

**United States Department of State  
Diplomacy Laboratory  
An External Evaluation of Kosovo's American Corners Program**

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## **Executive Summary**

This report provides analysis, findings, and recommendations as they pertain to American Corners in Kosovo as a contribution to an ongoing U.S. Department of State program. Stemming from America's foreign policy, three corners located throughout Kosovo have been working to educate the populations they serve and to unite the country and improve its identity. The Corners, Pristina, Prizren, and Mitrovica serve their communities with a variety of educational and informational topics to include law, economics, language, STEM, and the promotion of regional stability with economic growth. It is the goal of the research to improve the Corners and support Kosovo as it works to become a democratic state.

Methods of research derived from a variety of resources; open online resources, the American Corner's website, lectures, and resources from the Indiana-Purdue University Library database. Research was also conducted by Zoom meetings with the American Corner's staff members. Staff members were asked specific, structured questions, and were also given open-ended discussion opportunities. Findings from research show an overwhelming response for improved collaboration among the three Corners. If done together program planning and implementation would benefit. For further collaboration, there is a need for increased involvement with the US Embassy to implement more cohesive training for all Corners staff. Some staff and space requirements and subject recommendations are presented as well.

The authors recognize the limitations of the research. None of the authors have spent time in Kosovo first-hand. The research is also being conducted during a serious international Pandemic, creating an environment and issues that may not always be consistent. The corners are also a relatively new foreign policy State Department enterprise in Kosovo and as well have been impacted by the Pandemic.

## **Part I: The Situation**

### **Hypothesis**

With increased internal collaboration and support from the United States (U.S.) Embassy, and access to resources such as technology and transportation, the three American Corners in Kosovo will continue to advance the US Department of State's strategic goals. Kosovo will continue to educate its population, building its individual identity, while strengthening its economy and becoming a successful foreign partner of the United States.

### **Introduction**

Kosovo, once a part of the Soviet Union's State of Yugoslavia, gained its independence from Serbia in 2008. Though now independent, Kosovo has struggled to create a new national

identity. The country faces an ethnic divide among Serbians, Balkans, and Albanians. The United States has used foreign policy to assist Kosovo to become a new democratic state. Kosovo has goals of joining the European Union, United Nations, and the North American Trading Organization. With the three American Corners in Kosovo, the US has implemented a focus on improving the rule of law, increasing economic development, and promoting regional stability. All three Corners, Prizren, Mitrovica, and Pristina complement each other and have similar goals. All three have their own unique strengths and challenges. Utilizing research and case studies, recommendations for the corners follow. To understand these, it is imperative to discuss specific details concerning each.

In short, Pristina, the Capitol of Kosovo, is home to the most active Corner and is in a major international city. Located just east of central Kosovo, Pristina has access to advanced technology, providing it with the most staff, support, and programming. American Corner Prizren, sits in the southern part of Kosovo. This corner is housed in the Inter-Municipal Library. American Corner Mitrovica, located in the northern region, is housed in the Vuk Karadzic Library.

Each corner strives to complement each other, all working toward the same five goals; provide accurate, compelling, timely, and audience-appropriate information about the United States—its history, culture, society, and values, 2) facilitate English language learning through access to English language speakers, resources, computers, and the Internet, 3) promote U.S. higher education through Educational USA advising by providing international students with accurate, comprehensive, and current guidance on applying to U.S. colleges and universities, 4) foster people-to-people connections, increase understanding, and build respect with host-country audiences through cultural programs, and 5) support continued engagement with U.S. government alumni, connecting them to local audiences through alumni programs where credible, local voices can share firsthand information about the United States and American values (American Corner Mitrovica, n.d.). The Corner's staff work each day with their respective populations, reaching to meet the goals set by the US. The United States Embassy, located in Pristina, serves as a resource to all three corners. Through research and analysis, it is believed that for Corners to continue to impact their communities and help Kosovo serve as a strong,

democratic state with effective and compatible collaboration among the three Corners.

## **Methodology**

To contribute to material findings for the report, the groups prepared critical case studies involving detailed analysis of each corner and then interviews with the three corners in Kosovo, and a whole group video call with the Embassy itself to develop a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the American Corners in Kosovo. This also considering the current state of the country regarding its relationship with Serbia, COVID 19's impact and its economy.

First, the groups studied the history, culture, demography and all other perinate factors involving Kosovo and then specifically, these three locations. They then prepared for individual interviews with each of the three American Corners in Kosovo. In so doing, each group was assigned a designated point of contact to email and establish a Zoom conference call to talk via video with workers from each American Corner to gain insight on each Corner's work in the area. Once each point of contact replied with their schedules, the teams either emailed the questions to the group and received replies or spoke in a video conference and took notes on the answers. Each group asked their point of contact the same set of questions:

- Are the American Corners advancing the U.S. Embassy's strategic goals?
- Do they meet the vision of a modern American Space?
- Are there barriers to their work preventing them from conducting programs or reducing the quality of their programs?
- Are staffing, physical and virtual space and resources provided appropriate to needs?
- What activities such as staffing, audience, resources, physical and virtual space, and services could be improved?
- Is there anything else the Network can do to help?
- Do you think introductory courses and programs should be taught first in Albanian, Serbian, or Turkish?

With this information, the class was able to compose one case study for each corner and this portion of the research paper also covers the Network. These case study reports include an

analysis of the strategic goals and how they are being met at each corner, roadblocks, and the different contextual, geographic, cultural, and political factors that affect each corner. In each analysis, the groups also provided a list of recommendations to each Corner, such as overcoming language barriers and public transportation limitations.

Each group then recorded the answers gathered from each Corner's point of contact and posted them to the group's discussion boards. Afterwards, all three groups sent one group leader to meet with the American Embassy and spoke directly to Mr. Besim Kokollari to discuss the Network overall and ask any questions group members may have about the American Corners. Here, he was able to provide the groups with critical insight, experience, and firsthand recommendations for the Corners. This meeting with the American Embassy provided a richer understanding of the network as a whole and contributed to the final project that includes similar components of the first case study, including analysis of the current state of the Corners and recommendations for any issues the Corners may encounter.

### **Analysis and Findings**

The three case studies presented findings that helped support the hypothesis and its questions regarding each corner. Through the study of each American Corner, findings can be presented to offer useable recommendations.

#### *American Corner Prizren*

During the analysis of the American Corner Prizren, it was found that they work to help students obtain a United States Degree that may be used in their country. It was identified that if the American Spaces can help Kosovars focus on STEM degrees and skills, there will be improvement to their economy and infrastructure. A positive impact to the economy may also improve peace between Serbia and Kosovo. American Corner Prizren's priority mission is to maintain focus on improving the rule of law, increasing economic development, and promoting regional stability (U.S. Embassy Pristina, 2018). The Corner's strategic goals are to 1) Improve the Rule of Law and Governance that Meets Citizens' Needs, 2) create a sustainable, inclusive economic growth that supports Kosovo's stability and integration to the West, and 3)

contribute positively to regional stability, including making progress in normalizing its relationship with Serbia, transitioning the KSF into an armed force, countering violent extremism and malign external influences, and promoting minority rights, and integrating into Western structures (U.S. Embassy Pristina, 2018).

The Corner has a diverse group of participants and are visited by tens of thousands of individuals annually. However, physical, and virtual space are cause for concern regarding the presentation of barriers to adequate space for attendance and programming. They have limited space located in the library where the Corner resides. While the physical space is a challenge, the Corner hopes to improve and expand that to reach more participants.

Through the findings of this case study, it is recommended to increase the available space for the current American Corner in Prizren. The process to seek alternate means could prove beneficial to reach a larger audience of participants. This can be achieved through looking to rent office space for specific programs. The collaboration with a local university, secondary school, or other business could also prove to be necessary to acquire additional areas or rooms to continue programming. It is also recommended to improve planning and collaboration with all American Corners in Kosovo. This collaboration can be achieved through weekly leadership meetings with the Embassy and Kosovo American Corner employees. Additionally, it is recommended that a full-time English teaching assistant be provided by the Embassy. Learning English is one of the largest appeals about the Corner, and others.

### *American Corner Pristina*

The American Corner Pristina is the capital city of Kosovo and plays host to the most populated and active American Corner in the nation. This corner is situated in the East central part of the country. With this corner reaching the most participants, it can have more partnerships, support, staffing, and programming compared to the other the two American Corners in Kosovo. American Corner Pristina has recently expanded and renovated its physical space, allowing participants to utilize resources like 3D and laser printers; resources which are extremely limited in the nation. With the additional space, the Corner has been able to provide more access to STEM course offerings, moving toward a more hands-on programming style



than it previously offered.

The specific mission of American Corner Pristina is to 1) establish and strengthen the relationships between the United States and Kosovo, 2) demonstrate American values and culture, 3) promote learning the English language, 4) encourage study abroad in the United States, and 5) foster mutual understanding and good will (American Corner Pristina, n.d.).

There is a language barrier presented in the execution of these programs within Kosovo. For example, if the American Corners want to teach Albanian, all three locations must teach Serbian also, both of which are the most common languages spoken in Kosovo. With the issue of staffing at all locations, it is difficult to attain this goal. Throughout its existence, events and programs at American Corner Pristina have shifted from a traditional educational format to a theory-based approach. The Corner's programs aim to dive into all three aspects of the Embassy's strategic goals; however, the largest focus is on economic development. These efforts to educate in theory-based approaches to economic challenges are seen through the Corner's technological advancements, student access to theory-based approaches in economic studies, and hands-on experiences. Five core programs were identified during the case study process. The programs include information about the United States, English Language Learning, EducationUSA, alumni activities, and community engagement. These programs help the Corner to accomplish their mission and goals, as well as the Embassy's.

With the findings in this case study, it is recommended that the Corner work to employ additional staff members to meet the high demands of upward mobility in participation. Additionally, it is recommended that Kosovo adopt a wider range of studies within their educational programs to meet the needs of a new generation of Kosovo civilians. If these programs are implemented, it is recommended that American Corner Pristina adopts a transportation assistance program to help students and other participants arrive at the Corner. Lastly, it is recommended that the Corner adopt classes to teach other students Serbian and Albanian. This will help to break the language barrier and provide a more inclusive environment for participants who want to engage with the Corner.

### *American Corner Mitrovica*

During the case study of the American Corner Mitrovica, the goal of the corner was easily identified. The focus of the Mitrovica American Corner is to showcase the freedoms displayed through American values such as the commitment to democracy and maintaining citizen rights to free access to information. This is achieved by engaging students through English language classes, discussion clubs, and webinars. American Corner Mitrovica is unique in the sense that tension still lies between the Albanians and Serbians. Due to this tension, Mitrovica is in an area where informal travel is not permitted. This challenge requires a longer security process for personnel from the other corners and the embassy to enter North Mitrovica. Additionally, the Corner Mitrovica is staffed by one individual who provides programming to a diverse group of participants. Throughout the case study it was found that Mitrovica predominantly uses holiday celebrations and study abroad exchange programs to unite people.

While the Corner aims to meet the five goals of the Embassy, its core programming reaches participants interested in the English language. Specifically, the conversation club has proven to be one of the most sought-after programs at the American Corner Mitrovica. During conversation club programs, members can converse with American volunteers in an informal setting of group activities.

Throughout the analysis of American Corner Mitrovica it was recommended that there be more collaboration between corners to provide joint programming to allow for more course offerings. Additionally, it was found that the Corner could benefit from more training annually. This would allow for the Corner to better understand the environment it is in and how to best reach its diverse group of participants. Lastly, it was recommended there be a more consistent line of communication between all Corners and the Embassy. Biweekly meetings between the Corners could help aid them in collaborative programming efforts and strategic planning.

Overall, the case studies proved to be beneficial when analyzing each Corner, their current situation, and recommendations for improvement. Each Corner presents strengths in programs and outreach to their diverse populations. Through careful consideration and discussion, overall recommendations are presented to improve service delivery among all

Corners in a collaborative effort.

### **Recommendations - Including ---the Overall Network**

Throughout the completion of the three case studies and meaningful conversations with the Directors of each American Corner and the American Embassy, several recommendations came to fruition.

- It is recommended there be an implementation of more effective cooperation among American Corners in Kosovo. More specifically, regarding program planning and implementation not all Corners need to produce the same types of programs but aim to fill in gaps across the board. As the Corners begin to plan these programs, the Embassy can facilitate this by talking to each Corner on a more consistent basis in addition to their annual strategy and program planning. This will aid each Corner to build stronger programs for their participants.
- Currently, each American Corner has a specific focus on themselves. It is recommended that each Corner begin to share expertise, content, experiences, and practices in their planning processes at the American Corners. The American Corners can complement each other in program activities. The Embassy can aid the Corners by facilitating this process by establishing built in mechanisms for each Corner.
- It is recommended the American Corner staff members participate in Embassy's Public Affairs strategic planning process that takes place annually. Within public affairs, the Embassy considers the American Corners when planning, but could benefit from their participation in the strategic planning process. If their perspective is integrated into the planning, the overall strategy surrounding American Corners would be more implementable, practical, and achievable.
- The implementation of joint training throughout the year is recommended among all American Corner staff. These trainings can be used to strengthen the network of Corners and facilitate effective communication among the Corners staff.

With the implementation of these recommendations, the Corners can begin to work towards a more collective whole. By participating in a collaborative strategic planning process,

more training, and effective communication, the American Corners can work to provide more access to unique programming for their participants. These recommendations require collaboration and communication but can create opportunity for positive change across the three American Corners. The class wishes to thank Mr. Besim J. Kokollari for his Zoom and email conferences with us, providing immeasurable, sound advice.

## **Conclusion**

Through various methods of research and analysis, there was an overwhelming and repetitive finding; the need for more collaboration and internal communication among the three American Corners. A team effort paired with involvement from the US Embassy is expected to strengthen the corners and improve their efforts. A need for physical resources such as larger spaces, technology, transportation, and staffing were discovered. Overall, the corners are strong and have successfully moved towards the U.S. Department of State's objectives of supporting an independent and democratic Kosovo. The corners have centered around regional stability, rule of law, and economic growth. An internal collaborative and strategic planning process are imperative to continue to educate citizens, to give them a sense of independence, to instill hope.

## **Part 2: Case Studies**

### **Case Study 1 – American Corner Prizren**

#### *Situation*

Prizren is in southern Kosovo. The location of this American Corner is within the Inter-Municipal Library in a building which is shared with two other businesses. For their audience, Prizren has a very diverse constituency to serve. They are located near a Serb-minority population. They focus closely on individuals between the ages of 14-31. Spoken languages in Prizren, as well as Pristina and Mitrovica, vary some considering diversity. According to the World Atlas," Given that nearly 90% of Kosovo's population are ethnic Albanians, is it not

surprising that the Albanian language is the most popular. In fact, it is spoken as a first language by 94.5% of Kosovo's population. Albanian is also one of Kosovo's official languages, along with Serbian (WorldAtlas, 2019). English is the common language though, which the American Corner uses for all its programs there. The staffing at the American Corner of Prizren relies heavily on volunteers. Their staffing also corresponds to the space available that they have as well as the volume and number of programs that they offer. Although their spacing is minimal, they provide an abundant amount of information and many resources for a broad audience.

Some general issues impacting Prizren can be seen by looking briefly at the other Corners. Mitrovica is in northern Kosovo and is situated in a heavily Serb-minority population. The American Corner is located on the first floor of Mitrovica's public library, Vuk St. Karadzic. Currently, that specific northern Kosovo area is mentioned in a brokered deal to be traded with Serbia. Their audience is quite diverse, considering the fact of their location. However, this also places them in a hostile environment. The Serb-minority dislikes the majority, and their relationship with them is unfriendly at a minimum. Their number of visitors in 2018 amount to 4,690, with only 79 programs available. Mitrovica offers 1,744 books, 214 eBooks, 20 magazines, 181 films, and 31 games. With their languages being as diverse as Prizren, English is also a widely spoken language throughout the country. The American Corner of Mitrovica partners with the U.S. Embassy Pristina, Kosovo, and the American Advising Center. This American Corner holds the smallest number of programs and visitors yearly out of all three American Corners within Kosovo (U.S. Embassy Pristina, 2018).

Pristina is in central Kosovo. The American Corner of Pristina is found in the National and University Library of Kosovo. The surrounding population of the Corner is primarily Albanian and Balkan. There is no threatening, hostile environment that is near this Corner. The American Corner of Pristina is one of the larger Corners in Kosovo. In 2018 Pristina had received 71,953 visitors and presented 346 programs. Pristina offers 214 eBooks, 20 magazines, as well as games, films, and audiobooks. The American Corner in Pristina provides unique programs that differ from the other corners. They offer programs such as 'Na No Wri Mo,' which is an Ethnographic writing course. They also offer business courses that would help build the economy of Kosovo. They hold a partnership with the National Library of Kosovo, U.S. Embassy

Pristina-Kosovo, American Advising Center, Kosovo United States Alumni, American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo, SOS Villages Kosovo, The Ideas Partnership NGO, and the Inter-Municipal Library of Pristina (U.S. Embassy Pristina, 2018).

### *Issues and Challenges*

For Prizren and Kosovo writ large, it is a very diverse country with different cultures and ethnicities. As mentioned, in 2008, Kosovo gained independence from Serbia, which created a divide between the Serbs, Balkans, and Albanians. Before Kosovo's independence from Serbia, they were a part of the Soviet Union state of Yugoslavia, which brought more diversity to the nation. That is a barrier that the country currently faces in trying to define their nation's identity. The American Corner programs in Kosovo has accomplished splendid work at uniting the ethnic groups together and advancing the strategic goals of the U.S. Embassy.

For their ethnic culture, Kosovo is primarily Balkan and Albanian but has some Serbs and Bosnians who make up the minority population (CIA Publications, 2020). With that said, 94.5% of the country is Muslim, and 3.7% is Christian (Roman Catholic and Orthodox). Pretty diverse socially, but as a country, they are still working on being united and wanting to be a member of the European Union, United Nations, and the North America Trading Organization (CIA Publication, 2020). Kosovo leaders feel that if they become a member of these international organizations, their national image will improve. Kosovars of all ethnicities will feel united due to the prestige of being affiliated with those organizations.

The American Corner Prizren in specific, according to the U.S. Embassy in Kosovo, has been assisting young students in the fields of technology and business (U.S. Embassy in Kosovo, 2020). Here at Prizren, students can also obtain a US Degree that they can apply to their country. If American Spaces can help Kosovars focus on STEM degrees and skills, they will improve their economy and infrastructure. Improving the economy may also improve peace between Serbia and Kosovo because people are working and staying busy. It may also build unity between all the multiethnic groups in the country.

According to Kosovo's 2018 Integrated Country Strategy, their mission priority is to focus "focused on improving the rule of law, increasing economic development, and promoting

regional stability (U.S. Embassy Pristina, 2018)." The strategy goals include:

1. Improving Rule of Law and Governance that Meets Citizens' Needs.
2. Sustainable, inclusive economic growth that supports Kosovo's stability and integration to the West.
3. Kosovo contributes positively to regional stability, including making progress in normalizing its relationship with Serbia, transitioning the Kosovo Security Forces (KSF) into an armed force, countering violent extremism and malign external influences, and promoting minority rights, and integrating into Western structures (U.S. Embassy Pristina, 2018).

The American Corner programs have helped Kosovo achieve these goals due to the curriculums they offer to the youth that they could use in the future. Especially when it comes to having children with diverse backgrounds come together to learn and unite as one. Kosovo's friction point in trying to achieve their strategic goals is that they are the poorest country in the Balkans. According to the 2018 Integrated Country Strategy, Kosovo has a 30% unemployment rate, and 43% of the country is below 25 (U.S. Embassy Pristina, 2018). This is important to review because Kosovo is a very young country with a young populace. Opportunity for growth is limited if employment remains low and job opportunities few, but with the United States' assistance and thoughtful programs from the American Corners, improving education and learning job skills, Kosovo's employment rate should improve. Every effort should be made to improve employment through expanded job opportunities, particularly with the United States and the European Union and the United Kingdom.

### *Current Actions*

Due to the current situation regarding the COVID-19 Pandemic, the American Corner of Prizren had to make some changes to their program. Before the start of this Pandemic, Prizren experienced many visitors and offered varied programs. In 2018, the American Corner of Prizren had met with 28,500 visitors, with 2019 seeing over 30,000. Historically, since 2011, the Corner received visitors each year, ranging from 8,991 to 44,930. However, the programs offered at this specific Corner fluctuated numerically each year. In 2018, Prizren saw a total of 314 programs being offered to their audience. Those included: Conversation Hours, Reading

Hours, Story Time, Movie Time, and Game Day. Regarding their current series, they offer programs focusing on such things as "The role of women on society" and "Empowering and engaging youth through arts and culture" (U.S. Embassy Pristina, 2018). The American Corner of Prizren presents 218 ebooks, 20 magazines, 300 films, and 44 games. Concerning overall materials in 2018, there were 4,884 circulations. Outside of these items, Prizren also offers resources to expand the number of materials available. For journals and journal articles, Prizren's audience can visit the 'Directory of Open Access Journals' and 'PubMed Central.' Project Gutenberg can be accessed for ebooks, while ERIC can be accessed for full-text and bibliographic information. (U.S. Embassy, Pristina, 2018).

For the American Corner of Prizren, their staffing is proportional to their available space. However, both matters require improvement. Initially, as the space increases, the need for an increase in staffing as well is almost inevitable. Increased space is needed to improve their quantity in programs. With this, there would be a need for additional staffing to run these programs smoothly, whether it be full-time staff or volunteers. Currently, Prizren has two full-time staff and 25 volunteers. However, their volume of visitors has consistently grown in annual numbers. This is a very diverse clientele, and they are visited by tens of thousands of individuals yearly. Physical and virtual space are huge concerns regarding presenting barriers to continuing adequate attendance and programming. They have a tiny office space located in the library. Physical space is a challenge, and they hope to improve and expand it. Resources and materials are satisfactory.

### *Recommended Changes*

The first recommendation is to seek to increase the available space for the current American Corner in Prizren. Based on the number of programs they offer, yearly audience, and staff engagement, increased space will significantly benefit this Corner. Understanding that the physical location may not change due to budget or other factors, it may be beneficial to seek an alternate means, buy renting office space for specific programs they intend to present. Should an agreement be reached with a local university, secondary school, or other business, they may acquire additional areas or rooms to rent on an hourly basis, which will assist the Corner greatly



in meeting its needs.

Second, improved joint planning and collaboration with all American Corners in Kosovo are needed. Collaboration can be achieved through weekly leadership synchronization meetings with the Embassy and Kosovo American Corner employees. This will increase the weekly communication across Kosovo and maintain a closer relationship with the Embassy. Additionally, this can help to continue discussions on programs each Corner offers or produces while providing regular advice on "best practices" from other American Corner employees. At a minimum, it would be beneficial to involve the primary American Corner staff in yearly face-to-face working groups at the Embassy regarding strategic planning and guidance. Allowing American Corner employees to visit the Embassy in Pristina and receive direct updates on strategic goals and future plans can help employees see why their Corner's mission is so vital to overall success.

Additionally, it would be beneficial to extend this focus outside of just Kosovo. To achieve Mission Goal 3, the Regional Public Engagement Specialist role in Belgrade can be used to bring together more American Corners program collaboration. Each American Corner in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia have their unique challenges and barriers. Through the Regional Public Engagement Specialist, the staff should conduct virtual meetings to discuss program ideas, collaborations, lessons learned, etc. This outward focus can be significant not only for program development but also to lead the American Corners towards Mission Goal 3.

Lastly, a full-time position for an English teaching assistant provided by the Embassy would significantly benefit the productivity and effectiveness of American Corner Prizren. Seeking to learn English appears to be the largest attractor for visitors to the American Corners. If the Embassy can provide a full-time employee to each Corner or one that can work on a rotational basis to the corners, this could help with recruitment and introduce more programs in the Corner.

### *Conclusion*

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the American Corner organization with

limitations on its staff and decreased visitors and program numbers, increasing its space availability is its most important priority. American Corner Prizren needs more space to run concurrent programs in its office and has the staff and volunteers that are fully capable of continuing to increase its productivity. The next priority will be to improve communication and collaboration across all American Corners and with the U.S. Embassy. The Corners need to be able to share program ideas and plans to execute the objectives that the network wants to accomplish. American Corner Prizren cannot act alone, as it needs the network to help them with finding the best steps to move forward.

As the United States supports a multiethnic, democratic Kosovo, the American Corners have been a successful foreign policy tool assisting the U.S. Department of State's objectives. While needing improvements, the American Corners have helped the country and their people improve on regional stability, strengthening the rule of law and fostering economic growth. American Corner Prizren has explicitly continued its growth every year and, with improvements to its space and collaboration, will have continued success.

## **Case Study 2 – American Corner Pristina**

### *Situation*

Pristina, the capital city of Kosovo, plays host to the most populated and active American Corner in the nation. Situated in the East central part of the country, Pristina enjoys a less mountainous terrain, a less war-torn environment, and a more technologically advanced atmosphere than that of the Corners in Mitrovica and Prizren (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2020). Pristina boasts a population of about 200K and has a mixed ethnic demography made up of Albanians, Bosnians, Serbs, Turk, Ashkali, Egyptian, Gorani, Romani, and more, as well as a religious demography made up of Muslim, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, other, none, and unspecified (CIA, 2020; Allcock et al., 2020). The majority language of the Pristina Corner is Albanian, much like the majority of Kosovo itself, but still has a small population of Serbian language speakers (CIA, 2020; G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020). Based on the ethnic groups that live in Kosovo, there are other languages that are spoken, but are uncommon, considering that they represent less than 6% combined (CIA, 2020). Most of the

participants at the Corner have at least a conversational level understanding of the English language (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020).

Due to its physical location, as well as its proximity to the US Embassy and its partners, the American Corner Pristina boasts the most partnerships, support, staffing, and programming of the three American Corners in Kosovo. The Corner is able to maintain three staff members: Durim Hasaj, Fitore Misini, and Gresa Koca (American Corner Pristina, n.d.c). These staff members are responsible for advertising, controlling social media, planning, and facilitating the programs/events, and maintaining resources (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020). This is the highest staffing of the three locations, considering the other two corners have only one or two staff members (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020). Recently the Corner has expanded and renovated its physical space, adding a “Maker’s Space” which allows participants to utilize resources like 3D and laser printers - resources which are extremely limited in the nation (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020). This maker’s space has allowed the Pristina Corner to expand its STEM offerings and move toward a more hands-on programming style than it had previously offered (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020). Most of the programming at the location leans toward a focus on economic development and growth (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020).

The Pristina Corner is located on a college campus within the National Library of Kosovo, which situates them in an area to mainly serve university students but offers programming for a diverse clientele (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020; American Corner Pristina, n.d.c). Participants from all over the nation come to the Pristina location to take advantage of the more consistent and diverse programming (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020). Most of the programming at the Pristina Corner takes place in English, both to be more inclusive of those that do not speak the majority language, and to further the goals of the American Corner (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020). However, this does pose some challenges, some of which will be addressed later in this document. The location is currently open Tuesday-Friday from 0800-2000 hours, with limited hours on Monday and Saturday in order to reach a wider level of participants and accommodate different

clientele (American Corner Pristina, n.d.a).

### *Issues and Challenges*

The mission of the American Corner Pristina is to establish and strengthen the relationships between the United States and Kosovo, demonstrate American values and culture, promote learning the English language, encourage study abroad in the United States, and foster mutual understanding and good will (American Corner Pristina, n.d.c). The current social climate (COVID-19) has impacted the way everyone conducts business. The American Corner Pristina has cut back on its in-person activities, which has caused a decline in participation and attendance (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020). Before the pandemic, the American Corner Pristina could host over 300 activities per year and have up to 500 people a day come through the corner (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020; American Corner Pristina, n.d.b).

As a result of reductions in in-person meetings, most of the programming from the American Corner Pristina has moved to web-based, which limits the attendance to those who have access to computers and the internet (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020). In general, 89.44% (1,706,150) of the population in Kosovo has access to the internet, 6.11 out of 100 people have a fixed telephone line, and 32.3 out of 100 people have a mobile cellphone (CIA, 2020). Additionally, this transition has taken away the hands-on learning aspect that can be accomplished with in-person meetings. This is an ongoing challenge that the Corner has had to face throughout the pandemic.

In general, the American Corner Pristina being as busy as it is, all the responsibilities fall unto only three staff members. These three staff members are responsible for all responsibilities related to programming, marketing, and resources. This means the staff must consider the travel time for those in surrounding areas, who are interested in attending the programs. In Kosovo, public transportation does not run after 6PM (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020). This requires the American Corner to schedule most of their programs before this time, so participants can get home at a cheaper rate compared to taxis and other forms of transportation which are available in Kosovo in the evening (G. Koca,

personal communication, October 30, 2020). Even though the Corner is located on a college campus, the staff needs to be mindful of those who need to travel to achieve a bigger audience.

Within Kosovo as a whole, language presents a barrier. As an example, if the American Corners want to teach Albanian, all three locations are required to teach Serbian also, both of which are the most common languages spoken in Kosovo (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020; Allcock et al., 2020). Over 90% of the people in Kosovo and about 99% of the people who visit the corner speak Albanian (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020). Unfortunately, the staff at the American Corner Pristina does not have a Serbian speaking member, which forces them to teach exclusively in English (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020). This can cause an issue/barrier of excluding certain people who are not confident in their English-speaking abilities (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020). Concurrently, the Corner suffers from staff problems based on these issues and challenges. With having a limited number of staff members, the Corner may not be operating at its best in relation to its operating capacity.

### *Current Actions*

Before COVID-19 had spread globally and affected in-person social gatherings, including educational and professional programs, attendance at the American Corner Pristina was growing rapidly (American Corner Pristina, n.d.b). The corner maintains strong ties to the local community and the parent Embassy with nearby schools and related student-development programs to meet the needs and ever-changing demands of their main participant demographic: university students (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020; American Corner Pristina, n.d.c). As it was stated in the past section, attendance could reach up to 500 participants in a single day, with up to 300 events in a single year (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020).

Over time, events and programs at the American Corner Pristina have gradually drifted from a traditional educational format to a more 'theory-based' approach (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020). In this manner, the Corner has made efforts to expand their resources and focus on technological advancements to elegantly disseminate information to

participants (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020). As it was stated in the beginning, the American Corner recently included a maker's space, expanded their space to accommodate more university students, and are actively working to increase the quality of their programs (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020).

In their programs, the American Corner Pristina primarily focuses on working toward the U.S. Embassy's strategic goals: rule of law, economic development, and regional security (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020). While the Corner's programs focus on diving into all three aspects of the Embassy's strategic goals, the largest focus is on economic development, like it was stated in the beginning (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020). As it was mentioned in previous lectures and discussions, Kosovo's arguably greatest source of conflict lies in economic instability, because of technological disadvantages and lack of infrastructural development (CIA, 2020). These efforts to educate in theory-based approaches to economic challenges are seen through the Corner's technological advancements, student access to theory-based approaches in economic studies, and hands-on group events (CIA, 2020).

Overall, the Corner has five core programs: Information about the USA, English Language Learning, EducationUSA, Alumni Activities, and Community Engagement (American Corner Pristina, n.d.a). These programs help the Corner to accomplish their mission and goals, as well as the U.S. Embassy's. Concerning this, the Corner can circulate anywhere between over 700 to over 1,500 materials each year (American Corner Pristina, n.d.b). Currently, however, there has been a lapse in attendance at the American Corners Pristina due to COVID-19 pandemic limitations, like it was previously mentioned. This global health crisis has affected programs, staffing, and overall student attendance. Currently, there are no in-person events or classes being conducted, and most lectures are held exclusively online.

### *Recommended Changes*

With the above information in mind, we recommend that the American Corner Pristina adopt the following recommendations to better serve their corner of Kosovo and the community they work with. First, if economically feasible, the Corner should work to employ

one or two more staff members to meet the high demands of upward mobility in participation. Three staff members overseeing upwards of 500 participants a day is nearly 167 students per person which they must accommodate. If hiring more staff members is not economically feasible, then perhaps staff members can give university students who are familiar with the program and interested in public administration or community work an opportunity to volunteer or intern with the corner to help with administrative business and help the staff members run the corner as smoothly and elegantly as possible.

Second, we recommend that Kosovo adopt a wider range of studies in their educational programs to meet the ever-changing needs of a new generation of Kosovo civilians. Because Pristina is the capital of Kosovo, this corner has access to a large group of students and other participants with evolving skill sets they will soon bring into the workforce. While continuing to educate participants about American culture and promote positive relations with America, it can also be beneficial to foster more informational awareness. For example, media literacy is a problem both in the U.S. and in other countries, and this learning to fact-check and understand the source of media and news and make educated decisions based on fact rather than opinion can be beneficial to students in the American Corners program and in the U.S.

Third, we recommend that the American Corner Pristina adopts a more comprehensive transportation assistance program to help students and other participants arrive at the Corner. First, public transportation stops at 6PM (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020), which presents a hurdle for students or other participants to come to the Corner after this, especially if these individuals rely on public transit if they do not have their own means of transportation. To address this issue, if economically feasible, we recommend that the American Corner Pristina implement their own transportation for participants who require assistance, similar to American student busing programs. If the Corner were to survey the students, evaluate which students would need transportation and which areas could benefit from additional transportation, they could include their own private transportation for the Corner and bring in even more students regardless of public bus schedules.

Finally, we recommend the Corner to adopt classes to teach other students Serbian and Albanian. The next barrier to education for the students would be the lapse in a consistent

language to teach in. Due to regulations between the three corners by the U.S. Embassy, if a lesson is taught in Albanian, it must also be taught in Serbian, like it was stated earlier (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020). However, as it was stated in the issues and challenges section, the Corner does not have a faculty member that speaks Serbian, so the staff must conduct all lessons in English (G. Koca, personal communication, October 30, 2020). Because lessons are taught in English, this prevents any Albanian or Serbian-only speaking students from participating in this program. To assuage this, we recommend that the faculty hire an individual who can speak Serbian to reach the widest possible audience group and educate as many students as possible. If this is not possible, we then recommend that faculty members at the Pristina corner make a best effort to learn Serbian to cater to the area's needs. We believe that with adequate staffing or student volunteers, a well-rounded educational program, a comprehensive transportation assistance program, and classes that teach Serbian and Albanian, the American Corner Pristina can continue to capitalize on its success and popularity and resume serving the community in the best possible way.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, increasing the American Corner's staff will only improve the potential for education opportunities for its clients, through diversified programs, as well as serve to broaden community liaison and outreach. Within these opportunities, prioritizing tech advancement skills training, as Pristina has showcased through its maker's space, will advance the Embassy's strategic goal of economic development through a skilled workforce. As such, higher paying jobs received by a more skilled workforce will be vital to Kosovo's sustained economic development and stability. Critical job fields such as health care, education, and infrastructure will provide a more marketable hiring pool, as well as a stabilized economy to gain the confidence of international investors.

As discussed, limited public transportation times have negatively impacted attendance at American Corner spaces. Exploring the potential for after-hours transportation of students would serve to allow flexibility in both work and study schedules. Funding permitting from the Embassy, transportation costs could be offset to students attending American Corner classes



after the 6PM public transportation cut off time. Arrangements might possibly be made to provide transportation to students via rented local taxis or buses, or through a voucher program whereby students can apply for and are compensated for transportation taken when no public transportation exists. An investment of this kind in the local community would most assuredly be the truest of commitments by the American Embassy.

Additionally, through the window of democracy which the American Corners provides, reinforcing education and freedom of speech and expression to Kosovars would only serve to empower them by instilling hope and confidence, and a sense of independence, in both themselves and their nation. Education and development projects and informational training sessions could focus on providing training regarding information technology, the health field, as well as construction to build infrastructure and energy sources. In this light, it appears vital that American Corners determine, if possible, the most beneficial language with which to utilize in teaching students. Defaulting to the English language due to language concerns, appears to have limited the target audience and potentially hindered the educational message necessary during training sessions. American Corners, through the relationships it builds, to the training provided to Kosovar citizens, will be vital to Kosovo's future stability through educational programs which provide a gateway to the country's future.

### **Case Study 3 – American Corner Mitrovica**

#### *Situation*

The Kosovo American Corner Mitrovica is on the first floor of the Vuk Karadzic Library in the northern part of Mitrovica (Mitrovica, 2020). This Corner was opened on September 26, 2005 and is a partnership between the United States (U.S.) Embassy Pristina and Vuk Karadzic Library. The American Corner Mitrovica provides books, U.S. magazines, electronic databases, and free internet access for research. It was established to build and strengthen relationships between the U.S. and the people of Mitrovica. The Corner holds various events and encourages students to study abroad in the United States. These programs also promote American values and culture by engaging students through English language classes, discussion clubs, and

webinars.

The focus of the Mitrovica American Corner is to showcase the freedoms displayed through American values such as the commitment to democracy and maintaining citizen rights to free access to information. The Corner provides access to English language speakers and to foster relationships between Kosovars and American. Doing so increases respect and understanding between the two countries. The American Corner Mitrovica is funded by the Public Library “Vuk St. Karadzic” and through the U.S. Embassy Pristina (Mitrovica, 2020). The library covers most of the management and cost for staff, salary, space, utilities, maintenance, and other supplies. Furthermore, The U.S. Embassy Pristina provides support for books, magazines, internet, programming, office supplies and furniture (Mitrovica, 2020).

### *Issues and Challenges*

Mr. Besim Kokollari from the American Embassy noted that Mitrovica is different from the other American Corners and must combat a unique challenge. This is due to the tension between the Albanians and Serbians. This challenge requires a longer security process for personnel from the other corners and the embassy to enter North Mitrovica. In a zoom call with the Director of American Corner Mitrovica, Ms. Irena Otašević, one barrier that was highlighted was the small number of staff support in Mitrovica. She explained that she was the only staff member at this corner. However, Mr. Kokollari mentioned another staff member is expected to join the corner in November due to a recent grant provided to Mitrovica.

Each of these American Corners are very similar in the primary mission to create an engaging relationship with western culture. The Corners Pristina, Prizren, and Mitrovica have five shared goals to emphasize the United States’ mission to help build mutual respect and understanding between the two countries. According the Corner’s website, “the five goals are to 1) Provide accurate, compelling, timely, and audience-appropriate information about the United States—its history, culture, society, and values, 2) Facilitate English language learning through access to English language speakers, resources, computers, and the Internet, 3) Promote U.S. higher education through EducationalUSA advising by providing international students with accurate, comprehensive, and current guidance on applying to U.S. colleges and

universities, 4) Foster people-to-people connections, increase understanding, and build respect with host-country audiences through cultural programs, and 5) Support continued engagement with U.S. government alumni, connecting them to local audiences through alumni programs where credible, local voices can share firsthand information about the United States and American values (American Corner Mitrovica, n.d.).” Each corner uses a different variety of events and technology to help engage citizens and encourage a mutual understanding. For instance, The American Corner Pristina uses lectures, films, and webinars while Mitrovica uses more holiday celebrations and study abroad exchange programs to unite people from both areas.

### *Current Actions*

Membership is free and open to registered users of the Corner. The American Corner Mitrovica provides access to current information about the United States via book collections and Internet through a variety of events such as speaker programs, English-language classes, discussion clubs, workshops, lectures, exhibits, documentary and movie projections, holiday celebrations, meetings, webinars, Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), and various exchange programs.

Mitrovica has a significant number of games for children including educational board games and videogames, as well as other resources such as the SmartBoard, iPads, and kindles. Currently, there are limited programs at the American Corner Mitrovica due to the impact of COVID-19. Ms. Otašević, the director of the Mitrovica Corner, stated that COVID-19 is a barrier for attendance to some programs in a virtual world. However, she is very creative with programming ideas to increase participation and attendance. Some of her previous events including English Conversation Group for Children, Alumni Open House, TOEFL Preparation Courses, and other programs emphasizing the importance of renewable energy sources and recycling. Further, the U.S. Embassy’s 2016 Alumni Small Grant Program, presented a large series of programs offering topics such as public finance, keys to success, basic English blended media course for journalists, English language classes for children, conversation club, safe internet use, children’s week in the library, and MLK Day.

Specifically, the conversation club has proven to be one of the most sought-after programs at the American Corner Mitrovica. During conversation club programs, members can converse with American volunteers in an informal setting of group activities.

When analyzing enrollment and participation in the last few years, there was a clear visual at the number of students the American Corner Mitrovica was able to reach. In 2018, there were 79 programs with 4,690 visitors and 237 materials circulated. In 2017, there were 155 programs with 7,280 visitors and 590 materials circulated (Mitrovica, 2020). Over the last three years, the American Corner Mitrovica has shown growth in the number of programs offered and participants within the Corner annually.

### *Recommended Changes*

While speaking with Mr. Kokollari, many recommendations arose. He emphasized the need for multi-corner programming, additional training, collaborative strategic planning, and increased opportunities for separate corners to visit the embassy. He provided these recommendations with the goal to improve each corner and the programs they offer. He also emphasized the collaboration between corners to provide joint programming. One specific program that could potentially be implemented is the Dreambuilder: Empowering Women Entrepreneurs. This free online program is available in English and Spanish and seeks to provide networking opportunities and mentorship activities around the world (American Spaces, 2020). This program aims to have a global network, and this could be a perfect opportunity for the collaboration between corners to fulfill the mission of this program. Additionally, he highlighted that additional training could benefit the American Corners by fostering relationships among the staffers at the different Corners. In doing so, the staffers could use each other as a resource for program ideas and implementation. Similarly, the separate staffers could collaborate on developing a strategic plan. Having a strategic plan would allow the Corners and the Embassy staff to conduct long term planning and create a plan to achieve its desired goals. Additionally, the Embassy could make a more conscious effort to invite the American Corner staff to Pristina. Staffers often enjoy visits to the Embassy as it allows them to see how their role and the American Corners in general advance the mission of

the Embassy.

To improve communication among the Corners, biweekly meetings should occur within the Corners. Consistent meeting times could aid in developing a collaborative strategic planning process, as it would encourage buy in from all the stakeholders. The biweekly meetings could take place electronically which would alleviate cultural barriers among the staffers. Additionally, meeting electronically would allow continued planning during the Pandemic.

### *Conclusion*

Through an analysis of the American Corner Mitrovica, there are many opportunities to foster change for the improvement of program delivery to students and citizens. The focus of this corner is to showcase American values and provide a mutual understanding between the United States and the people of Kosovo. With the implementation recommendations, all American Corners could begin to provide joint programming, embark on a collaborative strategic planning process, improve internal communication, and enhance current training practices. It is imperative to keep the shared goals of the American Corners at the forefront of this implementation of these changes.

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