

## **Improving the Competitiveness of Rural Areas in the Aspect of Rural Tourism Development**

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### **Abstract**

The main objective of this research is carrying out the analysis of actually used and potential opportunities for development of agrotourism in the Omsk region (Russia). For that it was applied the tool that allow to compare the assessment of the potential for agrotourism development in various rural areas. Based on the results of the analysis, the region of the Southern forest-steppe zone has the highest potential for the development of agro-tourism. Based on the results of the rating assessment, the leader is the Kalachinsky District. However, based on the results of the conducted evaluations, it is possible to judge the existence of conditions for the development of agro-tourism in all areas of the Omsk region. The obtained results allowed giving recommendations on increasing the level of development of agro-tourism in the Omsk region.

**Keywords:** Rural tourism; Development of rural areas; Competitiveness of rural areas; Omsk region; Evaluation of agro-tourist potential.

### **Introduction**

Agrotourism is the sector of the tourist industry oriented to use of natural, cultural, historical, and other resources of rural areas and its features for creation of a complex tourist product. The positive social component of rural tourism consists in employment of country people in the field of services in the village. Therefore, development of this direction can be considered as a way of social development of depressive rural areas, which allows stopping degradation of the rural areas suffering from permanent outflow of the population, in particular, on a work absence reason.

An important problem for the region today is the lack of an organizational and economic mechanism for creating and integrating the agro-tourism potential of the Omsk region. This problem arose in connection with the need to improve the level of development of rural areas in the region, which are currently in crisis. One of the main directions for the withdrawal of these territories from the crisis is the diversification of the rural economy. The specificity of the Omsk region, its territorial and historical and cultural features will allow us to define new directions for diversification through the development of agro-tourist potential.

The urgency of the research is to improve the organizational and economic mechanism of involving the population in agro-tourist activities on the basis of identifying and using the territorial and historical-cultural characteristics of the countryside.

The main objective of the study is to analyse the rural tourism potential in the Omsk region. To answer to the main objective, the paper is structured as follow: The second section of the paper was devoted to

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present the literature about competitiveness of rural areas. In the third part, the methodology for conducting the study was thoroughly examined. In the fourth part, the results were presented. In conclusion, recommendations were given for the development and enhancement of the competitiveness of rural areas.

### **Theoretical Basis for Improving the Competitiveness of Rural Areas in Tourism**

The competitiveness of tourist destinations is one of the most pressing problems in the tourism industry, not least in the rural tourism sector, as increasingly domestic competition intensifies the pressure on rural tourism to ensure their survival. One of the reasons why the competitiveness of the appointment attracts attention from the government, industry and the scientific community is that in order for the rural tourism industry to be profitable and sustainable in the long term, it is extremely important that the rural tourism sector maintain its competitiveness. The competitiveness of a tourist destination can gain competitive advantages, such as tourist loyalty, satisfaction and re-patronage, revising a specific destination (Law & Lo, 2016).

The competitiveness of tourist destinations clearly demonstrates the level of socio-economic development of the tourist destination with a special overview of the quality of life. The competitiveness of tourism is based on the belief that the experience, the images that a tourist acquires in a tourist place, is the main product in tourism. Therefore, it is necessary to increase the competitiveness of tourist destinations. The competitiveness between products at enterprises in the sphere of tourism (organizers of travel, hotels, transport and other tourist services) is determined by the choice that the tourist makes between directions (Angelkova et al., 2012).

Destination competitiveness is the most important component, which is related to the ability of the destination in the delivery of goods and services higher than in other destinations and the goods and services were evaluated as important tourism experiences by tourists (Wilde & Cox, 2008). Competitiveness of destination is also the ability of the destination to maintain its market position relative to competitors, creating value-added products and integrating all performance levels of various components of the tourism industry to maintain its resources. It is proved that the competitive level of destination factors affects the attractiveness of the destination (Hassan, 2000; Law & Lo, 2016).

A competitive advantage can only be created by better responding to demand-side challenges that, in their view, require a significant role in managing appointments (Law & Lo, 2016). The tourism policy is defined as the responsibility of the public sector entities, whose goal is to create conditions that maximize the benefits for the stakeholders of the region while minimizing the negative consequences (Komppula, 2014).

According to Lo et al. (2016) the influencing factors of tourism competitiveness are:

- availability of transportation services. It is important to have a quality air, train, bus, or sea transportation services to reach a tourism destination, particularly rural tourism destination as its highly influences visitors' choice of destinations (Aguila & Ragot, 2014).
- good quality of accommodation. It provides destination satisfaction (Hosseini et al., 2015), and subsequently influences visitors' word-of-mouth recommendation to attract new customers.
- cultural heritage as comprised of products of culture, such as antiquities, artworks, ethnographic materials, monuments, sites, heritage buildings and historical urban areas which have intrinsic values (Maneenetr & Tran, 2014).
- entertainment as activities include live performance of music, dance, shows, and plays. It is believed that entertainment acts as a core resources or attractors that highly determine a tourism destination attractiveness, and allow part of the visitors to fully utilize their times to avoid boringness.

## Research Methodology

The main objective of this research is carrying out the analysis of actually used and potential opportunities for development of agrotourism in the Omsk region (Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Map of Omsk region.**

*Source: Author's own elaboration.*

For carrying out a research it is necessary to analyse the available resources for development of rural tourism, such as amount of unique natural and geological objects, cultural and historical sights, set of manifestations of unique ethnos and crafts, number of agrotourism projects. Necessary data for 2015-2016 year were obtained directly from administrations of thirty-two municipal districts of Omsk region.

The purpose of the technique proposed by Shumakova et al., (2015), is a comparative assessment of the potential for agrotourism development in various rural areas. The territory of the Omsk region was divided into four zones depending on the climatic zone: the northern forest-steppe zone, the southern forest-steppe zone, the northern zone and the steppe zone. Measure description is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1: Description of indicators for integral assessment of agrotourism potential of rural areas**

Indicator	Description
P <sub>1</sub>	Characterizes the level of development of the agricultural industry in a certain territory. Represents the specific weight of quantity of agricultural producers in a certain territory.
P <sub>2</sub>	Characterizes natural features of the rural territory and is defined as set of the unique natural and geological objects located in the considered territory.
P <sub>3</sub>	Characterizes cultural features of the estimated territory and represents set of the most significant cultural and historical sights (monuments, the museums, etc.) and (or) their groups (archaeological complexes, ancient settlements, barrows, etc.).
P <sub>4</sub>	Characterizes uniqueness and identity of the people living in the rural territory and represents set of manifestations of unique ethnos (interesting traditions, customs, a way of life, etc.) and national crafts.
P <sub>5</sub>	Characterizes organizational and economical and legal conditions of the organization and development of agrotourism in the rural territory. The presence or absence of such conditions is indicated by the number of agrotourism projects operating on the territory: the more of them, the more favourable are the conditions for the development of agrotourism.

The technique allows:

- 1) to quantitatively estimate different aspects of agrotourism capacity of the territory;
- 2) to execute complex assessment of agrotourism capacity of rural territories on the basis of calculation of an integral indicator;
- 3) to carry out comparative assessment and to classify rural territories by set of potential opportunities for agrotourism development;
- 4) to define the priority directions of development of agrotourism for certain rural territories.

For calculation of a total indicator the following formula was used:

$$In = P_1 * \sum_{i=2}^5 P_i \quad [1]$$

The first indicator (P<sub>1</sub>) is chosen as defining as the level of development of the agricultural industry of the territory will define capability of diversification of business activity. Results are grouped in the table. On the basis of results, the schedule is constructed.

Agrotourism capacity of rural territories is the difficult social and economic category representing set of the interacting factors promoting effective development of agrotourism (Table 2). Depending on the

conditions characterizing rural territories and the factors influencing their development they can be estimated and classified by the level of attractiveness of development of agrotourism.

**Table 2: Set of indicators of a technique and scale of their assessment (cont.)**

Ecological wellbeing of the rural territory	It is caught and neutralized pollutants from stationary sources, %	Rating scale	Designation of mark assessment of an indicator
Availability of unique natural and geological objects	Number of the objects located within the rural territory, piece.	0 units - 0 points; 1 unit - 1 point; 2 units - 2 points; 3 units - 3 points; 4 units - 4 points; 5 and more than a unit - 5 points.	B <sub>1</sub>
Availability of cultural and historical sights			B <sub>2</sub>
Availability of unique ethnos and national crafts			B <sub>3</sub>
Availability of the existing agrotourism projects	Number of the existing projects in the territory of the area	0 units - 0 points; 1-2 units - 1 point; 3-4 units - 2 points; 5-9 units - 3 points; 10-20 units - 4 points; 21 and more than a unit - 5 points	B <sub>4</sub>

**Table 2: Set of indicators of a technique and scale of their assessment (cont.)**

Ecological wellbeing of the rural territory	It is caught and neutralized pollutants from stationary sources, %	To 10% - 0 points; 10,1-20% - 1 point; 20,1-40% - 2 points; 40,1-60% - 3 points; 60,1-80% - 4 points; more than 80% - 5 points.	B <sub>5</sub>
Development of transport infrastructure 1	Provision of highways by local roads, km on 1 sq.km.	To 0,04 km - 0 points; 0,041-0,07 km - 1 point; 0,071-0,1 km - 2 points; 0,11-0,14 km - 3 points; 0,141-0,2 km - 4 points; more than 0,2 km - 5 points.	B <sub>6</sub>
Development of transport infrastructure 2	Share of local roads with hard surface in the total length of local roads, %	To 10% - 0 points; 10,1-20% - 1 point; 20,1-40% - 2 points; 40,1-60% - 3 points; 60,1-80% - 4 points; more than 80% - 5 points.	B <sub>7</sub>

The technique of assessment of agrotourism capacity of the region or rural territory has to consider factors of both groups, otherwise assessment will be unreasonably overestimated or underestimated that equally negatively can affect development of the tourist industry. The technique includes set of eight indicators (Table 2) characterizing the agrotourism capacity of rural territories. Mark assessment from 0 to 5 points is appropriated to the first seven indicators depending on their value, behind that calculation of an integral indicator is performed. Indicators are provided in the Table 2.

For calculation of final value, the formula will be used:

$$I = B_8 * \sum_{i=1}^7 B_i \quad [2]$$

Where B<sub>8</sub> – the indicator characterizing availability of the developed agricultural industry in the rural territory. Is determined as the specific weight of the agricultural producers located in this rural territory in their total quantity by all rural territories for which rating assessment of agrotourism potential is carried out.

## **Analysis and Presentation of Results**

### ***Results for integral indicator of agrotourism potential of rural areas***

The carried-out assessment of agrotourism capacity of rural territories of the Omsk region allowed revealing uneven distribution of opportunities for development of agrotourism in different climatic zones of the region.

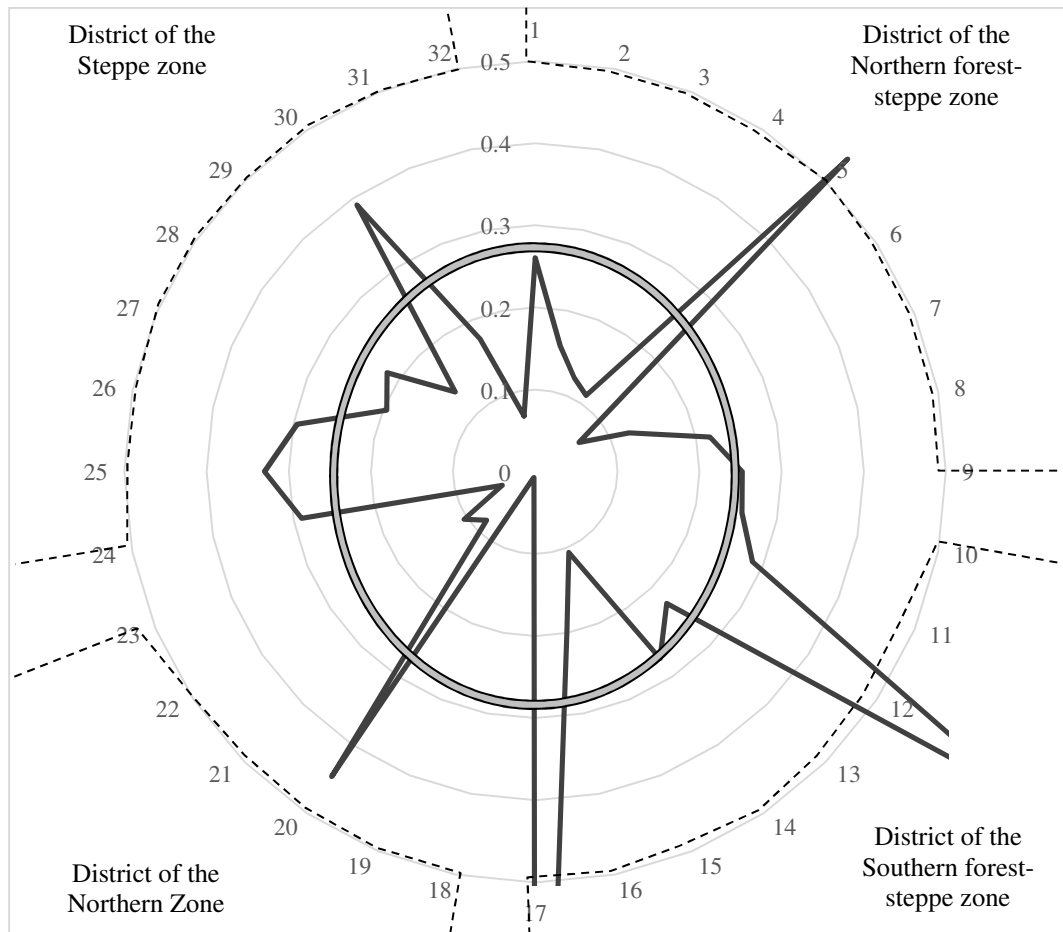
Regions of the Southern forest-steppe zone (28,04) have the largest potential for development of agrotourism. It is caused by existence of enough unique natural and cultural objects, and also the developed agriculture (in the territory of these areas 34% of all agricultural producers of the region are concentrated).

In spite of the fact that in the territory of regions of the Steppe zone 47% of all producers of the Omsk region are concentrated, potentialities for development to agrotourism concede in them to opportunities of regions of the Southern forest-steppe zone (20,14). It is connected with insignificant concentration of the natural and cultural objects interesting to tourists.

Areas Northern and Northern forest-steppe zones of the Omsk region have approximately identical set of natural and cultural sights, and also unique ethnos and national crafts, but potentialities for development of an agrotourism in the north of the region are significantly lower, than in the Northern forest-steppe zone. It is explained by extremely low level of development of agricultural production in Northern areas of which only 4% of agricultural producers of their total number across the Omsk region are the share.

Optimum organizational, economical, and legal conditions for development of agrotourism projects were created in the territory of the Northern forest-steppe zone what the number of the agrotourism projects realized there confirms.

Visual idea of the level of agrotourism capacity of certain areas of the Omsk region allow to obtain the data submitted in the Figure 2 according to which it is visible that practically in each climatic zone there are areas which are leaders in existence of potential conditions for agrotourism development. In the Northern forest-steppe zone Muromtsevsky and Bolsherechensky districts are obviously selected: the first – at the expense of a significant amount of the unique natural and historical objects known it is far outside the Omsk region, the second – at the expense of the unique only thing in Russia of a rural zoo and the historical and cultural complex "Starie vremena Sibirskie".



1 Bolsherechensky	9 Tyukalinsky	17 Omsky	25 Cherlasky
2 Gorkovsky	10 Azovsky	18 Ust-Ishimsky	26 Novovarshevsky
3 Kolossovsky	11 Isilkulsky	19 Tevrizsky	27 Tavrichesky
4 Krutinsky	12 Kalachinsky	20 Tarsky	28 Poltavsky
5 Muromtsevsky	13 Kormilovsky	21 Bolsheukovsky	29 Russko-Polyansky
6 Nazyvayevsky	14 Lubinsky	22 Znamensky	30 Odessky
7 Nizhneomsky	15 Maryanovsky	23 Sedelnikovsky	31 Sherbakulsky
8 Sargatsky	16 Moskalensky	24 Okoneshnikovsky	32 Pavlohradsky

**Figure 2: Integral assessment of agrotourism capacity of areas of Omsk region.**

In the southern forest-steppe zone the leader is Kalachinsky district in which along with unique natural and cultural objects 10% of all agricultural producers of the Omsk region are concentrated that provides ample opportunities for agrotourism activity with a support on the developed agriculture. In the Northern

zone the leader is Tarsky district in which administrative center a significant amount of the cultural sights representing a unique interlacing of different historical eras including the beginning of development of Siberia, history of the Siberian path on which Decembrists were sent into exile is concentrated and finishing with modern cultural objects. Such as Northern drama theatre, which performances are put on stages of the largest Russian cities.

Leaders in the level of potentialities for development of agrotourism in the Steppe zone are Odessky and Cherlasky districts in which the developed agriculture is combined with natural and cultural sights.

### ***Results for rating assessment of the potential of rural areas***

With use of a technique for each of 32 areas of the Omsk region a mark assessment of the indicators characterizing their agrotourism potential was given. On the basis of the carried-out mark assessment and the calculated share of the agricultural producers distributed across the territory of areas of the region the integral indicator of attractiveness was calculated. Value of an integral indicator indicated existence of potentialities for development of agrotourism in the area and allowed to compare different areas among themselves, having constructed their rating.

Results of mark assessment of agrotourism potential and the rating of municipal districts of Omsk region on the level of attractiveness of development of agrotourism are presented in Table 3.

High rating assessment of the first two areas is generally caused by the considerable level of concentration in them agricultural producers and the high level of development of transport infrastructure. The priority direction of development of agrotourism for these areas is the organization of tours for the agricultural enterprises for the purpose of acquaintance of city tourists with features of agrarian production. Besides, for Kalachinsky district the organization of tourist routes with inclusion in them of unique natural and geological objects, and also cultural and historical sights can become one of the directions of development of agrotourism.

All rural territories which received one and more maximum mark assessment of "five" one of factors were carried to the first classification group, received the maximum mark assessment "four" – to the second, received the maximum mark assessment "three" – to the third group. The fourth group included the rural territories which received mark estimates "two" and "one".

**Table 3: Rating of Areas of Omsk region on attractiveness level for agrotourism development (cont.)**

№	District	Mark assessment of the indicators characterizing agrotourism potential							Share of producers	Integral indicator of attractiveness
		B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>2</sub>	B <sub>3</sub>	B <sub>4</sub>	B <sub>5</sub>	B <sub>6</sub>	B <sub>7</sub>	B <sub>8</sub>	I
1	Kalachinsky	3	3	0	0	3	4	3	0,101	1,616
2	Sherbakulsky	0	1	0	0	2	4	3	0,087	0,874
3	Omskiy	4	3	0	5	2	5	4	0,037	0,855
4	Okoneshnikovskiy	2	1	0	0	4	3	0	0,072	0,725
5	Tavricheskiy	1	2	0	0	4	3	4	0,049	0,685
6	Isilkulsky	2	2	1	0	2	4	4	0,041	0,613
7	Odesskiy	0	1	1	3	0	2	4	0,056	0,613
8	Cherlasky	4	2	0	0	2	2	3	0,047	0,612
9	Kormilovskiy	0	2	0	2	5	3	4	0,038	0,605

**Table 3: Rating of Areas of Omsk region on attractiveness level for agrotourism development (cont.)**

10	Novovarshevsky	4	2	0	2	1	3	3	0,033	0,493
11	Lubinsky	4	1	0	2	2	4	3	0,030	0,486
12	Poltavsky	2	1	0	0	2	3	3	0,043	0,477
13	Azovskiy	1	1	3	2	1	5	3	0,029	0,456
14	Moskalensky	2	2	0	0	0	4	3	0,040	0,436
15	Russkopolyansky	0	2	0	0	3	1	3	0,046	0,413
16	Muromcevskiy	5	3	2	4	0	1	2	0,019	0,327
17	Tyukalinsky	2	1	0	3	4	1	3	0,023	0,321
18	Bolsherechensky	2	3	1	3	0	2	4	0,019	0,279
19	Tarsky	5	2	1	4	1	1	1	0,019	0,279
20	Pavlohradsky	0	1	0	0	2	2	3	0,035	0,278
21	Nizhneomsky	1	3	0	0	2	2	3	0,025	0,273
22	Maryanovsky	0	2	0	0	0	5	3	0,027	0,266
23	Sargatsky	2	2	0	4	3	2	3	0,015	0,248
24	Gorkovsky	3	0	0	3	0	3	2	0,017	0,191
25	Znamensky	3	4	2	2	3	2	4	0,009	0,173
26	Kolosovsky	1	2	1	3	0	1	2	0,012	0,124
27	Krutinsky	4	2	0	3	0	1	1	0,009	0,102
28	Bolsheukovsky	5	4	1	3	2	0	3	0,006	0,100
29	Nazyvayevsky	2	2	0	2	1	0	2	0,008	0,072
30	Sedelnikovskiy	2	3	1	0	0	0	4	0,006	0,062
31	Tevrizskiy	3	5	1	0	0	1	1	0,001	0,014
32	Ust-Ishimsky	1	3	1	0	0	0	0	0,001	0,006

The main characteristics of the selected classification groups of rural territories are presented in Table 4.

**Table 43: The main characteristics of classification groups of rural territories depending on the potential directions of development of agrotourism**

Share of agricultural. producers	Indicator share in score on group, %						Share of agricultural. producers	The number of areas in group	
	Unique natural and geological objects	Cultural and historical sights	Unique ethnos and national crafts	The operating agrotourism projects	Ecological wellbeing	General extent of highways			Extent of highways with a hard surface
1 group	22,0	19,0	5,0	18,0	10,0	11,0	15,0	12,0	6
2 group	20,2	13,2	1,6	12,4	17,8	16,3	18,6	28,8	9
3 group	12,3	18,4	7,0	12,3	7,9	17,5	24,6	31,2	10
4 group	10,8	14,9	1,4	2,7	12,2	29,7	28,4	28,1	7

The first classification group included six municipal districts. Feature of this group is the low level of development of transport infrastructure and the biggest variety of unique natural, and geological objects, and also cultural and historical sight in total with unique ethnos and national crafts. This group is characterized by also the most developed sector of the existing tourist projects. The share of the agricultural producers concentrated in regions of this group is the smallest and makes 12%. The priority direction of development of agrotourism is the organization of tourist routes with orientation to the unique nature and history.

The second classification group includes 9 municipal districts in which 28,8% of agricultural producers of the region are concentrated. This group is characterized by more developed level of transport infrastructure, the best ecological situation and existence of a significant amount of unique natural and geological objects.

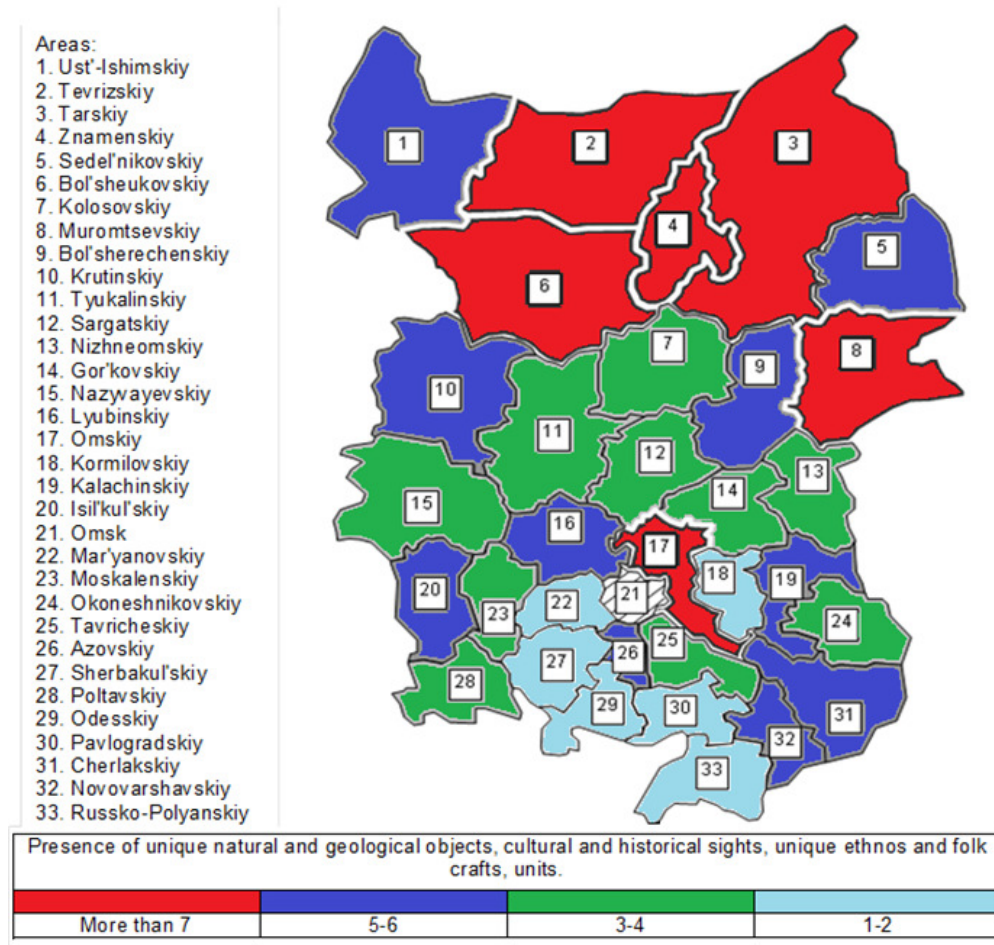
The third classification group is the most numerous and includes 10 areas in which the greatest number of agricultural producers (31,2%) is concentrated. This group is characterized by the high level of development of transport infrastructure and existence of a significant amount of cultural and historical sights, national crafts and unique ethnos.

The fourth classification group includes seven municipal districts in the territory of which 28% of agricultural producers of the region are concentrated. This group is characterized by the low level of concentration of unique natural objects and cultural and historical sights, and also almost total absence of the operating agrotourism routes.

At the same time, regions of this group have the most developed transport infrastructure. The priority direction of development of agrotourism for this group is cognitive agricultural tourism with inclusion in tourist routes of visit of agricultural production.

The offered technique of rating assessment of agrotourism capacity of rural territories allowed to carry out their classification depending on the potential directions of development of agrotourism which should be considered as priority (Figure 3). The provided classification in the long term can become a basis for development of model of development of agrotourism on the basis of specialization of certain rural territories on certain directions of development of agrotourism.

The perspective direction of further development of the offered approach to assessment of agrotourism capacity of rural territories is transition from determination of the potential directions of development of agrotourism in the estimated rural territories to performance indicators of development of tourist activity. At the same time, efficiency should be considered from the following positions: efficiency for initiators of tourist projects, efficiency for budgets of all levels, efficiency for inhabitants of rural territories and efficiency for tourists. Availability of agrotourism potential and conditions for its implementation for each rural territory should be estimated from the economic point of view. In this case it is possible to implement system approach to sustainable development of rural territories.



**Figure 3: Classification of areas of Omsk region by availability of the objects that are of interest to development of agrotourism activity.**

### Conclusions, limitations and Future Research Lines

Despite the available positive examples of development of agrotourism in the Russian Federation, it is necessary to state practical lack of the normative legal documents which are specially regulating agrotourism activity. In them, it is not specified, and often at all, there is no concept "agrotourism" or other similar terms: "rural tourism", "ecotourism", "green tourism". It should be noted that it is not

possible to transfer the standards and standards applied in the field of recreational and hotel business mechanically to small family hotel economy in the village because of specifics of the last.

The Omsk region has all necessary for successful development of agrotourism activity. Development of agrotourism should not come down to one option (or models) and could include several directions, perspective for conditions of the Omsk region. For example, the following directions (models) could be perspective:

- 1) Creation of regional agrotourism networks through development of small, family and individual agro travel business based on the existing tourist's resources of rural areas: means of placement (small family hotel economy) and agrotourism infrastructure (including the different agrotourism objects and types of business connected with ensuring agrotourism).
- 2) Reconstruction of the sociocultural environment of the historical settlement - "the historical village", "the national village" or other type of the settlement (a settlement, etc.), a reconstruction of the sociocultural environment of other historical objects (noble and merchant estates, monasteries etc.).
- 3) Creation of the large and average specialized agrotourism objects oriented to acceptance of tourists and the organization of their good rest. It can be the specialized centres (sports, cultural, culinary, etc.), the stylized "agrotourism villages", and also "fishing", "hunting villages", etc.
- 4) Creation of the state and private agricultural parks as the complexes large multipurpose tourist, exhibition, advertising and exposition, cultural and propaganda, research and production etc., having means of placement and the corresponding infrastructure.

For sustainable development of tourist, activity in rural territories of the Omsk region will provide:

- high level of life of country people and increase in profit of the organizations of agro-industrial complex, enterprises of an infrastructure complex and organizations of culture and rest;
- preserving of natural, architectural, historical and cultural objects of the region;
- creation and ensuring needs of the population to life in rural areas and acquaintance to it.

Agrotourism development as sectors of the regional tourism industry will demand partnership of the power – business – local communities – a wide range of the interested non-governmental organizations of all levels. Participants of development of agrotourism are:

- the basic enterprises – the enterprises specializing in profile types of activity (the organizations and persons rendering services in accommodation, the organization of rest and tourism, recreation facility and other similar enterprises);
- the organizations of resource infrastructure – the organizations servicing the public industries including transport, power, engineering, nature protection and information and telecommunication infrastructure;
- the organizations of market infrastructure – the organizations rendering financial, legal and consulting services, shopping facilities (auditor, consultancy, credit and financial, insurance and leasing services, logistics, trade, real estate transactions);
- research and educational organizations;
- organizations of investment and innovative infrastructure.

The used technique of assessment allows classifying rural territories by the level of agrotourism potential and to define the main benefits of the territory based on which it is necessary to create the perspective directions of development of agrotourism.

The technique allowed to reveal in each climatic zone leading areas on the level of potential opportunities for development of agrotourism and to define set of the conditions, which provided their leadership.

The technique of rating assessment of agrotourism capacity of rural territories allowed carrying out their classification depending on the potential directions of development of agrotourism, which should be considered as priority. The provided classification in the long term can become a basis for development of model of the organization of a regional agrotourism cluster based on specialization of certain rural territories on certain directions of development of agrotourism.

Further researches in the field can include creation of models of functioning of an agrotourism, development of agrotourism routes in territories of the Omsk region, the miscalculation of an economic component of development of agrotourism activity.

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