Transatlantic Collaboration: U.S. - Kosovo
Education as a Vehicle for Adaptive and Sustainable Development
Haley Leopold, CISTP Student Research Intern

Abstract:
A collaborative effort between ecologically focused educational systems of Virginia and Kosovo could empower local communities, schools, and individuals in both areas to become the future regional leaders in sustainable and adaptive development. This project would connect schools, universities, and other educational institutions in Kosovo with parallel organizations in the Virginia with the intention of establishing a channel of communication that is conducive to the sharing of ideas, innovations, and advancements in sustainability, environmental initiatives, and project-based pedagogy. Equipped with a strong foundation of environmental knowledge, a new generation of problem solvers will emerge to face the challenges of climate change, creating a resilient and positive self-identity.

Wind for Schools: Intercultural Connections
Through its Wind for Schools program, the Center for Wind Energy at James Madison University raises awareness of the advantages of wind energy in public schools and communities while also developing public knowledge about renewable energy methods. Education pertaining to renewable energy, particularly wind energy, is integrated into university curriculum. Primary and secondary schools, or host schools, work with the university to implement a small wind turbine that may be used as a teaching tool and incorporated into the school’s renewable energy and sustainability curriculum.

This proposal suggests a partnership between educational institutions of all levels that are associated with the Wind for Schools program, or similar curricula, and parallel institutions of education in Kosovo. Ultimately, the collaboration would build upon the capacities of institutions of education in Kosovo. Ultimately, the for Schools program, or similar curricula, and parallel renewable energy and sustainability curriculum.

A wind turbine installation at Grassfield High School in Chesapeake, Virginia was made possible by its partnership with James Madison University and participation in the Wind for Schools Program. There are seven host schools in Virginia that have installed wind turbines through the Center for Wind Energy at JMU.

Conclusions: Benefits for Kosovo
- Project alignment with the environmental priorities of the updated Kosovo Environmental Strategy, Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning
  - “Development of long-term educational programmes...and support for environmentally focused scientific projects” (2011, p. 14)
- Sustainability and environmentalism as essential aspects of the culture
- Increased efforts for the preservation of valuable natural resources as well as surrounding landscapes
- Foundation established for a flourishing ecotourism sector, which would create jobs, decrease the high unemployment rate, and create a source of income for the restoration and improvement of the nation’s infrastructure
- A sense of local ownership of environmental and sustainability initiatives
- Increased knowledge of Kosovo’s natural heritage
- Positive self-identity and social resilience
- A well-educated youth better equipped to face the ever-growing threat of global climate change
- The creation of future professionals/employees in the emerging environmental, renewable energy, and ecotourism sectors
- Renewable sources of electricity and additional educational tools provided by the construction of wind turbines at schools
- Enhanced intercultural communication
  - Dispels and breaks down common stereotypes, myths, and other barriers to successful interactions
  - Fosters respect, understanding, and acceptance of differences
  - Opens up an exchange of ideas, feedback, and inspiration

Potential Challenges:
- Possible financial difficulties
- Teacher training in areas of sustainability and environmentalism
- Investing in technology for successful international communication as well as coordinating projects (e.g. installation of a small school wind turbine)
- Need for interpreters
- Inequities in access to technology and communications
- Language barrier between students, teachers, and members of administration
- Incidences of miscommunication, use of unintentionally offensive gestures or remarks

Future Considerations:
- Current curricula of participating educational institutions require further evaluation and revisions in terms of environmental, sustainability, and eco-literacy
- Curriculum integration of project-based, STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education
- Preexisting teacher training programs require reform in order to prepare current and future educators to teach a student-centered curriculum with an ecological focus

References:

Fostering strong foundations in the education sector.

Facing the Repercussions of a Troubled Past
Despite the end of the conflict in 1999, Kosovo continues to experience major setbacks:
- low levels of economic development;
- high unemployment rate of 45 percent (USAID, 2014);
- 28 percent of its population under 15 years of age (Population Reference Bureau, 2014); and
- an underdeveloped environmental and sustainability education sector.

Even though efforts have been made by federal and local governments to increase public awareness concerning current environmental degradation, particular attention should be given to developing environmentalism and sustainability mindsets through education.

Young students complete their schoolwork during a school day in Pristina Kosovo.