



FINAL REPORT/ GLEN INTERNSHIP 2017

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Home organization: INEX-SDA, Czech Republic

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Place and country of the Internship: Oku, Cameroon

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Host organization: The Society for the Promotion of Initiatives in Sustainable Development and Welfare

Summary

This final report summarizes my three-month internship in Cameroon, where I traveled with my tandem partner Johanna from Germany. We spent almost all of our internship in Oku, which is located in North West region of the country and it consists of 36 villages. We came here at the beginning of the rain season and left in a sunny, warm day. We worked in SOPISDEW (The Society for the Promotion of Initiatives in Sustainable Development and Welfare) where our main task was Ecotourism. We weren't the first team to work with SOPISDEW, so we continued with the project without any major problems. Our team was mainly made from five-member, but sometime it has grown and we co-operated in a group of twenty people. During our stay we were able to get to know this community better and I must say that the departure was not easy at all. Not everything was always perfect, our departure was somehow sadder not only for this beautiful place and people, but also because of the political situation that has prevailed in the country. This internship has opened a lot of new questions in me, it has changed my professional discourse and last but not least it has enriched me in many ways.

Shrnutí

Tento report shrnuje mou tříměsíční stáž v Kamerunu, kam jsem vycestovala s mojí GLEN tandem-partnerkou Johannou z Německa. Větší část naší stáže jsme strávily v Oku, které se nachází na severozápadě země a sestává z 36 vesnic. Zavítaly jsme zde na začátku období dešťů a odjížděly za slunného prohřátého dne. Pracovaly jsme v místní organizaci SOPISDEW (The Society for the Promotion of Initiatives in Sustainable Development and Welfare), kde naším hlavním tématem byl Ekoturismus. Nebyly jsme prvním týmem, který spolupracoval se SOPISDEW, takže jsme pokračovaly dále bez větších problémů. Naš tým byl zejména pětičlenný, ale často se rozrostl a spolupracovali jsme ve skupině i dvaceti lidí. Místní jsou velice přátelští, hodní a srdeční lidé, během tohoto pobytu jsme mohly poznat lépe tuto komunitu a musím říct, že odjezd nebyl vůbec lehký. Ne vše bylo vždy snadné, náš konec stáže byl poněkud smutnější, ne jen protože jsme se musely rozloučit s tímto krásným místem a novými kamarády, které jsme zde poznaly, ale také kvůli složité politické situaci, která v zemi zavládla.

Pre-departure preparations

By pre-departure preparations, everyone will imagine in particular all bureaucratic issues, vaccinations, tickets, visas and a lot of another things. For me it meant preparing myself for this journey. This is exactly what GLEN gave me because this whole cycle is not just about internship itself, but it is composed also of pre-departure seminars. I thought to know a lot of things related to this topics, but there were many inputs I didn't experienced yet. The seminars are more about open new themes and everybody has to find own answer with own perception of things. The content of seminars was very helpful to me during our stay in Oku, and because me and Johana participated in seminars together, we had time to break down these topics thoroughly also with our new friends. I think these seminars are so important before departure for everybody who is not dealing (university, work) with the topics of global education.

SOPISDEW

The Society for the Promotion of Initiatives in Sustainable Development and Welfare (SOPISDEW) was created in 2010 and registered as a charity and it is an apolitical, non-profit, grass-roots community based development organization created to empower rural and indigenous communities through holistic approaches. SOPISDEW is diversified into a wide range of activities including: water, sanitation and health, agriculture, environment, nature conservation and sustainable tourism.



We were very lucky to have as supervisor Tah Kennette Konsum, director of this organization. Thanks to him impossible often became possible and he was a huge support for all the minor and bigger problems we had to deal with. It was a great benefit for us to work in a smaller community because everyone knew we were Kennette's trainees, and as people were quite interested in knowing what we were doing, they often added some ideas. In Oku, tradition and community plays a very important role. Next to the »Fon«, the traditional head of Oku, various secret societies exist. The »Kwifon« creates together with the Fon the traditional government. This society is responsible for most of the religious ceremonies, the protection of the Fon, sanctioning of defaulters of the Land Laws and solving disputes. The military society (»Manjong« or »Nfu«) is another secret society in Oku. Unlike the Kwifon which is the only one in the whole of Oku, military societies are nu-

merous with the main one in the Oku Fon's palace. The leaders of the military societies were to carry information from the Fon or from the Kwifon to their various villages and also exchange message on the state of affairs especially boundry-line villages on security matters. This is still the practice today.

Our project - Sustainable tourism development in support of community

Oku is a wonderful place with plenty of natural treasures and a peaceful and welcoming community. From the tourists' perspective, this is one of the most exceptional place in the world. Eco-tourism rules are very important, because with them we can also improve everyone's lives.

Thus tourism has to create a benefit for everyone of the local population.

Involving the Oku community in the tourism business is as crucial as assuring to conserve and protect local nature and culture. Through creating an income for local authorities and entrepreneurs tourism can improve local conditions, by for example investing parts of the revenue in waste management or reforestation. But tourism might also cause some problems, such as social dislocation, loss of cultural heritage, economic dependence and ecological degradation.

Therefore taking responsibility as a tourist plays a tremendous role in the sustainable tourism branch. Sustainable tourism is defined as »tourism that respects both local people and the traveler, cultural heritage and the environment« (UNESCO).

In this way we can provide an exciting and educational holiday that is also of benefit to the people of the host country. Oku implements the rules of sustainable tourism into practice and can be seen

as a pioneer in this field. The Tourism Board was created in 2015 and is constantly creating new sustainable projects involving the local community and linking tourism with nature conservation.

With our team, we have identified the main points which we considered important to focus on:

- **Collect 20 most important sites of Oku:**
Photo-documentation, historical - biological description, information
- **Develop programs for tourists:**
One day – two days program for tourist, connect tourism with voluntourism
- **Create Guide book + Flyer**
We used all information from past participants and all new collected information
- **Create map of Oku with tourist sites**
We used Geographical information system (GIS) or Google maps to create map
- **Update Web page**
All information, new map, new developed programs, (1 day program etc.) to make Web page more interesting for eco-tourists
- **Marketing on social media**
Humans of Oku – stories about people from Oku on FB and Instagram
Create social media page for Eco tourism in Oku
- **Create network**
With museums, universities, guidebooks and agencies
- **Set up Tourist information center in Elak Oku market center**
Put the flyers and guide book in to the Tourist information center (Bamenda, Kumbo included).

It's very important to mention that we weren't able to fulfill all of these points because it needs much more time. Usually the sites were far away from each other so we spent most of the time in monitoring and collecting the information about sites and in guide book.



Past years show that Oku is a destination of interest for tourists, volunteers and researchers. Since the Oku people are very much depending on their natural environment, the focus lays on the protection of the local forest and the surrounding natural environment as well as the maintenance of the local culture. The management of the ecotourism should be controlled by the tourism board. It will be made up of all the stakeholders. This ensures a general organization and structure, so that tourists will be easily able to get their necessary and wanted information for their stay in Oku.



Moreover, this will facilitate to get funding for various future investments and market Oku all over the world. Most importantly it will be a community project including various different local ecotourism operators. True ecotourism incorporates behavior and activities that help ensure that sustainable living, sustainable tourism and sustainable development remain a reality for Oku. The Tourism board will be responsible for assuring this in future.

With the Oku council we chose the most interesting places for tourists. People on assembly suggested where tourists can go and where they can't go at all. We have gradually begun tours with the tourist guides. Each of them knew about every place something, so we always learned something new and we were able to put together information about every site. In every site we recorded interviews with tourist guides, we took photographs and videos for guide book. Thanks to this activity, we have seen all of the secluded corners of gorgeous Oku. We also collected all contacts for accommodation, bars and restaurants, museums and visited them because of photo documentation and prices. For example Oku's museum got created in 2006 and it got initialized by the current Fon. At the Oku Fon's Palace Museum there is a complete set up of the cultural and traditional life of Oku people. The Museum also has a craft shop inside and they also train people in carving.

We collected contacts of all tour guides and all of them traveled to all the sites so we could share their knowledge among them all. Tour guides will be part of a guide book from which every tourist can choose their own tour guide, because each of them specializes in something else (birds, plants, two days tours, etc.)

We also founded Humans of Oku with our team and we assumed that one of the local journalists would continue this project. By doing so we also wanted to make little bit smaller certain stereotypes that people in the global north have about global south. Unfortunately after a few months after I returned, I have to admit that this project has not continued. Surely a major problem is the actual political situation that is not easy at all in this part of the country, and people have a different thoughts than Humans of Oku. Due to the difficult political situation, we have also lost sense of our project which is engaged in ecotourism and we realized that there are far more important things to deal with than this topic.

Voluntourism – Get involved!

Voluntourism is a new way of traveling that is becoming increasing popular around the world. It is when people volunteer overseas while they travel. It is similar to “eco-tourism” in a way, because the objective of improving lives is still present. Voluntourism involves tourists going on vacation and in our project we have found a few possibilities how to apply it directly in Oku:



Coffee Roasting: Spend half a day with John Tabi in his compound and learn how to roast your own Oku coffee.

Cooking: Learn how to prepare typical Oku dishes like Fufu or Popoff at the Women’s Empowerment Center in Elak.

Wood Crafting: Work together with Peter on the beautiful Oku carvings in Manchok and learn how to do them yourself.

Planting trees: Join Samuel on a tour around his tiny tree nursery at Mbokevu and plant some *Prunus africana* together.

Embroidering: Participate in one embroidery course at the Women Empowerment Center in Elak Painting Plastic paintings, Portraits, landscapes and abstract with Peter.

We visited all of our potential partners and talked to them about the possibilities of voluntourism. All that I listed above were enthusiastic and they allowed us to include them in the travel guide.

Why is important plant trees as *Prunus africana* for Oku community?

Western company promoted the exploitation of the *Prunus africana* tree to that point that today the tree is on the Red List of Threatened Species. This tree contains valuable elements, which are used in the pharmaceutical industry to treat prostate cancer.

The blossoms of the tree lend the locally produced honey its remarkable white color, and it is one of the most important product of Oku. So there is big reason to replant it. Radical changes are necessary to the sector to allow continued but sustainable exploitation and enable a win-win between income generation particularly in poor, rural, montane forest areas and biodiversity and sustainable resource use.

Conclusion

I think SOPISDEW is really good organization, we were working on a good project that interested both local and team members. For me it was very enriching to work in our team. I realized a lot of things and I tried to forget about how I work in Czech Republic, especially in terms of perception of time. It was very inspiring for me to see Kennette's enthusiasm, will, support and respect from his own community. I realized how Oku people are close to each other and how their coexisting melt down the structure of the society in which I grew up. Of course there were also the negative points of our internship. For example we were there 9 people from Europe (ASA, GLEN, ASA Global programs). I think that such a large group at such a remote place didn't allow us to enjoy the places and people more deeply and we didn't leave our European bubble, even we tried. I think this community is exceptional and this statement is impossible apply to all parts of Cameroon. Unfortunately, the anglophone part of Cameroon (where Oku is) tries to separate from francophone part and to rise new country Ambazonia. President Paul Biya doesn't support this fact even at the cost of human life. The anglophone crisis is the biggest timebomb in Cameroon, and if it's not addressed, it could break the country. This fact makes me think a lot about colonialism and not just about the past influence but also about actual presence of global north countries in Cameroon and it raises the question in me: How to deal with this fact?



Attached pictures:

- (p.1)** Ibal neighborhood, during our monitoring, Ibal, Cameroon
- (p.2)** Two pages from Oku guide book
- (p.3)** Juju on funeral ceremony, Oku, Cameroon
- (p.4)** Tourism board assembly at the council, Elak Oku, Cameroon
- (p.5)** Women empowerment center, lesson of cooking, Elak Oku, Cameroon
- (p.6)** Mount Oku