



INFO AND A COFFEE, PLEASE!

On March 5-6, 2010, in Yalta, Crimea, the USAID Local Investment and National Competitiveness project (LINC) and the Ukrainian House, a Kyiv-based tourist information center, held a workshop for Crimean tourism professionals on the establishment, operation, functions, and networking of tourist information centers



The participants mainly represented Crimean tourist service facilities and tourism authorities, and also included guests from Kyiv, the Kherson Oblast, Odesa, and Russia's St. Petersburg.

The workshop focused on a whole host of issues related to tourist information centers (TIC's). How to establish a TIC? Should it be public or private? What are its functions? Where should a TIC be located in a city? How should it be funded and staffed? What is the role of



LINC Crimea Field Director Daniel Themen: "We see tourism as a key sector for Crimean economic development, and information as a key for development of tourism"

TIC's in promotion of a locality as tourist destination? That these and other questions were hot was clear not only from the activity of participants but also from the fact that the number of those who attended the event exceeded the list of those invited.



LINC Tourism Specialist Svitlana Vozna: "Our primary objective today is to consider existing TIC organization models and implement them in Crimea"

Yanyna Havrylova, Head of the Ukrainian House and the event's co-moderator, made the first presentation. She said that in the first place TIC is a service institution that provides information and certain services to its visitors. She described the TIC logo as recommended by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) – white "i" against green background. She said some countries with a long TIC history keep their traditional logos. For Ukraine, however, which is just launching this activity, it would be a "right thing to give ear to this UNWTO recommendation," said Ms. Havrylova. She also described TIC types and



Ukrainian House TIC Head Yanyna Havrylova: "We have big ambitions and great expectations of this workshop: we want it to give an essential impetus to developing concrete operation of tourist information centers in various regions of Crimea"

functions, free and paid services they can provide to tourists, and gave examples of TIC's in several countries.



Tatiana Gavrilova, Leningrad Oblast government, Russia: "To attract business money [to tourism development] and write tourism development programs, you need to understand – what do you possess as a matter of fact?"

The chairman of Ukraine's Council for Tourism and Resorts, Yevhen Samartsev, presented the organization he is heading, and reported on programs they implement, their participation in lawmaking, and how they can assist in TIC development.

Then the floor was given to the other co-moderator, Tatiana Gavrilova, Tourism Office Head of Russia's Leningrad Oblast Committee for Physical Training, Sports and Tourism. She shared her experience in creating a TIC network in the Leningrad Oblast – an EU-funded project within the cross-border cooperation framework. Ms. Gavrilova described functions of those TIC's, which not only inform visitors but also promote the oblast as tourist destination, creating events and taking stock of all tourist attractions and facilities. She also provided an overview of how the state regulates tourism in Russia.

Olena Serheyeva, Senior Instructor with the Yalta Management University, in her presentation approached the workshop topic from the point of view of marketing, whereas the head of Chair of Mathematics and IT of the Kyiv Tourism, Economy and Law University, Oleksandr Budya, focused on organization of TIC networks and use of information technologies. Kyiv Eternity Club Vice President Dmytro Kokarev gave examples from international TIC experience.

The director of Sevastopol-based tour operator Laspi and also the chairwoman of the Hospitality Association, Olena Bazhenova, presented her views of the situation in Sevastopol, where private and communal TIC's coexist. She expressed concern about the lack of financial support for TIC's from both central and local governments, and told about attempts to find a commercial component of her private tourist information center. This issue was then developed further by Vyacheslav Areschenko, manager of the Kyiv-based Andriivsky Uzviz TIC.

What really began as a workshop – with presentations followed by Q&A – drifted into a round table, and culminated in a brainstorming, when every participant had a say and generated ideas, often conflicting. For example, when some said that TIC's must be only public, others responded that such centers may be private as well, or may be established as public-private partnerships or NGO's. Similarly, complaints about the lack of a regulatory framework for the TIC establishment and operation were retorted with statements that it's actually an advantage, and we have to catch the opportunity for developing TIC's while the business is not overregulated.

The discussion also showed that, while being eager to learn generally accepted TIC rules, each of the participants has been trying to find his or her own way of serving tourists – from providing a basic set of information free to offering various additional paid services and a cup of espresso on top.

Say workshop participants:



Sevastopol-based Laspi Director Olena Bazhenova: "The basic problem of the situation we are in is to find a commercial component of tourist information centers"



Yevpatoria City Rada Investment Policy and Foreign Economic Relations Department Head Serhiy Strelbyskyi: "Today we have to speak of a regional TIC. And it cannot be private. Tourist information centers must be public. Period"



Council for Tourism and Resorts Chairman Yevhen Samartsev: "We understand that charging the central and local budgets with the upkeep of TIC's is now unrealistic. Therefore, we need to look for a public-private partnership format"



Yalta Management University Senior Instructor Olena Serheyeva: "The main result of marketing is a customer willing to buy. That is, we must not only just provide information but also make the customer want to come to us"



LINC Advisor Ihor Lepyoshkin: "We say, 'Let's construct a [TIC] building, staff it, install computers.' But shouldn't we speak instead of that a TIC is not a structure but a function in the first place?"



Ukrainian House TIC Head Yanyna Havrylova: "Ukrainian tour operators and agents have a lot of fear that the information centers may compete with them. It's absolutely wrong, they have absolutely different functions"



Kyiv Tourism, Economy and Law University Mathematics and IT Chair Head Oleksandr Budya: "In fact, we have unique conditions. I mean, there is foreign experience in setting up and running TIC's. We need to employ it the most effective way"



Kyiv-based Andriivsky Uzviz TIC Manager Vyacheslav Areschenko: "We position ourselves as iCoffee. Nobody leaves us empty-handed. Whoever comes, always receives something free. Coffee is one of additional services. It doesn't bring any special profit, but people drop in to have coffee..."