In July of 2002, the University of Georgia participated in its first service learning program in Croatia. Ten students from disciplines as diverse as journalism, geography, political science, agriculture, sociology, and historic preservation participated. Some had traveled extensively internationally, while others had not traveled outside of North America. Though diverse in background and perspective, all ten students immediately saw in Croatia a country with a fascinating history, a breath-taking landscape, architectural treasures, and gracious people. Recognizing the country’s historic and cultural attributes, the students’ broad objective was to determine ways in which Croatia can economically benefit from these attributes, while preserving them and even broadening them.

Two weeks of the three-week program were spent in the town of Omišalj, on the island of Krk. During their time in Omišalj, students met with local officials, talked with locals about their thoughts and impressions, studied Croatian history, and visited historic and cultural sites on the islands of Krk and Cres. The students’ objective in Omišalj was to develop recommendations that would assist the community in preserving its historic and cultural heritage while enabling it to develop economically.

Due to its location on the Adriatic, Omišalj’s economy has traditionally been tourism-based. Yet, the tourism market has
been limited to those tourists who seek only a beach destination, thereby limiting the tourist season to the months from late spring to early fall. Students identified expansion of the tourism economic sector as the most practical means by which Omišalj can strengthen its economy and retain its cultural identity for the following reasons:

1) As Omišalj already has some of the necessary infrastructure in place as a tourist destination, further development of the tourism sector of the economy is the most logical means for further development of the overall economy.
2) Further development of the tourism sector is also a positive in that it encourages preservation of cultural heritage and historic resources that appeal to the international tourism market.
3) Tourism development is an effort in which the entire community can participate, thereby contributing to the development of democratic principles and local initiatives in a newly-democratic nation.

Therefore, the students developed a report which identified diverse attributes of Omišalj and contained recommendations as to how the tourism sector can expand through community-based marketing efforts.

Two overall needs were addressed:

1) broadening of the perception of tourism to include more than just Omišalj’s seaside location, thereby appealing to a larger segment of the tourism market and expanding the tourist season
2) development of marketing efforts to reach the tourism market beyond the surrounding countries

Based on the above two issues, five specific recommendations were made. The common thread among these five recommendations is that they all require community involvement. These recommendations were made with the intent that the promotion of Omišalj be a community-wide local initiative, allowing opportunities for input from all citizens.
As a result of their positive experience in Omišalj, the students chose to entitle their report “Voli Omišalj,” for they found much to love in Omišalj and are confident that, with the citizens’ love for their own community and willingness to contribute to its future, others will come to visit, and to love, Omišalj.

There are many reasons to love Omišalj. Its seaside location, historic streetscapes, and medieval architecture give it a unique charm that appeals to international tourists. Yet, in order to attract and accommodate tourists, adequate infrastructure must be in place and organized promotional efforts must be implemented. Following are specific recommendations that, if enacted, will help in the long-term development of an international, year-round tourism economic sector.

I. development of a community-based educational and promotional program to make the citizens of Omišalj aware of the town’s assets, thereby enabling them to effectively promote it
II. identification of year-round tourist attractions and activities
III. development of a tourism website
IV. development of a detailed tourism map
V. coordination of efforts with nongovernmental organizations in carrying-out the above recommendations
I. Community-based Education and Promotion

In order for tourists to be drawn to Omišalj, the members of the community must first recognize, appreciate, and promote the rich history, architectural appeal, and unspoiled character that give Omišalj its charm. Having residents who are proud of their community and recognize its attributes is a great asset in making the community appealing to visitors. Efforts must then be made to market the community externally.

Internal efforts of community-based education and promotion:

- A series of public meetings should be held to provide citizens with the opportunity to express interests, ideas, and concerns about economic, cultural, environmental, and political development and sustainability.
- Information should be compiled on the assets of Omišalj. Examples of its assets are its geographical setting, historic architecture, and intact old town. Guidelines should be established as to how these assets can be utilized economically, while preserving their environmental, historic, or architectural significance.
- The project should be promoted to community leaders and to the entire community.
- The end result is to have a united community devoted to economic, cultural, environmental, and political development and sustainability.
Details of internal marketing efforts:

A. How should the meeting be publicized?
   1. word of mouth
   2. posters placed in public places
   3. newspaper and radio notices

B. Who should attend?
   1. the mayor and other town leaders
   2. hotel and rental property owners
   3. anyone interested in community development

C. What should be said?
   1. first meeting:
      a. explain purpose of the meeting and how it could benefit the community
      b. allow questions to be asked and concerns to be expressed
      c. establish guidelines for future meetings
   2. subsequent meetings
      a. these should be community meetings about what the area wants, needs, and has
      b. one to three topics could be discussed at each meeting, depending on the depth of the topic and level of interest in the topic

D. How often should meetings be held?
   1. weekly during the first month of organizing the meetings
   2. once or twice a month following the first month of meetings

E. Who should conduct the meetings?
   1. first meeting: the mayor, Tihana Stepinac Fabijanić of ICAM, and other town leaders
   2. second meeting: elect officers and assign responsibilities

Sample topics:
- agriculture
- appearance and aesthetics of the community
- authentic handicraft production
- communication within the community
- cultural identity
- entertainment
- environmental issues
- fundraising
- healthcare
- historic preservation
- infrastructure
- island outreach
- local traditions
- political involvement
- privatized business
- telecommunications
- tourist accommodations
- transportation
- year-round tourism
- youth activities
- zoning
Details of external marketing efforts:

A. The community should take advantage of the knowledge of university faculty and students to help rural and traditional communities through collaborative reciprocal interactions.

1. university faculty can meet with community representatives to discuss and implement recommendations
2. students assist with the implementation of recommendations under the direction of faculty

B. The community can work with government agencies at the national level, such as the Ministries of Culture and Tourism to assist with external marketing.

1. these agencies can help promote Omišalj internationally
2. these agencies can also assist in the development of a regional tourism effort, as well as with website development

II. Identification of Year-round Tourism Attractions and Activities: Omišalj 365

The image of Omišalj as a beachside town limits its tourist season to the summer. Other amenities in the area exist that, with development and promotion, can make Omišalj a tourist destination every day of the year: Omišalj 365.

Purpose:

to expand tourism in Omišalj to all four seasons by promoting existing activities and developing new ones

A. Existing activities

1. sun and sea
2. historic architecture, such as the church in town square
3. the Roman ruins
B. Potential activities

1. develop local trails system
   a. utilize hiking trails
   b. establish a historic/scenic route of different distances consisting of half-day, one-day, and two-day hikes across the island. These can be guided or not.
2. cycling tours: partner with nearby towns for accommodations and attractions for bike tours that will travel between several towns on the island of Krk
3. kayaking: hourly rentals and two-to-three day tours around islands, possibly with camping
4. cooperative tours with neighboring towns, example: scuba diving in Beli or sailing in Baska

C. Use historic and cultural organizations

1. organize more festivals
   a. fall wine festival
   b. winter arts and crafts
2. organize tours
   a. historic tours: Roman ruins and walking tour of Omišalj
   b. theme tours: olive oil making and wine making
   c. promote biodiversity: biking excursions, nature hikes, botanical gardens

Concluding Remarks:

It would benefit Omišalj to develop a tourist brochure that incorporates existing and potential activities and which includes suggested itineraries for a one-week visit in all four seasons.

In all development of tourist attractions: focus on the traditional. Emphasize what is unique to Omišalj and to Croatia.
III. Development of A Tourism Website

A website that will provide a searchable database of accommodations, both private apartments and houses and hotels, in all parts of Croatia is needed.

Why is this a need?
Currently, the Croatian tourism website only offers a listing of travel agencies to contact if someone is interested in private accommodations. The travel agencies listed frequently have no website, or they have an email address that is checked infrequently. While there may be legitimate reasons for this, such as that Omisalj in general is not well connected to the Internet, the fact is that tourists, American tourists in particular want information easily and quickly accessible. If it is not, they will likely go elsewhere. Especially considering that Croatia is a non-traditional destination for Americans, special effort should be made to insure that information is as easy to access as possible. Providing a searchable database of accommodations from which solid information can be gathered and reservations can be made brings the prospective tourist much closer to committing to a trip. By including both hotels and private accommodations on one website, tourists who know which town they would like to visit can get all of the information they want from one website, instead of having to search.

Again, the easier it is for prospective tourists to get the information they want, the more likely they are to come.

A. What should be on the website?
1. it should not be difficult for people to find what they want. Therefore, the search form should be on the main page
2. the search form should include spaces where the potential tourist can enter:
   a. desired dates of travel
   b. the names of towns in the event that the tourist already knows where he wants to go in Croatia
   c. a checklist for attractions/activities available near the accommodations, in the event that the user is not sure where he wants to go in Croatia and would like to narrow his options in this way. This can include things like “beach,” “mountain climbing,” “biking,” “historic sites,” and so on.
   d. how many people will be staying and the number of beds desired, for use in making reservations
B. How should a search on the website be set up?

1. after the prospective tourist enters the information for
   his search, a list of available places should be shown,
   along with
   a. prices
   b. a short list of nearby activities and accommodation
      amenities (air conditioning, breakfast included, etc.).
   c. ideally, there would be a link to click on to allow the
      prospective tourist to see pictures of the accommodations
      and the surrounding area. Photographs are very important
      in getting a potential tourist to accept and trust a
      destination.

2. in the same way, maps or directions are always helpful
   in letting people understand exactly where they are
   going, and a link to one or both of those should also
   be included

C. How to Make a Website a Reality:

1. purchase a domain name such as CroatianAccommodations.com
2. contact every tourist office in Croatia, requesting that they provide a list of
   activities and attractions in the area, as well as a list of hotels and private
   accommodations in their town
3. recruit university students to assist with the compilation of data and building of
   the website (scanning pictures, entering information, and coding HTML). There
   is a lot of work to be done, and students are an inexpensive resource, who are
   eager to get work experience even without pay
4. as of now, booking online may only be a reality for a small number of hotels and
   private accommodations. Provide as much information as possible, and of course
   give fax numbers and phone numbers for any accommodation that cannot be
   booked online. Make sure to include a link to a website with international
   dialing instructions. As time progresses and Croatia becomes more and more
   internet-connected, more accommodations will be capable of being booked
   online, and the website can be edited accordingly.

The key thing to remember and focus on while structuring and completing
the website is this: the more information there is and the easier it is to
access, the more likely it is that the tourists will come.
D. Points to Remember in Website Development:

1. **flexibility:**
   by including both private accommodations and hotels on one website, users can find what really fits their needs

2. **education:**
   the use of university students in building the website

3. **group work:**
   a necessary component to the building of the website, since so much work will be required

4. **interaction:**
   as a website, interaction is a key part of using the database of information

5. **exploration:**
   the site provides the means for tourists to explore all parts of Croatia, not just the beach areas

6. **informed:**
   this website will help people be informed on available accommodations

7. **organization:**
   information will be organized in an easy to access and understand format

8. **communication:**
   as a website, encourages communication, especially between non-traditional tourists and Croatia

9. **accessibility:**
   tourists can be lazy - make information easily accessible
IV. Development of Tourism Map

Purpose of developing the tourism map:

As part of the larger goal of extending the tourist season in Omišalj and diversifying tourist activities, a tourism map needs to be developed to make the activities, accommodations, and services of Omišalj easier for tourists to access. This can be achieved by supplementing the existing maps of Omišalj with more information and greater legibility.

A. Information for inclusion:

1. Accommodations
   a. include all types of accommodations such as short-term apartment rentals and hotels
   b. these should be marked with a key giving contact information for each accommodation

2. Activities
   a. places where tourists can participate in sports or activities, including sailing, diving, snorkeling, tennis, and any others should be included on the map
   b. also include the seasons available, hours, prices, and contact information

3. Beach access: points where the public may access the beach should be marked

4. Historic sites
   a. churches
   b. the Roman forum and basilica
   c. the dry stone wall network
   d. any other historic or cultural sites recommended by the community
   e. historic sites should be clearly marked with a key explaining what they are and why they are of interest, as well as their hours of operation and any fees for entry
5. Hiking trails
   a. the network of trails for hiking and biking across the island should be included
   b. they should be marked with a symbol showing for what type of traffic they are intended
      (foot only, foot and bikes, etc.)

6. Refreshment
   a. restaurants, cafes, and bars should be included
   b. also included should be their hours, a price range, and a brief description of what is
      served

7. Public transportation
   a. the bus stop should be marked on the map
   b. the transportation system should be extensively explained to tourists by including
      information such as fares, the frequency and days of operation, where to buy tickets,
      and where one can travel from Omišalj, such as to Rijeka, the town of Krk, etc.

B. Legibility: in order to present all this information in a comprehensible way, a system
   such as the following may be used:
   1. color coding: each type of feature such as an accommodation or restaurant
      should have a different color or symbol and a separate key to keep numbers
      low
   2. orientation: compass points and the marking of landmarks and green space
      should be included to help the reader orient himself on the map
   3. language: Croatian should be supplemented by a few commonly known
      languages used by the international tourist market, such as English, German,
      and Italian
   4. contrast should be high in order to make the map as easy to read as possible

C. Implementation:
   1. funding: where possible, gather funding by charging local businesses to
      advertise, either on the edges of the map or by including a highlighted symbol
      of their place of business on the map
   2. audience: the map should be distributed to tourists via the tourism office and
      be displayed around town at points where tourists would be likely to go:
      a. restaurants
      b. bus stops
      c. currency exchange windows and automated teller machines at local banks
      d. as part of a promotional brochure advertising Omišalj as a destination to businesses
         abroad which guide groups of tourists in Europe
V. Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs)

Promotion of Omišalj can be greatly assisted by non-governmental organizations that partner with governmental agencies such as the Ministry of Tourism and the local tourism agency.

A. Hospitality Trade Organization
1. The Chamber of Commerce can form a hospitality trade organization. The members can be comprised of business owners that cater to tourism: hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops, and van and bus drivers
2. The purpose will be to serve as a way of communicating among those in the community who have common interests. It can also serve as a marketing organization.

B. Historic Preservation Organization
1. A local non-profit historic preservation organization can be formed, with its members comprised of anyone interested in the history of Omišalj and its preservation
2. The purpose will be to preserve the cultural, historic, and architectural integrity of Omišalj
3. This organization can also partner with the School of Architecture at the University of Zagreb for research projects, as well as with the Association of Preservation Technology and The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) for assistance in identifying and preserving its historic resources

C. The Church
1. The church can particularly be instrumental in the role of education. It has access to a large number of members of the community in a structured setting and has a trusted role in the community.
2. The purpose of its involvement is
   a. To preserve the cultural and architectural history
   b. To educate its members on the significance of its history and the importance of preservation
D. Craftsmen’s Guild
1. its members can be those with a craft that reflects the history and culture of the region
   a. artists
   b. needle workers
   c. potters
   d. small produce growers
2. the purpose is to preserve their craft and to promote economic development through craft fairs, a webpage, and trade shows

E. The Chamber of Commerce or Other Business Development Organization
1. one of the primary functions of these organizations will be to educate the community on the architectural treasures of Omišalj, how they can be preserved, and how they can be promoted and economically benefit the community without being overly-commercialized
2. this organization should also explore possible sources of low-income loans, perhaps at the federal level, that can be used by citizens to purchase small businesses and further the privatization of businesses such as hotels

F. The mayors’ network
1. the mayors of the towns on the island of Krk can work together to create a regional tourism marketing effort
2. the proposals under II. Identification of Year-round Tourism Attractions and Activities: Omišalj 365 can perhaps be more easily accomplished through such a unified, regional effort

Concluding Remarks:
The NGO network should benefit both locals and tourists. The education of locals on the great value of their architecture and crafts is essential if Omišalj is to attract visitors and promote a positive self-image. Locals must appreciate what they have if visitors are to fully appreciate and enjoy the local culture.
The Hotel Učka and the Chemical Plant

Two properties exist in Omišalj that are of concern to the community and which impact the potential for tourism development: the Hotel Učka and the chemical plant. The community is well aware of the significance of these properties and the large task that is involved in restoring the Učka and dismantling the chemical plant or adapting it for a more desirable purpose. It is symbolic that the two sites are situated in such a way that the Hotel Učka seems to “turn its back” to the chemical plant, thereby symbolizing a rejection of what detracts from the true character of Omišalj.

Hotel Učka:

Ideally, of course, an investor would purchase the Hotel Učka and restore it to its former grandeur. The hotel is of historic and architectural significance to Omišalj. It provides a great opportunity for future investment, as it could provide Omišalj with a historic hotel along the lines of those found in Opatija. This would give Omišalj a significant boost in terms of attracting international tourists. Obviously, what is needed is the investor. The most likely investor in such a property is one of the large, international hotel and resort chains. In order for these firms to consider such an investment, the tourist market potential must exist. If the community makes a concerted effort to implement some of the recommendations contained herein, as well as keeping community-wide efforts in place to voice and implement other ideas, Omišalj can increase its tourist base and in the future increase its potential of attracting an international investor.
In the meantime, the community may want to consider a “Protect the Učka” day or, to be consistent with the theme of this report, a “Love the Učka” day to be held once or twice a year. The entire community can come together to improve the property. Volunteers can help to protect it by boarding doors and windows, insuring that the roof is not leaking, and cleaning the property. This sort of activity would instill in the community a sense of pride in the hotel, prevent it from further decay, and perhaps draw national and international attention to it.

The Chemical Plant:

As the community is well aware, the chemical plant is an eyesore on the landscape. The first preference would be to have the plant dismantled. Realizing that this is an expensive and time-consuming process, the responsible party must be identified and charged with the project. Should this not be feasible, the community may want to organize an art project, whereby the chemical storage tanks are transformed into works of art. Local school children can be given the task of painting some of the tanks with scenes from Croatian history, and artists can be allowed to be creative with the remaining tanks. Again, this is an excellent opportunity to bring the community together in a project that will improve and benefit the entire community. It also provides an excellent opportunity to create something distinctive in Omišalj that may draw national and international attention.

In Conclusion:

Omišalj already possesses much of what is needed to attract tourists: a seaside location, natural beauty, and historic character. What is needed are further education and involvement of the community on the attributes of Omišalj, further development of a tourism infrastructure, and increased marketing efforts. With a long-term commitment on the part of the community, Omišalj can develop a strong tourism base that will provide the economic support necessary to sustain its historic character and its heritage. Voli Omišalj!
The Omišalj Report

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