

UNDP IN UKRAINE

Prospects for Green and Cultural Tourism in Udryck and Prylisne

Oxford Volunteers for Chernobyl 2011

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Prospects for Green and Cultural Tourism in Udryck

Summary

Udryck, a small and remote village in the Rivne Oblast nearing the Belarusian border, belongs to the third zone (zone of voluntary resettlement) of Chernobyl contamination. However, when visiting the village for a few days and residing with local residents, it was difficult to see the impact of Chernobyl on everyday life and activity. In fact there were no obvious signs indicating the village as being Chernobyl-affected. Like many other small and remote villages in Ukraine, economic development remains generally low, which is directly related to problems of poor infrastructure, access to healthcare and employment, transportation, communication, ect. For the most part, the morale among residents we encountered remained high, and community members were motivated to develop the village, actively attract green tourism to the area, and involve local youth in new activities. The community's establishment of a Youth Centre, village council's implementation of village symbols, renovation of the local school due to funding provided by residents, and the recent creation of a student-led volunteer group demonstrate the impressive ability of Udryck's resident's to mobilize resources, remain active, and produce successful results through community-led development.

While volunteering in the village, our primary objectives were to increase the potential for tourism in Udryck and the surrounding area, engaging the youth in various activities, and supporting the use of the Youth Centre. Upon our arrival, we began by evaluating the prospects for green and cultural tourism and identifying specific points of attraction. Residing and speaking with local villagers, interacting with youth and the Director of the Youth Centre, meeting with local village council, and touring surrounding green areas allowed us to get a better sense of Udryck's unique cultural heritage and natural habitat. After touring the area, it became clear that the village has beautiful landscapes, rich with flora, fauna, and rivers, which present opportunities for local eco-tourism. There are many well conserved spaces that offer prospects for rest and relaxation, and popular eco-tourist activities like hiking, camping, and wildlife observation. Udryck also offers specific points of historic and cultural significance that are unique to the area and worth exploring.

As part of identifying and strengthening prospects for tourism, we tried to engage the local youth as much as possible. To generate cultural and ecological awareness and interest, we encouraged the use of green space by holding outdoor activities, included students in the brainstorming and design process for green tourism and promotion of the Youth Centre, and administered tutorials that provided students the knowledge and tools to carry-out projects on their own. Generally, students were eager and interested to participate and contribute their ideas, demonstrating a sincere desire to continue with these activities in the future.

Despite the positive experiences during our stay and the potential for green tourism in Udryck, significant obstacles to increased tourism exist. Overall, the village remains difficult to get to from major cities, has no accommodation facilities, no markers of tourist points, low capacity for marketing, and poor communication with other villagers in Ukraine and abroad. Also, points of tourism must be more specifically defined and developed. Though we tried to address these factors during our stay, time was limited and we hope the community will work to overcome these obstacles so that the village can continue to develop and flourish.

Main objectives and tasks in Udryck

- Connecting with the Youth and creating intercultural dialogue



During our stay, we held an English seminar with local students to get them active and thinking about community-led projects both at school and the Youth Centre. To get to know the students and allow them to improve their English proficiency, we organized a picnic near a popular swimming site. In a relaxed environment over lunch, students were able to practice their English speaking skills and vocabulary, as well as communicate their interests and ideas for projects during our stay. Having received UNDP volunteers in the past, students were well acquainted with foreigners. As a result, some students had impressive

English proficiency and many expressed interest in connecting with international youth.

To establish a pen-pal style communication with young Ukrainians abroad, we contacted several Ukrainian organizations in Canada. Outside Ukraine and Russian, Canada has the largest number of Ukrainian Diaspora. We are currently in the process of corresponding with the Ukrainian Youth Association to find young Ukrainian-Canadians interested in participating. Connecting Udryck youth and Ukrainian Diaspora will allow students to engage in cultural exchange, while making new friends and contacts. Also, it can present an excellent opportunity to practice English skills and keep young Ukrainian Diaspora culturally connected to Ukraine. This communication could take place both in English and Ukrainian, through email or regular post depending on the students involved.

- Promoting use of the Youth Centre and youth activities



Upon our arrival, students expressed their desire to develop and produce a school newspaper. To help them launch this initiative, we held a seminar at the Youth Centre with interested participants to develop a newspaper concept, design, and format. Also we initiated a weekly Cinema Club, which involved screening of a movie, followed by a discussion session. Students were enthusiastic in participating in both these projects and expressed a desire to pursue them in the future.

- Identifying historical and cultural heritage points for tourism



Working with local residents, youth, and the Head of the Udryck Youth Centre, we were able to identify points of interest for tourists. Udryck has sites of historical and religious significance, such as its public well, which is thought to be over two hundred years old. Its water is considered to be sacred and to have healing properties.

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- Exploring opportunities for green and eco-tourism



Udryck is rich with natural resources, forests, rivers, and wildlife, presenting viable opportunities for green tourism. There are many sites where eco-tourism activities such as fishing, hiking, swimming, camping, and visiting wildlife and farm life can take place. The village is sparsely populated and much of its landscape is well conserved. As part of green tourism activities, Udryck can offer visitors bike rentals so that the area can be explored in an eco-friendly way.

- Promoting eco-tourism in Udryck



As a visitor, locating green and cultural points in Udryck are difficult since they are unmarked and are fairly spread throughout the village. In order to make these sites more accessible to tourists, we created a map highlighting points of green, cultural, and historical significance. This map includes the Youth Centre website and contact information so that visitors can obtain more information. The map has also been marked on GoogleMaps and can be viewed online via Flickr <http://www.flickr.com/photos/68214713@N06/6205155899/>.

We hope that the local community will continue to use the map to promote local tourism by posting it at railway stations and Cultural and Tourist offices in large towns nearby.

General Findings

For the most part, local community members demonstrated considerable enthusiasm, and desire to continue development of the village through increased activities at the Youth Centre and promotion of green and cultural tourism. As mentioned earlier, many existing projects like renovations at the school and participation in regional cultural competitions were made possible through funding from local families. Based on interactions with local residents and village council, it became clear that while residents would like to receive more funding, they are not reliant on external aid from the government or other sources. As a result, residents understand the importance of community-led development and are eager to push forward new initiatives to stimulate growth. However, we found that greater communication can take place between village council and local community members. For instance, most of our interaction during our stay occurred with the Head of the Youth Centre and community members, with village council taking minimal interest and participation in our projects.

During our stay, we also observed that while the local youth remain enthusiastic, the Youth Centre was generally underused. Many children were often at home helping families with farming, which often left the Youth Centre empty. Also, the computers being used at the Youth Centre only provide access to computer games and have no Microsoft Office programs. Also, only one computer of the six at the Youth Centre has Internet access, which remains slow and unreliable. On several occasions while using the Internet, the connection was lost and could only be reconnected by restarting the computer. The unreliable Internet and limited capacity of the computers at the Youth Centre make projects like the Cinema Club, school newspaper, and connecting with Ukrainian Diaspora more difficult to pursue. Moreover, these

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problems have not improved in the past year as previous Oxford Volunteers reported similar problems in 2010.

In terms of opportunities for green tourism, Udryck has great potential due to its beautiful landscape and close proximity to the Belarusian border. However, for successful tourism to take place significant obstacles must be overcome. For instance, the village is far from major cities and transportation remains inconvenient and slow. This makes it less attractive for Ukrainians from farther distances to visit the village. Also, Udryck should develop one specific cultural, historical, or ecological selling point to have effective marketing of the area. For instance, what in particular makes this village interesting and worth visiting? Is there an opportunity to sell specialty products? Are there ways to make the Polissian cultural experience more accessible to visitors? While initiatives to market the village are already underway with the successful development of local symbols from village council and the Youth Centre website, continued progress in this area is required. Overall, the stigma of Chernobyl does not seem to be a hindrance to attracting more tourism, but relate more specifically to overcoming obstacles like poor access to the village and poor marketing.

Recommendations for increased development and tourism

In order to continue promotion of Green and Cultural tourism to Udryck and overall development of the village we have outlined a number of recommendations:

1. Increased use of the Youth Centre is important to keep students active, empowered, and involved with community projects. For these reasons it is important that students receive support and encouragement from the Head of the Youth Centre, teachers, and parents to continue initiatives like the Cinema Club and newspaper. For example, older students attending universities in nearby cities can help with these activities by downloading films since they have better Internet access, and bringing them back to Udryck for the local Cinema Club. Also, obtaining Microsoft Office programs for the Youth Centre computers and improving Internet access are both significant to diversify the students' skills in technological communication and research, keep them globally connected, serve as an information source, and support overall youth development.
2. To enhance the capacity to accommodate tourism in Udryck, practical considerations must be addressed. For instance, there are no signs throughout the village marking convenience stores, restaurants, and buildings, thus making it difficult for visitors to navigate the village. While using the Tourist Map may help, signs should be placed on buildings and roads. Also, Udryck is poorly connected to other villages, creating a great need for improved infrastructure.
3. To attract tourists from Ukraine and abroad, Udryck local community-members and administration must focus on creating one overall concept for tourism to distinguish itself from other villages. For instance, the village of Krupove has established a Weaving Centre, complete with weaving training for visitors and an opportunity to view traditional hand-made Ukrainian products. Also, Lubyech has managed to attract tourists from Belarus, Russian, and Ukraine with the Lubyech festival. In a similar way, Udryck must focus on one particular product, event, or selling point to successfully market the village. Currently, Udryck receives visitors for fishing in its surrounding rivers; however, this area is highly polluted. During our stay we planned to organize a clean-up of this area with local students, but could not get access to a car to take the group to the site. We suggest that Udryck community-members focus on cleaning-up the area and encouraging use of the space with garbage bins, picnic tables, and lounge chairs. Making the area more accessible and appealing can allow for the expansion of expand outdoor recreational

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activities like swimming, biking, and camping for visitors. Udryck can also focus on one local product that can be made available for visitor to purchase. Currently the village has a small private honey farm that can be a site for green tourism, while potentially providing tourists something unique to buy and take with them like honey.

Also, since Udryck has no current accommodation for visitors, they could offer tourists traditional homestay experiences with local families. This provides tourists a unique opportunity to experience “real” Ukrainian rural life with direct exposure to Ukrainian food and culture. It also serves as a form of cultural exchange, as well as allowing locals to earn extra income. Homestay tourism can be particularly beneficial for Udryck since the village is too small to create other forms of accommodation like hotels at the moment. As a whole, Udryck is quite charming, with beautiful outdoor areas, and hospital and friendly residents that are accustomed to having visitors, making it an ideal location for homestay travel or student exchanges.

4. To improve the prospects of attracting tourists, Udryck village council and community-members should collaborate with district heads to create greater regional promotion. Information about Udryck should be produced and made available at tourist offices in larger cities nearby and on their websites.
5. Udryck local administration, the Head of Youth Centre, and schools should arrange for organized tourism with local communities in Belarus. Many local residents and students have family ties, interest in the country, and/or had travelled to Belarus. Since the border remains close, perhaps cross-border students exchange can take place creating greater opportunities for future visits to Udryck from abroad.

Prospects for Green and Cultural Tourism in Prylisne

Summary

Prylisne is a village located in the Manevychi Rayon, Volynska Oblast, in Western Ukraine. The village is ideally located in close proximity to the Polish and Belarusian border, the city of Manevychi, and is easily accessible from an international highway and the R-14 road, which passes through the village. The Manevitskiy district is located primarily in forested areas, which is populated with rare species of animals and plants. The area also has significant water resources with rivers, ponds, and a large natural lake Glinskaya.

It was the first year that Oxford Volunteers for Chernobyl visited the village of Pryslina, and it was quite evident in our general reception and the overall language abilities, attitudes, and reactions of local community members. Pryslina's local youth expressed considerable excitement and curiosity to meet with a foreigner and learn about different cultures, languages, and lifestyles. However, since the local school had not had an English teacher in previous years, many older students had fairly weak English proficiency, with many unable to communicate in English at a basic level.

Furthermore, after meeting with students and teachers at the local school, it was evident that residents were generally unaware of our role and the objectives of our work in the village. Residents were also less familiar with the concept of community-led development projects, and often assumed that we came to the village to provide financial aid. This made it more difficult to get local youth and teachers engaged and participating in our proposed projects for green and cultural tourism. Ideas regarding community-led development were also absent at the village administration level. The Head of Village Council whom we had worked with extensively, presented great ideas for obtaining funding for development and tourism projects through grant proposals and public-private partnerships, but did not consider involving the whole community in development initiatives. He worked closely with a local NGO "Community Trust", which could potentially help enhance communication and partnership between local residents and government.

During our stay in Pryslina, we helped the local village council research, brainstorm, and carry-out projects with the aim of promoting green and cultural tourism. While the potential for enhanced tourism to the village exists, the local community must support these initiatives and become active participants in their implementation. Greater collaboration between village council, NGOs, residents, and the local school can better ensure the success and sustainability of these projects. Therefore, it was important that in addition to helping village council with their proposals, we also interacted with residents through various activities to get them thinking about new ways of creating development through community-led initiatives and volunteering.

Main objectives and tasks in Prylisne

- Grant Proposal to the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Poland-Belarus-Ukraine 2007-2013

Our primary task while working in Prylisne was to assist the Head of the Village Council to develop a concept for green tourism in the village and complete the initial stage of the grant proposal to the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme between Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine. Igor, the Village Head, had already established a partner in Poland and local organizations to collaborate with on the project, along with a location for the office in an old schoolhouse on the main street in the village. Working with Igor and a member of local NGO "Community Trust", we wrote the first stage of the proposal in English, which outlined how the tourist office would be constructed, the timeline for its renovation, its purpose and objectives, target group, potential impact, and sustainability. The office would offer historical,

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cultural, and geographic information to tourists regarding the Volyn region and Prylisne, and would also serve as a resting and/or meeting point for travelers. Tourists could get maps and brochures on green tourism, rent bikes for travelling to green sites, and purchase traditional hand-made crafts that were made by students at the school. Once the initial tourist office is completed, it would be expanded into a Centre for Culture, Tourism, and Recreation, which would be used as a place for physical activities, games, traditional craft making, and a centre for young children to receive psychological services. It appears that several children in the area experienced psychological-related problems and did not have access to proper care. Therefore, the Centre could be expanded to provide these services to children, while serving as a Centre for activity for tourists and local residents.

- Branding and promoting Prylisne



Since Prylisne did not have local symbols, we designed one to help with the branding and marketing of the village for expanding green tourism. We created a basic design and hope that the village council will adopt the symbol and continue to produce it, so that Prysline can be better recognized and promoted.

- Getting the youth engaged



In general, local residents and students seemed disinterested and lacked basic information regarding volunteering, the eco-movement, and community-lead development. In order to engage the students, we held a seminar at the local school where students were asked to think about ways in which they can help with environment conservation of the area (i.e. replanting forests, cleaning lakes, and recycling).

- Creating intercultural dialogue



At the school, we also administered English activities with smaller children, practicing reading, pronunciation, and vocabulary in English. During the seminar, we also discussed cultural differences between Ukraine and English speaking countries like Canada, the U.S., and the U.K., allowing students to learn and inquire about new cultures. Outside the classroom, we participated in leisure activities with the students, allowing them to practice their English and engage in a cultural exchange.

- Promoting the ICT Centre



While working on the project proposal, we spent some time in the ICT Centre and were surprised to see that it was significantly underused. In fact from midday until closing no one came to the centre to use the computers. We were told that children stopped coming to the centre as often, since four of the five computers there were not working and would not turn on. Some younger children did make use of library and took out books, which

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was encouraging. Aside from the problem with computers we observed that the Centre was being underused due to that fact that it was under construction. For instance, the building did not have bathroom facilities. Also, we were told that many students had Internet access at home and did not have use for the ICT Centre. The Centre's auditorium was being used the most as a disco for the students.

Recommendations for increased development and tourism

In order to continue promotion of Green and Cultural tourism to Prysline and overall development of the village we have outlined a number of recommendations:

1. The Prysline local administration should complete its grant proposal to the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme with Poland-Belarus-Ukraine 2007-2013. Due to the village's strategic location near the Polish and Belarusian border, and being situated close to beautiful lakes and forests, prospects for tourism already exist. Establishing a Centre for Culture, Tourism, and Recreation in the village can enhance the potential for tourism by providing a place for visitors to get information and resources, purchase goods specific to the region, and interact with local villagers. Also, the Centre can provide a place for the community to come together and access health and recreation services. If provided the funding, this project should be pursued holistically, with joint cooperation and participation from community-members, NGOS, and local government. In order to provide residents with the knowledge, skills, and empowerment to bring about positive and sustainable change, Prysline's community-members should be an integral part of promoting and developing the region.
2. Similar to Udryck, Prysline must identify its points of interest for green tourism. In the past, the village has taken part in organized exchanges between students, but it must determine what specific attractions, activities, and goods will make new visitors come independently. One area that can be expanded and further developed is the village's lake and its surrounding area. The lake is popular among locals and provides an ideal spot for rest and recreation. Another possibility is to make use of the village's extensive apple orchards. Perhaps the village can put together an apple festival to connect community members and attract tourists.
3. To effectively market Prysline, the village council should adopt local symbols and use it in official documents and promotion materials. The village must actively brand itself through information campaigns online using sites like Wikipedia, and via maps, brochures, and photos. To help make these materials, local administration can use sites like UN volunteering to get in touch with graphic and web designers.
4. Though we were unable to make headway during our visit, Prysline community-members should pursue the possibility of working with Heifer Ukraine to make use of its apple orchard. Though some of the orchard's land has been rented out to private owners, most it is government-owned and is currently unused. The land and its produce have been tested for radiation and have been deemed "clean". Thus, perhaps with support from Heifer, the community can replant trees, retreat the land, and renovate the abandoned factory that once produced apple juice for economic production and enhanced development opportunities.
5. The renovation of Prysline's ICT Centre building should be completed as soon as possible. The building has a great library, computer lab, and disco; however, it is significantly underused. Most of the building is currently under construction, and consequently does not offer bathroom facilities. After its renovation, perhaps the building can also be used as a centre for other clubs and activities to attract youth. Moreover, a technician should be brought to repair the four broken

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computers, since many students have stopped going to the ICT Centre. Pryslina also could benefit greatly from providing information technology training at the ICT Centre for staff, residents, and local administration with poor computer skills. For instance, some members of the village council were unable to type on the computer, use computer programs, and navigate the Internet. It is important to build upon these skills to enhance the capacity of local residents to obtain information online, stay connected, and pursue future opportunities for increased tourism and development.