

Lyubech, Ripky, Khomutec: challenges for development

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Today, 25 years after nuclear accident, conventional ideas about Chernobyl include abandoned Exclusion Zone with deadly dangerous radioactive waste and its not numerous inhabitants, thousands of victims of radiation and forced migration, heroism and tragedy of disaster fighters. These images are widely broadcasted, leaving beyond the focus of attention those people, who live their ordinary lives, but at the same time bear both the socio-economic hardships of modern Ukraine and Chernobyl stigma.

As the participants of the program “Oxford Volunteers for Chernobyl Scheme”, we have spent two weeks in Chernobyl-affected settlements. Our task was to join life and activities of local communities in order to facilitate the process of recovery and development, which was launched by UNDP several years ago. These settlements and communities have diverse historical and socio-economic background, opportunities and difficulties, successes and failures, but at the same time, each is considered to be under significant Chernobyl impact.

Chernobyl-affected settlements: basic facts

Our first destination was **Lyubech**, a picturesque urban village on the border between Ukraine and Belarus. Lyubech belongs to Ripky district, Chernigov region, and numbers 2.3 thousands inhabitants. It is remarkable for its history: it was first mentioned in “Story of the Chronicle Years” about 882 and flourished as political and trade center of Kyiv Rus. Lyubech positions itself as a place where Kyiv Russ – Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia – unites, because the settlement witnessed 2 pacificatory conventions of princes of Russ in XI-XII centuries. Due to the fact that monk Antony, the founder of world-wide famous Kyiv-Pechersky monastery, was born here, Lyubech is known as a place of pilgrimage. Yearly occasion to visit the village is also so called Kyiv-Russ festival – colorful show with historical elements. In other words, Lyubech does not need any special branding – it already has a memorable image.

During the last years, the reconstruction of historical tourist attractions of Lyubech is sponsored by state. Though, the social and economic conditions of the village remain poor: unemployment, alcoholism, low birth rate, brain drain and low living standards did not bypass it. Large ship-repairing yard and other factories, which flourished in USSR times, are nowadays almost or finally closed. So, the inhabitants of Lyubech cultivate their vegetable gardens, graze cattle, pick mushrooms and berries; more lucky have additional income, working in services sector or running small business. In order to support young people, UNDP helped to open a Youth Center, which provides educational, computer and sports services. At the moment, Youth Center works stably, but experiences financial difficulties.

Our next destination was Ripky, an administrative center of the district. **Ripky** is an urban village with 7.5 thousands population and slightly more developed infrastructure. Unlike Lyubech, Ripky does not have historical sights, interesting architecture or amenities of nature. But it shares the common problems with its neighbour: the situation with employment, public health and prosperity is hardly better than in Lyubech. Both Lyubech and Ripky belong to the 4th Chernobyl zone (territory of intensified radiological control).



The relative strength of Ripky is its role of administrative hub. It is situated in the very center of the district; it has regular transport connection with other villages, hotel, banks, one of three district hospitals, good communications etc. Ripky is surrounded by natural and historical attractions: lakes near Oleshnya, lakes Neradcha and Sribne, eco-trail, numerous beautiful forests, orthodox Old Believers' villages Radul and Dobryanka, ancient Lystvyn and, of course, Lyubech. But today it seems that Ripky urban village does not use all attractions of the district for its benefit.



We were invited by Ripky Agency of Economic Development, established in 2007 with support of UNDP. RAED works actively, but still has not become a uniting factor in the community.

Khomutec, out last location, differs from other two. First, it does not belong to contaminated areas, but some resettled people from 3rd and 4th zones live there. Second, it is, in fact, small village with population which hardly exceeds 1 thousand people. Khomutec is situated in Brusyliv district, Zhytomyr oblast.



Khomutec is an ordinary Ukrainian village, which is hard to imagine crowded by tourists. Though, it is remarkably quiet and peaceful. There are several lakes and forests in outskirts, and also a mineral spring.

Since recently Khomutec has good bus connection with Kyiv: it takes only 1 hour to get to the capital. It allows the locals to work and study in Kyiv and return home in the evening. But the main occupation remains the same as in other villages: vegetable gardening and different forms of subsistence farming.

We were supposed to work in collaboration with newly established ICT center. Being run by IT specialist and

manager, this center pays for itself. Its leaders are full of energy and ideas.

Location #1: Lyubech

Field notes (Maryna).

Lyubech was our first destination. Being well prepared by our preliminary seminars, I looked with interest out of the window of the bus, looking for signs of poverty and devastation. My expectations seemed to come true: picturesque green groves alternated with abandoned fields covered with weeds, and run-down farmsteads. The road soon changed from asphalt to concrete. Behind me my fellow passengers



discussed having recently encountered wolves and wild boars practically in their own front yards. It looked like we were going to wild and depressing territory. For this reason, my first impressions of Lyubech were unexpected. If this nice, silent and clean town with historical sightseeing, green central boulevard and streets with block pavement somehow differs from other Ukrainian historical towns, it differs to the better. The availability of a toilet, hot running water, a shower and gas in our temporary dwelling finally dispelled my concerns. Before departing for the village I had prepared myself to wash outdoors with a bucket and cold water. A green tourist with modest expectations would in fact be satisfied by the conditions in the village. However, Matthew's reaction to the village demonstrated for me that Lyubech is nevertheless not quite ready to receive foreign guests.

Context:

Lyubech is a village with a long history, and it today receives state money towards the reconstruction of old historical landmarks and the construction of monuments. There is an annual Festival which first took place in 2007. The Festival celebrates Kievan-Rus and attracts tourists from both Ukraine and abroad; though at the moment it is not particularly well known and popular.

The Youth Centre was founded in 2007 and is based in the building of a former school. Although boasting an ICT centre with several computers and a sports room offering a selection of training equipment, the Youth Centre struggles to cover the costs of heating and electricity, and has been without internet access for over a year. The festival thus offers an ideal opportunity for the youth centre to exploit its prominent position in the community and move towards securing its own sustainability.

Tasks:

- Look at how the Festival might be used to raise funds, and how to promote the Youth Centre;
- Compose a report from the Festival.

Activities performed:

- **Strategic plan of action.**

Our tasks in Lyubech were centred on the activities of the youth centre and the town's potential as a tourist attraction, with the annual Kievan-Rus festival serving a key role in this regard. Although time-constrained by the busy schedule of the programme, we began a process of working in consultation with the children and leaders of the youth centre to develop a plan of action within the framework of our tasks.

Field notes.

We were immediately invited to the local Youth Centre which was established by the Chernobyl Development Programme nearly 6 years ago. Several schoolgirls from the town's upper school met us expectantly: it seemed that they were waiting for a show to begin. Over the course of our work there we discovered that UN volunteers had visited many times before, and our predecessors' work consisted more in socialising with local people and educational activities instead of research and consulting. There was thus a somewhat different dynamic in the process of working with us to that which they had experienced earlier, and the fact that there was a foreign student present was 'nothing new'. Nonetheless, the fact that we weren't there simply to provide a way of entertainment did not prevent us from working together to discuss and develop ideas together.

▪ **Reportage from the Festival.**



We spent a day at the festival making photos, filming and noting our impressions. Our collected materials may be used by the the youth centre in any future promotional campaigns for tourists.

Obstacles:

Time constraints posed some issues in completing our tasks. Our time in the village amounted to only a little over two days, and the personal business of the leader of Youth Centre, Taisiya, meant that she was largely otherwise engaged. We were also unable to initiate a promotional campaign for the youth centre at the time of the festival due to the fact that the youth centre had made no provisions to this end, as had been supposed.

Achievements:

- The exchange of experience and ideas between local youth and volunteers
- Objectives for purposeful action were determined in collaboration with the children
- Preparations for a promotional campaign were made

Results and recommendations:

Working in consultation with the children of the youth centre a basic strategic plan was drawn up concerning the future activities of the centre. With an overall focus on stimulating a greater degree of interaction with the local community, the plan identifies the need to take advantage of the town's strength in attracting tourists and stimulating a greater level of participation among the town's youth. Necessary steps to this end were identified.

The motivation in such initiatives lies in alleviating the problems faced by the exodus of youth to bigger towns in search of work, and to provide a mechanism whereby the community can benefit from the success of its young people. The town faces many problems typical of rural communities in a lack of job opportunities. The youth centre could perhaps occupy a position more at the heart of the local community, and instigating a more 'cyclical' aspect to the youth centre's activities could go some way to combating this constant outflow of the town's youth. In publicising itself more, the youth centre would in effect reach out to those who are perhaps ignorant or unsure as to what opportunities there are with the centre.

The town has a great existing advantage in that it draws tourists yearly, but challenges include a lack of infrastructure, no hotel, no readily available information or facilities for tourists travelling to the town. A realistic approach may look at the formulation of a local tourist committee which could work towards providing missing facilities for visitors to the town.

As a result of our efforts, we attach a text of the strategic plan that we wrote in collaboration with the children of the youth centre, containing both an appraisal of the problems faced and recommendations for the future.

A strategic plan for the Lyubech youth centre:

Problems facing the youth centre:

- Insufficient funding;
- Decreased enthusiasm and inflow of beginners to the centre.

Reasons for the latter issue may include:

- Demographic factors;
- A degree of competitiveness with the local school
- Local community not involved: information on the activities of the centre do not reach the wider community
- Lack of drive towards creating fresh or new ideas
- There would appear to be some difficulty for newcomers to the organisation to integrate into established informal structures.



In light of this, the centre's future strategy should...

- Take advantage of the town's attractiveness as a tourist attraction and...
 - ✓ Increase chances of financing by seeking sponsorship;
 - ✓ Help the town to use the tourist inflow for its benefit;
 - ✓ Increase awareness of the town's inhabitants and guests about the centre.
- Ensure the constant recruitment of youth to the centre:
 - ✓ Attract young people who are not currently involved;
 - ✓ Keep in contact with former members of the centre who have left the town.

How to implement these plans? Point 1: Tourism.

Demand: what are tourists interested in?	Supply: what can the youth centre provide?
The history of Lyubech Recreation facilities Sport facilities	Excursions Information, directions for local sightseeing, recreation, nature, sport and walks
The culture of Polissya: music, dance	Folk shows performed by children from the youth centre
Souvenirs Local foodstuffs Accommodation	Information on local people who sell food, dwelling and souvenirs
Information about the youth centre, post-Chornobyl recovery in the region	Information about the history of the centre, area

How to implement these plans? Point 2: Involvement of new members.

Factors attracting youth to the centre:

- Realising one's full potential;
- The possibility of learning and self-development;
- Coming into contact with interesting people and ideas

Consequently, recommendations include the following action:

- Increasing awareness of the Centre among the local population, especially among younger pupils;
- Publicise potential advantages and opportunities offered by the centre to children's parents
- Seeking instructors and coaches for the children (this might include people from other youth centres and NGOs, former members, who are currently studying outside the town or interested specialists from outside);
- Create hobby groups which are not in direct competition with the school (photo group, musical group etc.);
- Create hobby groups devoted to folk handicraft which could then be sold to tourists;
- More informational boards and a general increase of self promotion;

- Involve new volunteers in solving current problems and running projects in the centre, and give children more opportunities to formulate and implement plans

Methods of spreading information:

- Festivals (Lyubech and Ripky district);
- Informational boards in the town, particularly in front of the youth centre;
- Internet – through tourist forums and informational sites, medieval reenactment groups, festivals, NGOs. Using the internet to spread information about the Kievan-Rus festival, Lyubech and the youth centre;
- Internet – forming a web-page, blog and social network profile- all of which should be regularly updated;
- Internet – search for tourist agencies which provide tours to Lyubech;
- Print brochures for tourists which contain information about tourist facilities in Lyubech;
- through informal peer networks.

Consequently, the following steps are recommended:

- Communication with local inhabitants and gathering information towards:
 - ✓ Collating a record of local legends and stories about Lyubech which are not available in existing accounts;
 - ✓ Developing the possibility of providing tourists with accommodation, food and souvenirs;
 - ✓ Promotional materials aimed at parents of local children could also be produced.
- Training of young tour-guides:
 - ✓ Teach prospective beginners and prepare those children who already have some proficiency in this area;
 - ✓ Take them to other cities and show the work of well-known professional guides.
- Evaluate such options as making and selling folk souvenirs and staging of folk shows for tourists.
- Prepare sources of information:
 - ✓ For tourists: maps, routes, contacts of households which may offer goods for sale;
 - ✓ For tourists: information about the centre and its success story (hang photos “before and after”);
 - ✓ For tourists: more prominent advertising;
 - ✓ For locals: an informational board announcing the activities of the centre;
 - ✓ For tourists and locals: ensure that there is a stable and renewed online presence;
 - ✓ Write articles and reports about the festival, town and youth centre.

Propositions on preventing the loss of active members of the centre:

The election of a committee of children involved in the organisation of the centre every year (not so much a leader, but a child that might articulate the aims and wishes of the members of the centre), and offer the opportunity to provide various posts of responsibility which might be involved in the organisation of events in the centre. This would of course require the supervision and involvement of the centre's adult administration, who might offer a mechanism by which such a committee of children are chosen. It is our hope that such an enterprise might afford children the opportunity to experience a sense of responsibility in working together to achieve certain goals, lending a sense of achievement and a consequent increase in self-esteem and confidence. Such posts might be renewed yearly, providing a continual group of children with a sense of responsibility and inclusion in not only the centre, but that they are playing



a role in the wider community. Having such representatives of the centre would provide a ready 'face' of the centre, with the wider community able to be aware of and recognise the activities of the centre and the children involved. It would be hoped that in having children fill such positions there would be an element of continuity and renewal introduced, with past representatives offering a source of counsel to those new to the role. To this end the centre might maintain contact with those children who have left Lyubech for other towns and cities. This may be characterised as offering a method of building stronger contacts between the children and their hometown and the

youth centre- with the hoped consequence of ensuring a contact between the various generations of people from Lyubech.

Such a scheme might provide a point of focus, or interest to the youth involved, but also provide a point of contact for local businesses and the local community. Though- through experience- resistance on the part of the school, local authorities and competitors (in tourism) through the historians from the Lyubech museum is expected, such competition may be considered a sign of development and success.

Location #2: Ripky

Context:

Ripky is the centre of a contaminated district suffering under a depressed economic situation which is, nevertheless, famous for its history and nature.

The Ripky Agency of Economic Development (henceforth: RAED) and the local ICT Center were established 5 years ago as part of a broader developmental process. The agency works on many projects, but has no clearly-defined direction of development.

Tasks:

Our tasks were aimed at supporting the current activities of the RAED. Our schedule included the following:

- Assistance in writing an application for the UNITER training program;
- Lending assistance at the ICT centre;
- Improving the web-page of the RAED (ripkyrgo.blogspot.com);
- Discussing possible strategies concerning green tourism.

Activities performed:

- Preparation of application.

One of the RAED's offered services is in providing consultation to entrepreneurs in matters of law and finding finance. The agency currently lacks the necessary expertise within the organisation as regards these topics and therefore decided to try to bring in external experts. The decision was taken by the leaders of the agency to participate in the UNITER training programme for organizational capacity. If accepted, members of the agency will be trained by other NGOs in providing effective consulting services and also in internal tasks of organization.

Together with Oksana we worked to formulate an application for this programme. Through working together we discovered there to be no common view on organizational development among the leaders, and for that reason the final text will be approved at a meeting of agency members.

- Preparation of useful information for users of the ICT centre.

Many users of the ICT centre often search for employment online and therefore we suggested putting the link of joble.com.ua on the computer desktops. Joble is a popular search engine for available employment opportunities in Ukraine which simplifies the job-seeking process for users.

We also installed videos about safety online and some educational games on the computer desktops.

- Renewal of web-page.

We worked on making the RAED's web-page more user-friendly and informative for potential clients and local entrepreneurs. Today this web-page is a business-card for donors and local authorities, in addition to clients and the local community. We ensured that information about available consulting services for businessmen was published on the main page.

- Visit to the local department of Social service for families, children and youth.



Social workers invited us to take part in preparing presents for schoolchildren from poor families. We engaged in a stimulating and informative discussion of the various similarities and differences between the Ukrainian and Scottish systems of welfare services.

- Discussion of green tourism in Ripky region.

Obstacles:

Time constraints meant that plans had to be achievable in a short period of time, and were not overly-ambitious. We thus focused mainly on discussing how plans might be formulated so that they are achievable and are realistic.

Achievements:

Through visiting the RAED and working together we feel that there was a positive change in the outlook and attitude of the members of the organisation as regards what is possible and what is necessary. Minor issues such as renewing the web-page or completing grant applications were long-needed and in fact represent important changes which affect the success of the agency.

In exchanging ideas about opportunities for green tourism we feel that an understanding of what is necessary was reached, and possible strategies for the future were identified.

Results and recommendations

- **Ripky agency of economic development.**

We feel that although one must recognise that the activities of the RAED are limited to its financial capabilities, and that they are thus forced to exploit any available sources of funding, this has led to a situation which sees little coherence in the goals of the agency. Grants are a vital source of funding for such organisations, without which their activity would be compromised. However, our discussions left us with the impression of a 'piecemeal' approach to projects, with any available funding dictating what the organisation focused its efforts on at any one time. Discussions about potential areas for development often met with a great deal of information which was not particularly pertinent or indeed concerned past projects which had not come to fruition. This proved a barrier to working on any real concrete plans, with much discussion producing a lot of 'heat' but little 'light'.

That the organisation must rely on grants is largely unalterable, but we do feel that the expectation that activity must come from the provision of support in the form of grants should be altered. The organisation is capable of more action, and would be in a position to galvanise support among the local population- in schools and workplaces- in working towards its goals which would be for the benefit of all. To take one example, the local park which the RAED hopes to clean up and fit with a children's swingpark could perhaps be the site of an effort on the part of the local community to bring some level of hygiene to an area which should be a place of rest and relaxation to all, but instead lies in filth and litter.

- **Green tourism.**

Ripky's strengths lie not in any potential for tourism, but in its position in the region. The town is unviable as any sort of tourist attraction, offering no basis on which one may market the town to this end. However, Ripky's strength may lie in how it could facilitate tourism for the surrounding areas which provide the necessary environment for holiday and relaxation. The town boasts one hotel and three banks, in addition to a restaurant, and a variety of shops. The town could perhaps form the 'base' from which tourists could launch their holidays in the area. This could potentially see tours begin from the town, with local tour guides leading excursions around local sights.

We feel that action is necessary on rather a more organisational level- and is applicable to the other towns mentioned in this report which wish to develop their potential as a tourist hub- and relates to the exchange of ideas and information regarding tourism. In our time in Ripky we were struck by the lack of awareness regarding what possibilities may exist in attracting tourists to the area. With the local administration based in Ripky and the presence of the



RAED there is the possibility to form a local forum with the remit of discussing and developing tourism in the area. Such a 'forum' (structured in whichever fashion so that it might facilitate the exchange of knowledge and opinions) could involve leaders and interested parties from various branches of local civil society, government and commerce, and work towards developing the tourist trade in the region. Such a forum would provide a platform for interaction and the exchange of knowledge on a regional, national and international level.

As regards infrastructure, many households are not ready to accommodate guests because of poor bathroom facilities and more general structural issues. It must also be noted that those who are able to invest in the tourist business encounter a great many obstacles in legal and tax issues.

Field notes.

One man in Lyubech built a guest house for tourists somewhere near Ripky, but his business failed when sanitary control began inspections. There is a general reluctance to submit any potential business to state apparatus, which holds great control over small business.

▪ **Ripky and Chornobyl.**

Field notes.

The Ripky ICT centre provides a photocopying service which is often necessary for bureaucratic procedures. During our time in the ICT centre we regularly witnessed people who required the photocopying of various documents for court. We discovered that this is a common practice linked to the divergence between the legally stated level of subsidies for Chornobyl victims, and the actual payments they receive. Actual payments were always much smaller than they should have been and so people use their status of "chornobylets" to win the compensation of this difference in court.

From our discussions with local people the impression was given that people considered Chornobyl to be no more or less important an aspect of everyday life than any other, with local people's attitude being characterised by an interest in simply prevailing in adverse circumstances. When asked about Chornobyl, the spread of cancer and other illnesses was mentioned, but without any degree of concern as to preventative measures which one may take. The status of Chornobyl victim was discussed with a high degree of cynicism, with the 'status' even being available on the black market. People do generally consider themselves victims, but not specifically of Chornobyl, rather more victims of more general societal, political and economic injustice. They suffer from poverty, injustice, political instability and bad health- with the reasons for this lying in an area of complex historical issues- and the people we spoke to didn't want to miss any chance to get compensation from the state.

Location #3: Khomutec



Field notes.

Khomutec is a small village intersected by the Brusyliv-Fastiv road. Houses and vegetable gardens alternated with abandoned gardens, lakes and fields. A calmness pervaded the leisurely flow of life in the town.

Context: The ICT Centre was established in Khomutec in 2010 with the support of UNDP. Although the project has only recently started operation, the ICT Centre already pays for itself and provides simple services in response to the demands of the local population. Local youth actively use the internet for study and entertainment, with the influence of the centre evident in the parents of some children having invested in a home computer thanks to becoming familiar with its uses at the centre. However, the availability of informational technologies could be used much more effectively. The internet is a relatively democratic and non-spatial tool, and in theory village inhabitants have the same access to remote education and work as city dwellers.

In 2011 a NGO was registered by the leader of the ICT centre in order to mobilize financial support through various channels, for example, in applying to grant-awarding bodies. At the moment, the main task for the newly established organization is to gain recognition and mobilize the local community and, of course, to formulate a plan of action. One such idea is to promote green tourism in this area.

Field notes.

Vadym's ambitious dream is to make the village something akin to Silicon Valley and home to the second office of 'MarketGid'- the internet marketing business which forms the basis of his major online employment project. Vadym is a sales manager, and his brother, an IT-specialist, helps him to implement his ideas. Their family voluntarily moved from the contaminated area to Khomutec, and the brothers worked hard to integrate into the community, receiving an education and forging careers- success which is not widely-emulated in the community. Now their wish is to share their experience with their fellow villagers and especially with the people of the 3rd and 4th zones who are suffering still from 'Chornobyl stigma'.

Vadym is inspired by the example of a man who rebuilt an old abandoned house in the Carpathians and now invites tourists from abroad to come and visit. He is already aware of a building which could be reconstructed and turned into a guest house, but is constrained by a lack of capital. Vadym's hope is that the Canadian diaspora will become interested in coming to the village on holiday. We gingerly expressed our reservations about what seemed to us to be unrealistic expectations, and he readily started to look for an alternative.

Tasks:

- Strengthen the authority of ICT Centre and its leader in the community;
- Discuss opportunities for using the internet profitably;
- Discuss opportunities for green tourism in the area.

Field notes.

In Khomutec we were warmly welcomed not simply as assistants, but as dear guests sent by the UN by way of recognition and approval of local initiatives. Our arrival coincided with the personal celebrations of Vadym, manager of the ICT Centre, and was perceived as symbolic proof of support of his ideas. In light of this, a large part of our time

was taken up by discussions of Vadym's ambitious and numerous plans, and also by participation in parties with his family and colleagues. The presence of a foreign guest attracted attention and recognition that this was due to Vadym's work. Although these celebrations somewhat lessened the time available for working together, the very experience of Ukrainian hospitality and warmth gave left an impression of what may be possible as regards tourism in the area. In addition to this, the goal of cementing the position of, and promoting Vadym's organisation was attained in an oblique fashion.

Activities performed:

- Talk at school with years 9-11.

We received permission to give a talk to pupils of the upper school on internet security (safety online), using the internet to educational ends, the potential for finding employment online, and the importance of learning English. We first explained how to use the internet in arranging to travel, search for employment, and pursue hobbies. We then showed some short films warning of dangers posed to young people on the internet. In offering an example of how interesting and informative it can be to



communicate with a foreign person in a foreign language we hoped to offer some form of inspiration, and indirectly stimulate a greater enthusiasm for learning English.

The talk was conducted in an 'informal' style- involving the children, asking questions and stimulating discussion. In such a way we were able to win the attention of the young people and gained an attentive audience, receptive to the messages given through our advice and ideas. We were able to share our experience and advice through dialogue, the interactive aspect to the talk saw the children grow in confidence, emerging from a reticence to express their thoughts. This served to combat what we perceived to be a fundamental lack of self-confidence or ability to assert their opinions. We also touched on Vadym's project, which would allow young people to earn money without the risk of falling prey to insincere employment opportunities.

- Communication about the future activities for the benefit of the village.

Vadym gave a detailed account of the plans for his project in internet commerce, currently in the process of development, but it is hoped that it can move the stage of attracting interest through a promotional campaign in the near future. We conducted an evaluation of the strengths, weaknesses, obstacles and threats of the project.

The prospective of green tourism was also discussed and the infrastructural needs were identified.

- Participant observation.

We had the opportunity to observe the realities of Khomutec: its tourist attractions, its inhabitant, their lives and the problems they face.

Obstacles:

- Time-constraints through Vadym being occupied with other concerns
- Our time coincided with celebrations which curtailed the available working hours

Achievements:

- Movement to realistic and attainable goals;
- Revised plans and projects;
- Increased enthusiasm of community leader;
- Strengthening of Vadym's position in the community.

Results and recommendations:

- **Green tourism.**

Khomutec, as a predominantly agricultural village in a rural setting, cannot compete with popular recreation zones such as the Carpathian mountains or the Crimea. It does not belong to any specific type of tourist destination: it is

neither an historical settlement nor a place of natural beauty, active rest or pilgrimage. As regards attracting agricultural tourists, Khomutec must compete with thousands of similar villages all over Ukraine. The success of the village in the tourist trade is therefore to a large extent dependent on the right marketing strategy-involving the development of in-demand services, the identification of interested target groups and the proper promotional strategy.



In our view, the strength of Khomutec is in its tranquility and the natural beauty of the great expanse of the Ukrainian countryside. This would be of great interest to those who wish to escape the pollution of built-up areas yet lack an available plot of land in the countryside. There are several picturesque lakes in the vicinity which provide ample opportunities for those who enjoy fishing. In addition to this, Khomutec has basic infrastructural provisions in the shape of several local shops with tables and chairs in a 'cafe' style, a club, a medical assistance point, and good transportational links with Kyiv and Zhytomyr.

Field notes.

While revising the web-page xomutec.com, we noticed a post left on the site dated 06.07.2011. A woman asked if there were any guest houses in the

Ukrainian national style where her company might be able to conduct a corporate team-building excursion. She also asked for contacts of these guest houses. No answer or any feedback was given. This vignette, in our view, illustrates the idea that the village might provide a suitable venue for companies/corporations seeking opportunities for 'wild-tourism'.

Today the infrastructural profile of Khomutec consists of:

- Several small shops with food and necessities for household and personal hygiene;
- Aid station;
- Post office;
- ICT Centre;
- There are new or rebuild houses with the necessary facilities, but no intention to invite tourists at the moment.

What could be done in the near future?

- A flat grassy area suitable for pitching tents could be prepared, with toilets, running water and a shed providing shelter.
- Information could be gathered about possible services for tourists which the local population could offer: the sale of food/meals, transportation by car, clothing and fishing rod rental etc.
- The banks of the lakes could be cleaned of rubbish and pollution.
- Information could be disseminated on existing forms of contacting potential visitors (through forums, magazines etc)



What are the potential avenues open for generating funds?

- ✓ There is an abandoned house suitable for development into a small guest house
- ✓ The construction of a kitchen where food for guests might be prepared
- ✓ The lake nearest the village might be cleaned to make it more aesthetically pleasing and more suitable for fishing.

Field notes.

While visiting the local school, we had an interesting talk with the teacher of information technology. In his free time he constructs and drives go-karts with his pupils at the local stadium. This activity could form an additional attraction for visitors to Khomutec.

A point that must be additionally discussed is how to make tourism profitable and beneficial for the whole community, not only those in a position to take advantage of any potential profitability.

Using the internet to earn money

Vadym and his brother, Olexiy, are in the process of developing a system which facilitates earning money online which is accessible to those who have no IT-specific qualifications. It was explained to us that the general idea concerns online advertising: a network of thematic web-pages is formed; with each web-page showing an advertisement of the other sites in the network in a system of mutual promotion. In order to be included in this network, an owner of a web-page should pay a fee to the network owner (10\$ at the moment). In order to create the network a system of 'managers' should seek out and enlist clients to the network. For each successful recruit a manager earns 5\$, and for each client recruited in turn by these new 'managers' on the network they will earn \$2. Vadym is of the opinion that what sets his system apart is that it is driven not by market logic, but altruistic motivation. In other words, the owner of the whole marketing system gains a modest profit, with the system of 'managers' earning the majority of the profits garnered.

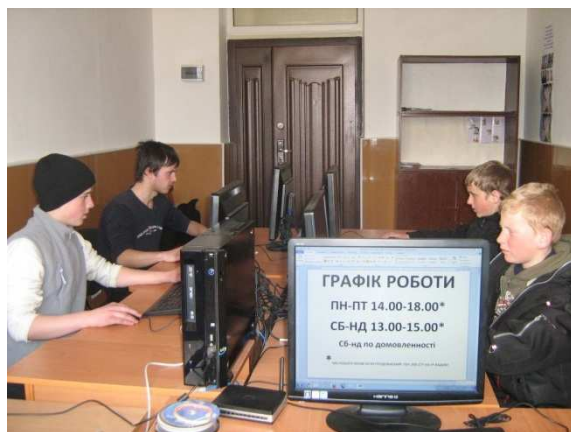
The idea would appear to have some potential, but the main problem is its form. There is nothing new which might distinguish it from other internet schemes known as 'get-rich-quick schemes', which are more often than not fraudulent. If the project is to make a serious and convincing proposal it would be necessary for the web-site to improve the quality and register of the language used significantly. The system wants for any level of transparency, and gives no real clear explanation as to how it functions.

Khomutec ICT Centre as an example.

As already mentioned, the ICT Centre in Khomutec provides a wide range of useful services for local people. Many ideas could be adopted in other ICT Centers. This would be particularly applicable to those centres which have problems with sustainability (lack of money). Though not every ICT Centre has its own IT specialist, most of these services do not require any complicated skills on the part of the administrators, only minor training. The training could be conducted with the help of remote access software which could also facilitate the necessary installation operations. This would negate the need for the physical presence of a specialist.

The services provided by Khomutec ICT Centre are:

- The provision of search engines through the internet;
- Preparing abstracts for pupils;
- Photo and video editing, compilation;
- Automatic conversion of printed text into handwritten;
- The sale of CDs and DVDs with downloaded media content (chosen by client);
- Computer help at client's home



The range is not comprehensive: a great number of services are available to administrators who want to make their Centers profitable. The main problem would appear to lie in an unwillingness to embrace that which may require a slightly higher degree of technical involvement. To give an example, Vadym published information regarding software which could be of use to many ICT centres on a forum specifically geared to the sharing of such information among UNDP-supported centres- the information attracted no interest. Tools such as forums which provide a forum for the sharing of knowledge and experience are undervalued and have the potential to bring benefits to many.

Khomutec and Chornobyl.

Khomutec is not a contaminated area itself, the families that moved from contaminated Chernihiv and Rivne regions live there, and their impressions are generally positive. Firstly, the migrants moved voluntarily several years after the

nuclear accident, so they didn't experience the stress of obligatory resettlement. They even had the opportunity to visit their future dwelling and decide if they liked it. Secondly, it would seem that integration into the community was successful: today many young migrants have families with locals. Thirdly, migrants, according to Vadym's observations, are more active and have more of an 'entrepreneurial' spirit. Although stereotypes about "dangerously contaminated people from the Zone" are still alive in the memories of those who experienced stigma, today occurrences of such stereotyping are rare and anecdotal.

Conclusions

It seems that today Chernobyl accident has only minor direct impact on people's living as compared with poverty, unemployment, social injustice and political instability. Problems of Chernobyl affected areas have much in common with other Ukrainian rural areas.

It is ironic that the status of victims of nuclear accident is both oppressive and beneficial. Its socio-psychological effects are unfavorable. But due to this status Chernobyl Development and Recovery Programme is implemented in these areas. The Programme definitely gave a strong stimulus for local activism and self-organization and provided some necessary services, which improved living conditions. At the moment, newly established initiatives are active and inspired, but they have already faced common problems of Ukrainian 3rd sector: lack of money and knowledge, weakened contact with community, high and constant responsibility of the leader as compared to common passiveness. That is why some support of developmental agencies is still desired until these initiatives learn to cope with the typical problems and tasks; or until they manage to establish strong and stable cooperation with other NGOs, local communities, etc.

The first step to enable green tourism in this area is to gather information about the services that local community is ready to provide. The second step is to contact target groups of potential tourists via Internet and make some advertisement. Centres established with the help of UNDP may become informational hubs for tourists. At the moment, "wild rest" in these areas seems more realistic, while development of tourist infrastructure (first of all - comfortable dwelling with perfect bathroom facilities) requires a lot of money.

We feel that the time we spent living in local communities in the Chernobyl-affected region was beneficial both for us, as volunteers, but most importantly for the people we were living and working with. In sharing our mutual knowledge and expertise we were able to address the problems which we have addressed in this report. The simple factor of having an element of the unknown in a foreign person certainly helped to give further motivation to those living and working in the communities in their future endeavours.

In looking at the issue of furthering the development of these regions we identified issues relating to the sense of estrangement people felt from their communities and even from Ukrainian society in general. The communities we visited all loved the land on which they live and the ways of life of which they are proud, but paradoxically suffer from matters relating to pollution and waste management. One proposal to build a swing-park would see children play metres away from piles of open refuse and broken glass. Such plans need to be reinforced by a change in attitude which sees sustainability and environmental awareness as key to the future well-being of the communities - one of the key lessons to be learned from the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. However, feelings of helplessness, powerlessness and exclusion were prevalent among those people we met in each of the three communities we visited. Challenges facing development - be that in the goal of developing local green-tourism initiatives or other - existed both among decision-makers and the wider community. Within institutional and organizational frameworks we encountered a lack of awareness and inability to work towards an understanding of how initiatives such as green-tourism might be feasible. We also encountered a fundamental estrangement of the local community from any sense of societal involvement or responsibility, and an aversion to personal enterprise. There are of course multifarious issues which have led to such a situation, but as regards voluntary work such as ours we feel that the feelings of disenfranchisement of local people must be addressed. This, again, is a deep and multi-faceted issue which pertains to economic questions (among others) not readily addressed, but work to build self-confidence and empower members of such communities would help - in our opinion. The young people we met relished the

opportunity to show the awareness they had of informational technologies and foreign languages and cultures, but lacked the confidence to exhibit this. That they have opportunities and possibilities ahead of them was a message which we endeavoured to convey, and the recognition among the young people we met that it is each person's choice to act was- we feel- one of the successes of our time living among the communities.

The experience lent a unique opportunity to gain an intimate knowledge of the everyday life of the people living in the Chernobyl-affected regions to us, and the experience of interaction with people from very different circumstances to the people living in these regions. The experience gave some insight into the warmth and hospitality of the Ukrainian people, and the beauty of its culture, history, nature and traditions.