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# The role of international education on public diplomacy: the case of Kosovo International Summer Academy

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Through international education programs such as the Kosovo International Summer Academy (KSA), countries aim to change their image, influence, and shift the perception and attitudes of international students towards the host country. In this article, we analyze the role of KSA in bringing international students to Kosovo and the changes in KSA students' perceptions, beliefs, and evaluations of Kosovo after visiting the country. We analyze the results based on how often KSA students have been to Kosovo, their most significant impressions, their attitude before and after visiting the country, and whether they would return to Kosovo after exposure to the information in KSA. Our findings suggest that after coming to Kosovo, KSA students evaluate Kosovo more positively compared to their opinion before participating in KSA. In turn, this suggests that international education programs may be a viable strategy for improving the image and public perceptions of small states facing similar state-building and diplomatic challenges as Kosovo.

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## Introduction

Public diplomacy developed as an essential alternative to creating ties among nations and people. Two of the most distinguished eras where public diplomacy is noted as an important factor in institutional and educational program cooperation are the Cold War and the post-9/11 era. In the first period, public diplomacy served as a mechanism of soft power strategy for the U.S., portraying its wealth, culture, free trade, people, democracy, and technological advancements as competitive to the image of the USSR (Bu, 1999). The next marked event is the post-9/11 era, where public diplomacy was the primary tool for building long-term relationships with long-term outcomes (Leonard et al., 2002).

International and non-formal education has caught the attention of countries and institutions worldwide due to their high impact, and even more so since the globalization trends have increased their score. Developed countries such as the U.S., U.K., Canada, and Germany have created special programs to invite students from all over the world, further confirming the importance of this sector (Byrne and Hall, 2014). Globally distinguished programs such as the American Fulbright program, the United Kingdom's Chevening Scholarship, DAAD in Germany, and the European Union's Erasmus+ aim to develop global leaders, strengthen influence (Ayhan et al., 2022), increase cultural understanding, promote bilateral cooperation and create friendships worldwide. In both historical and contemporary contexts, countries have employed educational exchanges to promote themselves globally and create people-to-people relationships. In doing so, they have become a vital and pragmatic tool, especially for small states that have limited financial capacities allocated for international image promotion. Student mobility programs (SMP) are an essential element of such promotion and, as Varpahovskis and Ayhan (2022) pointed out, SMPs are revered as a powerful public diplomacy tool that helps to create a relationship between students and the host countries. Different international education exchange programs in both developed and developing countries have also shown the capacity to change the perception of international students. According to Ayhan et al. (2022), the Global Korea Scholarship resulted in more positive evaluations of foreign students about Korea, its history, and traditions compared with their attitudes before being part of the scholarship (Ayhan et al., 2022).

In the case of Kosovo, a young state that only declared its independence in 2008, exchange programs as part of SMPs directly impact the international expansion of the country's image. We argue that Kosovo is trying to create a new image for itself, eradicate the perception of a war-torn place that derives from the past, supported by longstanding stereotypes, and make itself known as the country with the youngest population in Europe (Eurostat, 2023). The present case study is based on the Kosovo International Summer Academy (KSA), a public diplomacy-oriented summer academy that provides non-formal education for international students. Focused on "Peacebuilding in Post-Conflict Areas: Diplomacy, Leadership, and Negotiations," KSA, through an academic and professional program, provides the opportunity for foreign students to increase their knowledge about the country and fill in information gaps on the country's history since 1999. KSA is organized by the Kosovo Center of Diplomacy, a non-profit organization concentrated in the field of classic and public diplomacy in Kosovo, and has been promoted by the world's highest-ranking universities since 2013 as a unique opportunity for international students to explore post-conflict studies and diplomacy.

In the following sections, we evaluate the impact of two primary aspects of the KSA's cross-disciplinary, non-formal academic environment, based on a survey of 171 participants:

- First, participants' impressions and attitudes toward Kosovo, compared to their pre-participation-knowledge and the reality encountered in the country during their participation in KSA;
- Second, participants' level of engagement with the country and relationship maintenance through professional, academic, and personal connections following their participation in KSA.

The article is divided as follows: in the next section, we introduce the KSA as a background of this study. Further, we build an analytical framework that navigates this research through a literature review, its connection with public diplomacy, and the importance of educational programs for small states and their image. We then explain the research questions and methodology and present the findings through discussion and interpretation.

## Kosovo International Summer Academy

The KSA was launched in 2013. Originally called the "Kosovo Summer Program," efforts for its internationalization led to the subsequent rebranding of this program. Organized by the Kosovo Center of Diplomacy, the KSA is a ten-day program in which young people from all around the world gather in Prishtina, Kosovo, attending lectures and field trips prepared in advance for their information.

The focus of the KSA program is "Peacebuilding in Post-conflict areas: diplomacy, leadership, and negotiations," given the fact that in 1999<sup>1</sup>, the country experienced a war accompanied by human rights violations and atrocities (Hajdari and Krasniqi, 2021). Today, Kosovo's peace-building and state-building process continues to be vital for the Balkans and beyond.

KSA consistently pushes for a global dialog between the academic world and diplomats and politicians directly involved in conflict resolution, peace, state-building, and public diplomacy in Kosovo and the region. The academy consists of two components: an academic component, or a series of lectures by distinguished professors from top world universities, as well as local and regional scholars; and a non-academic component, which offers international students the opportunity to visit and experience different parts of the country, including its historical, cultural, and religious sights, and natural beauties. These latter elements are of high importance to the people of Kosovo and serve as vehicles of identity expression for the many communities that co-exist in the country. By combining the academic and non-academic components, KSA delivers a creative method of teaching and instruction from all angles and encourages its participants to engage in critical thinking.

As the organizer of the KSA, the Kosovo Center of Diplomacy also plays an active role in maintaining relationships with KSA's international participants through its alumni network, direct support in professional and academic interests and research, as well as professional career advice for all KSA participants who are interested in continuing their cooperation with the host country.

## Relation of international education to public diplomacy

International education programs are considered very effective and powerful tools that are essential to a country's foreign policy analysis (Ayhan et al., 2022; Byrne, 2016; Metzgar, 2016; Akerlund, 2014; Scott-Smith, 2009; Snow, 2008). Moreover, they are important mechanisms that contribute to the foreign policy strategies of states and their soft power (Nye, 2004). These elements benefit countries with financial constraints, which cannot allocate particular funds to sophisticate their soft power strategies and need more resources to invest in public diplomacy. Therefore, international education is an invaluable component of the state's soft power.

Today, public diplomacy has profound importance not only for large and small states but also for non-state actors, who use it as an instrument to influence cultures, attitudes, and behavior, or increase the influence on the actions that are to the advantage of their interest and values (Gregory, 2011). Moreover, scholars have documented the potential of public diplomacy to increase the interaction among people, create credibility, and strengthen their relations (Fitzpatrick, 2012).

International education and cultural exchange programs are among the elite tools of public diplomacy, which aim to promote mutual understanding and goodwill, establish interpersonal contacts, and aim for long-term contacts that create human connections among states and peoples. According to Bettie (2020), the wide range of these activities brings people from different countries into direct contact, which has a purpose and lasts for a particular time. Over the years, this side of the scholarship has evolved towards a globalized world and target, aiming to become an instrument of connection between “cultures, attitudes and behavior, building and managing relationships, influence thoughts and mobilize actions to advance their interests and values” (Gregory, 2011; Limani and Limani, 2022, p. 2). Values, culture, and ideas in the contemporary soft power agenda, according to Nye (2004), have a powerful influence on the global stage. Therefore, the experiences of students in developing social and intellectual relationships through international education have become an important vehicle for the state to uphold its foreign policy priorities and global profile (Byrne and Hall, 2014).

International education today has significant value. Its power is continually rising globally, which also increases the value of the exchange, interpersonal interactions, and opportunities for cooperation that result. The unique human factor of interpersonal communication is an equally important benefit of exchange programs, with the opportunity for both host nationals and exchange participants from the sending and host countries, respectively (Sustarsic and Cheng, 2022).

Melissen (2005) argues that public diplomacy aims to influence foreign people and authorities, with “people to people” diplomacy having the goal of creating a positive image of the country and winning “the hearts and minds” of these foreign audiences. From a governmental perspective, the human factor of communication with foreign peoples remains especially important (Malone, 1985). This is because global politics are human-centric, with the elimination of differences among classes, and citizenships, and increasing humanity, solidarity, and elimination of racism among the most important goals of humankind (Sustarsic and Cheng, 2022).

International education is an important contributing mechanism in the state’s foreign policy goals, particularly their soft power strategies that aim to mend and replace the financial disadvantages dedicated particularly to this aspect. The basic premise of inbound student mobility programs is to familiarize international students with the host country’s culture, values, lifestyle, political system, economy, and people, among others. It is expected that through their direct experiences, including studying, students will learn more about the country and are expected to generate favorable beliefs and attitudes toward the host country (Ayhan et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, studies on public diplomacy and international education, especially on educational exchange programs, highlight both positive aspects as well as negative opinions that can be created about the host country (Yun and Vibber, 2012). According to Black and O’Bright (2016) and Chien’s (2016) U-curve theory, the length of stay of international educational program participants is a determinant of the decrease in the favorable attitudes and impressions they create for the host country. Meanwhile, Istad et al. (2021) consider that the level of satisfaction of international students in the host country is

associated with their intention to stay in the country for work or further study after their graduation. This also shows that the lack of academic satisfaction in the host country can potentially lead to negative perceptions and attitudes towards the host country. Further research is needed on the benefits and limitations of international education programs as tools of public diplomacy, as well as on best practices in leveraging these programs as effective instruments to improve the image and public perception of states facing diplomatic challenges.

### Research questions

According to Buhmann and Ingenhoff’s (2015) 4D model of the country image, one of the most important aspects of a country image is people’s judgments and personal feelings toward the country’s attributes. According to this model, people’s beliefs about a country can be disaggregated into cognitive and affective components, which together determine their emotions toward the country. In the case of the KSA, one of the primary aims of the program was to enforce the positive emotions of participants and change the negative perceptions created by mis- and disinformation. To test the outcome of these aims, our research investigates how international education programs, specifically the KSA, impact the attitudes and perceptions of international students toward Kosovo and its society.

Research question 1: What is the difference between the knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of the international participants towards Kosovo prior to their participation in KSA, versus after KSA?

Research question 2: What is the impact of KSA on international participants and their level of engagement, relationship establishment, and maintenance of ties with Kosovo through professional, academic, and personal connections after KSA?

### Methodology

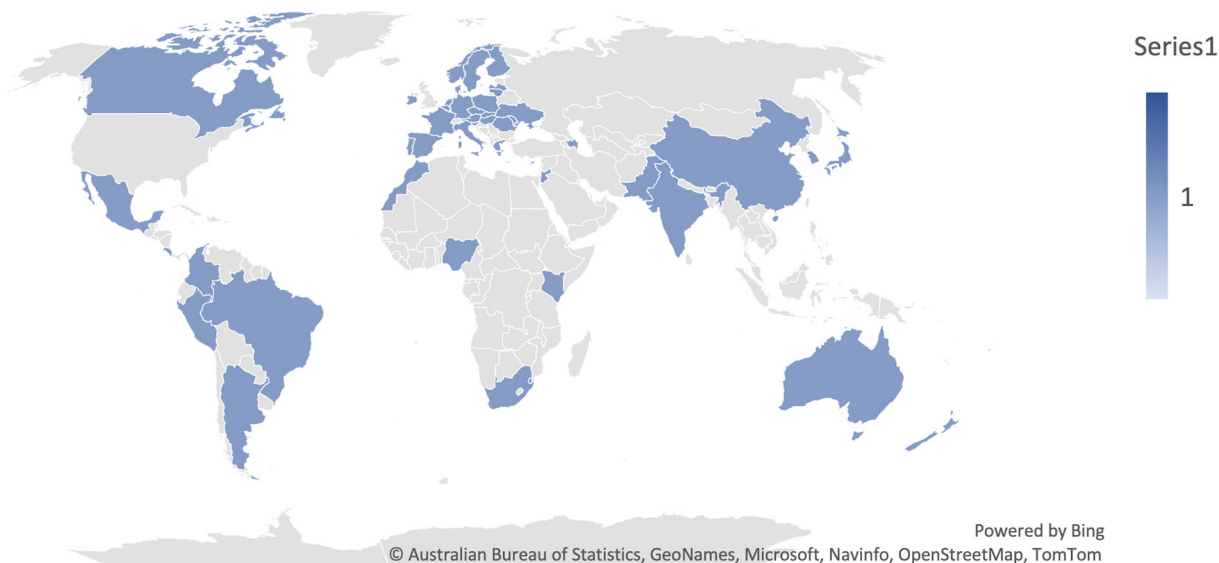
For this research, we surveyed KSA alumni to evaluate the role of non-formal education in the public diplomacy of small states, represented through the case of Kosovo. To achieve the most transparent results, the alumni included in the survey were the participants of the editions 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021, and 2022. From 2015 to 2017, there was only one group for the edition, while the 2018, 2019, and 2022 editions included two sessions/groups. The edition of 2020 was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation worldwide, while in 2021, the number of participants was limited due to ongoing pandemic preventive measures in Kosovo.

From 2015 to 2022, KSA engaged 552 participants from 82 countries and territories worldwide, including 349 women and 203 men. Overall, the survey received responses from 171 participants from 55 countries and territories. This represents 30.97 percent of the total number of KSA participants from 2015 to 2022.

**Survey procedures.** To assess the impact of the KSA on participants’ knowledge, attitudes, and willingness to return to Kosovo, we administered a digital survey to KSA alumni on the following three topics: participants’ emotions and attitudes towards Kosovo; their level of information about Kosovo before arrival; and their qualitative experiences during KSA. The survey was conducted online through the Google Forms platform and was distributed to the KSA alumni groups for a period of 10 days, from October 9 to 19, 2022.

The digital survey consisted of ten questions. The first three questions were related to gender, and country of origin, while the remaining seven multiple-choice questions were formulated to measure the perceptions and attitudes of KSA participants across

## Participating countries in the survey



**Fig. 1** Participating countries in the survey<sup>2</sup>.

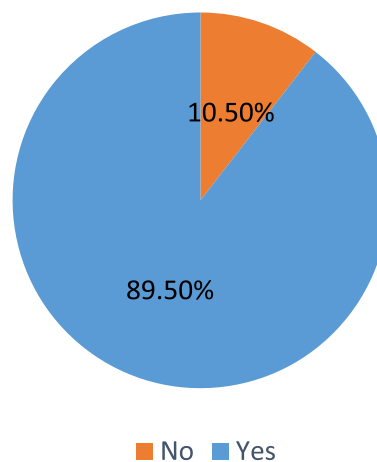
three time stages: before, during, and after participating in KSA. Throughout the survey, questions were designed to examine the impact of KSA on respondents' beliefs and perceptions toward Kosovo.

In particular, the questions "Was your participation in KSA the first time you visited Kosovo" and "Would you go back to Kosovo if you had the chance" were formulated to assess the impact of KSA on participants' attitudes toward Kosovo and their desire to return following the program. These questions were specifically cross-analyzed to examine the attitude of international participants who visited Kosovo for the first time through their participation in KSA, and their expressed wishes to come back to Kosovo following the international education program.

In examining survey responses, we used Pearson correlation analysis to investigate significant positive or negative correlations between questions, which were treated as both dependent and independent variables. For example, the questions "What were your concerns when you decided to visit Kosovo" and "What are the most significant impressions you have created about Kosovo during KSA?" were treated as independent variables for the question "Would you return to Kosovo if you had the chance?" Further, the question of whether "Kosovo was (way better, just the same or worse) to what I have read, heard before visiting" was used as the independent variable for the question "Have you been engaged in research, work or other activities related to Kosovo after KSA?" Lastly, the question "Do you recommend Kosovo to others as worth visiting" was not analyzed in conjunction with any other questions, due to the 99-percent positive response rate by the respondents.

**Participants.** Figure 1 shows the countries of survey participants of KSA. Among the participants, two did not specify the country where they were from. It is important to note that among countries of the European Union, KSA had participants from five countries that have not recognized the independence of Kosovo (Greece, Romania, Slovakia, Cyprus, and Spain). Other countries that have not recognized the independence of Kosovo, and which have participated in KSA, include Russia, China, India, Palestine, Ukraine, Brazil, Mexico, Paraguay, South Africa, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Moldova, Morocco, Mongolia, Argentina, Indonesia, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Cameroon, Ethiopia, and Kenya. Of

Percentage of responses: "Was your participation in Kosovo International Summer Academy the first time you visited Kosovo?"

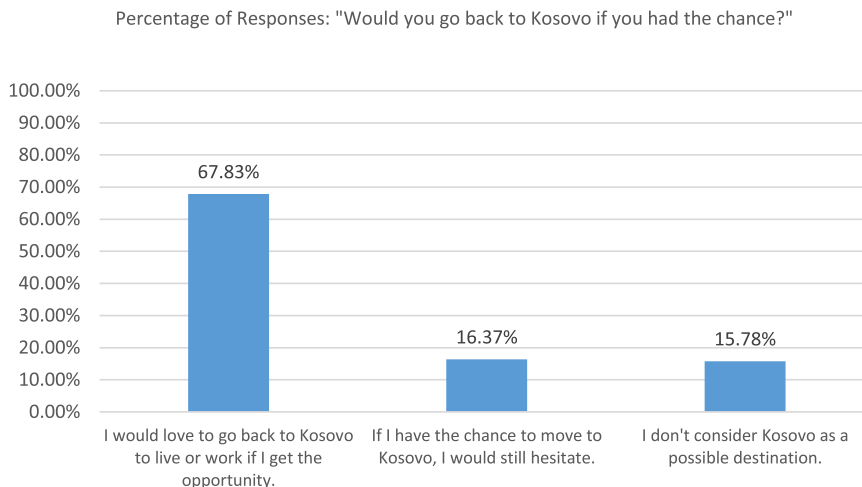


**Fig. 2** Percentage of responses (yes/no) to the question, "Was your participation in Kosovo International Summer Academy the first time you visited Kosovo?".

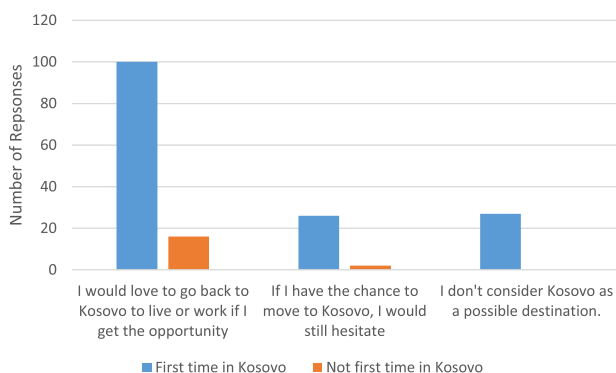
exceptional importance is the presence of participants from countries that have adopted a stance of rejection toward Kosovo's statehood, as there is a high probability that the population of these countries between 18 to 35 years of age does not encounter positive news or have a positive image about Kosovo based on local media.

### Results and analysis

Data analysis of the results shows a number of correlations between key variables. This section presents results from a series of non-parametric tests and bivariate analyses to assess the attitude of KSA participants toward Kosovo based on the knowledge they had about the country before their arrival; the difference



**Fig. 3** Percentage of survey responses to the question, "Would you go back to Kosovo if you had the chance?".



**Fig. 4** Number of responses to survey questions on whether or not participants would return to Kosovo, based on whether it was their first time in Kosovo.

between their knowledge of Kosovo and the reality they encountered; and how the KSA has influenced or changed their perceptions about Kosovo.

First, to gauge the influence of the KSA on its participants and the potential relationship they want to build with Kosovo after attending the program, we examined the correlation between the participants who were in Kosovo for the first time through KSA and those who had visited Kosovo before (Fig 2). Participants were asked to select one of three responses to the question: "Would you go back to Kosovo if you had the chance to live or work?" (Fig. 3).

Figure 2 shows that 89.5 percent of the respondents visited Kosovo for the first time through their participation in the KSA, while 10.5 percent had been to Kosovo before (Fig. 2).

Meanwhile in the Figure 3, in the three alternatives on the willingness of KSA participants to return to Kosovo, 67.8 percent said they would go back if they had the chance, while 32.1 percent declared that they would not want to return to Kosovo because of their hesitation or because they had not considered Kosovo as a possible destination (Fig. 3). Figure 4 shows the analysis of the two responses, to assess the impact of KSA on the perception of first-time visitors and those who had visited Kosovo previously. The majority of the responses are positive, from both KSA participants who were there for the first and second time (67.8 percent). However, there are still first-time participants who would hesitate or would not consider Kosovo as a place of destination. Correlation analysis demonstrates a significant negative

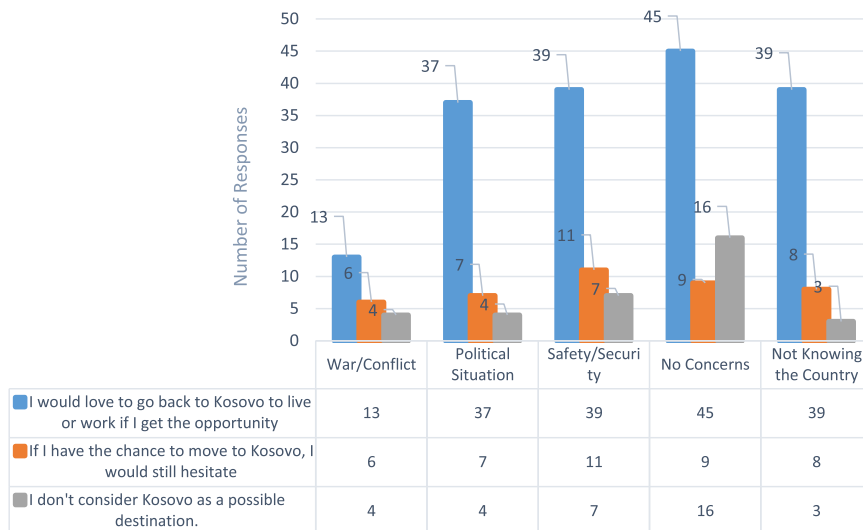
correlation (although weak:  $r = -0.168$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between the KSA participants visiting Kosovo for the first and second time, and their responses on their willingness to go back to Kosovo as presented in Fig. 4.

Next, in the Fig. 5 we examined whether participants' willingness and desire to return or not to return to Kosovo were related to any of the perceptions and fears that they had before traveling to Kosovo. In particular, participants were asked to select from having concerns over war/conflict, political situation, safety, and security, not knowing the country, or no concerns prior to KSA. The data shows a negative correlation between the concern of not knowing the country before traveling to Kosovo, and the level of desire to return to Kosovo ( $r = -0.171$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). 26 percent of participants who would like to return to Kosovo had no concerns before coming to Kosovo, while twenty-three percent were concerned about not knowing the country, or Kosovo's safety and security. Among participants who would hesitate to come back to Kosovo, the most common concern was over the safety and security of the country (Fig. 5).

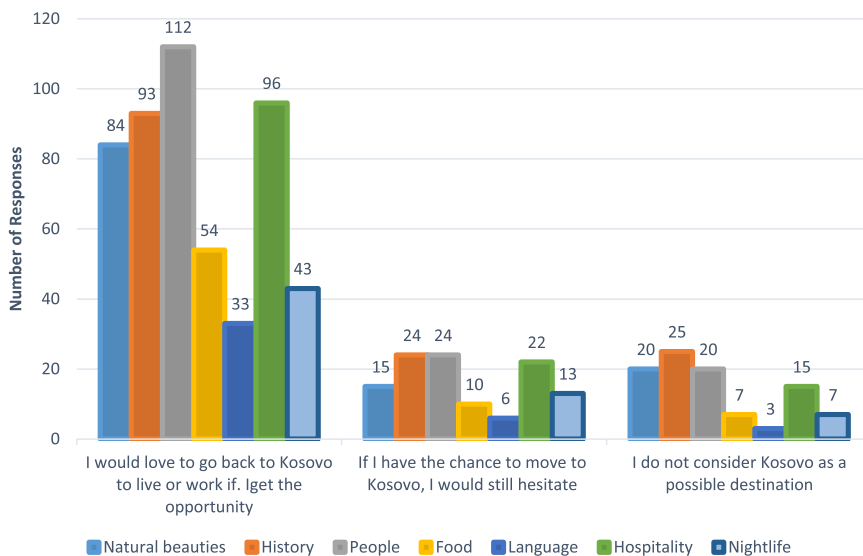
Figure 6 analyzes the impressions of KSA participants toward Kosovo, concerning their desire to return to the country. History, people, food, language, hospitality, nature, and nightlife are some of the aspects with which international students can create a more emotional bond with a country. Survey responses show that the most impressionable aspects of Kosovo to participants were its people (91 percent), history (83 percent), and hospitality (77 percent), with the least impressionable being its nightlife (39 percent) and language (25 percent).

Results did not demonstrate many correlations between the aspects of Kosovo that participants were most impressed by, and their willingness to return to Kosovo. However, a significant negative correlation is shown between the level of willingness to return and participants who have been impressed by people ( $r = 0.-291$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and hospitality ( $r = 0.-220$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Taken together, results validate the people-to-people approach of public diplomacy and the value of human connection as one of the most important methods of uniting people from diverse backgrounds.

In analyzing data on participants' opinions toward Kosovo, in relation to their level of engagement with Kosovo in various academic and professional capacities, as presented in Fig. 7 we found that the majority of respondents declared that Kosovo was better than they had initially thought. Responses show that KSA participants are mostly interested in engaging further in scientific and academic work related to Kosovo, as opposed to internships and work in Kosovo. Nevertheless, it is important to



**Fig. 5** Number of responses to survey questions on various types of concerns toward traveling to Kosovo, in relation to the question of whether they would return to Kosovo.



**Fig. 6** Number of responses to survey questions on the impact of the impressions of Kosovo on the level of desire to return to live or work.

note that even the respondents who have found the country just the same as they expected have expressed interest to be engaged with the country directly or indirectly after KSA. In light of Kosovo’s ongoing state-building and diplomatic challenges, the responses of KSA participants who found Kosovo way better than they thought suggest that scientific engagements such as articles, theses, and dissertations related to Kosovo may have a positive impact on enriching the academic literature and research on Kosovo (Fig. 7). These activities may also improve a multitude of dimensions related to statehood, peace, and state-building models, as well as the impact of Kosovo’s development and stability in regional and global politics.

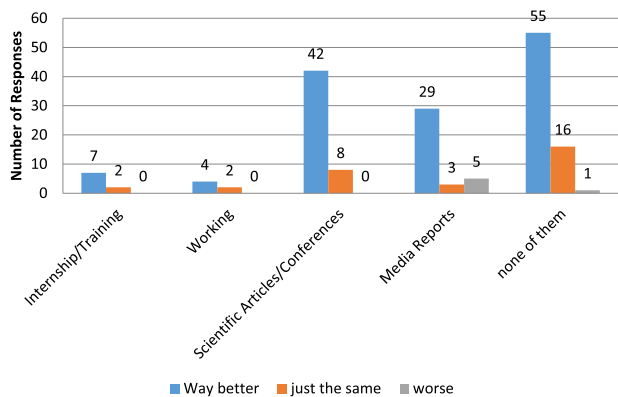
The data demonstrates a significant negative correlation between participants’ opinions about Kosovo before participation in KSA and their level of concern for the political situation ( $r = -.166 p < 0.01$ ) and safety and security ( $r = -.217 p < 0.01$ ). However, the more that participants found out about Kosovo, the less concerned they became about the political situation and their safety and security. This suggests that the information

participants had previously encountered about the country was different from the reality that they found in the country, resulting in their changing perceptions. Similarly, results show a significant difference in the expectations of KSA participants before participating in KSA, among visitors who had or had not previously been to Kosovo ( $p = 0.035 p < 0.05$ ).

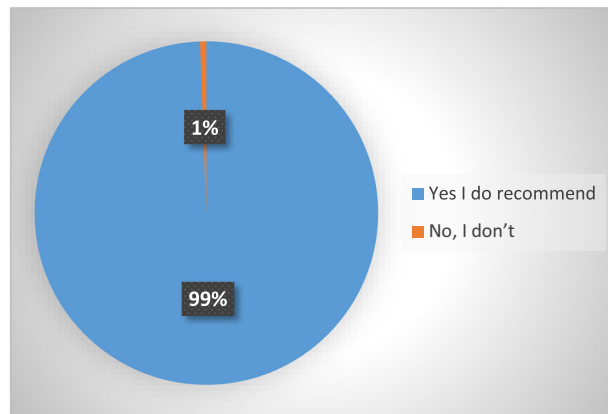
Finally, results show that 99 percent of KSA participants declared they would recommend as Fig. 8 shows, with no statistically significant differences across the above variables (Fig. 8).

**Discussion and conclusion**

Our findings show that international education has a powerful impact on the behaviors and attitudes of international visitors, and their desire to keep ties with the country. Nevertheless, changing perceptions cannot be entirely correlated with the desire for relationship maintenance or the desire to return. While 67.8 percent of KSA respondents said they would love to come back if they had the chance, 42 percent declared they did not engage in



**Fig. 7** Number of responses to survey questions on opinions toward Kosovo and participants' level of engagement with Kosovo on scientific and professional levels, before and after participation in KSA.



**Fig. 8** Percentage of respondents who, after participating in KSA, would or would not recommend others to visit Kosovo.

any activities related to Kosovo after participation in KSA. As Varpahovskis and Ayhan (2022) argue, maintaining a relationship includes many factors, as “relationship building and maintenance require the active agency of at least two parties.” Therefore, when studying the changing perceptions of international visitors toward a country’s image, and their shifting desires to establish long-term relationships with the country (Hajdari, 2019), it is important to also analyze the willingness and ability of the host country to maintain the relationship, following Icek Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behavior (1991). In this regard, the Kosovo Center of Diplomacy plays the role of the host country agency that maintains the relationship with its international participants through the Alumni Network as the organizer of the KSA, by facilitating continuous communication and connection in the field of academic research, project engagement in the host country, and assistance through its partnership network to support KSA alumni research interests on Kosovo and in the region.

Our findings demonstrate that the KSA participants’ most significant impressions about the country were its people, history, hospitality, and natural beauties, which suggests a stronger correlation between their country’s image of Kosovo with its society and history, than its language, food, and nightlife. As participants’ perceptions of Kosovo changed after engaging with KSA, this suggests that people-to-people diplomacy is most effective in changing the image of a country, by focusing on elements including society, history, and human connection. Although many KSA participants had expressed concerns before coming to Kosovo regarding the country’s safety and security, or their lack of information on the country and its political situation, both first-time visitors and those who had previously visited Kosovo had a high evaluation of its people, history, culture, and nature after engaging in KSA, reflecting their elevated perception of its country image.

This article also provides a quantitative contribution to public diplomacy literature by providing seven years of primary source data, which measures the impact of KSA as a non-formal education program for international students, on international visitors’ perceptions and attitudes toward Kosovo. As Kosovo’s process of peace-building, state-building, and declaring independence remains a unique case in international relations, the data analyzed in this article contains vital information on the shifting attitudes and opinions of international visitors to the country.

Finally, this article contributes to the assessment of international educational programs from a public diplomacy perspective. From a foreign policy standpoint, this article suggests that international educational programs may be a useful tool for small states to not only influence the perspectives of international visitors but also to

shape and elevate their image. Today, Kosovo continues to struggle to establish diplomatic relations and gain country recognition. However, findings demonstrate that international, non-formal education programs such as the KSA have the potential to influence the perceptions, attitudes, and country image of international visitors toward Kosovo, including those from countries that have not yet recognized Kosovo, or categorically refuse to do so.

As this research is primarily built on survey data from KSA participants from 2015 to 2022, further research is needed to examine the longer-term effects of international education programs on participants’ perceptions and attitudes toward the host country. While the advantage of this survey collection is the possibility to collect data from participants in a wide geographical span, factors such as incomplete response rates, the potential for respondents to misunderstand the questions, and the capacity for dishonest answers are among the limitations of the survey. Avenues for further research include conducting future focus groups with KSA participants or holding a series of interviews with alumni to incorporate additional qualitative data into this research. Further studies can leverage or expand on the original dataset provided by this research to examine the efficacy and sustainability of international education programs as tools of public diplomacy, and the role of international educational programs for countries that struggle with their international image.

Nevertheless, the findings from this research contain crucial policy implications for countries that struggle with their image at the international level, especially those that face streams of negative information or the lack of international promotion of the positive changes that the country has made in recent years. Taken together, results suggest that international education programs may be a viable strategy for small states to improve their image and strengthen positive attitudes by international visitors, contributing to a more positive public perception by the international sphere. Based on these findings, policymakers and practitioners may benefit from leveraging international education programs as tools of public diplomacy. By integrating or scaling up such programs, policy practitioners may effectively build the image of countries facing state-building or diplomatic challenges, similar to those ongoing in Kosovo.

**Data availability**

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to the closed nature of the Kosovo International Summer Academy but are available from the corresponding author upon request.

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## Note

- 1 From 1999 to 2008, Kosovo was a protectorate under Resolution 1244/99 of the Security Council of the UN (UN, 1999). The country declared its independence in 2008.
- 2 Countries and territories that participated in the survey according to the respondents: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kashmir (Indian Administered), Kenya, Kingdom of Eswatini, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Moldova, Morocco, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Palestine, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Scotland, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Ukraine, and the United States.

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## Author contributions

Conceptualization, LH and JK.; methodology LH and JK; analysis, LH, JK, BL, EL, ACH; investigation, LH and JK; writing—original draft preparation, LH, JK, BL, EL, ACH; writing—review and editing, LH, JK, BL, EL, ACH.

## Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

## Ethical approval

All procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. The study was not approved by an ethics committee because no physical or psychological discomfort or harm due to participation in this study was expected. Moreover, we did not use invasive methods and did not include in the survey underage respondents, considering that KSA does not accept underage participants (not younger than 18 years old).

## Informed consent

This article contains an online survey conducted with KSA participants. As the survey was conducted online, participation in the survey was voluntary. Nevertheless, the beginning of the Survey included the information consent as below: “You are invited to participate in a research study related to the importance of non-formal education in promoting the image of Kosovo to the international public. If you agree to participate in this study, you will fill out a survey consisting of 10 questions that will take about 5 minutes to complete. The information you will share with us if you participate in this research will be kept completely confidential to the full extent of the law”.

## Additional information

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