

Prospective of green tourism development and biodiversity conservation in Rokytne rayon

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Contents

1. Introduction: Green tourism development and the prospective of involvement community involvement into biodiversity conservation in Rokytne rayon
2. Green tourism establishments in Rokytne rayon
3. Eco-trail
4. Internet access centre
5. Community organization project proposals
6. Recommendations and conclusions

Abstract

Our research took place in several locations within Rokytno rayon, located in the north-eastern part of Rivne oblast. The rayon has been described as having a ‘unique, fairytale nature and picturesque landscapes’ according to the Rivne Region Tourist Guidebook. Rokytno rayon houses several natural reserves that form 25% of the oblast’s protected areas, and also several natural monuments. These include the Yusefin dacha, where an oak tree of over 1,300 years still grows, and the Osnytske water storage pool on the Lva River, a popular relaxation destination in the summer.



Figure 1 - Rivne oblast



Figure 2 - Rokytno rayon, showing main towns and villages marked out

Our main aim was to assess the potential for developing a green tourism industry in the rayon through promoting the singular natural features and biodiversity found there. In order to achieve this goal, we undertook a range of tasks, which included mapping an Eco-trail, talking to teachers of biology and ecology to obtain information on rare species in the region, interviewing potential green tourism

entrepreneurs, and assessing a suitable location for a CRDP-funded internet access centre that may be used to promote green tourism at a later stage.

Our main findings were that the rayon has a good potential in green tourism development, though it is in initial stage of infrastructure and tourism services provision. Lacking knowledge and communication between different stakeholders were identified as some of the main obstacles to embarking on a successful green tourism strategy.

1. Introduction: Green tourism development and the prospective of involvement community involvement into biodiversity conservation in Rokytno rayon

Green tourism refers to leisure tourism being done in rural areas with the usage and resources of personal households including natural recreational particularities of the area, as well as cultural, historical and ethnographical heritage of the region. The concept of “green tourism” is being promoted as a solution for a number of social and economic problems in the villages of Rokytno rayon. Experience and research have shown that green tourism can be used as a “catalyst” for improvement of life index and providing stability in rural area. The development of green rural tourism will help:

- increase material well-being and the outcome of rural residents
- solve problems of employment
- reduce immigration to urban areas
- direct attention of local communities on reforming local transport infrastructure
- restore and revitalize the activities of the houses of culture
- support environmental protection
- spread and support Ukrainian culture

We are convinced that these aspects are critical for the development of the culturally rich, but economically deprived Polissia area. We had the opportunity to evaluate the possibilities of Rokytno rayon, which seemed to be a suitable place for the promotion of green tourism. There are a lot of strong confirmations to support our suggestion: beautiful nature and different landscapes; great numbers of unique places of nature (the lake, the forest, the marsh); rich cultural and historical treasures; possibilities of various tourist activities (gathering berries and mushroom, fishing). Thus the potential of the region is excellent, and it was a big surprise to discover that some of the projects haven't worked at the territory yet.

In this report, we shall look at some of our main findings: investigating the potential of developing green tourism establishments in Rokytno rayon, mapping an eco-trail in the town of Berezove, setting up an internet, and judging the best location for an internet access centre. In the end, we will offer some conclusions and recommendations from our experiences and research in the Rokytno rayon area.

2. “Green tourism” in Rokytno rayon

There are five houses in Rokytno rayon (‘agrosadiv’) that have been proposed by the Department for Culture of Rokytno rayon as Green Tourism establishments that would allow guests to stay at their houses to get a taste of rural Ukraine, offer them various activities that would allow them to spend time outside in the nature, and offer materials on sights and activities within the Polissia area.

We wanted to assess the potential of these households to offer the necessary conveniences and activities in order to attract tourists in order to gain a picture of how developed green tourism plans in

the area were so far. To do this, semi-structural interviews, accompanied with a site visit to each establishment, were carried out in order to assess house owners' main motivation behind taking on a Green Tourism initiative, and the plans they had considered for making their business profitable in the future. The houses were located in the following locations within Rokytno rayon:

- Bilsk
- Synyzhove
- Kisorichy
- Borove
- Osnitsk

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Our basic findings for these site visits are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 – Basic findings from site visits to green tourism establishments within Rokytno rayon

Criteria	Bilsk	Synyzhove	Kisorichy	Borove	Osnitsk
Occupation of owner	Worker in cultural sector	farmer	Worker in cultural sector	farmer	farmer
Motivation	-	financial perspectives	financial perspectives	financial perspectives	financial perspectives
Conveniences	-	-	-	-	+
Previous experience (number of previous groups of guests)	-	-	2	1	-
Planning to get state-sponsored credit to ameliorate facilities	+	+	+	+	-
Cooperation	-	-	Communicating with colleges	-	-
Future prices	Standard "pricelist"	Standard "pricelist"	"Pricelist" with correlation	"Pricelist" with correlation	To be considered

*

More detailed interviews can be found in Annex 1

The lack of conveniences was identified as the main problem with most of the residences that we visited. Almost every house was under renovation, and four out of the five lacked running water. This

meant that toilets were outdoors, water was obtained from a hand-drawn well and was poured into a tap system that made it difficult to wash oneself properly, and showers were nonexistent. It seems like this would present a problem to tourists who may wish to undertake activities in the nature, such as hiking, gathering berries, fishing, or horse-riding, and would wish adequate sanitary facilities. It is important to mention that although tourists may be seeking a more rural and basic way of life, they may not want to experience it to such a degree.

The primary motivation for establishing a green tourism enterprise varied. It appears that most of the participants were motivated by the financial perspectives, although it must be noted that they had not considered the profitability of their venture appropriately. Four out of five relied instead on a price list given to them by the rayon administration, which had been drawn up through an analysis carried out in the oblast capital, Rivne, based on other green tourism enterprises.

Another point that should be mentioned is the lack of a target group – none of the households interviewed had any clear ideas as to what population groups (e.g. children, Ukrainian tourists, foreign tourists, pensioners, young people etc) they would focus on as their primary audience. This leads to poor understanding of specific services needed.

Overall, this green tourism initiative was found to be at its very initial stages of development for all five houses. Major efforts should be made by the owners of the Green Tourism to improve their facilities and use the rayon-supported credit scheme to improve their existing facilities and install new conveniences such as toilets and showers. In addition, they must make their activities more profitable and diverse. So, these obstacles must be resolved before achieving successful green tourism enterprise.

3. Eco Trail

'The Eco Trail is the outstanding form of communication with nature' – Berezove school Eco Trail booklet, 2008

Ukraine's should prioritize environmental education in the interest of sustainable development. As a result of an underestimation of the importance of environmental knowledge in Ukraine's general education system, Ukraine's environmental education system continues to be fragmented, uncoordinated, and ineffective (National Environmental Policy of Ukraine: assessment and development strategy, 2007).

That is why it was so important to undertake the task of mapping the Eco-trail developed by the Berezove school which represents a great educational tool by teaching children about the wildlife and biodiversity of their area while outside in the nature. It also holds the potential of promoting green tourism to tourists, if ultimately developed with trail signposts, and properly marketed.

The Eco Trail at the Berezove school was developed in 2006 by the biology teachers and pupils from local school. The trail is used particularly for classes of the school. Our task for the Eco-trail was to map the 7 points of the Eco-trail using GPS markers to obtain the exact latitude and longitude coordinates for the points on the trail. We were originally supposed to do this with children from the local school, but unfortunately during our stay there it wasn't possible because all of them were away on summer holiday.

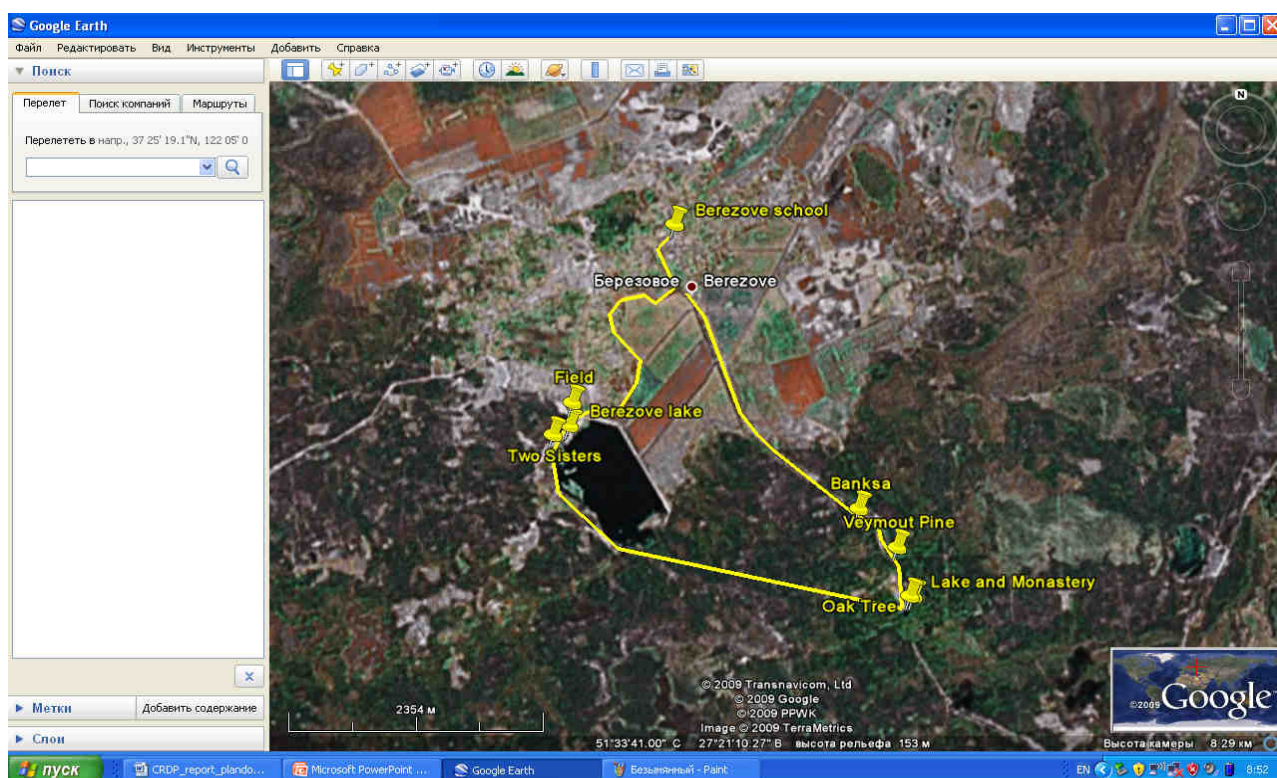
We went to the field with one of the biology who had originally developed the Eco-trail and used GPS to map down the coordinates. We then used these coordinates to mark out points on the Eco-trail on Google Earth. These coordinates are currently in the process of being transferred to Google on the internet.

The trail was heralded as being one of the best eco-trails in the region by some of the biology teachers we spoke to. At the moment, it is mostly used for educating the children in Berezove school, although it could very well be used to set an example for other schools, especially with the promotion of Google Earth to children. For the moment, schoolchildren from other parts of the rayon could be the main target group for this trail.

With further investment and improvement, the Eco-trail at Berezove could become a main tourist attractions in the region, through increased marketing via the internet and Google Earth. Carrying out improvements such as the installation of signposts and visitor information stands would open up more opportunities for marketing it. In this case, the target group could be expanded to include leisure and green tourists. Various lessons could be learned from such enterprises in other countries, such as the trail network present in the Koli National Park in Eastern Finland which offers visitors a range of clearly marked trails of different lengths and themes to choose from (see Annex 4).

Thus, we propose the following recommendations for improvement and promotion the Eco Trail:

- equip the trail with required signs and informative plates and stands
- involve more children from other schools and other parts of the rayon
- get children to participate in GPS mapping exercises and use this experience to teach them about Google Earth, integrating this into school website and IT classes
- include the information about the Eco Trail into promotion material of the rayon
- developing infrastructure: camping site, swimming place on the lake



4. UNDP-funded internet access centre

In 2009, UNDP plan to establish an internet access centre where anybody can get access to the information about Chernobyl and other relevant issues. One or two of such centres plan to be established in Rokytno rayon, either in the local school, library, or house of culture. Our task was to visit the three prospective villages (Karpylivka, Rokytno village, and Snovydvovichi) that had been put forward as potential sites by the Rokytno rayon administration, and to meet with the village council and local school to determine which site and facility would be the best place for such an internet access centre.

The main goal of such an internet information centre is to offer services such as trainings in using the internet to search for relevant information and communication. We used the following criteria to assess which village and facility would be the best to place the internet centre:

- What community shows a genuine interest in establishing such a centre?
- Have they considered how the centre will be maintained?
- Where is the biggest need for creating a centre?
- What kind of services can the centre provide?

Table 2 indicates how different schools scored on various assessment criteria:

Table 2 – Assessment criteria for internet access centre and scored for different facilities and locations

	Criteria				Sum
	Interest	Management	Need	Services	
Karpylivka	****	****	****	****	16
Rokytno village	*****	*****	****	*****	19
Snovydivychi	**	**	****	**	10

*

More detailed information is given in the Annex 2

Out of all three proposed facilities (local school, house of culture, and library) for the internet access centre, it was found that the local school in each village presented the best option for locating the internet access centre due to the efficient location of resources, such as computers, IT managers, and physical availability of a room. The schools were found also to provide the most active environment. All three schools we visited had internet access provided by the state. However, the internet access in Snovydivychi and Karpylivka was unavailable at the time of our visit due to the recent beginning of the school year, and the idea of internet access was not actively promoted to the local community, just to students. The physical place for the centre was available in all three schools, although in both Snovydivychi and Karpylivka, the room proposed was also in need of renovation. From this aspect, Rokytno village school seemed to provide the best physical premises for the internet access centre with its newly renovated computer room.

Based on our observations for this task, we have identified Rokytno village school as the most suitable place for a UNDP-funded internet access centre, due to the enthusiasm and initiatives of its school director and suitable physical location for the centre. As for Karpylivka, it is also deemed a suitable location, mostly owing to the village's rapidly growing population.

In addition, two of the three schools (Karpylivka and Rokytno village) showed great interest in obtaining a multimedia projector to be used to enhance educational processes. This was identified as a great tool to provide more information to the community, and it was even suggested that this might provide more benefit than an internet access centre, as mentioned by one of the IT managers at Karpylivka school.

5. Community organization project proposals

In 2010, UNDP will support 7 community organizations with grants for community projects. We identified one such project that could be put forward by Rokytno village school that would help promote cultural heritage and help bring some economic benefits as well as attract tourists. This was a project focused on restoring a traditional linen-making process in order to building community capacity and promote green tourism in Rokytno village. More detailed information is presented in Annex 3.

6. Recommendations and conclusions

Nature and people present the greatest potential of the Rokytno rayon. Rokytno rayon was also interesting in terms of its status as a 'Chornobyl-affected area'; most of the places we saw were not the grim, poverty stricken villages we'd previously thought we would encounter, but instead some lively, growing communities with a great resource of young people. It is important for the Rayon to invest in the education and activities of these children, and to harness their talents for one day working to improve their rayon.

During our time in Rokytno rayon, we had the opportunity to talk to various school directors, rayon officials, and people living in the towns and villages we visited. Our impressions of the people we met were for the most part positive, and we could see a great desire to invest time and resources into improving facilities for their families and communities, such as schools. The rayon has many resources, in terms of material on its history and cultural sites, spread amongst its schools and older villagers, that should be harnessed and collected – this may provide more ideas on how to market the area for green and cultural tourism.

We identified lack of communication and infrastructure development are the greatest obstacles for green tourism development. The rayon does not have proper facilities yet, with which it could adequately cater to tourists; green tourism establishments are not marketed properly, they have no conveniences, and ecotrails must still be clearly marked out and signposted if they are to be promoted. This is one of the greatest short-comings of the establishments visited. In terms of lack of communication, there appeared to be several instances where information given to us regarding eco-trails in the rayon, or sources of information regarding Red Book species, appeared to be contradictory or just missing. In terms of material on the history of the area and its cultural sights, there is a lot of material, much of which seems to be kept by individual schools. We came across a particularly wide selection of history in the Blazhevo school, whose school director was an active historian. It may be useful to pool together these sources of information in order to get a sense of all the particularities in the area that could attract tourists.

Finally, we identified a need for more educational and promotional work. This is especially needed by the homeowners of prospective green tourism sites who should pay closer consideration to their target audiences and the need to market their establishments. We recommend holding a training seminar to communicate with all prospective homeowners wishing to set up a Green Tourism establishment. This could be a forum for sharing examples from elsewhere in Ukraine, as well as other countries, of successful green tourism ventures, and what the key lessons of these could be. Another suggestion would be to introduce a group of visitors to each establishment, have them stay for one or two nights, and communicate their ideas to the homeowner in question, in order to give homeowners some idea of what to expect when receiving visitors.

In terms of target audiences, we feel that children and Ukrainians would be the key audiences to target for now. Children from within the rayon could experience the Berezove eco-trail and have it integrated into their ecology and biology lessons as a more interactive educational tool, alongside possible GPS mapping activities if resources allowed this. Lacking knowledge of spoken English presents a key obstacle to promoting the area to foreign tourists, who could be deterred by the lack of being able to communicate. However, the area may prove interesting for Polish tourists who may be interested in the very recent Polish history of the area and remaining relics such as the Polish cemetery.

Thus, we felt that the rayon does have potential in developing an as-of yet unexplored green tourism initiatives. It must however invest resources into proper marketing and must closely consider the target

groups it can afford to target – these should be oriented at Ukrainian tourists for the moment. The Chernobyl-affected area status should not be seen as an obstacle to this beautiful region of Ukraine.

Annex 1

Information from site visits and semi-structural interviews carried out for five Green Tourism establishments:

Bilsk

Our hostess in Bilsk was Olena Borisovets, the head of the House of Culture in the village. She is very active in supporting the cultural life of the village: she leads two ensembles of singers who takes part in different competitions. In the course of the interview, she mentioned that she doesn't have a direct motivation in Green Tourism business, stating that she should was doing it essentially because nobody else was willing to take the task, and it fell to her due to her responsibilities as head of the Bilsk House of Culture. She was however interested in the idea of profits from such a business and was willing to look into this possibility. Where prices were concerned, these she will take from the pricelist given by the Department of Culture of Rokytno rayon (headed by Mr. Kovalchuk).

Olena has never received the tourists in her house before, and she hadn't considered a target group. She doesn't expect to receive any subsidies or any other supporting from government although she did briefly mention the free credit given from government to support green tourism. Olena says her house is currently under renovation, and in the near future she plan to provide conveniences such as running water, both hot and cold, with an inside bathroom.

Synzhove

The host at Synzhove was Martin Shulzhik, a farmer who we experienced to have a rather poor understanding of the green tourism business. He is planning on obtaining the government-supported credit and building up the house for tourists in the field. He didn't mention anything about conveniences in his house, although we saw that there was no running water inside the house and that it seemed to be in quite a bad condition. Martin was convinced that if you want to feel a real rural life, you should live without conveniences. He had no clear target group in mind and we couldn't obtain much information about about services he could provide for tourists apart from showing them how farming activities were done. But the host is expecting to have a profit from that business and he supports the pricelist which Kovalchuk proposed.

Kisorichy

We were greeted in Kisorichy by the hostess Inna Primak, who is the head of the village House of Culture. Compared with the previous houses, Inna has some experience of receiving guests; there have been two groups of people staying at her house already, whom she provided with an excursion to the local sights, involved in some activities (such as gathering berries, mushrooms, and horse riding). Inna had a very initiative attitude and was interested in the experience of her colleagues. This year her house is under renovation, but in the near future she plans to build a summer house for tourists and perhaps an outside 'altanka' in the front yard. She had also given brief thought to target group, wishing to focus on middle-age people as opposed to groups of children. Despite her experience, Inna didn't have an exact pricelist. She has some examples, but in her case it will depends on circumstances. A setback to Inna's business is that she also did not have running water.

Borove

The owner of this house is a farmer, Ivan Boyuka. He gave us an argument of the positive effect of the need to rest in rural areas. He considered green tourism as an additional profit in his business. His plans include building a bathhouse, renovating his family's current house to make it comfortable for tourists. He doesn't expect government support, but is planning on taking a credit. Ivan had already

received one group of tourists (from Karelia apparently), which was his first experience. As possible sights, he offered showing tourists around his farm, which included a greenhouse used in growing varieties of tomatoes. At the moment he is thinking about future possibilities, services which he can propose, and the prices which have not yet been established.

Osnytsk

The place proposed for green tourism by the farmer Stepan. is completely different from the four others we described. In Osnytsk, we saw an estate that had been built up to look like a castle, with a theme of 'medieval' world and nature-based activities. The owner has strong motivation and also a very entrepreneurial attitude, possibly owing to his previous experience of running a business. He considers green tourism as a very profitable business. Stepan has strict deign plan for his estate, which in itself will form a tourist attraction. He is proposing a lot of activities and aimed both at foreigners and Ukrainians. Currently he is building a tourist complex which will include a cottage with sleeping rooms as well as a restaurant and sauna, a kitchen and staff quarters, stables for 8 horses and horse riding tracks, as well as some nature trails and possibilities of horse riding. The prices will be set after finishing work but will be adjusted with the aim of making profit and will not follow the government price list. It could be said that this type of venture may not strictly fit under the defition of 'green tourism' as it involved a larger-scale tourism enterprise that involved tourists staying in a house specially built for them and the employment of people external to the family, although out of all the sites visited, this establishment offered the most tourist-friendly and profitable atmosphere of all five.

Annex 2

Information from site visits and semi-structural interviews carried out on potential sites for the establishment of an internet access centre.

Karpylivka

The village of Karpylivka is home to about 3000 inhabitants. We visited the local school and house of culture, met with the school director, deputy director, two IT managers, and the creative director (художній керівник) of the house of culture.

Numerous people in Karpylivka already own computers, but have no internet, apart from some mobile-phone '3G' connections. In practice, people from the village already come to the school in order to use the internet 'unofficially'.

The school director showed genuine interest in an internet access centre, mentioning that the school already has two IT rooms, one of which they have physically available for a centre. The room in question is in need of renovation, but is ready for some new computers. This room currently functions as a teaching room for physics and chemistry, and would continue to function so if the internet access centre were to be set up, with internet becoming available in the evenings and on weekends. The director of the school mentioned that the IT managers would be available to manage the IT centre.

We had the opportunity to talk to two of the IT managers of the school, who both showed genuine interest in the centre, commenting that although many people have computers in the village, but have no knowledge of using the internet. One of the IT managers has identified particular training needs of villagers that he could address through an internet access centre: searching for information when buying a car or for writing an essay, as well as helping to make and share presentations to people running the church. He also mentioned the desire of the school to give special secretary training to children, which could potentially be enlarged to include villagers. We took such information as a positive sign that several training needs had been identified by IT managers.

Both the school director and IT managers also mentioned the need for a multimedia projector – this could be used to give presentations, prepare work, enhance learning, and provide more opportunities for recreational activities through creating a Cinema Club.

Regarding the house of culture, we were shown around by the creative director (художній керівник), who proposed two existing rooms that already contained sports equipment, but who otherwise showed no interest in the project, causing us to discount this facility as a potential centre for the internet access centre.

We visited the village council in Karpylivka as well, but the village councilor was on annual leave, and unfortunately his deputy councilor was unwilling to communicate with us.



Figure 3 - Proposed room for the internet access centre at Karpylivka school



Figure 4 - Proposed room for the internet access centre at Karpylivka school

Rokytne village

The village of Rokytne shouldn't be confused with Rokytne town, which is the capital of the rayon. Here we saw the local school and met the school director, and attempted to take a look at the culture house, which unfortunately had no one working there at the moment.

Rokytne village has an agroliseum specialized in agricultural and ecological studies, from where many students go on to study agriculture at Rivne college upon completing their lyceum studies. The school currently has about 800 students, projected to rise to 1000 in three years' time. We met Gennady Ivanovich Grogyl, the school director, who told us about some of the initiatives the school was taking. We were particularly impressed with his idea of developing a workshop for the community and tourists to restore the traditions of linen-making. It grew into a project idea, which we will present in Annex 3.

The Rokytne village school has two IT rooms and two IT managers. According to Gennady Ivanovich, the IT managers were perfectly competent to provide their services for managing the internet access centre. When we met with Gennady Ivanovich a few days later to obtain more information for developing the linen workshop proposal, he mentioned that he had already talked to one of the IT managers about the internet access centre, who had replied that he would be happy to help set it up. There was a classroom available where the internet centre could physically be placed, which was in good condition after a recent renovation.

Children in the school take part in a variety of environmental activities and actions, such as planting trees in the forest, cleaning the banks of the Lva River, and taking care of the springs in the region, and also collecting glass to take back to the glass factory in Rokytno town (this activity brings income to the school, which it has invested in increasing the material basis of the school, for example a new stage in the courtyard). As for the agrotechnical direction, students have done research on elite potato sorts' productivity, on the preferred ecological conditions for the growth of linen plant, and on the organizing their own beehives and forest management and floriculture (flower growing)

Regarding the internet access of the rest of the village, it was mentioned that the families with graduated students mostly have computers, but that not many out of these families have internet access on these computers. The school director has close links with the village councilor, and is also respected in the community. The school has partnerships with other schools, such as the Agrotechnical University in Rivne, and other colleges in the region.



Figure 5 - Proposed room for the internet access centre at Rokytno village school



Figure 6 - Proposed room for the internet access centre at Rokytne village school



Figure 7 - The second IT room at Rokytné village school, currently used for teaching

Snovydovichi

The village of Snovydovichi has a population of approximately 1000. Here we met with the school director and head technician of the house of culture.

Snovydovichi did not appear very interested in the project. The school director did point us towards a room that they were proposing for the said centre, but apart from that the other information he gave led us to believe that there wasn't the same level of interest in the project than at the other schools that we had seen. The school building was in worse condition than the schools we visited in Rokytné village and Karpylivka, and the teachers we talked to were more interested in directing resources towards renovating their school building, and also into building a canteen (currently, schoolchildren must go to the kindergarten building to take their meals, as Snovydovichi school does not have the physical room for a canteen).

An important point to note is that the Snovydovichi school has only one IT manager, who has changed every year in the past four years. The current one started at the beginning of this school year, and they are hoping that he will stay for longer. The director proposed his help in setting up the IT centre, but seemed to have given little thought to managing the centre efficiently and promoting it to the village.

We visited the culture house and library within it as well. The library was closed and had restricted opening hours, whereas the culture house seemed to have very little activities apart from occasional diskos, due to the bad physical condition of the old building. We met with the logistics manager (завроцн), who complained about the lacking conditions of the facilities in the culture house and who was very persistent in his opinion that there was more need for a general renovation of the culture house than for the centre of internet access. When we asked about the possibilities for using the library

as an internet access centre, we were told that the village had only one librarian, who split her time between Snovydovichi school and the culture house, indicating a lack of resources.



Figure 8 - Proposed room for the internet access centre at Snovydovichi school



Figure 9 - Proposed room for the internet access centre at Snovydvichi school

Annex 3

Project proposal for community capacity-building and promoting green tourism in Rokytne village by means of restoring a traditional linen-making process

Problem:

- the traditional knowledge about linen production is not being transmitted to the younger generations because of lacking facilities and economic benefits of production/ incentives

Goals

- the goal is to restore the process, to bring together people and provide them with the facilities and training needed, in order to revive traditional linen-making production process
- another goal is to gain economic benefits from this activity by selling the products and supporting green tourism in the area

Outcomes

- full cycle of linen production (what we see in the end) : income from linen for school, attraction for tourists, strengthening of community capacity (they will be together and working on this project), new ways of involving children in learning about their cultural heritage,

Tasks

Provided by the school	Support needed
Obtaining raw materials	
Provision of the plots of land needed to grow linseed	Appliances for land cultivation (including small tractor and sowing machine)
Managing the growth and production of flax	Purchasing linseed and fertilizer
Production of linen cloth	
Information about the technological process from elder members of the community	Setting up a room specifically designated for linen production
Management of the process of linen production	Installation of the machine needed to process the flax yarn