be arduous for the Slovak nation. The collapse of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, the occupation by the Nazis, the invasion by the Soviets and finally the dissolution of communism and Czechoslovakia, catalysed national independence and the need for massive transformation in the country (Kirschbaum, 1995). As a newly formed, free and independent country, Slovakia needed to build-up its state institutions. A political scientist and long term expat living in Slovakia, addressed the knowledge and skill gaps that arose, as a result of this lack of know-how.
“Slovakia has traditionally lacked in international expertise. In the Czechoslovak Foreign Service, the Czechs had taken many of the key international postings. You would always find a Czech Ambassador in Washington, London or Paris.” British Political Scientist, Lecturer at a Slovak University, Dr Karen Henderson

This gap was also partially attributed to a language divide. Under the communist regime, students were taught Russian as a second language in school. Access to English language and learning was not easily accessible to the people behind the Iron Curtain (Kirschbaum, 1995). After the Velvet Revolution, the difficulty to communicate in international languages inhibited communication between Slovakia and the outside world.

“During the Meciar government of the 1990s, individuals were made Ministers simple because they could speak German. The utter inability of statesmen to communicate in English was astonishing. In consequence, there was a whole lot of not understanding of what was going on.” British Political Scientist, Lecturer at a Slovak University, Dr Karen Henderson

Therefore, those that could speak English were at an advantage. The value of international languages was also appreciated by the respondent below, a Rector at a prominent Slovak university. Where he illustrated how he and his colleagues gained access to more information because of their language abilities. This was a competitive advantage, because of language translation delays. Most content, including news, first had to be translated from the foreign language into Slovak, before it reached the Slovak audience.

“We just knew more about the world. We knew what to watch for, we regularly browsed international sources. We kept our access set at an international level. So, by the time the big news made it into Slovak media. We already knew about it. We were ahead of the rest.” Rector, Slovak University, Anonymous

Evidently the transition from a planned to a market economy brought a lot of changes to Slovakia and also posed many challenges. For example, a great bulk of the labour force struggled to adjust to the skills and language needs of a free market economy. Once again, Russian was the primary foreign language taught in schools. When the regime collapsed, the markets also re-orientated from East to West. The Russian language was no longer useful for trade, in addition to other skills and knowledge learned under communism. The transition literature refers to the labour market segment most effected by the collapse of the regime as the ‘lost generation’ of the post-communist era (Campbell and Pedersen, 1996). In the below excerpt, Dr Henderson comments on this predicament. She explains, that the men and women that were in their mid to later career stages, at the time of the Velvet Revolution, had already developed their working habits. This made making change and adjustments all the more difficult.

“When communism fell, there was a general consensus that you had to have been in the early stages of your career development, to even adapt, (because) everything changed so
quickly.” British Political Scientist, Lecturer at a Slovak University, Dr Karen Henderson

Correspondingly, a political analyst at the Austrian Embassy argues that going abroad is beneficial to helping Slovakia catch up on lost knowledge and match up to the levels of the West. Accordingly, he believes that international migration is a vehicle that can facilitate contact, language learning, as well as contribute to knowledge dissemination through return migration flows. Considering the country’s legacy behind the Iron Curtain and post-communist transition period, exposure to Western societies may have positive implications on national development in terms of knowledge transfer.

“Slovak society can greatly benefit from return migration flows. People, who gain experience abroad, bring back knowledge to Slovakia that is still missing. Slovak universities are not of an international standard. There is an aim to bring Slovakia closer to the Western standard, including in the level of scientific research as well as management techniques.” Political Analyst, Austrian Embassy in Slovakia, Dr Simon Grueber

What is more the international experience can contribute to critical thought development, according to Professor John Palka. The grandson of the Czechoslovak Prime Minister Milan Hodza and double-Slovak emigrant, is also the author of the historical book ‘My Slovakia, My Family: One Family’s Role in the Birth of a Nation’ (2014). In the below excerpt he recognizes the good technical education Slovak students receive at home, but also sees room for improvement.

“In general, Slovaks students are highly regarded [internationally], they are renowned to have a strong factual basis [of knowledge]. But, when they go abroad, they learn how to be more analytical.” Board Member, Milan Hodza Foundation, Grandson of Slovak Prime Minister Hodza (1935-1938), Professor John Palka

Nevertheless, as echoed throughout the two-previous key-informant categories (see Chapter 8 and Chapter 9), the predominance of brain-drain is a real concern for the Slovak economy. Accordingly, most key-informants believed that the best and brightest are more like to leave the country, as confirmed by migration theories (Sjaadstad, 1962; Becker, 1964). Evidently, individuals with higher levels of education, are more likely to receive a relatively higher return to their human capital investment abroad (Chiswick, 1978). The loss of this Slovak trained human capital, is a challenge to business and the government. In the following section the civil society respondents add their commentary, as to the push and pull factors behind Slovak outmigration and return.

10.4 Home and Away: The Push and Pull Factors of Slovak Migration

There are a number of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors that catalyse human capital outflows. Some examples of ‘pull’ factors include better work and life conditions abroad, cosmopolitan vs domestic cultural preferences, and family reunification purposes. One co-founder of a regional NGO that preferred to remain anonymous, was also the parent of a high-skilled Slovak migrant
abroad. In the below excerpt, he provides a description as to the economic hardships that ‘push’ Slovak emigrants to explore labour market opportunities in other countries.

“In Slovakia, there is no job security. My son felt unsure about his work, so he moved to Holland. Now he works for a large American multinational there. He is very happy, he leads a calm life.” Co-founder, Regional NGO, Parent of Slovak High Skilled Migrant, Anonymous

His son is a textbook example of a ‘choice’ migrant (Kurekova, 2011a). A contractual employee working for a foreign MNC operating in Slovakia, DELL in this case, he decided to try his luck in another country. Wage-gaps, according to human capital theory are the predominant driver for outmigration, and continue to be the most prominent pull factors between East and West migration flows, for ‘hardship’ migrants (Kurekova, 2011a). At the same time, studies have also found that many of these tertiary educated East-West migrants experience downward occupational mobility when they work abroad (Dustmann et al., 2003; Janta, 2009). Slovak sociologist and senior research fellow at the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Dr Zuzana Kusa argues that this is a concession many professionals make in exchange for higher wages.

“In Britain, it is much easier to live a fuller life despite working in inferior positions. Slovaks do not need to experience an expansion of their learning, but rather they need to get rid of their everyday worries to stop living a life where they have to count every penny. People prefer to go to a country where they can earn more.” Slovak Academic, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Zuzana Kusa

What is more, leaving for abroad to earn more, was the predominant outmigration driver from the region pre-World War I. In the Slovak migration report commissioned by the European Union, the same author, alongside research economist Vladimir Balaz, document how international migration has historically been an economic survival strategy in Slovakia (Balaz and Kusa, 2012). In the 1800s, Slovakia had the second largest out-migrating rate in Europe (per capita), second only to Ireland. To date, approximately 2 million persons identify with Slovak ancestry in Canada and United states alone (Kirschbaum, 2005).

“Slovakia has a strong history of migration dating back to the 19th century. Demographers found that during the 1867 Slovak census there was a vast amount of people that were not present. They were absent because they were working abroad. We had the greatest migration rate after Ireland. Migration only began to decline after WWI, when the United States began to set immigration quotas. Finally, during communism the borders were completely closed.” Slovak Academic, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Zuzana Kusa

Following the political coup and erection of communism post-1948, Slovak mobility was very restricted. After the Prague Spring (1968), less than 1% of the Slovak population emigrated out of country (Balaz and Kusa, 2012). Comparatively, in the past quarter of a century, Slovakia has witnessed greater and greater mobility, due in part to the collapse of communism, but also
accretion to the European Union. Furthermore, the partial harmonization of socio-economic cleavages between East and West, has given rise to also non-economic migration motivations (Arango, 2000).

Non-economic pull factors such as language learning, cultural travel, adventure, as well as other lifestyle factors have been observed in migration studies (O’Reilly and Benson, 2009). Comparatively, there are emotional and psychological pull factors to return, including aging family members but also loneliness and isolation (White, 2011). Not to mention discrimination and glass ceilings and other modes of social ascriptions that are professional inhibiting (Jenkins, 2004; Favell and Nebe, 2009; Janta, 2009).

“I have friends that have come back because they reached a (glass) ceiling abroad. Although they were very successful, they encountered discrimination. They next level, was reserved only for the natives of that society. Maybe it’s different in the United States, but there are still many barriers to outsiders in Europe.” Rector, Slovak University, Anonymous

Accordingly, the social and emotional ramifications of living as a foreigner in a host society can outweigh the benefits of increased earnings abroad. Scientific director at one of Slovakia’s premier think tanks and Professor at the Central European University in Budapest, Dr Martin Kahanec refers to his personal experience of facing similar hardships while living as a foreigner in Germany.

“Outside I was always just another immigrant. It’s not always about the money, but also about where you live, whom you interact with and how you are treated. At home, it is easier to get into certain circles. Doors may open that would have otherwise remained closed to an outsider abroad.” Director, CELSI Think Tank NGO, Professor Martin Kahanec

The above two excerpts highlighted experiences of discrimination abroad. In general, the majority of civil society key-respondents expressed concern vis a vis the downfalls of emigration. Despite these barriers, recent data indicates that the majority of Slovak emigrants abroad prefer to remain outside the country. The Business Alliance of Slovakia, which incorporates OECD and Eurostat data, finds that 50% of Slovak tertiary graduates studying abroad and 69% Slovaks working abroad do not plan to return to their source country (Kremský, 2015). These findings strengthen claims of brain drain, a loss that is most acutely felt with the highest educated portion of Slovak society. It has been estimated that one third of the university student population studies outside the country (Balaz and Williams, 2004; Kahanec and Kureková, 2016). Consequently, some initiatives have been created in an effort to bridge build with this population, and look for ways to involve them economically and socially in Slovakia. Dr Michal Kovacs, director of the Slovak Professionals Abroad program at LEAF, a Slovak NGO that is engaged with diaspora bridge-building, explored how the country can learn from best practices of others, in this particular case, Israel.
“LEAF is interested in decreasing the impact of brain drain in Slovakia. Recently, I went to Israel to consult with established organizations that have more experience with the issue. The Jewish diaspora is much better organized. We want to better understand what are the motivations and incentives that bring talented people back from abroad.” Director, LEAF Slovak Professionals Abroad NGO, Dr Michal Kovacs

However, attracting migrants is one thing, but retaining them in the country is another issue. Attraction and retention is conditioned by the opportunity structure and remuneration packages available in the source country. In addition to the cultural perceptions towards the added-value of return migrants. For example, a critical divergence in cultural thinking vis a vis the value of returning international expats is evident between Slovakia and Israel. This is conditioned by the differing political histories of the two nations. In Israel, return is framed as an ascension, and therefore a step forward in one’s personal and professional biography.

“In Hebrew, the world Aliyah means to return but also to ‘ascend’. It’s a powerful etymology that stirs emotions in relation to home. I like the association with return being a step forward, rather than a step back.” Director, CELSI Think Tank NGO, Dr Michal Kahanec

In comparison, return is often associated to regression in the Slovakian context. Therefore, not only are returnees not socially revered, but the choice to come back is perceived as economically irrational in some people’s minds. As Slovak community activist and long term Dutch expat living in Slovakia explains for the reader below.

“They are often looked upon by others as they must be out of their minds. Many Slovaks are still surprised that people choose to come back to Slovakia.” Community Activist, Co-founder, Dobre Trh NGO, Ilolah Van Oijen

The above statement, also parallels her own journey of choosing Slovakia as a permanent home, for herself and her family. However, a negative reaction from the locals towards returnees, is also to be expected to some extent. The influx of new players into an already established ecosystem, can shake up power structures (Cerase, 1974). Foster’s (1965) research on Mexican peasant society and the ‘image of limited good’ provides a useful reference point. In provincial societies, community members have an ingrained understanding that resources are finite. When Slovak migrants return, the pie must be shared with more stake-holders. Tom Nicholson, a prominent investigative journalist and founder of a democracy civic initiative, adds additional commentary to this phenomenon.

“They de-Slovakize when they move away. When they come back, it can be very frustrating – because many feel as if they have moved on.” Investigative Journalist, SME Newspaper, Tom Nicholson

The factor that people change when they move away from their source country, must also be
considered. Evidently, return is still a big decision that encompasses a similar cost and benefit analysis to outbound migration. The stakes are further augmented by the number of dependents the migrant has, as well as their professional success achieved abroad. An individual just entering the labour force, may be more open to relocation, than someone more established in their profession or in mid-career, as the below respondent, a successful Slovak emigrant to the United States and philanthropist supporting Slovak leadership development, explains.

“Today’s youth are the first generation that actually has a chance to go beyond the borders. The problem is, that those that go abroad and are successful are not very interested in return.” International Hotelier, Executive Committee American Fund for Czech and Slovak Leadership Studies, Henry Kallan

Leaving behind the material comforts of a more Western lifestyle, in addition to the prospect of greater career growth and success abroad, may seem counter-intuitive for many people. Perhaps this is why less than 10% of Slovaks currently living abroad return (Slovak Spectator, 2016). However return can also be drive by other factors, as the following section will explore.

10.5 Knowledge Transfer and Innovation: Seeding New Knowledge across Territories

Williams and Balaz (2008) found that skilled outbound nationals were increasingly becoming courted by domestic governments, in the hope of curbing brain drain and recruiting lost skill and talent. Saxenian (2006) documented that the successful leveraging of expat social networks and knowledge flows, as per the case of Taiwan and the Silicon Valley, has strengthened these governmental initiatives. Poland, most affected by the post-accession exodus has also been a CEE leader in diaspora outreach (White, 2011). Bridge-building with the diaspora is critical to helping to upgrade the source country also according to Dr Ragan. In the below excerpt, he demonstrates how late Czechoslovak president Vaclav Havel sought to positively mobilize the Czech-Slovak diaspora, in an effort to bring in new and much needed Western knowledge back East, post-Velvet Revoulion.

“President Havel was a visionary. After the revolution, he immediately reached out to the Czechoslovak Diaspora. He knew that those that had lived abroad had acquired a different knowledge base. He asked all Czechoslovaks to come back and donate something of themselves to the country. It was never a question of money but rather skills and knowledge. That was the type of thinking he had. How can we help to advance the country and how can we do it quickly? His goal was to bring voices back.” Slovak-American Poet, Playwright and visiting Professor at Charles University Prague, James Ragan

Comparatively, community activist and Dutch-Slovak immigrant Illah Van Oijen argues that returnees bring back not just knowledge, but a new mind-set and vision altogether. She believes, that by changing their environment, migrants awaken their sense to ‘seeing’ the world in a new way. This allows them to more easily identify gaps, upon return.
“Slovaks abroad are able to see different examples from different countries, this helps to open their eyes. When they return, they help to open other people’s eyes too. Ideas are stronger than anything else. Once people have experienced an idea, they can communicate the idea through their action and make other people more open to it. They bring ideas home like seeds” Community Activist, Co-founder, Dobre Trh NGO, Illah Van Oijen

Through international experience, migrants can acquire critical insights into the functioning of a foreign society as well. The daughter of current Slovak President Andrej Kiska (2014-), Natalia Kiskova, comments on how return migration can contribute to the transfer of best practices seen abroad. In the below excerpt, she directly refers to her father’s success as an example and case in point.

President Kiska, is a former returned migrant from the United States. In his youth, he left Slovakia in the hopes of finding the American Dream. However, despite his engineering background, he worked abroad as a low skilled migrant. What is more, despite his downward occupational mobility, he still engaged in informal learning and acquired new encultured and embedded knowledge from the US (Blackler, 2002). Upon his return to Slovakia, he went on to become a financial magnate by establishing several hire-purchase companies, before venturing into philanthropy and later politics.

“Slovakia is a young country, but we do not have to re-invent the wheel. My father did not invent anything new. He established success because he saw something that he considered useful abroad (the hire purchase concept), identified a gap for it in Slovakia and implemented it very effectively. The local mind-set can facilitate or constrain opportunities. Some things may work abroad, like selling kebabs from the back of a truck, which is popular in the UK, but we are not necessarily ready for at home. We tend to be a bit more conservative when it comes to trends. It’s important to have this understanding, so as to tailor the product to the local context.” Board Member, Ay Ti v IT NGO, Daughter of Slovak President Kiska (2015 - ), Natalia Kiskova

Williams and Balaz (2008) argued that as migrants’ lives span trans-nationally, they gain familiarity between two or more socially situated environments, thereby functioning as potential knowledge brokers translating knowledge to and from different contexts. Correspondingly, human mobility has significant implications for knowledge and learning, in addition to knowledge transfers which benefits “non-migrants in areas of origin and destination” (Williams, 2006: 604). Which is why the majority of the civil society key-respondents recognized that engaging with the Slovak diaspora could be economically beneficial for Slovakia in the long run.

“Cooperating with the diaspora can have great economic and social meaning. Slovaks abroad can help bring back business and investment. They know best the advantages of the local market. For example, in Israel, I learned that out of the thousands of American companies that have a person of Jewish origin in a key decision-making post, only 3 did
not bring some aspect of their operation to Israel.” Director, LEAF Slovak Professionals Abroad NGO, Michal Kovacs

The ability to act as pipelines between both home and abroad was further supported by Van Oijen, who commented on trends that she has observed in the Slovak creative sector. Due to their expanded social networks, returning international Slovaks can remain personally connected to the outside world while living locally, which the majority of key-informants also viewed as advantageous.

“At the same time, they stay connected with the international culture. They live in this country, but continue to engage in international projects, working with intelligent people and building collaborative platforms both at home and abroad.” Community Activist, Co-founder, Dobre Trh NGO, Illah Van Oijen

Which brings us back to the central argument Williams and Balaz (2008: x) make in their seminal work on international migration and knowledge. They argue that “migration is more than just a source of substitute human capital, it can be a source of diversity and creativity”. However, knowledge transfer is also influenced by culture. Gurteen (1998) argues that creativity is often blocked by deep-seated beliefs about the world. Environments that appreciate openness and diversity yield more positive results, than those that are more traditional, and inverted (Gurteen, 1998). Advanced economies have traditionally sought to attract talent from abroad as a means to source more creativity. For example, Dr Ragan refers to how the United States has benefited from this practice.

“The coming together of knowledge through diversity is what has made the United States so successful. Robert Kennedy’s campaign had a great catchphrase and it remains one that I, continue to live by today: ‘if you surround yourself with the best you will be the best’. But, communism destroyed these aspirations. It produced a society that was driven to the ground by the denial of access to information and freedom of speech. A culture of mediocrity arose in its place.” Slovak-American Poet, Playwright and visiting Professor at Charles University Prague, James Ragan

The prospect of going out to learn from advanced economies was recognized as valuable by the majority of the civil society key-informants. However, they also recognized the value of securing access to a wider and more influential international network, also made possible by the international experience.

“We need global as well as local mentors. Slovaks who go abroad not only gain knowledge, but also access to a greater network of people to learn from. The best way to learn is to learn from those that have done it before.” Board Member, Ay Ti v IT NGO, Daughter of Slovak President Kiska (2015 - ), Natalia Kiskova

Nevertheless, the recipient environment must also be receptive to the new ideas and out of the
box thinking that some of the returned migrants bring back, if they are to make the most use of the incoming knowledge. Management literature has demonstrated that when an organization culture is not receptive to new ideas, individuals can become frustrated in their effort to improve things, and eventually burn out. Eventually, feeling less inclined to share their message in the future and ultimately eroding their capacities for knowledge transfer altogether (Van Woerkom, 2003).

10.6 Why Come Back: What Drives Returning International Slovaks?
Most civil society key-informants observed that return migrants were driven by professional but also personal reasons to come back to Slovakia. In addition to experiencing rapid career growth, key-respondents also recognized their desire to create and mobilize change. Just as outbound migrants experienced downward career mobility, in exchange for higher remuneration. Returnees were seen to experience upward career mobility, but in exchange for lesser compensation. It is for this reason that Professor Kahanec argues that some individuals are driven to return for non-economic but rather social and personal reasons.

“Some people want to help Slovak society move forward, other people like the challenge of it. The marginal product of your effort can be much greater at home. Bringing irrigation to Oklahoma may not change much, but brining irrigation to a less developed region can improve the lives of thousands.” Director, CELSI Think Tank NGO, Professor Martin Kahanec

Similarly, Dr Kovacs also noted of a similar trend in the Israeli context. According to his own Israeli case study, he found that many participants were inspired to come back, by the desire to want to help advance their country.

“In principle return is a dual-level motivation. The first impetus is what we all want, the altruism to help the country they come from and ultimately leave behind a legacy. The second is that they are also motivated by their own personal and professional growth. Both are possible.” Director, LEAF Slovak Professionals Abroad NGO, Michal Kovacs

At the same time, although altruism is a noble driver, Professor Kahanec explained that returnees must not identify with what he referred to as a ‘saviour complex’.

“One enlightened individual can change many things. But, where do you want to create that change? In general, people aspire to make a contribution to the society they feel most attached to. But, one should never be driven by a ‘saviour complex’. Nobody wants a saviour. Your primary (or inner) motivation should be to help, and not to necessarily, to be appreciated.”” Director, CELSI Think Tank NGO, Professor Martin Kahanec

Evidently, the returnees’ desire to come back and help drive social, economic or political change can be poorly received by the locals, according to some of the key-informants. Stayers can find such aspirations patronizing or even invalidating, not to mention professionally threatening
(Cesare, 1974). At the same time, sociologist Dr Kusa discusses how migrants can overinflate their biographies as part of a cultural practice that values the journey narrative. According to her, the international migration experience, more closely resembles certain cultural ideals. That is, the idealized cultural pattern of the journey, as celebrated in myths and fairy tales throughout history.

"Biographical narration is a subjective construction of a personal ideology. Those that return talk about how they grew. Novels, short-stories, plays all talk about how life is about expanding. The same theme can be found in literature all over the world. Learning is an essential part of the culture for us all. It’s exactly what you see in fairy tales to leave home, to experience and to return. It’s not because of migration per say. It is the way we talk if we do not want to devaluate ourselves, so we say we expanded, gained something, transformed etc.” Slovak Academic, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Zuzana Kusa

Nevertheless, she also points out that in the pre-industrial era, the professional value of the journey was recognized by certain industries. For example, journeymen were trade apprentice in Austria and Germany, that had to leave their home and journey for several years, before they could become tradecraft masters. The ‘wander’ was a professional staple and part of the path to becoming a professional.

“It goes back to the German pre-industrial practice of apprenticeship. Young interns would have to leave to go perfect their craft. The ‘vandrovalka’ (‘wander’) was an obligatory journey. Those that have been abroad feel they more closely resemble those ideals. They can give material examples of what they learned. Their stories have value, because they fit the attributes of the narrative. The hero was, went and defeated.” Slovak Academic, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Zuzana Kusa

According to Dr Kusa, returnees propagated a similar narrative, of leaving, growing and returning, because it fits into a meta-cultural practice that appreciates this rite of passage. When this narrative is mobilized, returnees can better position themselves on the domestic labour market. Evidently, there are many different and contested views as to the value of return migration, however this was not a perspective shared by the majority of the key-respondents across the three categories.

10.7 Agency and Change: The Emergence of a New Leadership
Knowledge transfer is sometimes a costly process because it requires personal and structural change. In the below excerpt, an anonymous respondent talks about his professional experience privatizing the state banking sector, after the collapse of communism. Currently he sits of the board of the British Czech and Slovak Society and actively engages with Czech and Slovak community building in Britain.

“Cultural change is always hard work. It’s different from technological change. When the time comes to update your operating system from Windows XP to Windows 8, you kind
of just have to go with it. You do not have much of say. But, with cultural change its
dharder. It is bit more personal.” Board Member, British Czech and Slovak Association in
the UK, Anonymous

Rees also recognizes that knowledge transfer, and/ or cultural change involves a balancing act,
between anticipating and understanding other people’s reactions, while simultaneously
advocating a new agenda and remaining firm with it.

“There is always resistance. There are always going to be people, who say what we are
doing works just fine. It has worked for five years, fifteen years, or however long, why do
we need to change?” Board Member, British Czech and Slovak Association in the UK,
Anonymous

Knowledge transfer is dependent on communication as well as persuasion, that is the ability to
convince other individuals that the adaptation of the new idea is worthwhile. Those with first-
hand experience of how things can work - better, are inherently in a better position to advocate
for change. Dr Ragan finds that lived experience in mature democracies, helps to build trust in
the value of democracy in a transition country such as Slovakia.

“I believe in the breaking down of borders. A country like Slovakia has always been
occupied by foreign powers. People have a great deal of fear and mistrust of the
unknown. In such a climate, new knowledge is encountered with difficulties. If one is to
persevere they must have courage to spread their vision. When people come back they
return with experience. They can re-affirm that there is nothing to fear. That democracy
can work and this is how we can realize it.” Slovak-American Poet, Playwright and visiting
Professor at Charles University Prague, Dr James Ragan

According to management theories, ideas need champions and this is key to innovation: Howell
and Higgins found that “innovation is the initiation, adoption, and implementation of new ideas
in an organization” (1990: 40). A similar opinion is shared by the rector, who comments on how
returning international Slovaks can potentially raise the knowledge standard for Slovak stayers,
through the practice of knowledge sharing and knowledge dissemination.

“International Slovaks are perceived as reinforcements. They are expected to be of
a higher standard, then those that do not have the same experience. But, this is to be
expected. International Slovaks have seen new things, been to new places, and studied in
new environments.” Rector, Slovak University, Anonymous

However, change also takes time and effort, it is not an automatic process. This is because, new
knowledge can also act as a confrontation, it can appear as threatening to those that have
stayed behind (Cerase, 1974), as some respondents alluded to. As a result, a clash between
world views may ensue. However, the Rector identified this resistance to be inevitable, which is
why he argued that returnees have to be patient during the ensuing knowledge transactions.
Once again, the majority of key-informants recognized this to be a long-term, and in some cases uphill battle.

“They should not expect that everybody is just going to listen to them straight away. First, they must be willing to listen to others. They cannot expect to come back and become a king in a second” Rector, Slovak University, Anonymous

Social resistance to outsiders, in this case returning international Slovaks, must be understood in a historical context as well. As already discussed, Slovaks have been historically excluded from the decision-making power for a millennium, dating back to the times of the Austro–Hungarian empire (Kirschbaum, 1995). This cultural pattern was repeated under communism, when Slovakia was a satellite state controlled by Moscow. In addition, further subjugation was inflicted according to Marxist ideology (Applebaum, 2012). Under communism, Slovak citizens were seen as objects of the state, rather than as sovereign and decision making individuals. Those that leave Slovakia, gain exposure to a different system. In general, democratic societies allocate more civil liberties to the individual. Comparatively, many civil society key-informants, identified the returnees to coming back with greater independence and confidence as a result of this international exposure.

“Those that have come back from abroad seem to be more confident. It’s like they can say I have tried this, I have tried that and now I choose this path. Upon return, many have actually transitioned into a more independent way of life.” Community Activist, Co-founder, Dobre Trh NGO, Illah Van Oijen

Professor Palka situates the transformation of the individual, vis a vis Slovakia’s historical struggle for ethnic, national and now individual sovereignty. For centuries, the Slovaks have been struggling for and fighting for independence. Perhaps, the transfer from lesser to greater individualism is another step towards greater Slovak sovereignty as discussed by Professor Palka.

“A big part of the Slovak National Revival of the 19th century was about become self-aware of a national identity. Ethically speaking, people lived very constrained lives before.” Board Member, Milan Hodza Foundation, Grandson of Slovak Prime Minister Hodza (1935-1938), Professor John Palka

In this perspective, transformation and cultural revolution, occurred as a result of coming into greater sovereignty. Previously, in the above referenced example, it meant cultural and national identity. Nevertheless, the notion that Slovaks are their own ethnic group and therefore have rights to their language and culture, was a radical concept at the time. It was championed by a very small group of people, before it eventually became a mainstream concept, and later the reality for all Slovaks living as Slovak citizens today.

“At the time only a miniscule amount of political, economic, social and even administrative power was in Slovak hands. There were very few persons in positions of
officialdom within the territory of present day Slovakia that self-identified as ethnic Slovaks. An awakening at national level is something like a self-realization at a personal level. The process of moving towards a greater sense of self, accompanied by greater courage and a greater sense of belonging.” Board Member, Milan Hodza Foundation, Grandson of Slovak Prime Minister Hodza (1935-1938), Professor John Palka

In the above quotation, Professor Palka correlates the national awakening to an individual awakening. Similarly, Freire (1978) demonstrated that once a consciousness raising process has been initiated, it affects the belief system of the individual. The notion that one has ownership over their own life, and therefore agency, was foreign concept attributed to the historical experience of Slovakia. Comparatively, independence and self-sovereignty, may be unfamiliar notions, to a collective that have been objects, rather than subjects of their history up until 1989.

**Conclusion**

The above three empirical chapters offered the perspective of key-informants across business, government and civil society sectors in Slovakia. Together they analysed the value-added that returning international Slovaks bring back to a post-communist, post-transition emerging economy. Each of the three respondent groups has been presented separately because each category addressed a different layer of Slovak society. The business sector, for example, observed the contribution of returnees from the perspective of the economy and the firm. All respondents interviewed were operating at high level positions. This included a minimum of company or department managers, with several directors, founders and CEOs also being included in the respondent cluster. The business key-informants recognized returnees as being of ‘practical’ and ‘strategic’ added-value, vis a vis their knowledge and skill transfer into the Slovak labour market.

This added value was understood in contrast to the knowledge and skill gaps in the Slovak labour market, attributed in part to the communist legacy and the continuing need for reform of the Slovak education system. According the majority of the respondents, across all three categories, recognized that the Slovak education system did not cater to the skill and knowledge needs of a 21st century knowledge economy. Comparatively, firm managers viewed the international migration experience as a positive sign-post on prospective employee CVs. Professional experience was appreciated and sought after as a ‘strategic’ added value and firm asset, in terms of specific knowledge gains from abroad. However, and at the same time, the greater majority of respondents appreciated ‘any’ international experience as an indicator for soft-skill acquisition, including competencies such as independence, confidence and critical thinking.

The interviewees from the government sector built on this theme and simultaneously offered a more holistic explanation as to the overall transition process from communism to free enterprise economy. The government respondents, which included high profile individuals from politically influential positions, provided an overview of the institutional changes that had taken place over the course of the past quarter of a century in Slovakia. Considering that Slovakia was a geopolitically isolated country, to some extent removed from non-Eastern Bloc international
markets, and had with very little experience with private enterprise. Although there were always some small scale private enterprises in terms of selling food, taxis, and other services, even during the communism. The respondents identified that almost any international exposure – particular to mature democracies and advanced free market societies was beneficial for the above-mentioned reasons. Correspondingly, returnees were seen as potential knowledge brokers, that upon return, helped to anchor these perspectives and know-how into the Slovak labour market and society.

Overall, the limitations of the education system were a central topic for all three key-informant groups. The fact that Slovak universities were not internationally competitive was addressed, in addition to the fact that Slovaks had a deficiency in soft-skills training. The lack of soft skills development was attributed to a legacy issue, considering that social sciences and critical thinking were neglected under communism. Simultaneously the generation of a more independent, critical reflective and internationally savvy labour force was perceived as integral, both in terms of helping to drive the entrepreneurial agenda as well as meeting the needs of a predominately export driven economy, as was the case in Slovakia.

Finally, the civil society respondents produced the most socially reflective analysis. Once again, the civil society key-informants contextualized the value of returnees, vis a vis the country’s post-communist transition. Comparatively, they attributed many of the political, economic and institutional changes as occurring top down. In turn, they brought to light, the importance of transformation also occurring from the bottom up, via the perspectives, behaviour and mind-set changes of the citizenry.

Return migrants were therefore perceived as potential vehicles that can help to disseminate new and competitive knowledge, but also European and international values, as well as entrepreneurial initiative. Finally, the civil-society respondents also addressed how the international experience may enhance independence and confidence in general. According to the respondents, it offered migrants exposure to new perspectives and ideas, as well as encouraging them to execute those ideas at home with greater confidence and self-trust.

Despite these differences, there was considerable convergence across the three key-informant categories, and the greater majority of respondents identified returning international Slovaks as a positive added-value in the Slovak labour market. In a globally dependent economy such as Slovakia, language skills and international exposure were seen as needed by, and in demand from employers, particularly international firms operating in Slovakia. However, it is important to recognize that the perspectives of the key-respondents were also partially skewed. The majority of business, government and civil-society interviewees had international migration experience in their personal biography, while several respondents were also foreigners, living as expats professionals or ambassadors in Slovakia, and beyond. Their personal positive experiences with international migration may have informed their desire to participate in the research study as well. This was recognized as a research limitation.
11.1 Introduction
This chapter is dedicated to the perspectives of the return migrants, who through their personal journeys - document the process of learning and knowledge transfer through the complete migration cycle. It offers insights into how corporeal mobility contributes to accelerated learning as well as exploring its impact upon return, and outlines how skillsets and mind-sets can be transformed through the international migration experience.

Although not exclusive to the migration experience, this chapter explains how mobility puts individuals into contact with systems of difference by moving across culture, language and geography, which may evoke the need for new sense making. This thesis explores the extent to which international migration is not only a vehicle for accelerated learning, but also transformative learning as result of these profound learning experiences (Mezirow, 1971). Although novel to migration theory, the notion of perspective change has been somewhat explored in the travel literature, which has acknowledged the transformative nature of the travel experience (Martin, 2010; Morgan, 2010; Lean, 2012).

Catalysed in part through a disorientating dilemma, transformative learning occurs because individuals have a fundamental need to make sense of their experience, according to Jack Mezirow (1971), the father of the adult learning. Moreover, certain life experiences have a more profound impact than others, hence the disorienting event is seen as a catalyst for growth and profound learning. The ensuing gaps in understanding that emerge, provoke both reflexive but also reflective thinking. The latter is critical to emancipatory knowledge development (Habermas, 1984), or as Freire (1978) termed a consciousness raising experience.

Ultimately, this chapter investigates the key themes of learning, knowledge and transformation made possible through the international migration experience. The extent to which returning international Slovaks self-identify as bringing back valuable knowledge and skills, in an environment where locals lack similar international exposure, business know-how, but also soft-skills is also analysed. In addition to the knowledge absorption capacity of companies operating in Slovakia, and whether and how this inhibits knowledge and skill transfer (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990).
# 11.2 Returnee Respondents Breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ed.</th>
<th>Country Abroad</th>
<th>Position Upon Return</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Jan</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Cameraman and Film Maker</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Peter</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Program Co-Director</td>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Anna</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Art-Psychotherapist</td>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Katia</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>IBM</td>
<td>MNC - Global</td>
<td>Employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Miso</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Tech Start-up</td>
<td>SME</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Gabi</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Director and Founder</td>
<td>SME</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Iva</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Ladislav</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>SME</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Martina</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Marketing Manager</td>
<td>SME - UK</td>
<td>Employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Klaus</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>IT Programmer</td>
<td>MNC - Global</td>
<td>Employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Alex</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Café owner</td>
<td>SME</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Dominika</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>DELL</td>
<td>MNC - Global</td>
<td>Employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Paula</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Café Owner</td>
<td>SME</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Katarina</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>DELL</td>
<td>MNC - Global</td>
<td>Employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Martina</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Germany &amp; NL</td>
<td>Think Tank Founder</td>
<td>SME</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>Country/Region</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Industry/Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>UK and Sweden</td>
<td>Scientist</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Matos</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Scientist</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Elena</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>IBM</td>
<td>MNC - Global</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Jozko</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Ireland &amp; NL</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>SME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Rastislav</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>IBM</td>
<td>MNC - Global</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Marian</td>
<td>JD</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>SME - Global</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Bohus</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Scientist</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Matus</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>NL &amp; Spain</td>
<td>Statistician</td>
<td>MNC - Global</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Ministry of Finance Director</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Alexandra</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Start-up Consultant</td>
<td>SME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Samuel</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Education Institute Founder</td>
<td>NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Sasha</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Ministry of Economy Director</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Jakub</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Ireland &amp; NL</td>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>SME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Veronika</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Ministry of Interior Director</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 15 List of Participants – Slovak Return Migrants
(Source: Author)
*JD = Juris Doctor Degree
*MS = MSc/MA
Utilizing a snowball interview technique (see Chapter 7) a total of 30 returned migrants were interviewed for this research. Given the research criteria, all respondents were tertiary educated. The majority had completed their Master’s education in Slovakia, while an additional seven had PhDs, and there were also Post-Docs. It should be noted that two of the respondents had conducted their bachelors in the Czech Republic. However, this was counted as having studied in Slovakia, because Czech and Slovakia used to be one country, and it is very common for Slovak students to study at Czech universities due to bilateral agreements (Balaz and Kusa, 2012). Furthermore, two more respondents interviewed had complete their undergraduate education abroad. The researcher was not aware of this discrepancy before the time of the interview, but discovered this information during the interview process. In the end, she decided to keep their statements as part of the study, because both had stayed on in the country as workers before returning back to Slovakia.

What is more, given the relatively high education levels of the returnee respondents, their drive to go abroad, as well as their professional ambitions upon return, the majority of respondents interviewed could be classified as high achievers, even amongst their fellow tertiary educated peers. As already discussed in the methodology chapter, focussing on elite migrants was not the intention of this study. However, given the research criteria, paired with the selectiveness of the international migration experience, as well as the snowball method of gathering respondents, a positive bias towards elite respondents nevertheless emerged from the fieldwork process.

From the onset, thematic patterns in the data could immediately be observed, particularly in regards to what industries and sectors returning international Slovaks found employment in. The Slovak based, global MNCs were a popular destination for employment. Accordingly, eight respondents were employed for MNCs at some point upon return back to Slovakia, with IBM being the most popular destination. The fieldwork confirmed that returnees’ skill profiles fit those of the shared-service centres, therefore forming a potentially fruitful partnership with the ICT sector companies.

At the same time, an additional 11 respondents were self-employed, while three became remote employees, who continued working for their international employers while living back in Slovakia. In total, 14 returnee respondents were not dependent on jobs in the Slovak labour market. Correspondingly, four were inspired to work for the civil society sector, either as employees or founders of new NGOs, while an additional three landed high flying careers in government, working for three different government ministries: the ministry of interior, the ministry of finance and the ministry of economy respectively. Slovak government funded science and research institutions absorbed four returning scientists, while the remaining respondents found jobs for local Slovak SMEs.

The research fieldwork was conducted in Slovakia’s capital city, Bratislava from: summer 2014 to summer 2015. In subsequently following up with the study respondents, the researcher found that six individuals, originally interviewed in this study have since out-migrated again. They left
Slovakia once again to work abroad in the Czech Republic, Austria, the United Kingdom and, in one case, at the World Bank in Washington, DC. These finding confirm arguments made in migration literature, which observe that return is not always a permanent decision. As stated by King (2002), mobility trajectories have evolved as a result of globalization, and today’s international migrants are demonstrating far more circular and cyclical migration journeys than ever before.

11.3 The First Generation that Could: Drivers for Out-Migration in Slovakia

Despite Slovakia’s recent economic prosperity, wage-gaps between Eastern and Western Europe remain a major cleavage between the two regions. Nevertheless, according to the respondents, remuneration rates were not the primary driver for outmigration. The concept of emigrating for non-financial reasons, is not uncommon in migration theory. According to the literature, non-economic motives can outweigh economic ones for young professionals (Arango, 2000; Halfacree, 2004). In some cases, individual migrant can be attracted and ultimately pulled out of their source country, due to language, learning, cultural travel, adventure and other lifestyle drivers (O’Reilly and Benson, 2009). At the same time, these can be seen as longer term and indirect economic drivers because they increase employability upon return (Balaz and Williams, 2004).

According to the respondent data, the following 4 dominant themes were reflected in the returnee narratives as reasons for going abroad. Although not listed in order of importance, these could be categorized according to four pillars: money, language, learning and international exposure. Evidently, some individuals could be influenced by more than one of these drivers. Likewise, the majority of respondents had only just completed their university studies, and had not yet worked professionally in the domestic labour market, when Slovakia joined the European Union in 2004. Hence, the exploratory nature of their international migration experience was often highlighted.

Money

“I was offered a job with a net income 500 Euros per month. It was for the Peugeot-Citroen car manufacturing factory in Trnava, working as a material engineer. I realized that I was unwilling to work for that money. So, I followed my girlfriend to Dublin.” (Jozko - Engineer; Countries Abroad: Ireland and the Netherlands; Jobs Abroad: McDonald’s Worker and Mechanical Engineer)

Language

“At school, I learned the German language. I felt like I was the only person on the planet who did not speak English. I knew my only chance to learn it - was to go out and be forced to speak it.” (Paula- Small Business Owner; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: Restaurant Manager)

Learning
Formal
“I was in the generation that really started to take advantage of the fact that we were in the EU. I opted to go study abroad. Perhaps because of the prestige that came with it. I think that today its nothing special. But, back then it was quite a big deal.” (Sofia - Business Consultant; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: Investment Trade Intern)

Informal
“I find that younger people, who do not have international experience, are very much inspired to go abroad. They see it as an opportunity. They are very thirsty for more information.” (Veronika - Start-up Consultant; Country Abroad: Denmark and Belgium; Jobs Abroad: Business Consultant)

International Exposure
“My parents were always telling me stories of how they wanted to leave and be free. I also wanted to see something new, something beyond what we had here.” (Jakub - Artist; Countries Abroad: Ireland and the Netherlands; Jobs Abroad: Security Worker and Artist)

Due to Slovakia’s solid economic status, outmigration was for the most part an individual decision, rather than a family-based one for all migrants interviewed. The relatively elite respondents interviewed, were not leaving Slovakia out of hardship and their outbound journey was not a family survival strategy. The non-economic driver to their mobility experience reflected their middle-class socio-economic status. Again, this was not the intention of the researcher – as she only wanted to secure access to tertiary educated outbound and returned migrants. Perhaps, due in part to their economic status, the migrants’ mobility experiences were similar to those of their Western European peers, doing gap years abroad, or post-university self-exploratory travels (Martin, 2010).

What is more, given the relatively short-term nature of their mobility experiences, the outmigration driver for many was learning orientated. On the most immediate level, outmigration offered access to new language learning opportunities. In turn, this included formal and informal learning experiences. Studying at a foreign university was appreciated, both in terms of acquiring valuable social capital as well as access to knowledge. On the other hand, the informal learning nature of the international experience was also appreciated and even celebrated by the majority of return migrants. In general, they felt enriched by gaining exposure to another society.

Comparatively the international exposure driver could also be understood vis a vis Slovakia’s communist past and the geopolitical isolation that their parents experienced. Several of the respondents interviewed expressed the desire to experience the world and gain exposure to societies that were not constrained by the same communist legacy. Hence, the migrants left for the West and not the East, they were more inclined to experience life and learn from more economically advanced societies of their western European EU-15 neighbours.
That is not to say, that the very same respondents, do not also travel East, or to developing countries during their lifetime. Moreover, they could have found their East bound migration experiences equally knowledge and learning provoking. However, these experiences were not addressed for the purposes of this study. Likewise, many Slovak migrants, once abroad did choose to stay-on in their destination country. Although statistically data is lacking and inconsistent, media estimates say that less than 10% of international Slovaks return back to Slovakia (Slovak Spectator, 2016). Evidently, a far greater portion remains abroad, and it is for this reason, brain drain remains an area of concern for the country, as stressed by the three key-informant groups (see Chapters 8, 9 and 10).

11.4 Eastern Bloc Legacies: Migration Before and After the European Union
Evidently, before EU accession, migration to the West was heavily constrained by bureaucratic processes and immigration barriers. Unable to secure professional employment visas, Slovaks mainly entered Western European labour markets through informal labour market strategies. This included overstaying tourist and applying for student visas with the intention to also work illegally in the country. Without proper work permits, they were then side-lined into the informal labour market. With access to more professional jobs blocked, many experienced de-skilling and job tracking. Williams and Balaz (2004) observed that au pair schemes were particularly popular with Slovaks to facilitate legal access to the UK labour market. This experienced was confirmed by several of the returnees, who prior to 2004, worked as au pairs in the UK as well as other countries in Europe.

“If you did not speak English, the easiest way to get to England was on an au-pair visa. It was safe, because it guaranteed accommodation with an English family. I did not mind it, because I went there mainly to learn the language” (Rastislav – Services at IBM; Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad: Sandwich Maker)

Evidently, short term employment abroad working in the hospitality sector or care industry was utilized as a viable economic strategy by several of the study respondents. The more favourable currency exchange rate at the time, also encouraged many Slovaks, prior to 2004, to go abroad and accumulate target earnings.

“No too long ago, before Slovakia joined the EU, people would come to Scotland to pick strawberries. They were paid 3,50 pounds an hour, which was nothing for the Scottish. In Slovakia, it was incredible money. One pound equalled 70 crowns. Back then everything was really cheap. By doing this, people could save money to build a house in Slovakia. But, when the euro came everything changed. You just cannot save as much anymore.” (Jan – Cameraman and Film Maker; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: Construction Worker and Photographer)

Once Slovakia joined the Eurozone, domestic costs increased. Labouring abroad in minimum wage jobs was less economically advantageous than it had once been. At the same time, Slovaks
gained access to a 500-million-person large market. No-longer dependent on immigration visas, Eastern Europeans could bypass the informal labour market altogether (Williams and Balaz, 2004). However, deskilling and job tracking continued, still in the hospitality and service sector, but also in manufacturing and construction (Janta et al., 2011). It was during their foreign labour market integration, that many Slovaks for the first time came into contact with their ‘Eastern European’ identity.

“I did not know I was Eastern Europeans until I moved abroad. Being born in Slovakia, we are taught that we are from Central Europe. In England all Slovaks, Pole, Czechs were - bloody Eastern Europeans.” (Paula- Small Business Owner; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: Restaurant Manager)

The migration literature affirms that tensions between in-group and out-group members across social, economic and cultural differences are not uncommon during the international migration experience (Jenkins, 2004). Many migrants prior to leaving their source country often had no concept of what it felt like to be an out-group member (Kane et al., 2005). Migration is the vehicle that puts people in touch with new cultures and societies, but also demarks a transition where formerly in-group members become outsiders in the new host country (Favell and Nebe, 2009). In turn, some respondents experienced discrimination and racial stereotyping abroad for the very first time.

“’My colleague [fellow investment banker] told me ‘you have an accent of a builder from the Eastern Bloc, but you don’t look like one’. Was it because I was wearing glasses and nice clothes? So, I asked him ‘what is that supposed to mean, is that a good or a bad thing?’” (Peter- Co-Director NGO; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: Investment Banker)

The reality remains that the majority of post-accession migrants were employed in low-skilled sectors in the UK (Janta et al., 2011). Therefore, the cultural association of the Eastern Europeans being waitresses or construction workers was not baseless. Evidently, some migrants used employment in low-skilled jobs as a labour market survival strategy (Janta, 2009). Any employment was perceived as better than none at all and low-skilled jobs allowed migrants quick access to immediate cash flow. What is more, although these wages were low by UK standards, they were still higher than those some returnees earned working in their professional jobs back home.

“In Ireland I began working at McDonald’s. Half the crew was from Poland, the other half from Slovakia. I immediately earned more than double what I could get in Slovakia. It was also an opportunity to learn a new language, and to meet new people.” (Jozko - Engineer; Countries Abroad: Ireland and the Netherlands; Jobs Abroad: McDonald’s Worker and Mechanical Engineer)

On the flip side, outsider status and ethnic group membership was not always a disadvantage. Being part of a minority also opened doors to new opportunities, as examples of positive
discrimination also materialized in the data. In the below quote, the respondent got his first break abroad, because he was an ‘Eastern European artist’ and the Dutch gallery at the time, wanted to showcase work from the new European member states.

“My first break came from a Dutch gallery. They were looking for something new. Their exhibitions were full of Western artists. It was the right timing, we had joined the EU, Holland was opening up and people were curious about: Eastern Europeans.” (Jakub - Artist; Countries Abroad: Ireland and the Netherlands; Jobs Abroad: Security Worker and Artist)

Correspondingly, discrimination also appeared to lessen with time, as cross-cultural exchanges increased. Trust appeared to grow, through greater contact between the in-group and out-group populations. Subsequently, as migrants accumulated cultural capital from their host country (Bourdieu, 2011), glass ceilings also began to lessen, but they were not eradicated entirely according to the respondents.

“They were very cautious from the beginning. But two years into EU membership, you could feel that a cultural shift was happening. You started to read articles about Poles, Czechs and Slovaks. After that, things started to become much more open minded.” (Gabi— Director of SME; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: HR for British Rail)

This section explored the negative implications of the ‘Eastern European migrant’ label, as described by the respondents. The literature demonstrates that there are structural mechanisms that channel new migrants into certain sectors, including low-skilled sectors that traditionally suffer from a high turnover (Mollenkopf and Castells, 1991; Favell and Nebe, 2009). Comparatively, ethnic stereotyping of Eastern Europeans could also be observed in national newspapers in the UK. A quick overview of the Daily Mail newspaper headlines during the peak of the East-West migration wave in 2007-2008, often framed them as benefits seekers and plumbers (Janta, 2009). Nevertheless, this was understood by most respondents as being a common response considering how little contact the British had with Eastern Europeans prior to the 2004 EU-accession.

11.5 Migration: Challenges and Opportunities of Living in Movement
Moving across culture, language and geography can be very challenging experience that requires adaptation and resilience. Hence, only a small percentage of people are migrants, culminating at around 3% of the total global population (Williams and Balaz, 2008). The integration and assimilation phase into a host society can also be financially and emotionally taxing (King, 2002). But with time, migrants can adapt, and by acquiring the necessary cultural capital they can also move ahead in their professional careers, as demonstrated in the below statement.

“My first three years abroad were very difficult. I had an under-average job, with an under-average salary. My husband and I lived in conditions I would have never accepted had we stayed in Slovakia. Overall, it was a period of great stress. In effect, we hit rock
bottom. I learned what poverty is. But, things started to improve once I got a grasp of the English language. I started to read books again. Literature became my great step forward.” (Anna - Art Psychotherapist; Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad: Art Psychotherapist)

Nevertheless, migrants also demonstrate a greater risk propensity vis a vis the non-migrant stayer population (Williams and Balaz, 2012). For example, in the below quote, the artist returnee respondent felt attracted to the Netherlands, while simultaneously living in Ireland. However, this was before the Dutch opened their labour market to EU-8 migrants. With no access to legal employment, Jakub was homeless and sleeping on the street. He persevered and later experienced his first professional breakthrough, having his art exhibited at an Amsterdam gallery.

“I started living in—between two countries. I began travelling to the Netherlands, and totally fell in love with both places. But, the Dutch labour market was not yet open to EU-8 nationals. So, I started selling my work on the street. I was sleeping in the park, at the beach, in central station - anywhere I could put my sleeping bag down.” (Jakub - Artist; Countries Abroad: Ireland and the Netherlands; Jobs Abroad: Security Worker and Artist)

Evidently, migrants often experience a transition period upon relocation, as the above two excerpts demonstrated. This can be an emotionally taxing and difficult experience. Nevertheless, certain professions are more easily mobile than others. Especially those that do not require embedded and encultured knowledge of the destination environment (Blackler, 2002). Notably, hard-skills are traditionally the most transferable, because they can easily be applied across different contexts (Williams and Balaz, 2008). One popular example, is the IT sector, as confirmed by the below respondent.

“Migration within the EU was very easy. But in my trade, it even easier, with an IT skill-set you can work for almost anywhere. All you need is a computer and some knowledge of English.” (Klaus - IT Programmer; Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad: IT Programmer)

Across the board, the majority of returnee respondents began more actively to engage in their social world, once their physical survival needs were met, that is they secured some kind of an income abroad. Once the respondents had cash flow, they then also began to more actively engage in self-introspection and new learning in general. This was often framed in terms of ‘losing the fear’ as illustrated by the migrant below.

“Ireland thought me how to overcome my fear. I had no idea of what I was capable of. It’s there, working those crap jobs that I noticed the first boom in my personal development.” (Jozko - Engineer; Countries Abroad: Ireland and the Netherlands; Jobs Abroad: McDonald’s Worker and Mechanical Engineer)

In travel literature, the phenomenon of introspection as a result of a journey is well document
(Turner and Turner, 1969; Ross, 2010; Cohen, 2010). Comparatively, Mezirow argues that personal disorientation, in many ways initiated by the international migration (or, travel) experience is a precursor to transformative learning (Mezirow, 1981). Correspondingly, this study provides insights into how international migration can be a context for accelerated learning that contributes to professional learning, but also personal (transformative) learning. The core finding is that international returning Slovaks can bring back new skillsets, but also new mind-sets as a result of developing a more ‘open, discerning and inclusive’ meaning perspective, as documented by Mezirow (1990).

11.6 Migration: The Added-Value of Formal vs. Informal Learning Abroad

Williams and Balaz (2008) noted that most migration studies use education credentials as indicator for migrant skill. The same can be said for immigration and visa allocation schemes (Salt, 1988). Evidently, university degrees are an important sign-post in career development, and formal learning is a major driver in global population movements (Findlay et al., 2012). Some students travel half way around the world to acquire top tier education qualifications (Guruz, 2011; King et al., 2010). Slovaks are no exception to the rule. They are equally attracted to study abroad, all the more so because the education system in their country, is still influenced by the former regime according to the key-informants. The teaching method under communism, defers from that of Western free market democracies, in terms of focusing on rote learning vs. developing critical thinking, creativity and independence. What is more, only one Slovak university is ranked in the top 500 of global rankings.

“In Slovakia, the education system is very old fashioned. On the exam, you are expected to reproduce knowledge verbatim. There is one book per course, and you are expected to just memorize it. In England, there is a completely different approach to education. For one assignment, you are expected to read through a diversity of material, from books, to articles and newspapers and in the end, produce a reflective essay.” (Martina – Marketing Manager; Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad: Marketing Manager)

In fact, all the returnee respondents that attended part of their university education abroad, shared a similar appreciation for the international education system. In addition, the returnees mirrored the views of the business, government and civil society key-informants interviewed. In general, all study respondents perceived the Slovak education system as laggard and in need of reform. What is more, the returneess viewed their internationally education experience as integral to developing their critical thinking abilities.

“The Slovak education system is mostly about memorizing, so when you learn something, you believe it, but abroad I learned to think through everything. It was like that in school, but also in real life. When somebody tells you something, you do not accept it immediately. You think about, you question to it, you question yourself. You learn that not everything presented as fact, is necessarily true.” (Rastislav – Services at IBM; Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad: Sandwich Maker)
Once again, the international migration experience is valuable because it offers migrants a new point of perspective. Living across two or more societal systems begets reflection, simply because migrants have to account for social narratives. For example, innovation literature explores the value of workplace diversity and argues that the clustering of people with different world views and perspectives actually contributes to creativity and ultimately a competitive advantage for the firm (Bassett-Jones, 2005; Noe et al., 2006). It is an interesting concept to explore vis-a-vis a society as well. The more culturally varied and economically diversified a society is, the more plural the perspectives and discourses are like to be (Saxenian, 2002). Likewise, the pluralistic nature of democratic societies starkly contrasts those once controlled by totalitarian regimes. Traces of this mono-thinking can still be found in the education system in former Eastern Bloc countries, which prioritized one truth, over a more pluralistic and integrative perspective (Montuori, 2005). The lack of critical thinking development was a concern for many Slovak migrant respondents.

“My Slovak students have access to good knowledge, but are less capable to draw insights from it. For example, in my high school history class, we were taught to literally write down: year, dash, this is what happened, and again year, dash, this happened. We were never encouraged to step back and ask what does this all mean.” (Sofia - Business Consultant; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: Investment Trade Intern)

Evidently, the migration experience allowed for the experience of contextual contrast, in the form of society and of course, as discussed above, in education approach. In foreign universities, Slovak students appreciated being exposed to more points of view and being encouraged to formulate their opinions as a result. They also celebrated the practical approach to learning, whereby students were not only encouraged to memorise theories, but rather to also learn from real-life case studies. Most respondents appreciated this practical approach to learning.

“My education in Germany showed me how things can work. I was better able to compare and see the difference, to observe how certain processes don’t work in Slovakia. For example, what really frustrates me is the lack of cooperation between Universities and the private sector. This was hugely unfamiliar. In Germany, we had companies on campus - like Nokia and BlackBerry, in addition to many other private sector firms. They all tightly cooperated with the university.” (Miso- Tech Start-up Entrepreneur; Country Abroad: Germany; Job Abroad: Internship)

This gap between practical and theoretical experience is partially attributed to time lags as a result of communism, and the social and economic disparities that remain between East and West. These influence the types of education programs that are available to study in Slovakia. For example, the area of ‘urban design’ is particularly novel in the Slovak context. Prospective students must go abroad, if they want to gain access to industry cutting knowledge as explained by the returnee below.

“My Slovak University gave me a very good technical foundation. But, I felt the social
dimension was missing. I decided to study abroad because I wanted to learn from professors that actually had experience in the field.” (Iva- NGO Administrator; Country Abroad: The Netherlands; Job Abroad: Internship)

At the same time, the good technical foundation of the Slovak education system was celebrated by some respondents. Nonetheless, just as above, the social dimension and the development of soft-skills were areas that still needed to be worked on. Once abroad, many returnee respondents were shocked to encounter a system that encouraged individual expression and thought. Once again, the difference in education ideology between East and West, can be attributed to communism, which suppressed the individual and therefore individual expression.

“It all started via an Erasmus exchange program to Denmark. The way Danish people are socialized is so different from us. They are raised to be self-confident from a very young age. Western Europeans are taught to say and fight for their opinion. In Slovakia, it is the complete opposite. At University, everybody is quiet and shy. The teacher is the sole authority.” (Veronika - Start-up Consultant; Country Abroad: Denmark and Belgium; Jobs Abroad: Business Consultant)

According to an OECD (2016) report, reform of the Slovak education is needed to enhance performance. There was an overall consensus across the four respondent groups, that the current model to learning does not reflect the dynamic needs of Slovakia’s emerging economy. Evidently, there is no right or wrong way to educate a population. However, being part of a global economy, certain countries are seen as market leaders in education provision. They indirectly set the bar for others to follow. The majority of the top performing international education institutions are located in the West, although many East Asian universities are also emerging as top education destinations (Deem et al., 2008).

Interestingly, it was not just exposure to the formal education system that returnees valued. But, rather the informal learning they also encountered. Comparatively, the whole experience of living in a new society was grounds for informal learning, this led to new knowledge acquisition in the form of best practices, as in exposure to methods or systems or approaches that worked better than what they saw in Slovakia. This also provided ample grounds for self-introspective and therefore transformative learning, to be discussed in greater detail below.

11.7 Migration: Transformative Learning and Meaning Perspective Change
Jack Mezirow’s (1971) seminal theory on adult learning documented adult perspective transformation made possible through exposure to a disorienting dilemma. A process of critical self-reflection was subsequently mobilized, which culminated with a new and more ‘open, integrative and discerning’ meaning perspective. Inevitably and according to Mezirow (1981) learning is not just a knowledge accumulation process. Although professionally speaking this may me the case, for example, an individual may learn a new technique, tool or software that allows him or her to perform an operational or task more effectively.
However, learning is also personal. New experiences may contribute to perspective transformation, akin to Mezirow’s theory (see Chapter 5). Similarly, Kuhn (1962) linked this process to that of a paradigm shift. Evidently, not all learning results in a paradigm shifting experience. According to Kuhn (1962) this only occurs when new information, begins to poke holes in the existing model of knowing, ultimately resulting in the deconstruction of the old outlook in favour of a new one. For example, scholars once believed the earth was flat, until new evidence came forward to suggest that the globe, was in fact round.

This thesis explores the extent to which international migration is not only a vehicle for accelerated learning, but also transformative learning, because it contributes to meaning perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1971). Although novel to the field of migration literature, this concept has been somewhat explored in travel literature, which acknowledges the transformative nature of the travel experience (Martin, 2010; Morgan, 2010; Lean, 2012). Travel removes the individual from their familiar environment, including ideas, information, identities and landscapes they are most familiar with. Exposure to another culture can act as a door opener, to new ideas and thinking. Likewise, it can challenge existing beliefs and stereotypes and ultimately may give rise to new and more expansive thinking, as suggested by many of the returned migrant respondents.

“People need to travel and see [a different reality] for themselves. This is one way, we can change the country. You understand more, because you can better compare.” (Jakub - Artist; Countries Abroad: Ireland and the Netherlands; Jobs Abroad: Security Worker and Artist)

“In Slovak society, there are well-trodden paths of doing things. You study, you graduate from University, you get a job, soon after you get married, you have kids, and you have the same friends from childhood and you watch the same things on TV. In London, you meet people with opinions that are totally different from your own. It enriches you, you gain a perspective nobody in Slovakia would show you. At home, you would never even think of doing things another way, but out there you discover that another way is possible.” (Klaus - IT Programmer; Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad: IT Programmer)

According to transformative learning theory, individuals are socially conditioned into certain perspectives. These outlooks are absorbed as status quo and seldom challenged, unless provoked by a life experience that does not fit into the pre-existing paradigm (Mezirow, 1971). Correspondingly, the act of corporeal mobility puts migrants in touch with a new environment that is different from their immediate and familiar environment and culture. These experiences, may be categorized as more profound, and therefore evoke deeper reflection. It is precisely at these tension moments, where transformative learning can occur. Whereby previously held beliefs are shed in favour of a new and more open, inclusive, but also discerning meaning perspective (Mezirow, 1990). This can have a tremendous implication on the migrants’ personal life, the way they see themselves, but also the world around them.
“What changed is my relationship to people. Before, I used to judge people according to their appearance. In England, I started to be interested in what was inside, because I met so many different people there and everybody had a different story. After that it just became natural for me, I no longer judge people on their appearance.” (Rastislav – Services at IBM; Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad: Sandwich Maker)

Although not exclusive to the migration experience, mobility puts individuals into contact with systems of difference, but also systems of power (see Chapter 5). Exposure to hegemonic structures and their social manifestation, in the form of discrimination and racism, can prove shocking to the individual migrant (Favell and Nebe, 2009). According to transformative learning theory, profound live events and/or disorienting dilemma, may also have a negative impact on the individual. Some studies have found that some backsliding can occur, as the individual slips backwards into more self-deprecating beliefs (Merriam et al., 1996).

But, then again, if a transformation of meaning perspective does occur, this can have a life altering effect on the individual. This is why transformative learning is referred to as emancipatory learning when applied to Habermas’ (1984) theory on knowledge. Likewise, Freire (1978) noted a similar process, in his observations of the consciousness raising process, when studying the Brazilian peasantry. This occurred when an individual transitioned from lesser to greater independent thinking, or from ‘object’ to ‘subject’ of his reality. In the below quote, the respondent demonstrates how he was able to deconstruct some of his old knowledge and/or cultural imposed beliefs, through exposure to new knowledge and alternative cultural beliefs. This encouraged him to develop more independent thinking, which he referred to as creating his own opinion on life.

“After you have gotten to know a different culture, you become more tolerant to other things, to other people. I would say the whole experience of living abroad and ability to compare it to life in Slovakia, helps to create your own opinion on life.” (Jan – Cameraman and Film Maker; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: Construction Worker and Photographer)

What is interesting to observe, is how this respondent began to identify how his personal belief system actually constrained his workforce integration in the UK. Much of migration literature explores the de-skilling process of Eastern Europeans in Western European labour markets (Favell and Nebe, 2009; Janta, 2009). This understanding builds on human capital theories that identify the mechanism of how and why newcomers are tracked into low-skilled 3D jobs (Massey et al., 1993). What is seldom explored is how self-imposed personal belief systems by the migrants actually feed into the job tracking mechanism.

In the below excerpt, the respondent commented on how he realized he had been holding himself back, based on his own belief, that he was not good enough. Jan felt that, as a newly arrived Eastern European migrant, he still had to improve his English and therefore still had to prove himself before he could go after what he wanted. His paradigm shattered when he met an
Italian woman, that spoke more broken English then him, but was already working as a professional in his desired industry, while he was still employed in construction. It is, at this critical moment, that he learned he had been holding himself back.

“One day I met an Italian woman who spoke even worse English than me. In fact, her English was really bad...but amazingly, she was already working professionally in London as a photographer and doing really well at that. It was because she had that Italian cheekiness, she had the courage to go after what she wanted. That’s when I understood that I had been hiding. I was hiding behind my English [or lack of], always being shy because of it and always just waiting for the ‘right time ‘to come. But, here she was, speaking much worse than me and already working in the business!” (Jan – Cameraman and Film Maker; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: Construction Worker and Photographer)

This is not to say that structural forces do not constrain professional opportunities and labour market access. Evidently, this brings forward the agency vs. structure debate which is well documented in migration literature (Bakewell, 2010). However, it is this process of transition from lesser to greater individual independence that is particularly significant in the Eastern European context.

The following section will explore the transition into self-sovereignty in greater detail. Self-sovereignty including the ability to think and act for oneself is a novel concept in the Eastern Europe context, because individual autonomy was repressed by the dictate of communism for over 4 decades (Applebaum, 2012). Prior to the arrival of communism, following a Europe divided after the Second World War, Slovakia was for the most part an agrarian society. Dating back to the Austria-Hungary monarchy, and the kingdom of Hungary before that, the region was feudalist in orientation for close to 1,000 years (Podoba, 1998).

The socio-historical context and feudal legacy of Eastern Europe has shaped the collectivist nature that is still dominant in the region (Hofstede, 1984; Janta, 2009). What is more, from its Visegrad-4 neighbours, which include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, Slovakia is the most collectivistic country in the Central European region according to the Hofstede scale of individualism to collectivism (Kolman et al., 2003). The empirical data collected from the respondent interviews confirmed these findings. In general, Slovaks expressed a more collectivist perspective.

On the other hand, the migration experience offers a point of departure from this matrix. One where the lone individual ventures into the unknown, to give life a try outside the confines of their immediate family, native language, culture and social network. On a grander scale, the corporal mobility experience may be considered as a ‘rite of passage’, one that facilitates the transition into independence. Whereby the migrant cannot rely on his familiar social network to meet his needs and navigate his/her social world. In the below two excerpts, one female and one male respondent explain how and why this experience was liberating and later empowering.
“I don’t know, the fact that I was abroad made me feel free. Just to have the consciousness that I am alone in a foreign country and that I need to take care of myself. I experienced freedom in the sense of taking care of myself, to go to the bank, post office, to be responsible for myself.” (Natalia – Services at Dell; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: Hotel Cleaner)

“Outside, you are a stranger. You know no one. You don’t speak the same language. You don’t share the same mentality. You are far away from your family and friends. I learned how to rely on myself, and work through difficult circumstances on my own.” (Jakub - Artist; Countries Abroad: Ireland and the Netherlands; Jobs Abroad: Security Worker and Artist)

This rite of passage may be related to the migrants’ biographies. The majority of the respondents were in their 20s at the point of departure from Slovakia and were transitioning into greater independence anyways, as result of completing their university education and beginning their professional careers. Furthermore, literature on the gap year experience, which shares some similarities with the international migration experience, has observed similar patterns of individual growth and development occurring as a result of going abroad (Martin, 2010). According to the statements of most respondents, it was as though they enjoyed being challenged by the international experience, because this was the platform that allowed them to experience and come into their greater independence.

“Living abroad helps you become more of an adult. Back home, I had a very simple path to follow. After graduating from university, I began working for my mother. I then opened a similar business to hers. It was all very nice, but easy. It felt very good to go out, find work, and succeed on my own. It made me a stronger person.” (Martina – Marketing Manager; Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad: Marketing Manager)

Nevertheless, being removed from one’s native culture can be a very alienating and challenging experience, which migration literature often explores (King, 2002). But, according to the respondents interviewed in this study, many choose to leave their native environment because they wanted to experience the challenge of succeeding in a bigger and more dynamic market. It is important to keep in mind the selectivity of the sample, most respondents were university graduates and therefore already in top education echelons of society. However, due to the snowball interview method, the majority of the respondents were also overachievers, meaning that in their young age they had already achieved professional success.

“What was the secret to success? Did one achieve it from working hard, or were they born with it? I realized that I wanted to challenge myself [driver for leaving Slovakia]. I learned that you have to be proactive, that you have to be willing to step out of the crowd. The more times you fail, the more you learn” (Veronika - Start-up Consultant; Country Abroad: Denmark and Belgium; Jobs Abroad: Business Consultant)
The positive risk propensity many of the respondents shared vis a vis their migration experience, is also observed in migration literature. According the Williams and Balaz (2012) migrants have a more positive relationship to risk than non-migrants, this propensity then over spills into other aspect of life, name entrepreneurial initiative. What is more, many of the respondents also indicated that they enjoyed being able to make mistakes, and also learn from them. It was as though they wanted to learn through their own trial and error, rather than just follow the safe and predestined path laid out by their parents and to some extent grandparents.

“I detached myself from my family, before I was dependent on my parents’ opinions completely. I realized that I have a ‘right’ to make mistakes and that I can learn from them.” (Katarina – Services at Dell; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: Hotel Cleaner)

Civil obedience and following the status quo was also essential to physically surviving during communism (Applebaum, 2012). It is no wonder that parents passed on this knowledge to their children. At the same time, the skillset needed to succeed in a free market society is different. Likewise, entrepreneurialism cannot exist without and independent and critical reflective workforce, that is willing to try new things and by default also make mistakes. In the below excerpt, one respondent discusses how she became a more empowered and independent individual as a result of her migration experience.

“I discovered something inside of me, a skill, a strength that I didn’t even know I possessed. I am now able to manage things on my own, even if somebody tells me it is not possible. I am surprised by what I can do. What matters is how you feel and not what others think. Today, I do things because I want to. Not because others expect me to do them.” (Elena - Services at IBM; Country Abroad: The Netherlands; Jobs Abroad: Flower Picker)

The pick yourself up by the boots-straps, self-efficiency mind-set is more commonly found in capitalist societies (Mauer et al., 2009). However, the understanding that individuals are responsible for their success is a radical departure from the socialization of communist past, where the state took care of citizens from cradle to grave. Whether it is good, bad or necessary remains a value judgment. However, Slovakia is no longer a planned economy. Today the now democratic country is a free enterprise economy that must compete on the international market. Globally competitive skillsets and entrepreneurial mind-sets can be an added value in this transition context (McGrath et al., 2000).

11.8 Why Do They Return? Industry Gaps and Professional Opportunities
To further situate the reader in the returnee mind-set. It is critical to also understand why migrants would return to an emerging economy in the first place. Although Slovakia has one of the strongest performing economies in the Eurozone (SARIO, 2016), partially attributed to its solid industrial foundation and relatively good formal education and training, the country is still an emerging economy with a weak but forming entrepreneurial ecosystem. Return is therefore a
challenging endeavour. The greater majority of the of the respondents interviewed had more comfortable and better paid jobs abroad. However, just like with outmigration, return migration is not always driven by solely economic motives (Arango, 2000). According to the literature, migration drivers can also include pulls such as family, friends, language and culture (Dunn, 2005). In the following excerpt, one respondent explores the loneliness and alienation he felt in the host society as a reason as to why he wanted to return home.

“It was also the isolation, I felt lonely in the UK You know, you earn money and you live in this perfect city with everything that you love, but the reality is that you are lonely there. I was a freelancer, I didn’t work that often. But, everybody else did. I spent my time visiting all the places that I love, hanging out in all the great cafes – but, it was all so very lonely.” (Jan – Cameraman and Film Maker; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: Construction Worker and Photographer)

It is important to recognize that the majority migrant respondents were in their early twenties at the point of leaving Slovakia. The data collection for this study was conducted just over a decade into the EU accession. Hence, many of the returnees were nearly or had already entered their thirties. They were therefore entering a new phase of their lives, including the prospect of settling down and starting a family. Unsurprisingly, several female respondents began to look towards their homeland, because they identified it as an environment where they could gain access to social support during the child rearing years. That is, they could rely on their parents to help to raise their children. On the flipside, others were also drawn back because of social obligation. They returned because they wanted to help support their ailing and elderly parents (White, 2011).

“We are the first generation that left to study abroad. Many of us are now coming back. We are in our 30s, entering a new phase in life. It’s time to settle down, to have a family. This is a big driver that is propelling many young people to return.” (Sofia - Business Consultant; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: Investment Trade Intern)

Multiple factors affect the decision to uproot and move once again. Likewise, multiple factors also effect the decision to come back home. Evidently, return is not an easy decision. In fact, it can even be more challenging then departure. At an older age and more advanced stage in their career, outbound Slovak migrants may find it harder to uproot, because there is more at stake to lose. That is not to say, that they don’t also have a competitive advantage in domestic labour market.

However, in addition to the alienation factor of living as an outsider in a foreign society and the biological pull to wanting to raise a family at home, two predominant drivers for return migration could be observed in the respondent data. These include return due to: 1) opportunity and 2) patriotism. The following discussion explores these two facets in detail. The economic gap and ensuing opportunity structure are explored first, as many migrants were inspired to address market gaps, spurred in part by exposure to new knowledge and services in the West.
Subsequently, this also informed the second driver, that is patriotism, and the desire to help make Slovakia better as a result of knowledge transfer.

“The UK helped me to find inspiration. Inspiration in how things can work. Many people have come back with similar visions. They saw something out there that did not exist here.” (Paula- Small Business Owner; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: Restaurant Manager)

This often took an entrepreneurial dimension, the above respondent came back and successful started her own small business, that now sustains her small three-person family. Likewise, others aspired to leverage their niche knowledge of two or more national contexts and look for ways to start similar entrepreneurial ventures in Slovakia.

“I began to explore options of establishing my own company in Slovakia, one that would cooperate with partners in the Netherlands.” (Jozko – Engineer; Countries Abroad: Ireland and the Netherlands; Jobs Abroad: McDonald’s Worker and Mechanical Engineer)

Although, Jozko’s business plan eventual fell through and his is now working as an employee for a Slovak engineering firm. He demonstrated the desire many of the returnees shared in wanting to start something new in Slovakia, based on their ability to recognize market gaps and other shortcomings in the national context. This happened when they began to take notice of products, services, and infrastructure they had grown accustomed to abroad. The desire to merge the reality out there, with the reality back home became a major impetus for change. Their new and evolving cosmopolitan needs became drivers that inspired returnees to bring those services, products or ideas they had seen abroad, back home.

“You find yourself missing things you took for granted abroad. You may have ridden your bike to work every day in Amsterdam, but you can’t do it in Bratislava. You realize your quality of your life has deteriorated as result and you are driven to change that. There are many opportunities here disguised as deficiencies, which is the impetus.” (Marian - Lawyer; Country Abroad: Belgium; Job Abroad; Lawyer)

At the same time, the same respondent also acknowledged how difficult these changes are to implement. Nevertheless, he remained positive about the prospect of the emergence of likeminded communities that were motivated by a common vision and could better actualize these changes together.

“Of course, it’s nice to have an idea, but much harder to put it into practice. It is a challenge not to be discouraged and lose interest. I can see that these communities are growing larger out of need, because what they want is missing at home” (Marian - Lawyer; Country Abroad: Belgium; Job Abroad; Lawyer)

The importance of working in small clusters was acknowledged as vital, not only in terms of
social change back home, but also private entrepreneurial success. Despite living away from home, the majority of respondents interviewed maintained a good understanding of their native context. What is more, they were able to quickly identify the advantages that their native language, culture and kinship ties offered, vis a vis living as a foreigner abroad. In the below excerpt, one respondent explained how he was able to leverage these native connections into successfully starting up his own business. Later, he secured over one million euros in seed money for it, from one of the country’s leading venture capital funds.

“I always had a dream of being an entrepreneur. When I lived in Germany, I did not have so many connections. I worked as an employee. You need connections to run a business. This is why I returned to Slovakia. I knew many people here. I had many friends, who were interested in starting a company [with me].” (Miso- Tech Start-up Entrepreneur; Country Abroad: Germany; Job Abroad: Internship)

At the same time, family and friend connections did not always help in securing employment at home, especially where no job opportunities existed. Some returnees had to make adjustments when they came back to Slovakia, like physical relocate to a different part of the country. For example, although all the respondents interviewed were already living in the country capital, as part of the fieldwork criteria, this was not always the case. One respondent explained how she could not find work in her native region or in her professional industry when she first returned. She therefore had to make re-adjustments to secure employment. This included relocating to the capital and getting a job at an ICT sector multinational company, even though her background was in hospitality and tourism management.

“In the beginning, I tried travel agencies and jobs in the hotel industry. I was looking for something like that, but I found nothing, so I started to focus on corporations, IBM, AT&T and so on.” (Dominka – Services DELL, Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad: Stockroom Worker)

Many returnees found jobs working for one of the foreign multinationals. These companies were attributed to be ‘always hiring’ and offered salaries that were good in comparison to the standard entry level wages in Slovak firms. Moreover, they allowed them to continue using their foreign language capacities, because English was often the standard language in the workplace. In the below excerpt the same respondent explains why the low local remuneration rates, encouraged her to seek out an international employer.

“My friend got hired for an entry-level position for a local travel agency. Her gross income was 500 euros a month. So, I got demotivated how could I live on that? The salary discouraged me from searching for other jobs like that.” (Dominka – Services DELL, Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad: Stockroom Worker)

The balance between having a career and working ‘a job’ that pays the rent is a predicament many young people struggle with today. Returnees were no exception to the standard. Although
MNCs offered a comfortable living-wage, at the same time the positions did not offer much room for professional growth. Once again, the same respondent listed the drawbacks to having a relatively well paid job, versus working in her professional industry of interest.

“The creativity [was missing]. I would enjoy doing something else because working at a computer is not what I would like to do, but unfortunately the situation is like that, let’s hope it will change.” (Dominka – Services DELL, Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad: Stockroom Worker)

In another example, one returnee, after spending 5 years working for one of the biggest MNCs in Bratislava, decided to leave the corporate world and venture into self-enterprise. With the savings, he made from his corporate job, he was able to open a large cafe. His entrepreneurial venture paid off and he is now much more personally and professionally fulfilled as a small business owner.

“I decided to quit IBM. I didn’t feel I was living my purpose. I worked as a financial analyst. I didn’t want to spend the rest of my life sitting in front of a computer filling in Excel sheets.” (Alex– Small Business Owner; Country Abroad: Ireland; Job Abroad: Café Owner)

All of the migrant respondents interviewed were employed or self-employed at the time of the interview. In fact, some were already very successful and in leading positions in their area of expertise or specialization, particularly in the fields of science and government.

“At home, I can bring an added value. I try to bring back my skills and knowledge, from speaking English, to studying in Oxford, through working in Brussels.” (Veronika - Director in the Ministry of Interior; Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad: Administration)

All the respondents currently employed in the country’s ministries, came in at mid-level positions but were very quickly promoted into managerial roles. Some, in a very short time, even became directors. In the below excerpt, one respondent who later became the right hand of the former Slovak Minister of Economy Vazil Hudak, discussed her role in leading an exciting new initiative. This was Slovakia’s new innovation strategy in support of a greater and more dynamic and enterprising society.

“I am currently negotiating with the European institute for innovation and technology, to help create more of an international environment in Slovakia.” (Sasha– Director Ministry of Economy; Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad: HR)

Correspondingly, the big leaps in career growth that some of the return migrants experienced, particular in regards to the state ministries can be attributed to knowledge and skill gaps found in transition economies. The redundant skills of the post-communist ‘lost generation’ have resulted in a unique opportunity structure. One where the newly freed, post-communist, post-
accession ‘golden generation’ can truly reap the reward from. Evidently, some returnees were quick to recognize these gaps and leverage them into professional opportunities. At the same time, coming home and making a difference also excited some of them personally.

“It’s also about being a bigger fish in a smaller pond. I gathered some interesting experience abroad and I wanted to share it with the people here. Working in international affairs has put me in touch with a motivating agenda, because Slovakia is a new donor on the development scene.” (Andrea– Director Ministry of Finance; Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad; PhD Researcher)

The above discussion illustrated how university educated returning international Slovaks economically re-integrate into the Slovak economy. Many had no professional experience at the point of their departure. Yet upon their return, they were able to successfully find employment at home. The most popular destination for the migrant respondents was the ICT sector of foreign owned MNCs, followed by government ministries and academia. A small portion took the entrepreneurial route, although many of those currently in employment expressed a current or past desire to start their own business so as to address many of the market gaps they observed in the Slovakian context. One important finding was that according to the respondents interviewed in this study, return back to Slovakia was not exclusively driven by rapid career growth prospects and lucrative job opportunities. Rather, some of the returned migrants interviewed, top performers from some of the world’s leading universities, also came back because they aspired to evoke and participate in social and professional change, ignited through their knowledge and skill transfer.

11.9 Why Do They Return? Patriotism and Nation Building
Patriotism and the opportunity to be part of the nation-building story was a major theme that emerged from the one-year long fieldwork experience. In essence, many of the returnees interviewed were simultaneously coming back because they wanted to be part of change in the post-transition country. Correspondingly, they also recognized that their outside world knowledge could bring an added-value to a society still in development, vis-a-vis the mature economies and democracies of the West. First and foremost, they wanted to capitalize on this knowledge professionally. However, there was also a strong social dimension behind their desire to evoke and participate in change.

Similar drivers have been identified in literature on the Jewish diaspora and Israel, whereby Cohen (2008) found that migrants were pulled to come to/ return to Israel as part of a nation-building and psycho-emotional driver. Nevertheless, some of the respondents interviewed were careful to not employ the word ‘patriotism’ in their speech, because of its negative connotation to nationalism in particular. Nevertheless, their aspiration to help their native country were readily apparent.

“I have always been motivated to make a contribution. Working as a consultant for large international organizations, such as the United Nations and World Bank, would allow me
to put together excellent conceptual notes for initiatives. But, in the end you never know if it will see the light of day. I was missing impact in my work. Return, was a spur of the moment decision. All I knew was that I was hoping to work for the government. I would not say it is patriotism. But, I came to the realization that this country is my home, and I want to make a positive change.” (Andrea– Director Ministry of Finance; Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad; PhD Researcher)

“I love my country. People tend to see that in a negative way by associating it with nationalism. I don’t think that’s the case. I am very fond of Slovakia. But, I do not see reality through pink glasses. I am deeply concerned about many things that come with this system.” (Sofia - Business Consultant; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: Investment Trade Intern)

Correspondingly, as a result of their migration experience, the majority of the respondents became substantially more aware of their ethnic, cultural and national identity abroad (Brubaker, 2004). This caused some of them to re-evaluate their perceptions about Slovakia and the value of their country of origin.

“There is a strong sense of pride [among Slovaks] abroad. Whenever anything works out well and they read about Slovakia on BBC or Telegram or the Washington Post, there is a huge sense of pride. I mean you can just see it on Facebook [with the tag line] #proud to be Slovak. No one from Slovakia would say that, it is just people from abroad, who are excited about [‘AEROMOBIL’] the flying car. You know, anything that is invented in Slovakia, they are like yes! This is us!” (Gabi– Director of SME; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: HR for British Rail)

At the same time, they recognized the potential of doing things differently. Transferring what they saw abroad with conviction because they have already seen those ideas already successfully implemented elsewhere. The majority of the high-performing international Slovaks interviewed, expressed an interest to participate in the greater change already happening in Slovakia.

“Great things can happen for Slovakia. When we are given permission to think of creative new solutions, rather than just following what has been done before.” (Veronika - Director in the Ministry of Interior; Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad: Administration)

However, it also has to be noted that their appreciation for Slovakia and the country’s positive growth potential may be tied to romanticizing their homeland, which is common practice identified in migration literature with outbound/ or expatriate migrants (Cerase, 1974; Cohen, 2008). At the same time, the nation-building driver behind return may also be correlated to a cultural appreciation made possible by having experienced a different point of comparison, facilitated by living in another country.

“Western countries have too much comfort and they are losing their impetus for growth.
Slovakia has great potential. There are many high-quality, hard-working people here. Slovaks are active, tireless and patient. We want an opportunity to prove ourselves. If only we could realize the possibilities and focus on what we do have, instead of what we don’t, Slovakia could move forward very quickly.” (Jozko - Engineer; Countries Abroad: Ireland and the Netherlands; Jobs Abroad: McDonald’s Worker and Mechanical Engineer)

Exposure to the esteemed and once geopolitically denied West, allowed some respondents to develop a healthier self-appreciation for Slovakia while abroad. One respondent working in a senior position at the Ministry of Economy, expressed it in terms of coming into self-confidence.

“We already have amazing people here. What we are missing is the exposure and the confidence. We need to believe in ourselves more. We are smart; we are good; let’s try to do something with it.” (Sasha– Director Ministry of Economy; Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad: HR)

Akin to a consciousness rising process (Freire, 1978), most of the returning migrants interviewed identified with becoming more self-reflective abroad. However, this transition could also be correlated to their age (20-30 years of age). Nonetheless, a strong sense of wanting to help Slovakia become a better country, was ever present throughout the return migrant interviews. Considering that Slovakia only acquired its independence in 1993, after close to 1,000 years of subordination in the empire of Austria-Hungary and later very turbulent 20th century (Palka, 2014). The novelty of national sovereignty may explain some of the nation-building and patriotic driver many of returnees shared.

11.10 Knowledge Transfer and Role Modelling
In a bottom-up approach to social change, many of the returnees interviewed expressed a desire to help to improve things in Slovakia. They wanted to transfer their knowledge and skills, but also new values and habits they had acquired abroad. This opportunity structure was also strengthened be the emerging start-up ecosystem, and the social campaigns launched by the business sector and government in support of a more dynamic and enterprising society. Simultaneously, the need for new a leadership to arise in Slovakia to help champion this growth, was also echoed throughout the interviews.

“We want a Slovakia where people are proud of being Slovak. A country where people want to live. We need people who will start, initiate and support good projects. We need people who will not look down on others. We need to create a win-win situation. We need good, virtuous people, who are willing to inspire others. I mean leaders, in the sense, that they start something new.” (Samuel - Founder of Education Institution; Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad: PhD Researcher)

The overall lack of public role models comes as no surprise considering the suppression of individualism by the former regime. Individuals were seldom explicitly promoted as beacons of success, unless they were athletes or party leaders (Applebaum, 2012). Many returning
international Slovaks have the potential to become leaders, in an environment where locals lack international exposure, business know-how and in some cases also the confidence to do so. Some returnees, particularly those that have achieved economic success through their own business ventures have become popular names in Slovakia. The newly formed political party ‘Progressive Slovakia’ is made up of such entrepreneur returnees. For example, the brainchild of the movement is a serial entrepreneur who returned to Slovakia after finishing his education at Science Politic Paris. At the same time, the rise of new social and political leadership cannot be taken for granted in a post-communist climate, whereby the notion of a leader can conjure up also negative connotations.

“We actually have a conceptual problem with the notion of leaders. In German it evokes the Third Reich, while in Slovak it refers to a Sheppard leading a flock of sheep.” (Andrea– Director Ministry of Finance; Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad; PhD Researcher)

This could also be attributed to socio-historical reasons. Unlike its neighbours, Slovakia is a very young nation state that never had its own royal kingdom (Palka, 2014). In turn, it does not share the same established national identities as some of its neighbours. Up until very recently, the Slovaks were for a long time ruled over by external forces, be it the Hungarians, the Germans, the Russians and to some extent the Czechs as well. It is for this reason, the cultivation of national heroes is a very recent phenomenon, which the below respondent commented on.

“The Czech’s had President Havel. We do not have, at least not in our recent history, a strong, inspiring public figure that immediately comes to mind as a role model. I believe it’s important to create a positive culture of role models, individuals that push our society forward.” (Sofia - Business Consultant; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: Investment Trade Intern)

This same sentiment was echoed by a fellow returned migrant, who viewed that positive examples of leadership were still missing in Slovak society. Coincidentally, she stated that leadership, implemented on a smaller scale through peer to peer mentorship could also be a useful vehicle for knowledge sharing.

“Positive examples are really missing. Mentorship would help. Our young people are lacking in confidence, they need more support and encouragement.” (Andrea– Director Ministry of Finance; Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad; PhD Researcher)

Of course, framing returnees as future leaders is a narrative that may be self-serving. At the same time, the majority of the study respondents were high performing professionals, well on the track of becoming the country’s future decision makers. Several of the study respondents returned with education credentials and work experience from some of the world’s leading universities, institutions and companies, including Harvard, Oxford, the European Parliament and the World Bank. Nevertheless, they identified peer learning or mentoring as a useful vehicle for knowledge sharing.
“Knowledge transfer and role modelling by returning internationals can be an opportunity. I think that they can contribute a tremendous amount to our society. Slovaks that have achieved success abroad are able to bring back insights and skills, and serve as role models. If nothing else, they can inspire the people around them. That is a contribution in itself.” (Sofia - Business Consultant; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: Investment Trade Intern)

This study found that these returnees were driven by both professional and altruistic motives. What is more, prior to their departure from Slovakia, many did not share the same aspiration to want to advance the Slovak society. It was only after their international migration experience, that their social perception shifted, as the below respondents explained. In addition, the experience also empowered them to believe that they could also drive change.

“Previously, I never felt the obligation to help my country. My focus was on my career and improving my position. But, after 5 years at Goldman Sachs, my views changed. I began to feel the need to give back to society.” (Peter- Co-Director NGO; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: Investment Banker)

“Our experience abroad, showed us how things can be different. When we came back, we started looking for and reaching out to people who shared the same vision. Together, we have helped found two new initiatives: ‘Mobile-Garden’ and ‘Voids’. It’s not really a question of opportunity, but responsibility. Who will change things, if not us?” (Iva- NGO Administrator; Country Abroad: The Netherlands; Job Abroad: Internship)

“How to change things? Through young people coming back. When you live abroad, you get to see things in a different perspective. You discover that alternatives are possible, that we don’t have to continue doing things just one way. We can do things differently.” (Veronika - Director in the Ministry of Interior; Country Abroad: UK; Job Abroad: Administration)

“In the UK, I learned that everything is possible. That was the biggest lesson. That everything can be done, you just need to figure out the way.” (Jan – Cameraman and Film Maker; Country Abroad: UK; Jobs Abroad: Construction Worker and Photographer)

Evidently, the notion that individual success is self-attributed, rather than circumstantial is novel departure from Marxist ideology and the communist conditioning of the past (Kirschbaum, 1995; Applebaum, 2012). In some cases, returning international Slovaks helped to infuse the Slovak labour market with new vision and agency that some respondents identified as much needed. Therefore, based on their impetus and desire to evoke change, paired with their enhanced international exposure and professional training, returning internationals Slovaks have the potential to become industry leaders in an environment lacking in similar knowledge and skills, but also competencies. Nevertheless, without support and engagement from local players and
power structures, having a vision may not be enough to implement change in the long run.

Conclusion
This chapter was dedicated to the post-accession East-West return migrants, that were the focus of this research. The discussion began with an analysis of the key drivers of outbound migration in addition to the larger and less obvious meta-socio-historical parameters that also inform the decision and desires of the young Slovak migrants. The discussion then expanded into temporary migration challenges, such as migrant discrimination and glass ceilings abroad, in addition to loneliness and alienation and the pull of family back home.

However, these are mostly quickly overshadowed by the value of learning through the international experience. Exposure to formal learning was celebrated by returnees, particular in regards to being encouraged to develop their critical thinking, as well as exposure to case studies. Correspondingly, in addition to securing access to new languages, best practices, knowledge and skills, migration was also appreciated as a vehicle for informal learning, which in some cases also resulted in transformative learning (Mezirow, 1971).

Many of the respondents interviewed felt personally transformed by their migration experience. They self-identified as becoming more open minded, but also more critically reflective as a result of their international exposure and experience of living and working in a different society. In most cases, international migration contributed to the acquisition of hard, but also soft skills. Key competencies such as improved communication abilities, enhanced confidence, expanded comfort-zones as well as critical thinking. Evidently, these soft-skills were perceived as having added-value in an environment that previously suffered from geographic isolation, private enterprise collectivization and civil liberties suppression for over 40+ years (1948-1989).

Considering that the Iron Curtain collapsed some 25 years ago, it is understandable how the region still suffers from socio-economic cleavages between East and West. As demonstrated by the personal experiences of several respondents, it is no surprise that returnees, armed with globally competitive knowledge and foreign languages, have the capacity to rapidly move up career hierarchies. It is for this reason, that many of the respondents interviewed identified gaps and opportunities in the Slovak labour market and also made professional use of them. However, patriotism, altruism and nation-building desires were also drivers for return.

Some returnees recognized the in-demand nature of their knowledge and skills in Slovakia, in addition, to their potential to enact positive social change in Slovakia. Intentionally or otherwise, they can and also did distribute their know-how by role modelling behaviour. This culminated in the transfer of skills but also new perspectives into the post-communist, post-accession environment. That is not to say, that returnees did not feel inhibited by the market, institutional climate, but also mind-set constraints of being back in Slovakia. The majority of the returnees acknowledged these restrictions. Others also commented on their experience of being locked out of local social networks, as a result of moving away and therefore having to build up their professional connections yet again. However, in some cases they were able to overcome these
obstacles, by working with like-minded individuals, but also fellow returnees which proved advantageous.
Chapter 12

Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis explored the relationship between the theorizing of learning, knowledge, and knowledge transfers via human mobility. Empirical data was gathered across a spectrum of four respondent groups, the first three being key-informants from business, government and civil society. The perspectives of the key-informants were compared to those of the returning migrants. Subsequently, this study investigated the contribution that the return of skilled migrants makes in a post-communist, post-transition, and relatively new EU member country. It considered both their professional and personal (transformative learning) development, in addition, to the transfer of their hard and soft skills. In order to account for these changes, the thesis has drawn from a range of academic fields, including theories from: sociology, migration, social psychology, and management, with the aims to:

1. To explore the relationships between the theorizing of learning, knowledge, and knowledge transfers via migration.

2. To understand the significance of learning and knowledge acquisition as a result of mobility, in terms of how it contributes not only to professional but also to personal self-development.

3. To understand the motivations for migration and return, and address the extent to which learning, knowledge and knowledge transfer inform these.

4. To identify the extent to which return migration facilitates knowledge transfer, and the diversification of the knowledge available to organizations.

5. To assess what are the barriers and facilitators in the knowledge transfer process? How far is knowledge and learning acquired elsewhere, transferable across socio-economic contexts through return migration?

In the following discussion, the above presented research aims will be explored vis a vis the study findings to conclude this thesis and open the door for future research possibilities.

The Bringers of the New: Knowledge, Skills and Competencies through Return Migration

Research Aim #1
To explore the relationships between the theorizing of learning, knowledge, and knowledge
transfers via human mobility.

Drawing from the data implications, this study suggests that returning international Slovaks help with the transfer of not only hard-skills, but also soft-skills into Slovakia. These mobility flows have been greatly accelerated as a result of Slovakia’s EU accession and Schengen membership. By utilising their EU citizenship and the tenet of freedom of movement, the young educated migrants interviewed went abroad. In another country, they acquired new learning experiences that result in professional but also personal knowledge acquisition. The latter gave rise to soft-skills development. Although, competencies such as communication, critical thinking and creativity may be sought after in every workplace, they are particularly needed in the transition economies of Central and Eastern Europe (Londakova and Londak, 2011). Hence, the significance of return migration flows and the ensuing positive knowledge transfer implications (Klagge and Klein-Hitpab, 2010).

CEE soft-skills gaps can be attributed to numerous factors, most obviously, the communist legacy which included the suppression of individualism and the individual. However, it is also due in part to the current education system. All 3 key-informant categories interviewed, expressed concern about the state of the Slovak education system and identified, in particular, the universities as being in need of reform and curriculum improvement. At the same, they also recognized that even if these changes would be implemented immediately, the cultivation of new human capital takes time. It can be many years, until the next generation of talent is produced and ready to enter the Slovak labour force, and be able to meet the talent needs of a 21st century knowledge economy.

Evidently, this is a concern for governments and employers the world over. Both are keen to supplement existing human capital development methods with alternative options. In an effort to source these much-needed knowledge and skills, the attraction of talent from abroad becomes a viable solution for many firms and countries (Barley and Kunda, 2004). However, international migration is not only a vehicle that can meet labour market demand, but rather, it is also a vehicle that can facilitate new knowledge acquisition and human capital development and training (Williams and Balaz, 2008).

The three key-respondent groups interviewed is this study identified that international migration is a vehicle that can and has contributed to the positive ‘brain’ and personality development of some Slovaks living abroad. Correspondingly, the return and successful re-harvesting of international Slovak talent returning from abroad, may be useful in helping transition economies, such as Slovakia, catch-up on knowledge and skills gaps between East and West. These cleavages are attributed to the 40+ year communist legacy and geopolitical isolation the country experienced behind the Iron Curtain. As discussed throughout this thesis, individuals that come back from abroad, have gained exposure to much larger and more dynamic free market economies, that also have a longer history of democracy, to Slovakia’s quarter of a century experience (the Velvet Revolution happened in 1989).
Consequently, international Slovak migrants amass new languages, knowledge and skills as a result of their international migration experience. Upon their return, they are perceived as an added value to the economy, especially because of the post-communist skill and knowledge gaps that still persist. The key-informants interviewed indicated that the successful re-harvesting of returning international talent is a useful vehicle that can assist in Slovakia’s economic development and further integration into the global economy. However, their return not only facilitates competitive knowledge and skill transfer, but it is also a return on what would otherwise have been a lost human capital investment. Considering that the Slovak government had paid for their primary, secondary and to some extent tertiary education.

However, perhaps the most significant contribution of this study was not its focus on the professional knowledge enhancement made possible as a result of international migration. But rather, this study was revealing in that it exposed the significance of informal learning during international migration and its contribution to soft-skills development. Although the acquisition of formal education credentials, in the form of additional university degrees was greatly valued according to the return migrant respondents, several of which conducted their Master’s, MBA’s, PhD’s or Post-Docs while living abroad.

It was the informal learning that international migration facilitated, that returnees most appreciated about their foreign experience. That is not to deny the importance of the recognition and appreciation of professional knowledge development also acquired. Those migrants that did work professionally while abroad, did consider that they had gained access to useful professional ‘expertise’ knowledge, in terms of best practices, problem solving techniques, professional vocabulary and improved English or other foreign language abilities. This know-how was also recognized and appreciated by the majority of the key-respondents, particularly those from the business and government sectors.

However, even those that had professional jobs abroad, still placed great value on their informal learning experience. It was the latter that encouraged their personal development, and enhanced their soft skills development. Moreover, competencies such as enhanced confidence, improved communication abilities, greater independence and critical thinking, proved useful, and in some cases critical, to their successful re-integration into the Slovak labour market. This was especially for those that took on senior and leadership positions in their professional sectors, such as at the government ministries. In addition to those that sought to self-actualize as entrepreneurs on home turf.

Consequently, this thesis explored how the international migration experience triggered their professional, but also personal development. Made possible through the vehicle of human mobility and through the exposure to different national contexts, which the researcher termed as being a context for ‘accelerated learning’. In this way, the work builds on previous research that links theories of migration and knowledge. For example, professional development has been explored in migration literature in the form of high-skill mobility (Beaverstock, 2004) and Williams and Balaz (2008) built on this, during their exploration international migration being a
vehicle for the acquisition and dissemination of tacit knowledge. However, as explained in more details in the next section, this thesis has aimed to go further in terms of the theoretical understanding of the personal knowledge development of the individual migrants, drawing especially on the notion of transformative learning. The latter is associated with the development of a more open, discerning and inclusive meaning perspective for the individual migrant.

International Migration and Transformative Learning

Research Aim # 2
To understand the significance of learning and knowledge acquisition as a result of mobility, in terms of how it contributes not only to professional but also to personal self-development.

Mezirow’s (1998) transformative learning theory provides a useful theoretical framework in exploring the paradigm shifting potential of international migration. According to Kuhn (2012), a paradigm represents the world view of individual or community of practice. This view is assumed to be ‘correct’, until a new experience, or introduction of new knowledge, challenges old ways of thinking about and therefore knowing about a given topic. What follows is a slow, or rapid deterioration process, whereby holes are poked in the existing theory, concept or perspective, until the previously taken for granted knowledge becomes so destabilized that it can no longer account for reality and therefore must change. By applying Mezirow’s transformative learning theory, we can observe how Kuhn’s paradigm shift materializes in the adult learner (Mezirow, 1971).

The process is initiated through a disorienting dilemma. This is a form of psychological or emotional destabilization that according to Mezirow (1990) is caused by an abnormal life experience. Or a live event that then challenges the previous meaning perspective held by the individual. Exposure to new and different cultures can produce a similar dilemma, or disorientating experience (Morgan, 2010). In anthropology and the travel literature, this is often referred to as culture shock (Turner and Turner, 1969). According to Kim (2008) culture shock follows a dynamic process of stress – adaptation – growth.

Similar to Mezirow’s theory, Kim considers that stress or disorientation is the precursor to individual growth. That being said, “stress, then, is responsible not only for suffering, frustration, and anxiety, but also for providing the impetus for adaptive personal transformation and growth – the learning and creative responses to manage new cultural circumstances” (1988:56). A similar temporary state of crisis may ensue during the migration experience. By living abroad in the foreign society, some individuals’ previously held assumptions may be challenged and therefore also transformed.

For example, when individuals depart from their known world, their comfort-zone and social norms are challenged. What is more, the new ones of the host society are not yet acquired. According to adult learning theories, it is here, tottering between the known and the unknown,
that the pressure point behind some of the most important discoveries and self-realizations is found (Taylor, 2007). Once again, drawing on anthropology, travel literature, and adult learning theories, a state of crisis necessitates - new learning and in some cases profound change.

This thesis suggests that international migration may expose migrants to such profound learning experiences. This arises from exposure to new cultures, new people and new ways of organizing society. It is learning through contrast and the ensuing sense-making that many of the migrant respondents identified as informal learning. This corresponded to the most valued learning aspect of their international experience. The returnees appeared to have recognized how international migration provoked both their reflexive and reflective thinking in an effort to address the gaps made possible by the contextual contrast between two or more national, cultural and linguistic environments.

Hence, the researcher has suggested that international migration is a context for accelerated learning. The returnees demonstrated how exposure to a new national context, and therefore a new and different culture, potentially challenged their pre-existing beliefs and assumptions about the world. Therefore, the international migration experience can also be one of knowledge confrontation. In general, individuals are socialized into one culture, which originates in one national context. This gives rise to a specific way of seeing, thinking and speaking about the world. When that same individual moves across time and space and encounters a new a different national context, learning may be mobilized in an effort to make sense of the gap.

According to the key respondents, particularly those from the business sector, this was perceived as a comfort-zone expanding process. That is returnees appeared to be more confident in themselves as a result of what appeared to be more expanded comfort-zones. Some managers considered that this made them more attractive employees. In general, the arrival of a more confident labour force was perceived as an added-value, in an environment where workers lacked self-trust and self-confidence. These external perceptions by the key-informants, were backed up by the migrant’s subjective experiences. In general, returnees did feel more confident in themselves. However, this confidence was not only attributed to the new knowledge and skills they had acquired abroad, but also as result of overcoming hardship and challenge and personal growing as a result of their international migration experience.

According to the migrant interviewees, living abroad was/is not easy. The majority of the migrant respondents had to adapt to a new country, culture and language as a result of their geographical displacement. What is more, despite the hardship, which included culture shock and similar disorientations, as well as discrimination and glass ceilings, most returnees identified positively with their migration experience. As a result of overcoming these challenges, many gained greater confidence in themselves, in addition to improving their professional skills. It appears that abroad – in a foreign country and removed from the support of their family and friends some recognized that major changes had occurred in their personal development.
The shifts in personal development were often expressed in terms of enhancing their independence and therefore their individual sovereignty. They self-identified as having greater agency, but also thinking autonomously, in terms of improved critical thinking abilities. This included their ability to deconstruct knowledge, as well as formulate their own ideas and interpretations. At the same time, this overall transformation can be related to a rite of age passage. Many of the migrants were in their early twenties at their point of departure from Slovakia, having just completed their university education. Upon return, they were now closer to their thirties, or already in these, and therefore entering a new life phase both in terms of their professional careers and personal life transitions.

Nevertheless, the majority of the respondents interviewed associated going abroad with a positive experience that enhanced their confidence and independence. The impact that the migration experience had on their lives, was also observed by the key-informants. The business respondents, who hired these individuals as employees, in particular observed how they had come back different after migration. This change was perceived to be related to their tacit knowledge and therefore remained difficult to articulate by the respondents.

However, the recognition of the transformative nature of such a journey is not new to society. According to Joseph Campbell (2008) this archetype can be observed across era and culture. The cycle of departure, transformation and return is a popular mono-myth in general. From novels, to legends, to folklore and even fairy-tales, the narrative of departure, initiation and return has been an ever-present theme in the social collective imagination and mythologies. Often, presented to the reader under the guise of adventure, the individual is transformed, by leaving his/her home, overcoming many challenges, and eventually returning back, an enhanced and more wise person (Voytilla, 1999).

Popular literature and movies often portray travel and journeying as a vehicle that removes the individual from the everyday worries and expectations of their daily life (Cohen, 2011). Consequently, a certain liberation is experienced, in addition to feelings of isolation and loneliness, as mapped in migration theories. By focusing on the positive spectrum of the experience, the political philosopher Hannah Arendt summarized this feeling in her famous quote “loving life is easy when you are abroad. Where no one knows you and you hold your life in your hands all alone, you are more master of yourself than at any other time.” The notion of experiencing greater freedom, as a result of going abroad, was also shared by many of the migrants interviewed. Somehow, removed from the control, or watchful eyes of their families and friends, some individuals actually felt freer to be themselves in a foreign country.

This thesis sought to explore the role of learning, knowledge and knowledge transfer in the international migration experience. The fieldwork process exposed that valuable formal and informal learning took place as a result of the contextual contrast that international migration facilitated. Although it was not the original intention behind this study, the analysis suggested that international migration could also be a vehicle that facilitated self-discovery. Although this
notion has already been explored in travel literature to some extent (Ross, 2010; Morgan, 2010; Cohen, 2011; Crossley, 2012), its application is much more novel to migration studies.

**Drivers for Return Home: Professional Opportunities and Patriotism**

**Research Aim #3**

To understand the motivations for migration and return, and address the extent to which learning, knowledge and knowledge transfer inform these.

Despite the still significant wage-gaps between Eastern and Western Europe labour markets, remuneration rates were not the primary driver for outmigration according to the respondents interviewed in this study. At the same time, the concept of emigrating for non-financial reasons, is not uncommon in migration theory (Arango, 2000; Halfacree, 2004). The respondents in this study identified four key pillars as drivers for going abroad, these included: money, language, learning and international exposure. Once abroad, learning in both formal and informal nature became a positive attribute of the migration journey. However, it is important to recognize that the majority of respondents had only just completed their university studies, and had not yet worked professionally in the domestic labour market as their point of departure. Correspondingly, this could have informed the exploratory nature of their international migration experience.

Furthermore, one of the central concerns of the thesis was to address the drivers of return migration to Slovakia and what the migrants planned to do with their new-found knowledge and learning. But, before we delve into their labour market integration and knowledge transfer experiences, it is important to acknowledge, that only a small percentage of Slovakia’s large diaspora returns. With more than one third of the university population studying abroad (Kahanec and Kureková, 2016), in addition to 10% of the active labour force, media sources cite that less than 10% of international Slovaks return (Slovak Spectator, 2016) — although a lack of reliable statistics mean all such estimates should be approached cautiously.

Migration trajectories in the EU-8 post accession countries are increasingly more circular and cyclical than previous migration flows (Dustmann and Weiss, 2007). In Slovakia, there is currently no institutional body that measures outbound and return flows, and therefore it is difficult to obtain accurate percentages. However, in the Polish example, Ann White (2011) found that half of all post-accession migrants were back in Poland at any one given time. Perhaps, a similar proxy reference could also be made about Slovakia, given it is Poland’s neighbouring country, and that the countries have some shared socio-economic features. Moreover, Slovaks, after Poles, were the second largest incoming EU-8 migrant population in the UK (Janta et al, 2011; White, 2011).

Although Slovakia has had a relatively strong economic performance in recent years, for many outbound migrants it is not yet lucrative enough to face the risk of returning home to a much
smaller market. Concerns about access to good salaries and decent jobs are one deterrent, but psychological factors also play a role. Some of the study respondents argued that life abroad was easier. This perspective was shared by many of the key-respondents as well. They believe that even by working in more simple, or even unskilled jobs, international Slovaks could experience a higher quality of life abroad, in comparison to Slovakia.

At the same time, this study was selective in terms of the return migrant experiences and their labour market integration because it focused exclusively on the country capital, Bratislava. Chosen because it was the most popular destination for international Slovaks that had returned from abroad. Particularly considering, it represented the wealthiest and most dynamic city and also region in the country. Western Slovakia is the country’s largest FDI recipient, in addition to being the home of the majority of ICT sector MNCs, that employ over 70,000 professionals (SARIO, 2016). By (sampling) definition, all the return migrants interviewed in this study had returned to the capital, but the great majority of them had not been born in the city, although many had conducted their university studies in the capital.

Furthermore, the returnees identified two major reasons for coming home. These became their return drivers, despite having access to higher paid employment abroad in most cases. The greater portion of returnees identified ‘opportunities’ in the domestic labour market as a driver for return. These were attributed to time lags as a result of the transition process as well as human capital knowledge and skill gaps that were not addressed by the current education system. Due in part to their internationally enhanced human capital, which in some cases also included professional experience as well as formal education training, these returnees self-identified with having a competitive advantage in the domestic labour market.

The acquisition of international languages, and in particularly fluency in English, was identified as being an advantage. Furthermore, language skills were positively recognized and received by both domestic and international employers operating in Slovakia. Likewise, the majority of the key-respondents recognized language skills to be an added-value in the Slovakian context. This was particularly for those companies that catered to an international consumer base and therefore needed employees that could speak, or write with fluency in the foreign language/s.

However, in addition to skillsets, the key-informants also emphasised that returnees brought back new mind-sets: that is, perspectives and modes of thinking that were different from the stayer population. Consequently, the key-informants often used terms such as confidence, independence and critical thinking to highlight the ways in which international Slovaks were different. This greater agency, was reflected in the returnees’ ability to recognize opportunities in the Slovak context and to act on them. Several of the migrant respondents, expressed a desire to apply what they had learned abroad to their advantage at home.

During the interviews, many expressed the aspiration to want to start their own enterprises, and in some cases, some were already operating small enterprises in Slovakia. These entrepreneurial aspirations were directly attributed to having identified market gaps back home. Abroad, they
had experienced certain products and services that were not available to them in the Slovakian context. They were also able to identify human capital knowledge and skill gaps. Therefore, these gaps were identified to leading to potential opportunities, and proved to be a popular incentive for return. That is, in addition to the cultural, psychological and emotional pull of family, culture and language.

As a result, and also partially attributed to the selectively elite character of the migrant sample, some returnees achieved rapid professional success upon return. This was particularly apparent for the respondents that worked for the government ministries, but also those that set up their own entrepreneurial or institutional ventures, including non-for-profit organizations. Many other returnees interviewed found employment working for one of the country’s multinationals, or were at some point employed by a MNC. International employers proved to be an attractive option, because of the higher remuneration rates, but also, because it allowed them to apply their foreign language skills and international know-how.

However, the motives were not all economic and about personal gain. Another interesting theme that emerged from the interviews, was the ‘patriotism’ driver and the nation-building aspirations the returnees also shared. Once again, their aspiration to create social change in Slovakia, was partially attributed to market gaps they considered, and that they now could more easily identify as a result of having lived abroad. Upon return, some respondents identified some of the services they had grown accustomed to abroad, as missing in their native context, such as community gardens or bike lanes. The desire to re-create what they had experienced abroad, at home, became a social driver. Consequently, many returnees viewed these services as not only personally beneficial, but also of added-value to the greater society.

On the other, it is important to identify that although many of the returnees self-identified as wanting to help Slovakia with their new-found knowledge, many were hesitant to employ patriotic language to describe their activities for fear of being associated with nationalism and/or other negative associations. Another interesting revelation from the interviews was that the greater majority of migrant respondents did not share this desire, prior to leaving Slovakia. It was only once they were abroad that they noticed the social gaps at home and the opportunity to make a difference. This patriotic desire to want to initiate, and be part of greater change in Slovakia, proved critical when facing many of the barriers that returnees encountered upon re-integration into the Slovak labour market, including in respect of knowledge transfer.

**Knowledge Transfer and Knowledge Brokers**

The following sub-section will address research objectives #4 and #5 together:

**Research # 4**

To identify the extent to which return migration facilitates knowledge transfer, and the diversification of the knowledge available to organizations.
Research Aim #5

To assess what are the barriers and facilitators in the knowledge transfer process? How far is knowledge and learning acquired elsewhere, transferable across socio-economic contexts through return migration?

Knowledge transfer is the act of transferring knowledge from one environment, institution or individual to another. However, the ability to effectively communicate new knowledge, or ideas and concepts, is dependent on the competency of the knowledge broker to present these in a language that can be understood by the recipient (Polanyi, 1958). Ideas that originate in a different context, such as a different country, culture and language, take greater effort to communicate.

More often than not, a translation process ensues, because a harmonization between two cultures must first take place. A practice not just limited to language, knowledge translation is equally dependent on the unscripted understanding of the signs and symbols of another culture (Czarniawska, 2001). Therefore, successful knowledge transactions are dependent on finding a mutual knowledge base between two, at times, very different social environments.

The more divergent the two cultures the greater the harmonization efforts. For example, the cultural differences between most Americans and Canadians are smaller, than between Americans and Chinese. Therefore, knowledge transfer can be easier in some contexts, versus others. This is because knowledge transfer is not just a copy and paste process, but rather a social interaction that requires complex communication (Yang et al., 2009). Returnees must therefore first assimilate their new-found knowledge into the existing knowledge structure of the recipient context, in this case the native society, if their newfound knowledge is to be translated and have an impact.

Similarly, the returnees interviewed acknowledged the need to adapt their know-how to the Slovak environment. Accordingly, they couldn’t come back to Slovakia and do things exactly as they had done them in Germany or the UK. Rather, they had to look for ways in which they could apply their knowledge. Secondly, whether the locals would appreciate the knowledge was a real concern. According to management studies, knowledge must first be recognized before it can be received (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990). Companies and people must be open to innovation, or else all attempts at knowledge sharing will fall on deaf ears.

At the same time, trust between knowledge participants is also beneficial, and some would argue even necessary (Lundvall, 1988). This is because knowledge implementation involves change, and change involves risk. This is where returning international Slovaks may be at an advantage compared to other expat knowledge bringers. Returning Slovaks embody both the ‘bridging’ and ‘bonding’ social capital needed to bring novel knowledge, but also guarantee cooperation (Putnam, 2000). Weak social ties, usually formed between acquaintances and
colleagues are valuable links to securing access to new information and thinking (Granovetter, 1973). On the other hand, strong ties, or bonding social capital, are usually embedded in one’s culture, and are built on trust.

Returnees, coming back from abroad, can represent the bridging social capital which is particular useful in the Slovak context, a tightly networked and hierarchal environment (Hofstede, 1984). However, these close social networks also have their limitation, because they lead to idea lock in and promote the circulation of already known and in some ways redundant information (Burt, 1992). It is important to remember, that during the communist regime, Slovaks mostly could not form bridging social capital with non-Slovak outsiders, because they could not travel and break free of their geographic isolation – behind the Iron Curtain. With no contact with the outside world, it is understandable that people were also distrustful of individuals from different cultures, and xenophobic in orientation in general.

On the other hand, returnees also embody the bonding social capital that is usually built on trust and/or kinship ties. Although returning Slovaks bring new knowledge, ideas and concepts, they are also natives to Slovakia. Therefore, in the eyes of the locals, they are perceived as locals, rather than migrants or expats. It is this bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000) that could place them in a potentially advantageous positon vis a vis other foreign expats. Once again trust between knowledge broker and recipient is very important, particularly because the great portion of knowledge that returnees bring back is tacit, rather than explicit in nature (Polanyi, 1967).

Accordingly, returning international Slovaks are not only physical carriers and translators of competitive know-how, but sources of new perspectives altogether (Williams and Balaz, 2008). This is vital in environments, where people and companies have a tendency to suffer from path-dependency and lack of external exposure, partially attributed to the transition process and Slovakia’s communist legacy. Cohen and Levinthal (1990) argued that when choice is constrained, there is a tendency to get locked-into the current knowledge base (1990). By perceiving the work procedure, or world, according to only one model, firms or regions miss the opportunity to learn how things can be done differently.

At the same time, returnees face many barriers upon coming home. Fiscal cleavages and limited job opportunities are obvious deterrents to return. If nobody can hire them or pay what they consider to be ‘a fair wage’, what will pull them to return? However, not all motives for return are monetary as the respondent interviews illustrated. According to the fieldwork, several of the returning international Slovaks interviewed came back for reasons other than economic and or personal gain. Of course, they also saw opportunities in the gaps of the source country labour market. However, they were also eager to apply what they have learnt and enact change. Today, numerous NGO such as LEAF and Teach for Slovakia build on this momentum, they actively promote their initiatives to the Slovak diaspora, through a ‘help make Slovakia better’ platform.
However, patriotism and/or altruism aside, there is also an economic added-value to the return phenomenon that was most appreciated by the business key-informants. Management theories argue that, if companies want to grow, they need to generate new knowledge. This kick starts their innovation and allows them to stay ahead of their competition (Zahra and George, 2002). Although knowledge can never be depleted through use (Arrow, 1962), it can become outdated. Which is why the generation of new knowledge is critical to business growth. At the same time, knowledge creation is not a cost-free process (Mokyr, 2002).

In today’s innovation driven market, businesses invest vast amounts of capital to generate it through research and development programs (R&D). Also, if the knowledge cannot be created in-house, it is sourced from elsewhere. Barley and Kunda (2004) argue that when brains are needed, they are quickly attracted in dynamic markets. Head hunting, and by extension immigration, are vehicles that firms and later governments mobilize to secure access to knowledge and skill that are not available locally (Salt and Findlay, 1989). The return of international Slovaks helps to meet labour market demand for specific skills and knowledge.

Yet, knowledge transfer is also an unfolding process. The biggest inhibitor behind positive knowledge exchanges is not technical or scientific development, but rather social acceptance. If individuals are too out of touch with their native context, then potential knowledge brokers will have a hard time translating and thereby enacting their knowledge. Likewise, if the new knowledge is not recognized as valuable by the recipient, it cannot be transferred (Van der Heijden, 2002). Failed attempts at knowledge sharing can destroy hope for innovation. Those who were once inspired to share what they have learned abroad, can become quickly discouraged and leave the country once again (Van Woerkom, 2003).

Many returning international Slovaks, as sometimes referred to by the key-informants, are globally skilled and capable. Correspondingly, they are not dependent on job opportunities solely in the national labour market. If aspiring knowledge brokers consider they are unheard, or even worse, unappreciated, they may leave again (Zweig, 2006b). Alternatively, the literature has demonstrated that working in small clusters of like-minded people, is a critical coping strategy to counter resistance (Johnson and Lundvall, 2000). The respondents interviewed in this study shared these views. They found themselves drawn to working with others that also shared the international experience.

Correspondingly this mirrors similar patterns found in business studies. Amin and Cohendet (2004) found that new knowledge circulates much more quickly amongst communities of practice, before expanding into the greater society. Once the new knowledge is legitimated by a community of practice, it builds confidence in the idea and adaptation seems less risky. Hence, knowledge brokers are beneficial to the knowledge diffusion process. By understanding the coding schemes of two contexts, they help to expand boundaries and unite geographically removed regions (Wenger, 1998), while acting as key pipelines in the knowledge transfer process (Klagge and Klein-Hitpab, 2010).
The physical movement of people is critical to distributing this intangible know-how (Williams and Balaz, 2008). Likewise, international migration is a vehicle to acquire it. This study suggests that returning international Slovaks have the potential to also act as boundary spanning knowledge brokers, championing new knowledge, by physically embodying the new perspective. Through their confident voices, they can help to open the eyes, ears and minds of a people once sceptical (Williams, 2006). Yet international migrants, people that sometimes live in flux between multiple countries, are seldom appreciated for the knowledge brokers activities they enact (Williams and Balaz, 2008).

Policy Implications on Return Migrant Integration

Being global does not negate acting local (Clarke and Gaile, 1997). In fact, having personal knowledge of how both worlds operate is a great asset. Returnees understand how life works at home, in ways that would dumbfound an outsider. On the flipside, they have knowledge of a world beyond Slovakia which is an expertise that is lacking locally, but professionally critical in today’s globalized world.

The government and business sectors recognize that returnees have the potential to also act as advocates on behalf of Slovakia. Building on their international exposure, they can more easily identify gaps in the Slovak market, based on products and services that they experienced abroad and are not yet available locally. Secondly, they can help mediate opportunities for foreign investors, individuals and companies that need to gain familiarity and access to the Slovak market.

Finally, better prepared to execute jobs of an international nature, returning internationals can be a honey pot that will drive the innovation of tomorrow. The ICT MNCs already based in the country, demonstrate an increasing need for foreign language skills and communication abilities for their customer service roles and positions. However, those that come back with strategic knowledge have the potential to contribute to Slovak businesses that are looking to scale-up, therefore transition into global markets. Armed with international experience and contacts, as well as fluency in a foreign language, returning international Slovaks can help to bridge these transitions.

These knowledge transfers have the potential to transition beyond the confines of the firm or the industry, and spill over into the general society (Williams and Balaz, 2008). They help to empower other people through their own personal stories. Sharing with the locals their professional knowledge, but also their personal learning. Those that encountered a transformative experience abroad, developed a more open, integrated but also discerning meaning perspective, playing applying Mezirow’s transformative learning theory (1970). Therefore, they can help to disseminate this new mind-set, including the acquisition of soft skills, such as an expanded comfort-zone, enhanced communication and critical thinking abilities.

However, if diaspora is synonymous with a scattering of seeds, then repatriation signifies their re-sowing. Though the seeding process, they transfer their new-found knowledge and
invigoration to the benefit of the entire ecosystem (Saxenian, 2002). But, this transaction is incomplete without acceptance from the general public, therefore their fellow citizens. Furthermore, those Slovaks that have remained, which represent the greater majority of the country know the ins and outs of the country and have access to rich knowledge, specialized skill and elaborate social networks, that the returnees have been removed from.

Therefore, knowledge transfer is a dual stream mechanism, whereby both parties have to be sufficiently open to another and be willing to accept change. The returnees and/or knowledge brokers must understand that the transfer of knowledge from one context to another is not a copy and paste process (Yang et al., 2009). Likewise, the recipients must be open to the new knowledge and accept that they may be experiencing path dependency in their work processes and that there may be more effective methods and processes out there.

If returning international Slovaks are to cooperate and successfully engage in knowledge transfer with Slovaks that remained at home, a respect for their work, achievements and expertise must be extended. Likewise, the added-value that returnees bring back must be professional and socially recognized. The current push by the Slovak government and in particular the President’s office in support of creating a more dynamic and enterprising Slovakia, creates a unique platform to recognize and celebrate the contribution that returning international Slovaks can make.

Evidently, if the government and business sectors want to see more Slovak start-ups transition and go global, it is beneficial to have employees that understand the world beyond the borders of Slovakia. Based on the limitations of the Slovak education system and the social, economic, political and geographically isolation experienced under communism, international exposure and know-how is added-value to the Slovak labour market. However, not enough work is being done to bridge-build with the Slovak diaspora abroad and support the retuning population back home.

Currently, the grant scheme initiated by the Ministry of Education (summer 2015), in support of the return of Slovak professionals and exceptional students from abroad via remuneration packages is excellent, but just one of many steps that need to be taken. Currently, there is more propagation of Slovak migrant success stories in domestic media, including a popular radio show that has been recently expanded into a book publication that showcases international Slovak success stories. However, these focus on the outbound nature of the migration experience. The media is still shy with exploring the success stories of Slovaks that have returned.

However, the young but very prominent Slovak NGO LEAF and their Slovak Professionals Abroad program is very active with bridge building with the Slovak diaspora, in addition to organizing summer internship programs for Slovak students studying at top universities abroad. In addition to a number of activities, LEAF also organizes a very well received annual gathering which is the premier network working event for hand selected international Slovaks in addition to hand selected returnees, a total of 200 persons are invited to the Christmas do, that has been in full swing for the past several years.
In addition to the work done by the Ministry of Education and Slovak NGOs, such as LEAF and Teach for Slovakia, that seek to engage with, among others, also returned international Slovaks, through a ‘let’s make Slovakia better’ platform. It would be useful for the government to considering coordinating a campaign, that promotes ‘returnees’ success stories’. For example, the project could be spearheaded by SARIO, the Slovak Investment and Trade Agency, which is the primary government agency that deals with FDI and has also been allocated the responsibility of bridge-building and engaging with international Slovak professionals.

An agency such as SARIO has a legitimate and well respected platform, that is recognized by the business community and well received by international Slovaks. The ‘returnees’ success stories’ campaign could highlight the journeys of various international Slovaks that have come back and established success in Slovakia in their respective industries and professions. By highlight the success of the people that have already done it, that is positively integrated into the Slovak labour market, the government could empower those that have already returned to strive for more, in better applying their international know-how in the Slovak labour market. As well as encourage and inspire the return of international Slovaks still deciding whether if they should return home, and if they do, whether they will have an opportunity to apply their knowledge.

Reflections and Limitations
The most obvious constraint of this study is the elite nature of the migrant graduates. Once again, although this was not intended by the researcher, it manifested during the one year fieldwork interview process. The elite nature of the migrant respondent group, could be attributed to numerous factors as already discussed in the methodology chapter. Firstly, all respondents had to be university educated at the point of departure from Slovakia. They self-identified with leave the country, out of ‘choice’ rather than ‘hardship’ factor (Kurekova, 2011a).

Furthermore, they returned home with enhanced human capital, in some cases the returnees had augmented their education credentials by obtaining additional degrees from foreign universities. While others gathered professional experience in their industry and finally there were those that participated in low-skilled work, that did not reflect their skill base but nevertheless allowed them to participate in informal learning abroad. Overall, the international experience built on their formal education and training in Slovakia. For the most part, returnees were well received in the domestic labour market. Their chances of finding employment were also increased by the large and expanding MNCs ICT shared service sector, which were looking for employees with foreign language skills and cosmopolitan know-how.

Therefore, although the researcher did not set out to interview an elite sample of returned migrants, a combination of factors saw this bias emerge in the returnee respondents. This mostly pertained to the research criteria, the location of fieldwork process (the country capital) and the snowball selection method. Once in the field and conducting research interviews, the researcher then asked the study respondents to recommend other potential interviewees. As a result, successful returned migrants then recommend other persons from their social network. These were individuals that often-shared similar professional ambitions and had reached similar levels
of success. This pattern was particularly apparent with respondents from the government ministries.

Comparatively, the fact that this study was conducted in the capital city of Bratislava, was another limitation of the research. As the economic, social and cultural centre of the country, it represented the fastest and most dynamic region of the country. Bratislava housed the biggest cluster of Slovakia’s top universities, in addition to being hotbed for foreign MNCs including IBM, DELL, Lenovo, HP, Amazon and AT&T to name just a few. Correspondingly, Bratislava offers employers the highest concentration of qualified human capital in the country, as well as the lowest unemployment rate. It is for these reasons; this city was selected as the exclusive site for the fieldwork process.

Both the research criteria and fieldwork location contributed to the elite respondent bias. This had to do with the fact, that the researcher’s family comes from the capital city and as a result, she was also able to secure cheap housing and emotional support from her relations during the entire fieldwork process. In addition to gaining access to local contacts through family connections, her blood relations also helped to vouch for her identity in Slovakia, as a native, in addition to legitimating her status as a researcher in the eyes of the respondents. Secondly, it was more convenient for the researcher to conduct her fieldwork in Bratislava, for the reasons listed above. The capital of Slovakia, was also the prime destination for returning international Slovaks, given the development of the city vis a vis the rest of the country. Slovakia, as noted in the context chapter is a product of vast regional and economic disparities, even in comparison to the other Visegrad countries. Therefore, Bratislava was also the prime destination for return migrants for employment, but also quality of life reasons, given the fact that it is the country’s only cosmopolitan metropole.

Once again, as discussed earlier in the thesis the respondents were heavily selected from the elite end of the skilled migrant spectrum. This was due to the research criteria as all migrant respondents had to have graduated from Slovakia with a university degree (most commonly a minimum of a master’s level qualification was obtained by the majority) prior to their departure abroad. Therefore, compared to the general education level of society, these migrants were already on the more elite end of the cultural capital spectrum. This social capital was mostly further increased as a result of their international migration experience, whereby more social, and in some cases cultural capital in the form of additional academic credentials, was achieved while living, working and studying abroad (Bahna, 2017). Klagge & Klein-Hitpab (2010) also observed a similar dynamic, particular in regards to Polish returnees to metropolitan areas. Furthermore, the researcher observed that skilled and successful skilled migrants were also more willing to be interviewed, in comparison to those that had experienced more hardship in their domestic labour market re-integration. By employing the snowball interview method, this success rate was perpetuated, as successful skilled migrants recommend additional respondents to pool from, these individuals and acquaintances had similar elite migrant profiles.
At the same time, it is important to also point out that the half of the returnee research respondents were not originally from the capital. Many had migrated there as part of their university studies, living in one of the many university student dorms sprinkled across the city. Once their education was completed, they decided to migrate to another EU-15 country. Upon return, they choose Bratislava as their primer destination because of the job opportunities but also because of its cosmopolitan environment in comparison to the other regions of the country.

Correspondingly, many of the key-informants from the business, government and society sectors had international migration experience. Many had studied, lived or worked abroad. The fact, that they shared commonality with returning international Slovaks may have influenced their opinions and objectivity of the value of international exposure in the Slovakia context. Once again, as already stated in the methodology chapter, the researcher did not seek out key-informants with international migration experience. The fact, that they had this biography was normal to an extent, considering the seniority and high profile nature of their job positions. But, it also was a factor that may have encouraged them to want to participate in this study.

Another limitation could be observed in reference to the business sector. The greater majority of respondents were managers of multinational corporations operating in Slovakia. These companies all catered to an international consumer base, and therefore could have influenced their opinions as to the value of the international migration experience, and the skills and knowledge returnees bring back with them. The fact that local businesses were not as represented in this study, was attributed to their lack of interest in participating in the study. Severally exclusively Slovak midsized firms were approached, but they declined the interview.

Although a gender balance was achieved among the 30 returned migrant respondents, gender was not the focus of this research. This was due to the already considerable scope of the study analysis, including four respondent groups, three of which did not achieve a gender balance. At the same time, the researcher acknowledges that gender is likely to be important in shaping the experiences of returned migrants and it is something that could be addressed in future research. This would be alongside other themes, such as the importance of the destination country abroad, as well as the exact timing of the migration experience vis a vis the migrant’s life cycle, and the stage of their career development upon return.

Finally, the researcher’s personal biography could have influenced the interview process. She is a Slovak-Canadian, whom although fluent in Slovak, does not share the same social upbringing to those she interviewed. Although born behind the Iron Curtain, like the majority of the respondents interviewed, she did not grow up in the post-communist context. Rather, the researcher was raised in the ‘west’ having received her primary, secondary and tertiary education in Canada, the United States and the Netherlands. Although remain close to her native country and frequently visited, she returned to Slovakia exclusively to conduct her one year fieldwork process.
Having a hybrid-identity of a simultaneous insider and outsider proved advantageous is some cases and a liability in others. Overall, she believes that being both Slovak and Canadian was her greatest asset as it opened doors that would have conventionally remained closed to her, given Slovakia’s tight knit social networks, which she was not privy too. Being a quasi-outsider, whom could speak fluent Slovak and was studying the Slovak diaspora and its implications on knowledge transfer into the country, peaked many interests and proved beneficial to gaining contacts and access to respondents.

Future Research Directions
The study explored knowledge transfer a post-communist transition economy made possible as result of the tenet of freedom in a unified one-border Europe. The perspectives of the return migrants were compared to the voices of key-informants from business, government and society. Akin to a case study, the implications of these knowledge flows, made possible first and foremost through the complete migration cycle of departure and return, were studied in the Slovakian context.

It would therefore be very interesting to roll out similar studies across the former Soviet-bloc countries now in the European Union. To examine whether and to what extent similar experiences can also be observed, in terms of the value of learning through migration and the added value of this knowledge upon return. A comparative study would allow these differences and similarities to be mapped out. In addition to addressing a gap in migration research on the significance of learning through the migration experience. As well as exploring migration as a vehicle for knowledge acquisition in the form of hard and soft skills. Lastly, how return migration flows contribute to knowledge transfer from mature to emerging market economies, and if they may enhance the domestic labour market and help to leap-frog development in general.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to apply this research framework outside of the Eastern bloc context and thereby make cross-geographical and socio-historical comparisons with other developing regions, such as India, Taiwan and China. Notably, there could be stark differences between the ways ‘Eastern Europeans’ and ‘Asians’ integrate newly acquired western knowledge as a result of the complete migration cycle. This would encourage researchers to better understand what environments and economic initiatives work best in maximizing the knowledge, return migrants bring back to their source country.

Of course, the gender aspects and the differences between male and female return migrants would produce interesting insights, opening up a discussion of how the gender disequilibrium effects or does not affect the reintegration experience of international Slovaks.

Although such a wide-scale geopolitical comparison between different emerging economies and the West would be time and resource consuming, the researcher looks forward to other similar studies being conducted in the future. In addition, to more attention and research being conducted on international migration and learning, including formal and informal learning as well as professional and personal development.
Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

This study strived to make a contribution to academic knowledge by addressing the five research aims discussed above, in addition to significant theoretical and empirical contributions, including new theory building. This thesis explored, mapped and blended varying theories on learning, knowledge and knowledge transfer in the context of migration and return. Secondly the researcher made theoretical connections between the management literature on knowledge transfer into organizations, with studies that focused on individual learning and knowledge transfer in migration. Yet, the most significant theoretical contribution was made by applying adult learning theories from the field of psychology, namely transformative learning theory, to the migration context. By comparing the migration experience to a disorienting dilemma, the researcher was able to demonstrate how corporeal mobility across contexts may be a trigger for reflective and profound learning, resulting in a new - more open, discerning but also integrative meaning perspective.

The empirical contributions of the research were as important as the theoretical, particularly in regards to the historical context of the region. The 2004 EU accession was a pivotal departure point from the Cold War and the ideological, political and geographical division of Europe into East and West. Over a decade after the establishment of an enlarged and united democratic Europe, which witnessed a large East to West exodus. Return migration back into Eastern Europe has been gaining increasing academic attention. However, knowledge gaps persist due to the newness of the phenomenon. This study explored the novelty and significance of knowledge transfers via return (and circular) migration, although there have been earlier studies conducted on returned migrants (Balaz and Williams, 2004) in the region. Scholars have observed that Slovakia’s accession to the European Union was a game changer in terms of access to migration and subsequently also return. Correspondingly, studies conducted in the different institutional context of the pre-European Union, did not consider the role of the firm vis a vis return migration.

At present, there is a gap in the migration literature when it comes to addressing this phenomenon, which includes addressing the perspectives of firm management and their openness and receptivity towards returning international migrants. This study addressed this gap. It did so by comparing the perceptions of migrants to those of managers and vice versa. This study therefore contributed to a better understanding of how return migrants’ knowledge is valued and received by the firm, in an increasingly globalizing environment. To date, this study is one of, and possibly, the first attempt to link studies of managers and migrants through qualitative analysis. However, in addition to the perspectives of the business sector, this study went further by incorporating the perspective of two more key-informant groups; these were the government and civil society sectors. This further enriched the analysis of how the phenomenon of out migration and return has the potential to contribute to accelerated learning and knowledge transfer into an emerging, post-communist transition economy.
This research advanced the field of migration studies, by helping to better understand how corporeal mobility across socio-economic and national contexts affects learning at the level of the individual. This study simultaneously addressed the value that individual migrants place on their learning and knowledge acquisition abroad. By exploring how the outbound experience contributed to their professional and personal self-development, the study suggested that migration can contribute to the acquisition of hard, but more importantly soft-skills and their transfer back home. The latter being particularly significant, due to the fact that such competencies were/are in short supply in a transitioning post-communist Central Eastern Europe.
Appendix 1: 
Interview schedule

Returned Migrants

A) Motivations for Migration (Pre-Migration)

1. When did you make the decision to emigrate?
   - Age?
   - Education status (after completing, or during university)?
   - Was this an individual or family-led decision?

2. If you could sum it up, what was your dominant reason for going abroad?
   - Was it for positive reasons (pulled out)?
     - Ex) What factors attracted you to live abroad (job, education, love, money, adventure, new experiences, learning, independence)?
   - Or, for negative reasons (pushed out)?
     - Ex) What factors encouraged you to seek opportunity outside of Slovakia (lack of opportunity at home, low wages, no jobs, low quality of life, money, and lack of housing?)
   - Did learning and the acquisition of knowledge play an important motive in your decision to migrate (did you go abroad to learn something new – were you conscious of this motive)?

3. How did you select where to go? What country, and why?
   - Did language play a factor in the decision?
   - Did you move abroad; to acquire that language?
   - Why was that foreign language important to you?
   - Initially, did you intend your migration to be short-term, long-term, or permanent?

B) Life Abroad (During Migration)

4. Were you employed abroad?
   - In what type of employment?
   - Was it related to your education, training and experience?
   - Were you satisfied with your position? Job status?
○ Did you experience any career growth? Upward mobility?
○ Do you feel you have enhanced your career prospects through your migration experience?

5. What are some positive assessments of life abroad?

○ Is it social, financial, or learning related?
○ Is the notion of independence a part of it (self-realization away from the influence of family)?
○ What about freedom (did you experience your migration as an expression of freedom; the freedom to move; to freedom to ‘up and go’; the freedom to grow away from the confines of one’s family and native society [status-quo]?)
○ How have these experiences affected you (emotionally)?

6. What are some negative assessments of life abroad?

○ How did you identify as a migrant?
○ What about as a foreigner?
○ Where you ever discriminated against?
○ How did this change your understanding of race, class and nationality?
○ Do you find there is a stigma (negative image) to being Eastern European? How about specifically being Slovakian?
○ Do you think this stigmatization has increased, or decreased since joining the EU in 2004?
○ How do you believe East European EU-8 movers compare to the traditional West European EU-15 movers working and traveling in Western Europe?
○ Do you identify as Eastern European? Central European? European citizen?
○ How has this identification changed after migration (did you ever think about this identification, and its significance before migration)?
○ Finally, how did these experiences affect you (emotionally)?

C) Learning and Knowledge Acquisition through Migration

7. Did learning (and knowledge acquisition) play an important role in the migration experience?

○ What role does formal (school) and informal (life) learning play in the migration experience?
○ Or, is the significance of this learning realized later (once abroad), through first-hand learning encounters?
○ Or, in retrospect upon return (back in Slovakia)?
○ Can you give me some examples of formal learning (classes, workshops, school)?
○ And informal learning you gained while abroad (job, friends, errands)?
○ How is this learning different, from if you remained at home?

8. Does migration contribute to new skill acquisition? What about new knowledge acquisition?

○ Is the value of learning and knowledge realized prior to the migration experience, or in retrospect?
○ What knowledge did you gain that you did not have before migration, how can you describe that knowledge?
○ Are these technical knowledge gains (skills, degrees and certificates)?
○ What about practical (tacit) gains (learning about new processes; working in a different way)?
○ What about competencies (communication skills; inter-cultural communication; problem solving)?
○ Are these new skills, and knowledge, better received abroad (in the context they were acquired), or in Slovakia (novelty effect)?
○ Where do you think they have the most value?

9. How has the migration experience, shaped, enhanced or transformed your life?

○ How has this experience caused you to reflect?
○ On your life abroad?
○ On your life in Slovakia?
○ Can you give me some example?
  (Probe for Mezirow’s typology of reflection: content reflection - what, process reflection - how, and premise reflection - why)
○ How has it changed your perspectives, world outlook?
○ Do you view life differently?
○ How has it changed your self-perception, self-concept?
○ How do you view yourself after migration; how was your self-perception different before migration (in Slovakia)?
○ Do you feel that you have learned to think more critically because of it?
○ How do you think more critically; can you give me some examples?

10. How has the migration experience contributed to your sense of empowerment?

○ Has migration empowered you in any way?
○ Conversely, how has the migration experience disempowered you; how has it been detrimental to your self-concept (self-worth)?
○ How has it affected your identity (who you are; who you want to be; and who you
don’t want to be)?
○ What about your self-acceptance, do you find you are more accepting of yourself? What about others?
○ Do you find that you think more independently (guidance from within) as a result?
○ Or, are you more sensitive to the ways others perceive you (aware of judgment; stigma; discrimination)?
○ How do you feel about the status quo after migration?
○ How do you relate to it; how do you not?

D) The Return Experience (After Migration)

11. What motivated you to return? What are some of the positive and negative assessments of life at home (Slovakia)?

○ What are the circumstances that have attracted your decision to come back (opportunity, family, friends, love)?
○ What were the circumstances that originally deterred your decision to come back (lack of opportunity, low-quality of life, money)?
○ Was the return decision based on positive or negative reasons (push, or pull)?
○ Did you feel an obligation to take back what you learned from abroad?
○ What did you want to do with this knowledge?
○ Did you return to create change?
○ Or, were you tired of living as a foreigner (migrant) abroad – did your migration experience contribute to your desire to come home (live in your native culture)?
○ Was your return an individual or family-led decision?

12. How did you transition back into the Slovak workforce?

○ Upon return, are you employed in job that is related to your qualifications and experience?
○ Are satisfied with your employment outcomes?
○ What about your income/ salary?
○ Do you feel you are compensated for you foreign experience (language, know-how, skills)?
○ Do you find that your international experiences are socially recognized?
○ Do you feel positive about your career potential (opportunity for career growth) in Slovakia?
○ Is there an escalator effect between spatial mobility (working abroad) and
social mobility (status)?
○ Has this (positive correlation) been your experience?

13. What are the barriers or facilitators to the knowledge transfer process?

○ How is your new knowledge being utilized upon return? How is it not?
○ Is this knowledge well received in Slovakia?
○ Are your Slovak colleagues eager to learn from you?
○ Or, do they dismiss your suggestions (not appropriate for the Slovak context)?
○ What about the organization (firm) context?
○ Are there differences in reception across companies: national (Slovak) and multinational; what about public and private sectors?
○ Do they feel that your skills and knowledge have a higher value at home, or abroad?

E) Reflections and Future Aspirations

14. Overall, what are the benefits of living and working at home? In comparison to living and working abroad? What are the pros and cons to a national vs. international lifestyle?

○ What do you miss most about living internationally?
  ○ Ex) Freedom, anonymity, higher wages, easier life, development, independence, cosmopolitan lifestyle; being challenged; new learning and knowledge acquisition?
○ What are some of the advantages of staying behind in a post-EU accession environment?
  ○ Ex) Greater career opportunity at home; more upward mobility; no glass ceiling; family, friends, relationships, love; psychological stability: living with one’s own ethnic group, understanding the culture - where people are coming from; functioning in your native language?

15. What were the critical contributors to your positive settlement upon return?

○ What were some of the effects that hampered your re-integration process?
○ What helped facilitate it (programs, outreach, and migrant support networks)?
○ What could the government do to make the conditions more favourable for return migrants?
○ Finally, after returning to Slovakia, do you intend to re-migrate again?
○ If so, are you considering returning to your previous country of residence, or moving to a third country location?
○ Do you intend to migrate to Europe; or beyond?
16. How has the migration experience changed your perceptions of Slovakia?

- How do you perceive your opportunity structure in Slovakia?
- How has the migration experience changed your perceptions; how did you perceive it before migration?
- Do you have higher expectations as a result?
- How are your expectations different from your friends (non-migrants)?
- Do you think that returned migrants, in general, have higher expectations from life in Slovakia, than stayers (those that have never left the country)?
- Or, are you more positive about Slovakia; do you see the advantages of life at home more clearly?
- How are you more critical of the country?
- How do you challenge some of the status quo (norms, practices and hierarchy) that you are critical about?
- Do you find that returned migrants are more willing to challenge some of these established practices, more so than stayers (non-migrants)?

17. Overall, do you find that human mobility (such as your own migration experience) is a conduit for knowledge transfer between Eastern and Western Europe?

- What does Slovakia gain by the return of Slovak migrants (back home)?
- Conversely, what does the West gain, by the presence of Eastern European migrants in Western European labour markets?
- Does spatial mobility (East to West migration and return) contribute to the upgrading of the Slovak workforce, via the influx of new knowledge and skills (brain-training; brain-gain)?

18. Judging from your own migration experience - which one of the following conceptualizations best describes the cost and benefits of migration as a result of East to West labour flows (and return), following Slovakia’s Accession to the European Union in 2004:

- Brain Drain: Is Slovakia being drained of its most talented human capital, which is migrating permanently to the West (people seldom return to outweigh the costs of this human capital loss)?

- Brain Overflow: Are the young graduates leaving the country because of job-market over-saturation? No more opportunities in certain sectors (i.e. architecture; too many architects, not enough jobs for them)?

- Brain Circulation: Do you think the framework of the European Union is helping to circulate brains, through work opportunities out West and then mutual
opportunities back home, to the benefit of Slovakia and the West?

○ Brain Gain: Do you think that return migration is contributing to brain gain in Slovakia? Are migrants returning with enhanced abilities, in terms of new knowledge, networks and skills?

○ Brain Waste (Abroad): Are high-skilled Slovak migrants de-skilled; and tracked into low-skilled jobs and employment sectors abroad?

○ Brain Waste (at Home): What about upon return to Slovakia? Are their foreign skills and experience ignored; do their career gaps (working in low-skilled jobs abroad) make re-integration into the local workforce difficult; are they also de-skilled at home, and forced into un-skilled employment options?

19. Is there anything else you feel is important, that I have not yet included in this interview, and that you would like to add?
Appendix 2:
Interview schedule
Key-Informants:
Business Sector

1. As a potential employer, what are you looking for in an employee?
   - Please describe a ‘model’ employee?
     - Ex) age, gender, education, experience and skill level?
   - Are foreign language skills important?
   - What about international experience?

2. From your experience, what do return migrants offer, and is knowledge a contribution factor?
   - Have you employed any returned migrants?
   - What do return migrants contribute to your firm?
   - Is knowledge a factor; to what extent do returned migrants bring back new and different types of knowledge?
   - How do these skills, knowledge, and experiences compare with those of your non-migrant (stayer) employees?
     - In what ways are they different, in what ways are they the same, and in what ways are they inferior?
   - Is returnee knowledge still relevant?
     - Or, do you find that the knowledge gap (across socio-economic contexts) is shrinking as a result of globalization, travel and technology?
   - What about in terms of non-cognitive - affective abilities (self-confidence, communication abilities, inter-cultural awareness)?
     - In what ways are they different, in what ways are they the same, and in what ways are they inferior to stayers?

3. If returnees are bringing back new forms of knowledge (language, skills, competencies, networks), how are these received and harvested by your organization?
   - To what extent does return migration contribute to enhancing the knowledge and skill base of your company?
   - To what extent does it contribute to knowledge diversity?
   - To what extent does it contribute to innovation and creativity?
   - What barriers or facilitators are encountered in such knowledge transfers?
     - Language, culture, socio-economic (works in one system [country], but not the other?)
   - Does your organization mobilize any efforts to help harness the skill and expertise?
of returnees?
   ○ Research and Development (R&D) Programs, training sessions, brain
     storming, team meetings?
   ○ Could you provide me some direct examples of how your company has made
     arrangements in an effort to better extract and utilize returnee knowledge and/
     or suggestions?

4. What are some of the challenges you have encountered with returned migrants?
   ○ Does their lack of local (Slovak) experience negatively affect their chances at
     finding employment in Slovakia?
   ○ What about in terms of ‘career gaps’ (i.e. employed in unskilled, semi-skilled
     positions abroad as a result of migration)?
   ○ In comparison, are stayer career trajectories more traditional (begun their careers
     immediately after graduation), and thus easier to integrate into a relevant
     position within your firm?
   ○ Do returnees over-value their foreign knowledge and skills?
   ○ In reality, is their knowledge lacking in relevance (i.e. they have knowledge about
     serving coffee or cleaning hotel beds)?
   ○ Finally, do returnees have exceedingly high expectations (salary; career
     opportunity; work)?
   ○ How are these expectations unrealistic?
   ○ Are they difficult to integrate with your non-migrant (stayer) employees?
   ○ Are returnees’ team players or more individualists in nature? Is this a result of
     their migration experience?

5. Overall, do you find that human mobility (spatial mobility) is a conduit for knowledge
   transfer between Eastern and Western Europe?
   ○ What does Slovakia gain by the return of Slovak migrants (back home)?
   ○ Conversely, what does the West gain, by the presence of Eastern European
     migrants in Western European labour markets?
   ○ Does spatial mobility (East to West migration and return) contribute to the
     upgrading of the Slovak workforce, via the influx of new knowledge and skills
     (brain-training; brain-gain)?

6. Judging from your professional experience - which one of the following
   conceptualizations best describes the cost and benefits of migration as a result of East to
   West labour flows (and return), following Slovakia’s Accession to the European Union in
   2004:
   ○ Brain Drain: Is Slovakia being drained of its most talented human capital, which is
migrating permanently to the West (people seldom return to outweigh the costs of this human capital loss)?

○ Brain Overflow: Are the young graduates leaving the country because of job-market over-saturation? No more opportunities in certain sectors (i.e. architecture; too many architects, not enough jobs for them)?

○ Brain Circulation: Do you think the framework of the European Union is helping to circulate brains, through work opportunities out West and then mutual opportunities back home, to the benefit of Slovakia and the West?

○ Brain Gain: Do you think that return migration is contributing to brain gain in Slovakia? Are migrants returning with enhanced abilities, in terms of new knowledge, networks and skills?

○ Brain Waste (Abroad): Are high-skilled Slovak migrants de-skilled; and tracked into low-skilled jobs and employment sectors abroad?

○ Brain Waste (at Home): What about upon return to Slovakia? Are their foreign skills and experience ignored; do their career gaps (working in low-skilled jobs abroad) make re-integration into the local workforce difficult; are they also de-skilled at home, and forced into un-skilled employment options?

7. Is there anything else you feel is important, that I have not yet included in this interview and that you would like to add?
Appendix 3
Interview schedule
Key-Informants:
Government and Civil Society Sectors

1. How do you view Slovaks that have emigrated abroad (post-2004 EU accession)?
   - Pros and cons of emigration
   - Perceptions, reflections and social stereotypes
   - (i.e. are they...defectors; not brave enough to stay; migration is taking the easy-way out; de-skilled abroad; young adventurers; the ones that had the courage to leave; going abroad in search of opportunity; leaving in order to learn and grow)?

2. How do you view those that have since returned to Slovakia (post-accession returned migrants)?
   - Pros and cons of return migration
   - Perceptions, reflections and social stereotypes
   - (i.e. are they...returns for failure; career gaps as a result of being deskilled abroad; unrealistic expectations of life in Slovakia; potential positive contributors to Slovak society; money, knowledge and networks)?

3. What is the significance of the post-accession return migration wave (East to West/ West to East)?
   - Is return migration a novel (new) phenomenon in Slovak society?
   - How about in reference to the country’s recent communist history?
   - Is return migration happening on a large scale (critical mass)?
   - Are these numbers increasing?
   - Are returned migrants visible in Slovak society (media)?
   - Is return – like emigration (departure), becoming the new social norm (a ‘given’, or fact of life)?
   - (i.e. most post-accession Slovaks- go abroad at some point in their youth, and subsequently come back; this is the normative cycle)

4. In what ways do returnees contribute to Slovak society?
   - What are the effects of return migration in Slovakia?
   - Is this impact positive or negative?
   - What do return migrants contribute to the Slovak labour force?
   - Is this impact positive or negative?
   - In what ways are returned migrants different from non-migrant Slovak stayers?
   - In what ways are they the same, and in what ways are they inferior?
5. Does the migration experience contribute to new learning and knowledge acquisition?

- Is migration a vehicle for learning?
- Do migrants acquire new knowledge and skills abroad?
- How does this learning contribute to their self-development?
- Are migrants changed (transformed) by their migration experience?

6. To what extent, do returned migrants bring back new and different types of knowledge?

- Is this knowledge technical, practical, or something else (cognitive and non-cognitive growth)?
- Are returnees different in their emotional capacity?
- (i.e. self-awareness, self-expression, self-confidence)?
- To what extent does return migration contribute to knowledge diversity in Slovakia?
- To what extent does it contribute to innovation and creativity?
- Or, is returnee knowledge lacking in novelty and relevance?
- Do you find that the knowledge gap (across socio-economic contexts) is shrinking as a result of globalization, travel and technology?

7. Is this knowledge transferable across socio-economic contexts (from Western Europe to Slovakia)?

- What are the barriers and facilitators to the knowledge transfer process?
- Are these barriers institutional (Slovak government), individual (Slovak people), or both?
- What about in reference to the firm; are Slovak companies able to absorb and utilize this incoming ‘new’ knowledge?
- Or, are knowledge gaps across East and West still too large (different levels of economic development) to make use of it?
- Is knowledge tied to social context, it is only useful where it was acquired?

8. What are some of the challenges that returnees encounter upon return to Slovakia?

- Are these social, cultural, or bureaucratic (i.e. social networks have dried up; culture-shock, difficulties re-transitioning into the state organs: health-care, taxes, housing)?
- Do return migrants encounter discrimination?
- What about jealousy?
- Are they blocked out of opportunities because of it?
- Does their lack of local (Slovak) labour force experience negatively affect their chances at finding employment?
- What about in terms of career gaps (i.e. unskilled employment abroad)?
○ Or, do return migrants have exceedingly high expectations?
○ How are their aspirations unrealistic?
○ Are they out of touch with Slovak social norms and every day realities?
○ Do they think far too highly of their foreign experience?

9. Overall, do you find that human mobility (spatial mobility) is a conduit for knowledge transfer between Eastern and Western Europe?

○ What does Slovakia gain by the return of Slovak migrants (back home)?
○ Conversely, what does the West gain, by the presence of Eastern European migrants in Western European labour markets?
○ Does spatial mobility (East to West migration and return) contribute to the upgrading of the Slovak workforce, via the influx of new knowledge and skills (brain-training; brain-gain)?

10. Which one of the following conceptualizations best describes the cost and benefits of migration as a result of East to West labour flows (and return), following Slovakia’s Accession to the European Union in 2004:

○ Brain Drain: Is Slovakia being drained of its most talented human capital, which is migrating permanently to the West (people seldom return to outweigh the costs of this human capital loss)?

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○ Brain Circulation: Do you think the framework of the European Union is helping to circulate brains, through work opportunities out West and then mutual opportunities back home, to the benefit of Slovakia and the West?

○ Brain Gain: Do you think that return migration is contributing to brain gain in Slovakia? Are migrants returning with enhanced abilities, in terms of new knowledge, networks and skills?

○ Brain Waste (Abroad): Are high-skilled Slovak migrants de-skilled; and tracked into low-skilled jobs and employment sectors abroad?

○ Brain Waste (at Home): What about upon return to Slovakia? Are their foreign skills and experience ignored; do their career gaps (working in low-skilled jobs abroad) make re-integration into the local workforce difficult; are they also de-skilled at home, and forced into un-skilled employment options?
11. Is there anything else you feel is important, that I have not yet included in this interview, and that you would like to add?
Appendix 4: 
Returned Migrant Interview

Q: Okay, so, ready?
A: Yeah!

Q: So, when did you make the decision to immigrate from Slovakia? To leave?
A: The interesting thing is that it happened somewhere in winter 2004/2005 and it was because my partner at a time, actually my wife, we were married back then, wanted to study Ayurveda and there were a few possibilities here. So we decided to go there (U.K) and it all actually happened very fast because we always made decisions about those kinds of things very fast. So we decided immediately (to go), and since we knew some people there, they helped us to arrange exactly those things that are usually difficult from the beginning like housing and so on.

Q: And can you tell me what was your experience when you were there... for how long had you been there? You told me 5 years.
A: Yes (5 years in the U.K).

Q: Can you tell me about your experience, what did you do there, what you told me about it yesterday.
A: Well, every year was very specific and interesting in its own way; because there were so many experiences, because I perceive life as something based on experiences. For me it was in a certain way cultural shock, of course, as well as lots of other things...I met migrants with various nationalities, people from Pakistan, India, with a completely different mentality to me. Then with the English, and Britons from various parts of GB - and everybody had their own mentality, so it was very interesting. For me it was super shocking how evident is what I call it a caste, class system in Britain. It was very interesting for me to realize that. And I was interested in details, for example in...how many accents there are.

In general, I wanted to separate myself from the beginning, what is the opposite of what the majority of Slovak people- who live in some Slovak, Czech or Polish community. This is exactly what I was trying to avoid. I was trying to spend as much time as possible with The English, which was interesting for me...just the beginning was super hard. When we came there, we had money, but, of course, it was at a time when the rate of exchange of a pound and Slovak currency was insane (asymmetrical) and of course it was at a time when Slovak economy was awfully down in comparison with western Europe, and what was considered to be great salary here- didn’t equal to welfare in Britain, so even if we had let’s say- cool money, we spent it in our first two months in the UK. So one of the first things we were trying to figure out was school and earning money to survive, you know, so that was the first thing, I don’t know if you’re interested in this.

Q: You mean school for her. Or for you, too?
A: Her. Not me. Well, I wanted to learn English. Because I was learning English at high school, but, of course – at the time, that was annoying for me. Back in those days I was more into music and
beer. I mean, I knew some basics, but I knew that I need to learn more. So, I signed up at a language school in London. But, there I learned what is the difference in quality; what is quality, and what is- as I called it- touristic quality. So those were exactly the details, that I needed to understand, the mentality, how business works in London. And these are exactly the situations, where you learn them. For example, it was totally insane for me, the whole system built on references- that works in Britain. That you must outwit the system to be able to join it at all... So the thing is that to work...you need a bank account. Whatever, actually, to have an apartment, you need a bank account, you need the proof of address, yeah? And now... friends told me you cannot have the proof of address, when you cannot rent an apartment - without having a bank account. So it’s kind of a vicious circle. And these are exactly those practical things, you need to figure out. So my friends told me the short-cut, to send my driving licence, and receive an English driving licence- with an address you gave them. So I needed to do that. Secondly, you need to make friends with people, who are willing to give you their address – so that your name can be written on a bill. But, of course you need to wait, so that it could be sent there. But, then again, we had an advantage...because we had money in cash, and when I opened a bank account, I put all my money there, and then I was immediately offered very good conditions. For example, I was immediately given a credit card with minus 3,000 pounds (3,000 grand credit). This helped me a lot during that first year, because it helped me to survive when I was unemployed.

Q: Can I ask? Tell me more about the job. You graduated from university
A: Actually I studied at cinematography school...but what was interesting is how it went with my job.
That is exactly what is so interesting about the „Slovak mentality‘. I came into contact with it abroad, because at home, I couldn’t really see it (so clearly). I learned that people with a good education, do not have the confidence ...or back then they didn’t- I think it got a little bit better, but not remarkably...that Slovak people, even those who graduated from university, are willing to do low-skilled jobs- that they would never do here. But, they do it abroad.

Q: Yeah, tell me why?
A: I think it’s the mentality...it has something to do with confidence.

Q: Self-worth?
A: Exactly (self-worth). And it’s exactly the thing that... well, there is several aspects. One is the cultural aspect. Imagine that for 40 years, or more, because this was the case even before... Slovaks weren’t led to be confident, to be able to present themselves, to defend their rights. And it was always a political issue. So back then when it was a „peasant system‘ here...the Austrian-Hungary empire was the last country to change the system. In Europe. I believe Russians were the last, but Austria-Hungary and Russia were the last countries to change the feudal system.

Q: When was it?
A: 1800 and something...I don’t know. It was after those great revolutions but they must have been the last, it can be found on the internet.
Q: Like feudal system.
A: Exactly. So they were the last to change, and before then- people weren’t free. So we were one of the last countries in Europe to abolish servitude. And that’s the first thing. The second thing, was the catastrophic education system. Again, Austria-Hungary had one of the worst education systems, along with Russia, in Europe.

Q: And why do you think it was like this?
A: Well, because the education system... it’s simple. It’s simple because, the ruling class needs people to be uneducated to rule them, you know. And when you imagine that Slovakia was, especially Slovakia...you can see the difference between Czechs and Slovaks. The Czechs were ruled by the Germans and you can see it. The Germans actually always had the Prussian education system. They knew that education is ‘alfa-omega’- that science is ‘alpha-omega’ for society. And so, they simply always financed education and science. For this reason, Germans are so significant, their technology and everything.
However, Slovakia was a part of Hungary (in the Austrian-Hungarian empire). And Hungarians never had... actually, it’s not true, because Hungarians have many laureates of the Nobel prize, right? But of course it’s a big different to be ruled by Germans, then to be ruled by Hungarians.

Q: Of course.
A: And it showed up easily. We can see it in Africa that countries that were governed by Britain, they built roads, railroads. They brought industry and bureaucracy. Moreover, those countries that are successful in Africa, are exactly those countries that used to be British colonies. But former colonies of Portugal and France for example, those are exactly the countries where wars are going on, and situation is really bad.

So you see, every country has a different mentality and brings this mentality to a country it occupies. I’m not saying it´ a good thing but it´s interesting to watch, and this is exactly what the problem of Slovakia is. On one hand, the Czechs were governed by Germans. For example, they even had their national revival in 18th century, and we (Slovaks) did not. So the Czechs, along with all other European countries began developing a national identity in the 18th and 19th century. Just like Britain and France did a little earlier. All these European countries experienced a great surge in national consciousness in 18th, 19th century. This resulted in pride in national identity, developing a national culture and language, building in general such as building of national theatres etc.

However, this was not the case in Slovakia. When you look back into past, you see that people who cared about the survival of the culture, like Štúr and his supporters, they were struggling with two major problems. Problem A, was a huge religious conflict in the country. It means that they themselves were Protestants, however the majority of the country was Catholic, and fervently so. Secondly (Problem B), is that majority of the Slovak population had no education. Finally there was the widespread alcoholism.

I mean, it is the same problem that was in Northern Ireland, Britain...and everywhere. Alcoholism is a problem related to poverty. Every poor country, has had the same problem. It doesn’t matter
if it was in Ireland, or in the north...The Norwegians or the Swedish, they had to struggle with alcoholism also- until they became rich.

Now remember, that in addition to the alcoholism, Slovak society was super under-educated. However, the biggest difference between Slovakia and Britain... and all big countries as well, was that the major bringers of knowledge and culture where mostly- the rulers, the aristocracy. This was because, they could afford to hire the scientists, artists, philosophers, etc. to develop their knowledge... and this was absent in Slovakia.

Q: There was no noble class?
A: There was a noble class, but they did not consider themselves to be Slovaks. They considered themselves... they spoke mostly German, so they considered themselves to be Germans or Hungarians and therefore they never cared of serfs, not as much as the noble class did in Britain, they did not have any desire to help them. But, I don’t know, this should be verified, but that is a general feeling ...but, I am no historian, so this is just popular knowledge, it should be verified to what extent it’s true.

Q: Can you tell me more examples of how Slovaks have low self-worth?
A: Well, that is (low self-worth) exactly what is most typical for us.
Okay, now imagine, during World War I- the peasant system changed to capitalism overnight. For a short period, Slovakia became a Fascist state (a puppet state for Hitler), where people started to kind of look around....and then suddenly boom, Communism.

So for next 40 years, people lived in a state of fear. It was the same kind of fear that had existed before, during the feudal era. People once again learned not to speak up, not to speak their minds, since they knew that a punishment would follow. The Slovak people were afraid.
Plus, Slovaks have this strange mentality: they DO NOT believe that they are responsible for their own life. They don’t believe in it. You can see this, in terms of how successful all those reality shows are here. They are all based on the factor of, ‘coincidence’, ‘luck’, and ‘belief in God’. They think these factors will help them. And so they rely on some kind of higher law. That they need some good fortune, or God, or destiny to be successful, rich and happy. They believe, if somebody is rich, it must have been because of their ‘good luck’.

They do not believe in the Germanic principle- that happiness is something you can take. This is the belief, most people in Western countries share. They believe that if you work hard, finish school, work hard some more, follow the rules, you can achieve something – that it is attainable.

For example, I believe that I can- just by means of my attitude and hard work- become successful. However, few people in Slovakia share this belief – or, have this attitude. It is mostly found with the people who went abroad...and they learned it there (outside of Slovakia).

Q: But how?
A: But actually almost everyone who went abroad, went there shaking in their shoes. This is one
of ours national features that should be seriously studied, but I think it hasn’t been so far.

Q: I want to study this.
A: And when you look at it, you see that that’s how people are brought up. Now imagine that a regular family... I was lucky, very lucky to be born in my family, because you know, I’m a boy from a small village near Trnava. It was a very traditional surrounding. Strongly catholic. But it doesn’t matter that it was catholic, the main thing was that it was traditional. And by traditional, I mean doing the same all the time, just repeating what was done before. There was fear of change. However, my grandpa- fortunately, was very untraditional. He didn’t go to church, he refused to. He was to some extent a convinced communist. But, when the communists came to power, and he discovered the truth about the political trials in 50s, he said NO. He was such a level-headed guy. And even though he was only from a village, he didn’t fear anything...kind of like a country Rambo. And he liked to read books, there were always so many books at his home, and he was interested in everything. He listened to the radio Slobodná Európa (Free Europe) and Hlas Ameriky (Voice of America), you know, it was forbidden at the time. You were not allowed to listen to it, and if you got caught there was punishment.

He listened to it all the time... he was interested in these things. And so I always had a feeling, that there was something more, something beside the official outlook. And my father too, he was a very ambitious man. Thanks to him, I went to study Filmmaking in Prague. At that time, it was one of the most elite schools in Czechoslovakia. This was one of the good things about the old regime, since it was communism, and ‘we were all equal’, it was possible to go there – to get into such a prestigious institution. It wasn’t just a question of money or connections – as it is today. Rather, I just went there, passed the audition, and they accepted me. Simple. Also, I had good grades in high school.

But, coming from a small village- everybody was programmed to believe that, everything is impossible’. We were taught to just shut up and follow. From a young age, you know that your life is already lined up, all your values are set, and you must just do this and that...

Q: But how did your stay in Britain change your attitude even more?
A: Since I was interested in everything even before, so, of course, I was prepared. Also, I travelled a lot even before the UK. And it’s simple, when you meet people you see they’re relaxed. As I told you yesterday, when a regular Slovak meets somebody, he’s under pressure because...

Q: You can see it so clearly, how awfully seriously people act and how they always are always solving some problem...
A: Exactly, exactly. And the life is stressing them out. But it all results from their lack of confidence and believe in themselves. Because if they knew they can change things, they would go and change it. Right? And that’s exactly what I had already... I had this confidence in me, but it also depends on others, because even here there are confident people and they are successful, fortunately, I met people like that so I learned it from them. Right? So the thing is that unlike the majority of Slovaks I was confident. I’ll tell you an example. For example when a regular Slovak comes to
Britain, he’s under super pressure, he is super shy, and has problems to even go to grocery to buy something. But, also before we joined the EU, people who were working there – were doing so illegally, so they had hide in way. So that they wouldn’t attract the attention of the police. They used to hide so that police wouldn’t have found them, they were hiding their working clothes, so they learned how to live in this illegal environment.

And so the classic mentality of a Slovak would be... I am happy when I have something of high quality. This is what matters to me, quality. In relationships, in everything. To live to the fullest. But for Slovaks the most important is for everything to be cheap. It means easily attainable. For me, easy also means banal, you see? So you don’t need to risk anything, or even work for it. Anyway, there is much more... There are more topics... Like, for example, most Slovak people are actually looking forward to retirement. I say are you mad? How can you look forward to retirement, you’ll be old and you’ll die, won’t you? You should live your life for now, this moment. Like, people don’t work because they enjoy it. In fact, they can’t even imagine that they could go to work, and actually enjoy it, you see? With all of this on your mind you look at life almost as at a sort of punishment, and not an opportunity to achieve something.

So when they come to Britain, they come with this huge fear and nervousness, they lack confidence. And so, they look for low skilled work, even though they graduated from university. In fact, their whole community (Slovak) immediately directs them to do stuff like building, auxiliary work, constructions, cleaning, au-pair etc. For example, when American and Australian girls come to do au-pair work in Britain, they know their rights. Because, they come from ‘that’ culture (Anglo), and they know that let’s say, they will work no more than 4 hours. And they will not do the shopping, or cooking, they will simply- only take care of kids. But The English found out, that the girls from Eastern Europe have no idea about their rights, what’s normal and what’s not. And so, they made them work a lot more, even though it was illegal. For 8 hours a day, they made them clean, shop and do all these other duties that were not typically part of the au-pair job. For example, in Britain, it is normal for rich families to have a cleaner, and also a nanny. Being a carer of children was a normal, well paid job. But, the whole industry changed, because of the slavish nature of Slovak, Czech and Polish girls. The profession of the nanny was ruined, because Eastern European girls willing to do all the work: to cook, to clean, to shop

But, then again, this happened also because, at the time, the pound was so strong. Back then, one pound was 70 crowns, and if a girl was paid 10 pounds a day - which for a The English was like ‘are you kidding me’ (super cheap), but those 10 pounds was more than my father earned a day in Slovakia. So because of this great economic disequilibrium this could happen. And since people didn’t believe they could go any further in a foreign society...because on the other hand, The English are like that, if a girl told him she would NOT do that, they would have say - no problem, sure. I just tried, no worry, no harm. You know, so it was so interesting.

Q: Do the Czechs do the same type of work from the beginning?  
A: The thing is, when I first came to the UK, all the other guys were working at the car wash. That is absolutely illegally work. And everybody who works at the car wash in Britain, does it illegally. It
is mostly immigrants from Africa or Asia, everybody knows it, but nobody does anything about it because even The English want their cars washed for cheap. And you know that if you pay 5 pounds for a car wash, because it cost 5 pounds at the time, those 4 people cannot earn more than... And the truth is that people at the car wash work for 12 hours for 28 pounds, let’s say 30 pounds a day. And the minimum wage at the time was 5.50 GBP, so you know it’s a crap. And for example what my friend did, so that he could earn more money...since all drivers leaves their change in a car, he stole coins. So when they were cleaning the interior of a car, me too, I also always leave a few coins for the parking meters, there is always like 5 or 10 pounds in total. So, they stole 1 or 2 pounds to survive.

But I, on the other hand knew, that I would not work for less than 60 pounds a day. And so... I stuck to it. Basically, my philosophy was that I know my quality, because I am confident, and because I knew that it was my personality that sold me. I always believed it. And that’s how I became successful. But, I was also limited by my Slovak nature...instead of just going to the UK and doing photography or making movies I told myself, my English is not god enough- yet. That was my first thing, that my English is not so good. And I’m such a stickler, a perfectionist... and that makes my life harder. I’m very impractical. I came there and I told myself I would look for better jobs after my English improves. So I signed up for English school, with all these Brazilians, so it was kind of awful. Then I quit, because I made progress, but they were - even after 2 months repeating ‘Hello, my name is’.

And so I told to myself, okay, but I will not work for less than 60 pounds a day. So I worked less, but at the same time I was building my own character, of me it was unacceptable to work for less. So if somebody wanted to hire me, they would have to pay me 60 pounds. And so I started to work in construction, and since I’m a boy from Slovak village and all guys- like that from my generation, not young guys, can naturally do this and that, so I started to do carpentry, ad painting jobs and other stuff, but since I’m very talkative and everybody else is so shy...we were working for rich people in the central London, and they were creative types, and since I know a lot about history, art, and culture we immediately got along- really well. And they were interested, like who is this strange builder, who knows various topics. And because of my personality, it turned out- that my employer (team leader) became overshadowed, because customers preferred to talk to me. And that’s when I understood that that is (personality) my capital. And so the person I was working, when he would get offers that to him- were not exclusive, he gave them to me. And this was my starting point.

Q: What kind of offers?
A: Reconstructions. Reconstructions of apartments. And I got those offers and it immediately... the first job that catapulted me was for a Jewish family, famous producers from West End, and they rented a house in the middle of the city because they went bankrupt. They had to sell their villa at High Gate, and instead rented a huge four-storey house- a beautiful one and they wanted me to reconstruct. And Mrs. Marsha took a fancy to me from the beginning, because I look a little bit Jewish, so I think that played some role as well. I am not Jewish, but they look at it differently. It was like this even in Israel, they were all into me because of the way I look, they thought I was a
And she used to say that she’s going to adopt me, I’m her son and so on, and from then on, she was getting me jobs for all the rich people (her friends) from West End. They were all old people, about 70 and their hobby was to meet and talk to me. That was it, you see? It was all about that...grannies who married rich husbands were glad to see me. They were glad that all of a sudden there was this guy... because you know, a regular British builder is- fat, bald guy, and with bum crack. And all of the sudden, there’s was a guy who understands art, who tells them that this wallpaper is not a good match, since I like it, I have always been interested in fashion and all, so I was... and since I was going to those stores, and reading Vogue and all, I knew it all so I used to tell them, listen, Ralph Lauren has great wallpapers right now. And they were staring at me- like how could I know this? And then, exactly, we went there and they were like wow. And then they found out, since they were cheap, you know, and they didn’t want to pay for example 5,000 pounds to a designer, but they found out there is a guy who would do it for free, because for me it was business. Because I got paid, for the reconstruction, and they were recommending me to each other. And suddenly I was doing work for the son of one, then the family member of another.

So, although the first year was difficult (informal work at the car wash and low end construction). The first year it was exactly all about trying. Everybody was trying to push my cost down, I said no, so I was rarely working. Plus the credit card, it helped during emergencies. But I told to myself I would not go down for any cost. So that was the beginning. On top of it all, I divorced my wife, then I had to move out and live alone, so it was difficult to live on my own. Plus, the system of sharing flats was very interesting...Then the next year (second year) I got the first of those jobs (reconstruction). But, once again I was learning. The pricing and estimating, how to do it really. Sometimes it didn’t work out, sometimes I earned less, and so on. Then, actually, the third year was great. I got into the system of working for the rich people in central London. Then, I realized, or I got to a point where I needed to take it serious. That means to set-up my own business, my own Ltd. So that I could take my work- to a new level. But I kept on thinking...I entered a personal crisis, about what to do next in life?

It all goes back to the 1990s, to Czechoslovakia, after the revolution – when I was a teenager. Basically what happened, is that overnight, suddenly, all these came - everything new (and forbidden) was suddenly here (Eastern Bloc). Like heavy metal music. The first clubs, appeared in Prague. All these foreign bands, that were always banned before, came in. I loved it. Foreigners came- it was awesome. And with that, also came drugs to Czechoslovakia. Some had been here even before, but they were very hard to get before. Consequently, it was my generation that suffered the most because of it. For example, a lot of people got addicted to heroin. Some died, others ruined their lives, and so on. This was my generation. But I somehow knew that, heroin was always a no, never. But, what I got into was the rave scene. It started in ’92 or ’94 – rave and techno. So, I started listening to techno, and would go to techno parties, and along with that lifestyle, I started to take LSD and mushrooms. I also smoked a lot weed. And of course, there was also ecstasy. But, this was exactly the culture at the time...we were sniffing all the time. And it went hand in hand with philosophy.
At school, we had lectures, my favorite were those from philosophy. That is where I first introduced to old Indian philosophies. When I started to read them - I finally reached an understanding. It was like - wait! All of a sudden, a lot of things started to make sense. Suddenly, I realized that relations in life were completely different. That it could all be different. Because of this, I started to look at my family, and everybody, in a completely different way. And since I was studying film, and I wanted to be a moviemaker – to do something, I need to know this. I need to know life. I needed to know its principles. I could not be one of those people, who just repeat, and follow the line like fools. I needed to free myself from it all. And I think that in this combination of weed and philosophy, it happened. That’s when the brain of small village boy- got opened. And suddenly I was able to look at everything from a different perspective, or different perspectives.

And in my case, of course, I am unstable, I make a decision and I do it. Many times it is impractical, or rushed. I realize the consequences too late. So, I quit school, I quit moviemaking, and I needed to travel. And exactly at that time, I met my ex-wife. She was from a rich family, and was bored too. Her parents were forcing her...they had an image of her future lined up. She was going to work at ministry. But in real life, she was exactly like me, we met at a party... She started to do yoga and stuff like that, and her Dad kited trying to force her to work here or there, for this bank or that government positon. But, she wasn’t interested in the least. Simply, we met, we clicked, and decided to travel together. Our first trip was to Israel. And with her...she was a vegetarian, so I was also vegetarian...we both started to do yoga, meditate, and travel. So we spent a year in Israel, we went to the desert in Egypt, you know, to Sinai with the Bedouins and so on. Next year we went, I don’t know if you heard about the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela? So, we went there together. We went on foot, for a half of a year from France to Spain. So we... then we kind of returned to Slovakia, but we didn’t know what to do? It was the fad back then in 90s, it was the whole group of people who went to art school. Most of my friends were from a fine art academy, people who studies painting or sculpting at VŠVU or VŠMU. Simply, we were all like we’re leaving Bratislava. Lots of them left to Ibiza or to Canary Islands. Some of them still live there. I call them professional hippies, and some of them came to live in Slovakia. In the hills (isolated nature). But since the parents of my wife were rich, when they learned that we want to move out of Bratislava, they are from Piešťany, so they said okay, come to Piešťany. And why should you roam around, we’ll buy you a house. So they bought us a house in Piešťany, you know. And actually, we were neighbours. We lived just next door. So we had a house and we were like what are we going to do? I was depressed by having nothing to do, but since I had always been creative, I have been into artistic stuff since I was a little and my friend was doing pottery, so I was like okay, I will do pottery. So we... I went to the job centre where they were giving grants, and Daniela did, too, we both were given a grant and we opened a ceramic workshop. We even had a ceramic oven and all, and we were doing pottery. Only that you know, it was in Piešťany...I liked it a lot for a while, but you see what kind of person I am. I cannot be in a closed-in workshop alone all day. I need people. I need to communicate. And after a while, I started to miss the television industry. I missed the lights and the people. But, I also liked it there, we had a perfect life. I didn’t even matter if we earned something or not, her parents paid for whatever we needed. So, I didn’t have to care of anything.
My life went like this...in the morning, I woke up, meditated a little, walked a dog along the river. If I wanted to, I would do some pottery. If not, I would lay on the grass. I was growing an urban garden, I grew herbs and vegetables. So basically, I was living in a paradise. But it bothered me that her parents were giving us money. For me, as a man, it was suffering. That anything I could just-potentially need...my mother-in-law already bought it. I didn’t even know I needed it, and already purchased for us. And this pissed me off. Because then I had an identity problem. That, as a man, I am unable to take care of a family.

And Danka realized as well, that pottery was not exactly for her. That she was more into esotericism, and she kept on thinking that she would love to do something for people. She started to give massages, then she started this and that, and then she was like I want to do Ayurveda- I am going to study it. And since I was bored in Piešťany, a small town, I was used to live in big cities (Prague and Bratislava), so when she said let’s go to London- I said wow, let’s go!

So within a month we packed, arranged everything and went to GB. Without thinking, without anything. We called people we met thanks to yoga and then all the madness started. No solid agency rents you an apartment. They advised us to try it with Indians or Pakistanis, that they would have something for us. So we went through a Sri Lankans agency, we made a deal with friends to share some bigger apartment. But our friends backed out at the last minute, but we had already paid the deposit...I really liked how Sri Lankans think, it was so interesting, the owner of the agency said okay, you paid a deposit, you won’t get it back. But I know, you can’t afford the whole apartment, so you can live with me in my house. So we ended up living in a house in Sudburytown. For three months, like in a real family house, otherwise a very nice one, with a Sri Lankan family. It was a crazy experience. And they were rich, they owned a house, two big cars, but they were businessmen- so they were willing to move strangers into their own house for a thousand euros. And so on. And by that, my personality...like London for me has always been a perfect city with everything I love. Exactly the culture, all of that...

Q: And can I... What was your experience with discrimination?
A: None at all. I think Britain, especially London, is one of the most open cities in Europe for sure, and it’s amazing that they never ever have problem with me being a foreigner. There, I never...In the first place, I’m not a person that should seek...during those 5 years I didn’t come across any conflict. All of the jobs I did were just verbal agreements. I have never signed a contract with anybody in my life, but nobody deceived me. All of them paid me by check, they could be bad checks, but I have never ever had a problem, and people with whom I...but I was working for rich people. It’s different when you work for the poor. There, exactly their people had problems like this.

But in the community where I was...I really liked about it that...Those are exactly the two moments I’ll tell you about. One moment is, that we, Slovaks, are very strict...unfairly strict to anyone who doesn’t speak perfect Slovak. For example Slovak Hungarians who speak broken Slovak, we say fucking Hungarians, can’t speak Slovak. While I would say it’s cool that although you’re a Hungarian, you can speak great Slovak.
Q: Yeah, that’s unbelievable.
A: It’s unbelievable that... And I’ll tell you about the mentality. Where you can see it. When I speak English to somebody here and a Slovak listen to it, they say- your English is so awful! Being there for 5 years, your grammar is terrible, that accent, well, it’s a disaster! When I meet an American or an Englishman, they all tell me wow, your English is excellent! When did you learn it? It’s really cool.

Q: That’s what Slovaks tell you about your English? For real?
A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: And do they speak better then you?
A: (Do they speak better than you?) Of course not. That’s the mentality. Or I’m going to give you another example. If I show my pictures (he is a photographer) to an Englishman or an American, everybody is like ’wow, you’re fucking talented! That’s an amazing, man!’
If I show them to a Slovak, anybody, an uneducated person, doesn’t matter...they look at them, and say ’it’s a shame that the girl is not wearing something else, or if I did it, I would do it completely different’. You see? And none of them do anything. And then I tell them yeah, well, then do it. Do it for 20 years, and then come to tell me how it’s done. But that’s the mentality. That we are unable to appreciate ourselves... and it’s a question of a confidence. That in Slovakia very few people believe they are good enough.

Q: So do you think that people who were abroad and came back are more confident?
A: Exactly, exactly that’s exactly it...

Q: Why?
A: ...that people in Slovakia never speak highly about themselves. In Britain, I’ll tell you an example, we were working in construction. Every person who came, the first thing they did was praise our work. Every day. And suddenly you are given love from the person and it is a manifestation of maturity, a manifestation of normal love, you see? And that’s it that the first thing was that a person said: wow, guys, you are so talented! In Slovakia, a person comes and they take a water scale, and say ’shit, you did it all wrong, it’s tilted by 2 millimetres’. Everybody does it. Because, that is the mentality here. Because, in Slovakia everyone thinks that everybody steals. And that everybody wants to deceive you.

I’ll tell you an example about sex and women. In Britain when you hit on a girl, she doesn’t have a problem because she knows it’s a fun. Just to have a fun. You see? In Slovakia everybody knows it’s about sex if I like a girl, if I look at her, sure, I want to have sex with her. That I don’t want to play games, we’re adults after all. However in Slovakia, normal, adult women act like- gee, he wants to sleep with me. Well, of course! You know? But they feel, as if it’s something negative. As if, I want to steal something from them. But you know, we share, sex is fun for both of us...after all, for god’s sake, it’s not like I like it, and you suffer. You see what I mean? And the mentality goes to such intimate subjects. You see? And when I meet... when I went out and I met girls from abroad,
so of course, they knew exactly what’s going on and they communicated and flirted. Of course, everything else, as well as the sexuality was part of the sharing. And nobody had a feeling that I am a woman and he is taking advantage of me. It was equal. Like let’s have a good time together. Meanwhile in Slovakia it happened to me many times, but on the other hands it’s mostly with girls from the country. They’re different from the girls in cities. But especially country girls, felt as if I was stealing something from them. As if I was the one who was going to enjoy it, and they would be harmed. It goes so far. So the mentality is in everything we do.

Anywhere I go, for example, I had to change my personality many times, because I was acting too openly. For example I really loved when a lady from behind a counter in Britain tells you hello, love! How can I help you? Hello, love! I loved it. That people are being so open, so easy going. Okay, everybody knows it’s about business...well, of course it is! He/ she wants to earn money, and I want to pay her. In fact, I enjoy to pay her. It’s not like this here. Here, imagine, people working in stores suffer. They have complexes because they think gee, I suffer here so much, I’m a servant. They do not understand at all... People in Slovakia don’t understand what service means. And in Britain they do, there is very few places where I feel so good than there, especially in London, at least that’s how I feel. Of course, it’s different in poorer suburbs. But still, you can see exactly that people understand the principle of sharing and business. Slovaks, for example, don’t. And that’s a problem, for example for me it’s a big problem. Although, even in Bratislava there are places I like to go and where I can find my society, kind of hipster environment.

Q: And can you tell me, do you meet more returners than... do you have your own community? A: Not like that. I have my community here because I have been here since I was 18, so I have my community. I have friends...I have a friend, he’s also a cameraman, he lived in Britain for 7 years, with his wife, they went there because she wanted to study art therapy there, too, because they didn’t offer it here in Slovakia. And he too, that was interesting, this is an interesting story on how he was trying to succeed in movie industry for 4 years, and he told me that he sent 10 000 emails per year, he bought a thick book with names of production companies in London and he wrote to every one of them, first, he sent an email, then, two days later, he called them like hello, my name is Dušan, did you have a chance to see my email, you know, simply it took 4 years to get through.

Meanwhile, he made lots of projects for free and worked on 3 low-budget feature films. But, his story is very interesting, he was one of the most talented cameraman of our generation, and I think he was pretty much on the road there and he already started to work as a cameraman, actually, until then he was working in removals and suddenly... but then his wife graduated and she got a great job, just as if she was an English, no problem. I mean British society, especially in London, is very open and it focuses on quality. If you are a quality person, doesn’t matter where you’re from, even from Mars, you can get a great job. And it happened to her, she finished the school and they started to offer jobs to her, hospitals or what, they were all trying to make her work for them, so she could choose, even as a foreigner. But she got pregnant, and they decided they did not want to bring up children in London, so after 7 or 8 years they came back. But meanwhile, Dušan became a communist in London, he started to be interested in communism and he was fascinated by the Latin Americans living in Britain. So he started to be interested in communism, and he adorned the
camera, and buried his head into politics. Now, he earns like 1100 euros working for Slovak television (RTVS) as a cameraman. He does whatever work, halabala stuff. But, in his free time, he mostly translates communism articles from Latin America into Slovak, or at least he did. Now two very interesting moments came into my minds, one, e.g. Imagine what they say about the Slovak mentality.

Q: That is the interesting topic.
A: Imagine, normal guys, maybe a little bit simple...they don´t speak English, they come to Britain and immediately they start to act as slaves, just like that, very naturally- like professional slaves.

Q: Slaves?
A: And since they don´t speak English, they can find a job only by working in construction or hospitality, half-legal, you know. They find employment in companies that work half-legally, just like the whole construction industry. But, they work for Czech, Slovak or Polish bosses. Simply, because they can communicate better- they can speak to them Slovak. And those pay them, I’ll tell you an example, back then a normal wage for a painter was from 80 to 120 pounds. The English worked for 7,50 to 10 pounds an hour, too. And imagine I paid my guys 80 to 100 pounds, just like the English. But, in other companies when they found out a person doesn´t speak English, they immediately paid him minimum wage. They didn´t even discuss it at all. So the mentality was to exploit a person, the bosses did. But...

Q: Even English bosses?
A: No. No. Just when you worked for, I don´t want to be a racist, but when you worked for Pakistanis or others, that´s how it went. As soon as you worked for a regular British company, they had charts and they talked to you as if you were English. I never worked with them but my friends who did told me they never felt any, any discrimination at all. When they worked for the English (by ethnicity). I’ll tell you another example. One of my friends was a truck driver, he worked with trucks, and he was based out of a company in Birmingham. He said he had never seen something like that, the approach, whatever happened, they fixed it. It was perfect. Whenever he was in Europe, everything was great. He was absolutely satisfied, he had everything paid for, overtime included. Suddenly, they decided to move to Brno in the Czech Republic, since it was cheaper. And in that very moment, when Czechs started to manage his work, from Brno, he said, it turned into hell. Bad relationships, arrogant behaviour, so he left after a year.

Just like other friends...when you worked hard, even if you were a driver or whatever, my friend worked for a vegetable company, he was absolutely satisfied. Simply, everything was handled in a professional way, with a professional approach and British kindness. But here, people are awful, they are like – what do you want, stop bothering me. Even in a work environment, the idea is you should be happy with what you have and spot bothering.

Q: Can you tell me what the mentality is? Also, how do Slovaks perceive returnees- like you?
A: I don´t know honestly, I don´t know anything about this. Anyway, the people who have returned. well there are two different things.
Q: Okay, explain this to me.
A: Well, the first wave was before Slovakia joined the EU, actually before we joined the Eurozone... after that, everything changed. I’m going to tell you about it. Not too long ago, when people went to pick strawberries in Scotland, and were paid 3,50 pounds an hour, what was nothing for the Scottish. Well, here, it was incredible money. Because one pound equalled 70 crowns. And back then, even the prices... everything was cheap. So people were able to build a house from what they earned by picking strawberries, you see? And that was the time travelling. It was perfect. People were going to Israel, French, to Spain to pick grapes. To Italy for oranges, to Greece for lemons, to Britain for strawberries, and construction. By doing this, people could save money to build a house in Slovakia. But, when the euro came- prices changed. So you cannot save as much anymore.

Today, people who are really desperately, and cannot find a job here go because they have no other choice. And the big phenomenon is Slovak girls, from northern or eastern Slovakia, that work as carers in Austria. Me and Zuzana, accidentally, met an Austrian journalist who wrote a book about it, it’s the topic he studies. In fact, he lives here. He is an Austrian, who speaks Slovak, and lives in Spišská Nová Ves. Basically, he studied and still studies this topic. He said that the Austrians have handed us the responsibility of the death of their grannies and grandads. It’s the first great thing, in terms of Slovaks working in a certain profession. And the second one is this...

In Britain, 2 Pakistanis asked me how is it possible that all Slovaks are builders? I said we are not builders, most of the people working here aren´t builders at all. They have never been builder in fact. But the Slovaks are very quick to learn. There was a time when wherever you went, to any pub or restaurant in Britain, the manager there was from Slovakia. It means that they are very smart. But why? Because it was mostly people who graduated from university. And they have that stupid mentality that instead of working in IBM or Microsoft- they´re afraid to go there, they would rather wait and work as waiters. But a manager understands very quickly that he met an intelligent, smart person...

Q: But tell me how they perceive... what is the discourse, how do they perceive those who came back.
A: They don´t.

Q: They don´t even speak about it?
A: You know, they perceive it... I am not really into categories, but in Slovakia, lots of people are jealous. And the thing is that most of the people who went abroad, earned some money and brought it home. So they could buy or build a house, or they bought a car etc. So the other people (stayers) viewed them as successful. Although, not everybody is. Lots of them didn’t succeed and they came back, it’s not just a coincidence, all of those stories about frauds out there, there is a mafia in Britain earning money on stupidity of others. I know, exactly how it worked...

Q: And can I... you came back, but tell me how come you don’t earn 1100 euro. But you earn more?
Why is this?
A: Because I follow the same system, I followed in the UK. I told to myself that I will not work below a certain amount.

Q: And where did you get the cost from? And the confidence?
A: Because I know what I can do. That’s a very tangible thing. And I also know what can I do well and what is the cost of it. Although, I have the Slovak mentality too, I’ll give you an example. I also just waited, I mean I knew I didn’t want to work in construction forever...but, because of all the jobs I got in the West End, I began to earn really good money. And that’s when I asked myself, okay, should I set up my own Ltd? And that’s when I realized, no- I don’t want to do this. And I’m not going do it. I want to do photography, fashion, to work with the camera and film. Not this...I have to let it go. So I bought... back then I had a Caribbean girlfriend, Carleen, who had an office job for a local charity- and was also bored. So, I told her let’s go, we’re going to travel! So I bought a caravan, a VW, and we went travelling across the Europe for a half a year. And when we came back, I quit the construction business, and I got employed in a photography studio. But exactly, first, I went into building, because I didn’t really think any other type of work was possible- you know because I didn’t speak too much in English.

However, one day I met an Italian woman who spoke even worse English than me. In fact, her English was really bad...but amazingly, she was already working professionally in London as a photographer, and doing really well at that. And it was because...she had that Italian cheekiness (a different mentality), she had the courage to go after what she wanted (she wasn’t ashamed). That’s when I understood....I had been hiding. I was hiding behind my English (or lack of), always being shy because of it, and always just waiting for the 'right time' to come. But, here she was, speaking much worse than me – and already working in the business! I couldn’t believe it! I said to myself- you must be crazy for waiting for so long! Basically, all this time, I had been telling myself not yet, not yet...I’m not going to call the studio- just yet. My English is not good enough, my portfolio is not good enough, I’m not good enough....And of course, the reality was- when I came there, my portfolio was 7 times better than what was necessary. So because of my 'stupid Slovak mentality' I was wasting my own time waiting....I could have been working all along.

Q: And why did you come back?
A: That’s my nature, sometimes I make rush decision. Nobody, even my parents, believed that I would come back one day. Not even me. Because, I felt good there. But I returned because on the one hand I broke up with Carleen (his serious girlfriend), that’s my private issue- me and women. And the second thing is the isolation- I felt lonely in the UK You know, you earn money, you’re in a perfect city- with everything that you love, but the reality is that you are lonely there.

Also, because I was a freelancer, I didn’t work that often. But, everybody else (his friends) did. And you know how it goes in London, you arrange a meeting or get together with somebody, three months ahead. Then, right before, they cannot meet for whatever reason...and so you have to schedule a meeting three months into the future again. So here I was, alone in London. I spent my time visiting all the places that I love, hanging out in great cafes – but, it was all so very lonely.
Everything was so estranged. So I told myself okay, I’ll go to Slovakia, I’ll give it a try. So I packed and loaded all my stuff to caravan, came here and it felt so nice, because everybody was excited that I had returned. I spent the summer here, I had great time, enjoyed life. Plus, everything is so close here. You know it how it is in London, you need an hour to get anywhere. Here, it takes you like 5 minutes, you know...

Q: And by walking,
A: By walking. I can call anybody and they say off course, see you tonight! I go to town, sit at a cafe outside, and I see at least 10 people I know walk by. My friends, they sit next to me, we have a coffee together. Finally, I found that this is more important to me, than hanging out at some cool cafe.

Q: And do you want to make change here? Inspire to make change?
A: I’m thinking about this a lot. For me, this is the hottest topic. I am always thinking about Slovaks, and their state of fear and lack of self-confidence. That’s it, anywhere I go, I talk about it and everybody laughs at me. I am always assertive, a guru of assertively. Anywhere I go in the country, I always try to respect the people around me. Since, I film a lot of reality shows, I travel a lot...mainly to the centre Slovakia, and it’s a disaster for me. On the top of it, I’m a vegetarian, so you can imagine what are my experience from restaurants are like — with those waiters full of complexes. And everybody laughs at me. If I am with my film crew, everybody is like – oh here we go again, Jan is going to order his food. So for my colleagues, are always looking forward to it, to see what mess I get myself into this time. So from my part, I am trying for a change the mentality here- all the time. For example, one of my naive changes was promoting what I learned in London – kindness in traffic. One of the things I enjoyed the most was a traffic in London. I loved it. I drove everywhere and I loved the kindness. The way people let other cars go when they stop, or when they merge into the highway. Because, they understand the principles behind traffic, so they let cars merge in from the side, so that the traffic can run smoothly. This would never happen here.

So, whenever, I am on the road – whether it is with friends or taxi drivers, I always tell them, have you ever considered, that observing the speed limit and the driving regulations actually makes sense? The classic Slovak mentality is: ’fucking police, they made me stop, and I got a speeding ticket’. I tell them: ’you criticize the police for doing their job?‘ You were speeding, weren’t you? So why do you slam the police when it was you who was driving too fast? They are just doing their job. Why are you whining? You see?

In Slovakia, everybody drive so fast. And this is a problem. In Britain people drive slow, they obey the regulations, and when they see a car trying to merge, they block at it, allowing for them to go ahead. You can always see this behaviour the highway. This way, everything keeps moving. I understood that. However, in Slovakia- nobody will let you (merge). This is the problem. So I try total everybody, you know if you would only slow down – the cars from the side could join, and traffic would flow much sooner. The same thing goes for people who cross the road. Here, I don’t know if you noticed, hardly anybody will let you cross.
Q: Yes
A: Exactly. It’s the opposite in Britain, or anywhere in the West. Whenever, you even approach a crossing, the car automatically stops. In Austria, Germany, everywhere. This is what I always do. I always stop for the pedestrian. But, in Slovak – nobody will stop. Slovaks think – why stop? And I say because it is kind. Because it’s a question of European culture.

Q: Do you think, that fear and confidence is changing, are Slovak people becoming more or less fearful?
A: I believed yes and there’s great difference between Bratislava and the rest of Slovakia. And you can easily see it if you look at people. Of course, everywhere it’s the same, people from more remote regions, I don’t know, Orava, Kysuce, and so on, are not confident. And you can see at first sight, by their clothes and everything. But I believe it’s improving. I mean in Bratislava, I feel like anywhere else in Europe. And I can tell, because I travel all the time. Simply... for me, Bratislava is a European town. Not a city yet, a big town. There is a difference, but I really feel great here.

Q: Okay, do you have any other kind of statement you want to make?
A: Good luck with your work. (laugh) No, well, I think, there was the first Czechoslovakian president, Masaryk, and a motto of his government was nebáť se a nekrášť (don’t fear, don’t steal). It’s Czech. And I realized that’s this – that this is enough. For people not to fear and not to steal. Because here, the mentality, it’s very interesting... like everywhere where communism used to be. I saw it when I was talking to Eastern Germans. Western Germans had the same problem with Eastern Germans. So that’s the system of quasi-communist economy... well, what actually was, as my communist friend would said; was state capitalism, not a communism. And during that era, people develop some bad characteristics. Because of that people don’t believe that... because it was all like, if anybody stands out, let’s cut off his head. So in USA and everywhere in the West people are led to excel, not here...

Q: Hmmm, Slovaks were not allowed to stand out?
A: Exactly. In fact, they were persecuted for it. Two generations were spoiled like this. My parents were born into this. So they didn’t try to accomplish anything in their life, because of it. On top of communism, they also came from a catholic background, which shares a similar mentality, you know.

And because of this...because people don’t believe that they can achieve anything; they are desperate. And so they learn to steal, and do other bad things. Plus the general feeling is negative, low. People are confident in themselves. Not like they are in the West.

For example, in general - if people aren’t satisfied with their job, they change it. They go somewhere else. But, here in Slovakia, people are so afraid. They are afraid they will not be finding anything else...I wasn’t afraid-when I quit my job, I just did it. But, I also knew I have a credit card, so if something happens, I’ll survive...

Also, I came back, I saw how everybody was so underpaid. I mean, I knew my value. So, I decided
to wait, just like in London, I was not going to work under a certain amount. Which meant, that sometimes I didn’t work for a half of a year. Like now. Since February I work very little because I stick to my price. But I know that if I lower my price, people will never again pay me more. So now, I only do jobs where people know- that they need certain quality, so they call me. And they are willing to pay me, what I ask. But of course, in exchange they will get top quality work.

It pays off because I know that I could… For example, a regular Slovak would never do that. They would prefer to have certainty, and earn a lot less money in exchange. Than to risk, at the possibility of progress. But, I am also strange about this. I want… I hate certainty. I am nervous if something is the same… I like movement, I’m tired of certainty, I like uncertainty and adrenaline. So anyways, the traditional Slovak mentality is….well, it’s actually a big problem, but people think it’s normal, that it’s okay to function like this. That’s what makes me go crazy! People are not looking for work but for a job. Basically, they make an effort until they land ,a job’, then after that they don’t care. I call it „mám v piči’ (fuck it all, I don’t care), well, that’s the Slovak mentality.

Q: A job like permanent employment?
A: Exactly. Like permanent employment. When you sign a contract, like an agreement, people are satisfied that they have a job, and that’s it. They don’t care about how they do the job- because it’s permanent. I call them retired, they are already retired. They don’t have a mentality like okay, let’s do something, let’s make it better, let’s improve something. For them it’s like…don’t bother me, okay. It’s good as it is, why change? Lots of people think. For example, some people refuse to work with me, because they think I make them work too hard. Because I make everybody work their ass off. If you are on my team, you are not allowed to slack. So people at work call me the terminator. But, it’s great for the producer, because he knows I will always give him hundred percent (100%) effort. But I ask for my money in return.

Then again, the problem is- that I ask for the money, and I get it. But, the people who work for me, don’t ask. So they know that I am paid more…Anyways, I can’t fight for them, they must do it on their own. And that makes me nervous, the mentality. I mean, we work in a great industry, the work is relatively easy, people are nice, intelligent, you know. I mean, I really can’t imagine people working with people who don’t want to be there. You know. The Slovak mentality, of doing nothing, is not fun for me. I mean, they just want to lay-back. Even in regular companies, my friend who runs his own company says this is a common problem: how difficult it is to find good employees and motivate them.

You publish an announcement that you´re looking for employers. And lots of people answer. The problem is to find quality people. Employees who understand that a job doesn’t just mean a contract and a wage. But, a job actually means work, and for that you need to use your energy. I mean, for the most part, people think that going to work, means making a coffee…then everybody is already excited about lunch break. And then to go home. And that’s a problem. That’s a big problem in Slovakia, a huge one.

Plus another problem are the oligarchs, those people that made big money after the revolution.
 Basically, they got a lot of money, without any effort. The wealth was handed to them (it was stolen). And Slovak people now this...that there was a big group of people who gained incredible money without doing anything.

Q: In the 90s?
A: Exactly. And lots of them are still here. The mafia that parasite off state contracts. This culture of bribery, old school ties, backscratching, lobbying etc. It works like that here. People who make above standard money, without any effort. And everybody sees that – and they get demotivated by it. I think that is another huge problem in our culture. Basically, this factor has a devastating impact on common people. I mean, people go to work, and a common employee... my sister who graduated from university, makes 500 euros a month, and she has a higher education.

Q: 500 euros?
A: Yes, 500 euros. The sister of my ex-girlfriend in Britain is also a teacher, in elementary school. And she makes 36,000 GBP a year. So, a teacher at an elementary school in London makes 36,000 GBP a year; and my sister, a teacher in an art high school who graduated with a red diploma (cum laden) makes 500 Euros a month. So, she earns, 6,000 pounds a year, and the other teacher makes 36,000 pounds. That’s a big difference...

Q: How do you survive on that?
A: Well... they are creative.

Q: Yeah?
A: Yeah! Well, they can make it, they are creative with their money. They have 2 children, her daughter is now 14 years-old, a teenager. So, you can imagine, she wants everything...all the gadgets, she wants them all. It’s all about the creativity.

Basically, lots of things work on a DIY (do-it-yourself) basis. That’s why services aren’t so successful here, because most people do everything by themselves. I’ll tell you an example, in London you wouldn’t cook dinner for yourself every night. When you are tired, or don’t have time, you order take out. It’s simple. But my sister knows that to order a meal costs her- this amount of money, and if she goes and buys all in groceries and cooks it herself, she saves 3 euros. So she cooks at home. And she does it simply. If you want cooked beans, you’d buy Heinz beans, open the can and put them in a pot. But Heinz beans cost 1 euro, and the same amount in dried beans cost 30 cents. So she buys dried beans and makes the equivalent of 4 cans of Heinz beans. So she saves 4 euros.

Q: And what about clothes and so on?
A: She shops... well, clothing is cheap here, too, finally. So she goes shops at cheap stores, you know, New Yorker and others. That’s the different, I go to- I don’t know, G-star and buy a pair of jeans for 180 euros, although I could buy a similar pay at H&M, and pay only 20 euros.

Q: How do you deal with having more money than your sister? Is it hard for you?
A: Just... you know, what’s really hard for me...Well, the hardest thing is to see the mentality of the
incapability. But, that’s her personality, you know. For example, many times it happened, that I bought them various goods, especially for kids. And then I realized I must stop that, it wasn’t good.

Q: What happened?
A: They felt insulted. As if I considered them to be beggars...So they didn´t take it as a positive. For them it was something bad, something shameful. On the top of that it wasn’t a good educational method, because kids were automatically thinking- Jan will come, he has money, he’ll buy us things. And that wasn’t good. It changed our relationship. So I stopped. I realized that it can’t go on like that. Now I am trying to figure out how to help them, so I need to make a plan.

Q: To help your sister.
A: Her, but especially her kids. And I tell you, I understood one thing. And that’s exactly it. That my sister doesn’t have money, actually they live in an old house that would do with some reconstruction, but they lack economic intelligence. People in Slovakia lack economic intelligence, I lacked it, too, I’m still learning. Because us – Slovaks, never had money, so we never knew what to do with it. I’ll tell you an example. My sister, although she’s in debt, and her husband doesn’t make much either, they wanted a BMW. So they bought an old one, but it was a big car. It takes three litres, a Beemer for 8,000 euros. But they couldn’t afford it so they asked for a higher mortgage on their house, so their loan got increased, in order to pay for the car – that they don’t use. Because it is too expensive to drive around, since it has an engine for 3 litres. So they use the office car of her husband, with a consumption of 5,5 litres instead of 11. Here you can see the economic unintelligence of Slovaks. And of course, the poverty forces you to show off your status. And all the Austrians wonder why we have such huge cars. All the Austrians are shocked when Slovaks go Vienna etc., because for Westerners, the Austrians and so on, the Slovaks are those who drive these insanely big cars.

But there is also a historical element, because back under communism, it was impossible to buy a foreign car. It was forbidden. You could get a Skoda, or Lada from Russia, a Trabant or Dacia from Romania...For us, having a car, is an embodiment of the quality of life that is on par with the one in the West. It is something that is extremely important for us – historically and socially. So my sister, whom cannot actually afford a car, or should have bought a much more economic purchase...like me when I was in London, I bought a cheap Citroen for 300 hundred pounds, broke it ... because you know how it goes in London, I hit it somewhere every now and then, I didn’t take a good care of it. Then I sold it for scrap metal, got 50 pounds back, and bought another car for 400. Basically, these unwise economic decisions are why we have problems now. But this is the case everywhere, even in Britain - the credit cards and all. And here it’s even more protuberant because the system of Bai lifters is even more sever. And that’s the big crisis right now.

And the same goes for my parents. For example, my father, a very intelligent person, was in a good position during the years of privatization. But he simply knew that it’s was a dirty business. He knew exactly what was going on, and because of that he didn’t get in on it. Although he was invited and was offered a chance. So everybody around him became super-rich. Today, some of them have been imprisoned.
Today, he is retired. Now imagine that my mum has a pension of 250 euros, and my father some 450 euros, so they have like 700 euro per month, that’s for two people. However, in a village, they are able to survive... they spend 50 euros per week on food. And they are able to survive. So it is possible. Because my mum cooks, she buys basic ingredients, and cooks and they survive alright. And their only problem is that they have a huge house, which they built in the communist era, when Russian gas was 2 cents. But, now it’s incredibly expensive, so most of their expense go to heating the house. And they must heat it up, otherwise the walls would mould and so on.

And me, I am trying to help them, of course, I give them some money, but I know it’s not solving anything. Because when I give them money, I just support them to... and my sister, too. But, with my sister, I won’t give her money anymore. Because, I know she is going to just waste it. She won’t take the money to put it to good use, or set up a business-although she’s smart and talented. She won’t achieve anything more, because of her nature. I mean she could have become successful, too, but she didn’t do it. So from my point of view, it’s counter-productive to give her money since she’s just wasting it. You see, that’s bullshit. You need to earn money to waste it. If she wanted to make money and said okay, lend me some money, I will set-up my own business. I would say yes!

And my father is the same. He is absolutely desperate, a classic pensioner, nobody needs him. he’s sitting and watching TV all day long. I tell him, dad, why won’t you do something? Look, I have money, lets open a coffee shop in Trnava, a great business, nobody sells take-away coffee in Trnava. Let’s rent a snack bar at the main station, brand new railroad station, and operate it exactly how it is in London, take over a style of something already known like Starbucks. Let’s make a smaller version of take away Starbucks, it might be called, I don’t know ,Coffee For Stars’. It will be at the station, and my mom and you- could do it.

His reaction is, awwwww, nooo. This Mafia will come and ask for extortion money. I tell him – Dad we don’t like anymore in 1996! Today it’s not like that. He just said, no, I am okay, I don’t need it. But if he was an American pensioner, he would say of course son- let’s do it! You see? And it would be a hit cause nobody has done it before. It’s perfect, you know, just muffins and coffee. Everybody loves it in London, they would love it here, too. I mean, it’s even a cheap idea. You don’t need too much money, 5, 000 euros and off you go. But they said: no. So, instead, my dad sits all day at home, depressed just watching TV. Because of it, he thinks that there is a war going on outside. You know, that if he goes out, he would be raped, robbed and murdered, and a car would crash him....And this mentality is exactly...

Q: What did you learn the most from the UK?
A: I think that what I’ve learned in UK ...well, there are plenty of things, for example racism. I learned a lot about racism there. About tolerance. Also because I had a black girlfriend, I finally understood what the racism really is. It was shocking, it was really shocking. So, in the first place, I started to perceive, well... it was a great lecture for me to be in Britain, London, it gave me a lot of understanding of the racism and the tolerance. It was a huge... I mean I thoroughly reassessed how Slovaks, without even knowing it, are racist and chauvinistic. But they don’t even know they
are. So that is what I could finally see and understand there. And I thoroughly reassessed my own attitudes to the Roma, or other minorities, and so on. And I finally understood- clearly, what the different levels are, what is and what is not racism. And also I’ve realized how chauvinistic and racist we speak without knowing it. It was also because I was living in a Caribbean neighbourhood for three years. I mean, I learned a whole lot there. Basically, it was like... a university for me.

And on the other hand, talking about business, about the practical skills, I gained great confidence. I actually understood that there are known mechanisms of how to become successful, and if you follow these steps, the success will come. So that is what I’ve learned from the English. That is exactly what I understood by observing them. Above all, I understood that to be successful you have to have a vision. That success begins with a vision, and courage. That was an amazing thing for me to see.

I mean, the English – they were just a small island nation, but they had their vision. And by trusting that vision, having courage to follow it they took over the world. They still have remnants of this in themselves. Like, they are not scared of setting up their own business. I mean it seems like every The English is involved in some kind of trade, be it illegal or not. Even the smallest labourer, from a working-class background is immediately able to do business. He goes to Spain, and he opens up a restaurant and so on. So that is what I understood there, that every single person can be successful, if they want. I also learned how to have faith in success. That, to put it simply, if you have a vision, and you work hard for it- success will come, it is bound to. And that was for me personally the greatest message I’ve brought from Britain. And never to aim low. Always aim high! That how it works, most famously successful people- photographers, moviemakers, those whose movies everyone goes to see, they are aware of details of course, but in the first place, they see the big picture and they aim high. And that was the alpha omega for me.

Q: To dream big?
A: Exactly! And work hard! Work hard and dream big! For me, that was the biggest... and that everything is possible. And nothing is impossible. Everything can be done, you just need to figure out the way. And then you go and go and go! That is... that was the greatest message for me. And also, I’ve learned that you don’t need to cheat to get ahead. That you can be honest, and your effort will pay off.

Q: What do you mean, by poctivosť (honesty)?
A: Poctivosť is... Here in Slovakia, people think that only by cheating and frauds, is one able to get ahead. And poctivosť, its exactly the opposite. It means you can be successful, and still have integrity.
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