

Scholarship report

by

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Kalavan, Armenia (2nd of August 2019 – 15th of August 2019)



Profile and motivation

My name is Mislav Zuanović, and I am a 26-year-old student from Croatia. I decided to study two masters at University of Zagreb, both connected to geography. The first one I chose was spatial planning and regional development, and I finished that master last year. I like regional development because it gives me an opportunity to learn about ways to help rural communities which are facing many problems. For instance, depopulation, ageing population, traffic marginalization, the closing of public schools, lack of employment opportunities, etc. Working in a multidisciplinary field like spatial planning or regional development sound really thrilling to me because everyone knows different things that help us come to the best solution for a project, and everyone is willing to teach others their skills.

I always try to learn new things that are not taught at the University, that's why I like to go to different events and congresses that deal with my field of interest. Leading workshops is something I also really enjoy doing. I like it due to its interactiveness, and even as a leader I always learn something new from the participants. Furthermore, I like them because it's a great feeling to teach someone something new. This is one of the reasons why my other master is teaching geography. Hopefully I will finish that second master this September.

So, that were the reasons why I applied for this scholarship opportunity. I wanted to learn something new and be more prepared for the real job once I finish my second master. I chose ABCD Innovation Center as my host because my workplan in Armenia perfectly combined my geography knowledge about regional development, and as well with teaching geography..

Assessment

Kalavan is a small mountainous village in Armenia, two and a half hour from the capital Yerevan. It has around 130 inhabitants, and 19 school children. There is only one road leading to the village, and it's unpaved. Ten years ago, situation in the village was quite bad, but in recent years due to the community led initiatives situation in the village is getting much better. More and more houses are getting renovated or getting built, and people are starting to immigrate to the village. One of the main success was saving the school from closing, and this school year they will have an English teacher for the first time. The inside of the school has also been renovated. Although it's still not

the most ecological friendly village, most of the houses in the village have sun powered water heating system. Kalavan Tourism and Adventure Center is the centre point of the village. It's a new building in which local people organise different gatherings, or events.

Due to the hiking paths, archaeological sites, authentic feel, and investments in rural tourism, the village is getting more and more popular among tourists. At the moment, in the village are six guest houses. That means that in the village can be around 25 tourists at the same time. Authentic feel is definitely one of the bigger positive factors for the tourism. That means using local products as ingredients for the meals and mostly speaking Armenian or Russian.

Besides different grants that the local NGO gets for various projects, one of the most important reasons for turning the situation in the village for the better is local community. They are really connected, and they try to help each other. For example, guest houses for breakfast provide local organic honey from one of their neighbours.







Main activities

Since I am finishing my master to become a geography teacher, main activities I organised in the village were activities aimed at school children. So, I organised a film club, geography classes, and upcycling workshop Besides that I held a presentation about Croatia, and I made a map of the area.

Film club

Two of every three people are visual learners. So, to raise awareness and make children understand certain topics showing a movie is one of the best ways to achieve that. After every movie showing we had a discussion, about the movie and the topic of the movie. We reflected on what we saw and tried to come up with methods and solutions to solve a certain problem that we saw in a movie.

We saw three movies:

a) A Plastic Ocean (2016). The movie follows journalist Craig Leeson, searching for the blue whale, but discovering plastic waste in ocean. So, he teams up with free diver Tanya Streeter and an international team of scientists and researchers. Together they travel to twenty locations around the world over the next four years to explore the fragile state of our oceans, uncover alarming truths about plastic pollution, and reveal working solutions that can be put into immediate effect. It was an interesting movie, but it's filmed in a serious tone so it's not the greatest movie about this topic for school children. Nevertheless, after the movie we had an impactful discussion about the plastic pollution and how to minimize it. One of the suggestions was to stop using single use plastic, like plastic bags, ear sticks, straws, etc. Also, to switch to bamboo toothbrush instead of a plastic toothbrush.

b) Before the Flood (2016). The movie gives a look at how climate change affects our environment and what society can do to prevent the demise of endangered species, ecosystems and native communities across the planet. It's one of the most popular movies about climate change in recent years, and the main star is a popular actor Leonardo DiCaprio. It's a powerful movie, since it covers different aspects of climate change and gives us advices how to try to fight it. I think the children really liked this movie, and the discussion after it.

c) That Sugar Film (2012). The movie is about Damon Gameau's attempt to document his experiment of the effects of a high sugar diet on a healthy body. Sugar is one the most consumed food in the world, yet the general public doesn't know much about it, especially children. Most of the people know that sugar is unhealthy for you, but we are mostly not aware of the amount of sugar we take every day. That's why I felt that this was an important movie to show.



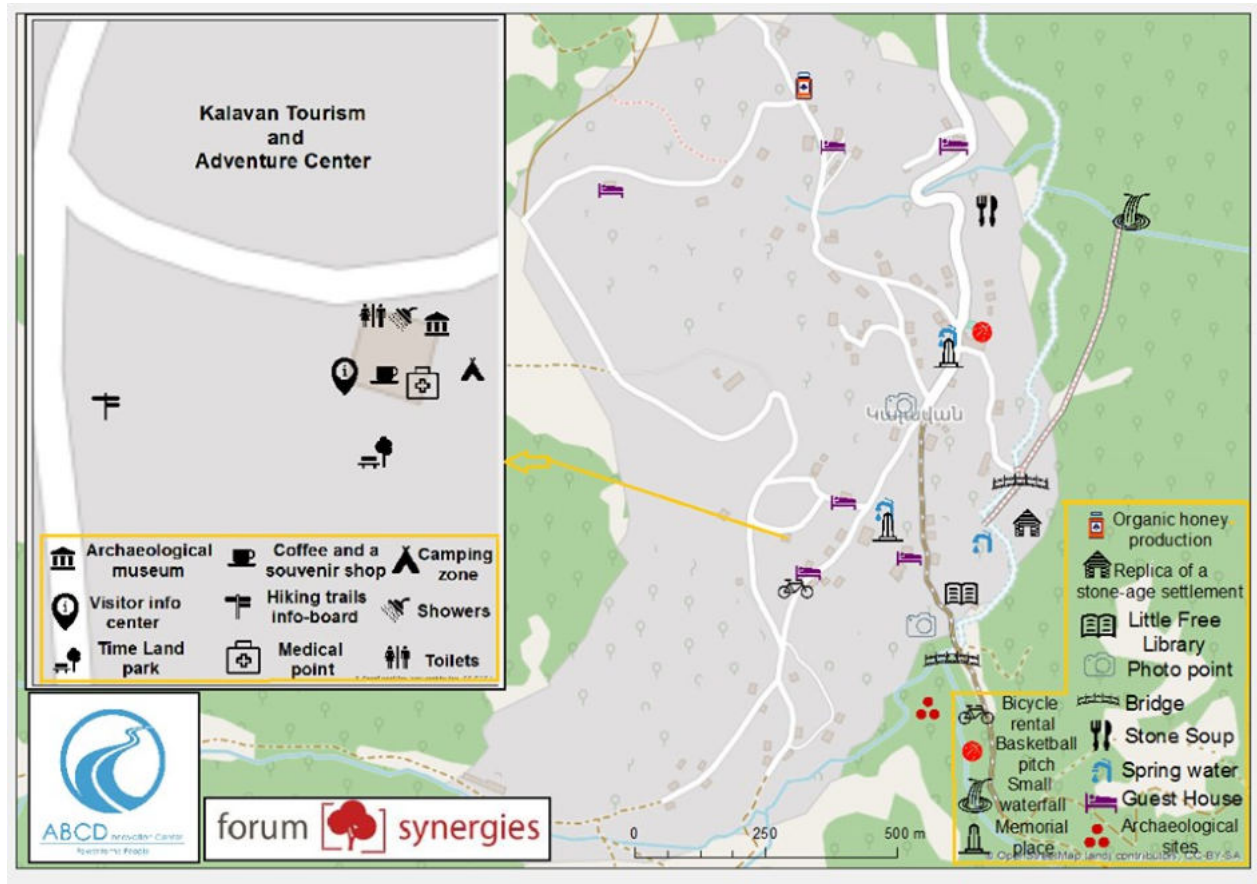
Upcycling workshop

One of the ways to reduce waste is upcycling. It's the process of transforming by-products, waste materials, useless, or unwanted products into new materials or products of better quality and environmental value. In this workshop, we upcycled old t-shirts and learned how to make different things out of them and make them have a purpose again, instead of throwing them away. We created headbands, shopping bags, and a macrame (a simple construction that can hold a houseplant). Furthermore, we tried to share ideas on how to reduce our ecological footprint.



Making a map of the area

Kalavan area is badly mapped on most common map websites like google maps, open street maps, bing maps, etc. It's hard for a tourist to find where to stay in Kalavan or what to do. So, I tried to make the situation better. I added some useful points to open street map. Also, I made a separate map with features like accommodation, restaurant, interesting points, basketball pitch, etc. This way it's easier for tourist to plan their stay in Kalavan.



Interactive geography lessons

I am studying to be a geography teacher, so I organised an interactive geography lesson for the school children. I tried to teach them something new and make them get interested in geography. Topic we covered were:

- a) Volcanos and earthquakes since Armenia is seismological active area.
- b) Water, and importance of water. This was a good topic to raise awareness of water pollution and how can they help prevent it.
- c) Spatial planning. We discussed their ideal village and which functions are needed in that village.
- d) Maps and orientation. This class was focused on orientation using maps. We also walked around the village using Kalavan map as a tool for orientation.





Presentation about Croatia

I held a presentation about Croatia for the locals (children and adults). This was a nice way for them to learn some interesting facts about Croatia and get to know Croatian culture and compare it with Armenian culture. I also brought some Croatian snacks and drinks so they can try them for the first time.



Other activities

Besides organising and preparing for those main activities I spent my time in Kalavan relaxing and enjoying beautiful nature, also getting to know the local people and their way of life. Of course, I spent the most time hanging out with the children. For example, I played basketball game with them on the only sport court they have in the village. Apart from that, we went for a full day hiking trip organised by the local children. They have their own hiking club, so they act as hiking guides for the tourists. It's a great way for them to practice foreign language, and to learn entrepreneurial skills. Apart from that, it's a great indicator for them that it's possible to start your own business in the village and be successful. We also organised a cleaning event in which we tried to clean the main road.





Interview

Margarita Muradyan was my mentor during the scholarship. A month ago, she decided to open a first restaurant in Kalavan because she saw a huge demand for it, due to the increasing number of tourists. Her restaurant is focused on the ingredients she gets from the forest or from her garden. She found the inspiration in the local women who always cooked like that for their families. Also, she realized it would be interesting for everyone to taste that kind of healthy, authentic food. It's a special place in Kalavan because Margarita decided to not use single use plastic in her restaurant, which is important for Kalavan because of the lack of waste collection in the village.

The main improvement she wants to see in Kalavan is a picture of the village that the inhabitants have. She wants everyone to realise why Kalavan is a special place. There are still some families not involved in any activities happening in the village so she would like to change that. People are working together in the

village, but Margarita feels that their cohesion still needs to be improved. Besides that, she would like to improve the accessibility of the village, primarily by paving the road.

Margarita looks positively on the future of Kalavan. In 10 years, she believes she will still be managing the restaurant, but she also plans to open the bed and breakfast. She plans to have a big garden full of plants and flowers. She thinks Kalavan won't lose its charm with increasing number of tourists.

She feels that there are certain things other villages can learn from Kalavan. One of them is using their unique resources. Kalavan doesn't have a lot of resources, yet they learned how to use those small resources they have. On the other hand, in some villages there are a lot of resources like churches, but people don't know how to use them. She believes that money is not that important, since there is always an opportunity for other villages to raise money thru different grants. Instead, she believes that community and the cohesion of the people is the most important factor for revitalizing the villages.



Lessons learned

During this scholarship I practiced my teaching skills, my ability to adapt to the new situations and the new environment. On the other hand, I also, learned a lot during my internship. Most important lesson I learned is the importance of the local communities. If the people, see their neighbours mostly as a competition than it's hard to achieve development of the whole village. Cooperation between neighbours is really important. For example, in Kalavan they sometimes watch a big game together, or play a basketball game, or just organise some small party. All of that helps raise connection with Kalavan and help make good memories of Kalavan. When people have good memories of Kalavan they are more motivated to improve it. Also, I learned that if Kalavan can be revitalized most other villages can be as well, but the inhabitants need to want to revitalize their village.

Action Plan

My plan after this scholarship is firstly to finish my master. After it I plan to go European Rural Parliament 2019 and learn something more about regional development and good practices around Europe. Afterwards, hopefully, I will find a job in Croatia connected with regional development. On that job I plan to apply my new knowledge.