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TÍTULO: El papel de los clústeres de Agriturismo en la aplicación del concepto de región de desarrollo sostenible.

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RESUMEN: Este artículo tiene como objetivo justificar la necesidad del desarrollo del turismo rural (agrícola) como condición para garantizar el desarrollo sostenible de las áreas rurales rusas. El objetivo principal de un clúster será promover el Agroturismo y atraer turistas, así como abordar otras cuestiones operativas directamente relacionadas con la atracción de turistas. En nuestra opinión, en términos de asegurar el desarrollo sostenible de las regiones rusas como la base para asegurar la viabilidad de todo el sistema socioeconómico del país, se debe dar prioridad a la diversificación de la economía no solo en el contexto sectorial sino también regional.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Desarrollo sostenible, Agroturismo, clúster, áreas rurales, asociación público-privada.

TITLE: The role of Agritourism clusters in implementing the concept of sustainable development region.

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ABSTRACT: This article is aimed at justifying the need for the development of rural (agricultural) tourism as a condition for ensuring sustainable development of Russian rural areas. The main purpose of a cluster will be to promote Agritourism and attract tourists, as well as to address other operational issues directly related to the attraction of tourists. In our opinion, in terms of ensuring sustainable development of Russian regions as the basis for ensuring viability of the entire socio-economic system of the country, the priority should be given to diversifying the economy not only in the sectoral but also in the regional context.

KEY WORDS: sustainable development, agritourism, cluster, rural areas, public-private partnership.

INTRODUCTION.

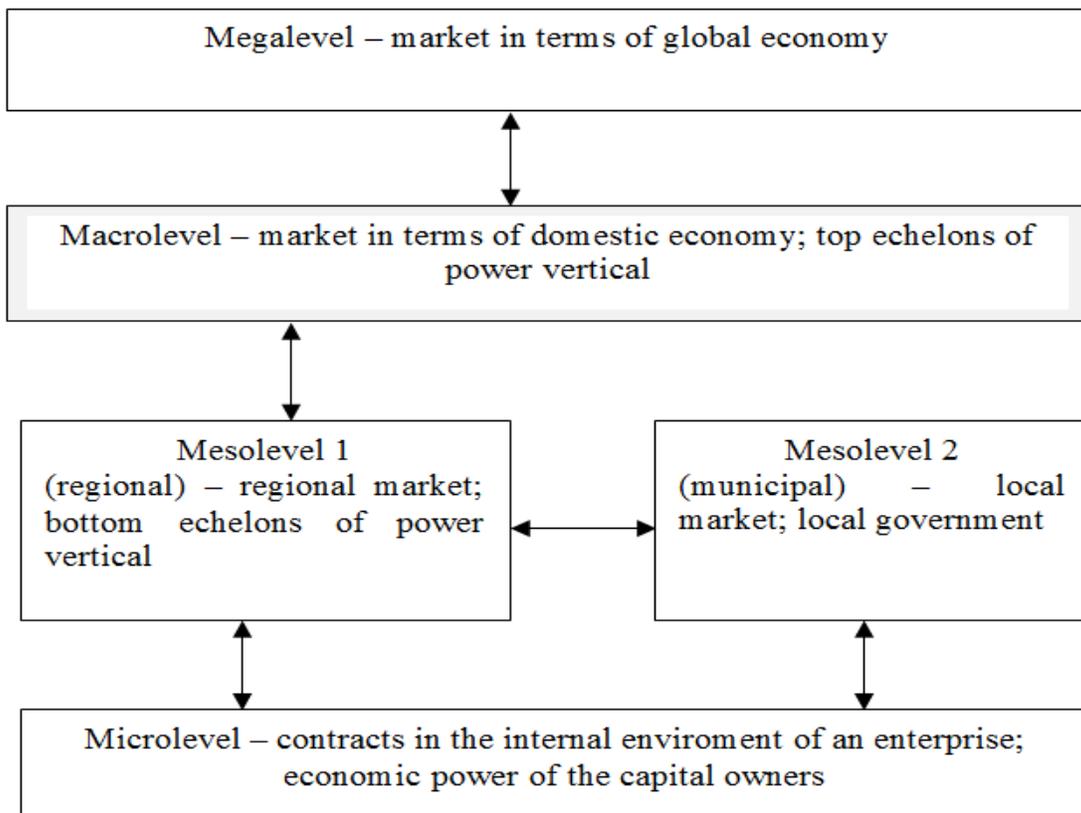
Today, the Russian economy faces the challenges of ensuring balanced growth, structural adjustment and production intensification, as well as social and industrial infrastructure development. Ensuring economic stability at the macro level for Russia is both a condition and a result of sustainable socio-economic development of its territories, which is a harmonious development of production and social

sphere with a parallel increase in the standard of living of the population and improvement of the environment.

The development of a theoretical and practical development strategy for each particular region of Russia is aimed at ensuring the economic stability and security of the region and the country as a whole. In modern conditions, the theoretical and practical issues of managing the sustainable development of a region and the tools employed to ensure such development become one of the most important tasks of state regulation.

The most important task for achieving sustainable development at all levels of the economy and for managing this process is not only to mitigate the projected risks and losses, but also to identify the factors of development in the internal and external environment, as well as to skillfully exploit the opportunities created by external trends. The integration of all levels of the sustainable development of a society and economy is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Levels of sustainable development of the socio-economic system.



DEVELOPMENT.

Russia's current challenge of achieving sustainable development at the macro and meso-level is exacerbated by the need for a structural adjustment of the economy, an import substitution and a transition from the raw-material based economy to the innovative one, which amid modern international competition becomes not just a challenge of ensuring sustainable development, but also a matter of the country's survival. The strategic objective of the new Russian economy is to ensure high sustainable growth rates and to catch up with the leading Western countries in terms of economic and social development by diversifying the sectoral structure of Russia's key industries as the basis for a structural modernization at the macro and meso-level.

Economic diversification (lat. Diversification means change, variety) is the parallel development of several types of industries and productions which are usually unrelated to one another. Having expanded this definition, we should also include the state policy aimed at creating an economic structure that meets modern challenges and comprehensive multi-sectoral development. In our opinion, in terms of ensuring sustainable development of Russian regions as the basis for ensuring viability of the entire socio-economic system of the country, the priority should be given to diversifying the economy not only in the sectoral but also in the regional context.

Historically, the development of Russian regions has been based on the exploitation of natural resource and production potential. The raw material orientation and structural imbalances of the regional economy make it unstable during economic crises and reduce its competitiveness during the recovery. This necessitates structural adjustment and diversification of the economy of most of the Russian regions. This primarily applies to the rural areas of Russia, the sustainable development of which requires a serious conceptual approach.

Until 2017, Russia had a Federal Target Program "Sustainable development of rural areas for 2014-2017 and for the period up to 2020". Effective from January 1, 2018, this program was aborted by Russian Government Decree No. 1243 dated October 12, 2017 "On the implementation of federal target programs integrated into separate state programs of the Russian Federation". At the moment, the measures aimed at ensuring sustainable development of rural areas are being implemented as part of a state program for the development of agriculture and regulation of markets for agricultural products, raw materials and foodstuffs for 2013-2020. The main activities of this sub-program include the development of rural infrastructure, the implementation of measures aimed at improving the living conditions of rural populace, the provision of support for rural initiatives by using grants, as well as the promotion and popularization of achievements in the field of rural development.

Despite the absolute importance of these measures, their positive results are impossible without the development in rural areas of relatively new industries that are not directly related to agriculture. In particular, rural (agricultural) tourism can be considered as an additional type of employment and source of income. At the same time, it can produce a multiplicative effect "growth point" on the rural economy, ensuring more rational and effective use of the human potential of rural areas. The search of agritourism organizational forms, which will contribute to its development, is an important challenge facing local and regional authorities.

Methodology.

The term "sustainable development" was first used in 1987 in a report released by the Commission on Environment and Sustainable Development under the UN General Assembly. Currently, this term is used in the economic literature to characterize the type of economic development that ensures environmental safety, renewability of limited resources and the quality of economic growth (for example, fair income distribution).

Of particular interest, in our opinion, is how academician Koptug (1992) interprets this concept. He believes that sustainable development “involves achieving a reasonable balance of socio-economic development of humankind and preserving the environment, as well as bridging the economic gap between developed and developing countries through both the technological process and rationalization of consumption” (Koptug, 1992). According to him, sustainable development is achieved by using the following three components at the same time:

1. Economic and environmental balance, whereby the production or other economic activity is organized in such a manner that its results are achieved without destroying the human habitat.
2. Economic and social balance, whereby the resources and the results of economic development are used in the best interests of population.
3. Balancing the existing and future challenges with a focus on the needs of both current generations and generations to come (Koptug, 1992).

Having analyzed modern foreign studies on the issues of sustainable development, we may point out two imperatives for ensuring it: achieving environmental sustainability (Olivier, et al. 2011) and ensuring socio-economic sustainability of the territory (Edwards, 2005; Epstein Marc, 2008; Kiron, et al. 2013).

The issues related to ensuring sustainable development in rural areas have been seriously studied in the Russian economic literature. In the works of Dondokov (2010) and Trukhachev (2016), it is emphasized how important agritourism is for meeting the challenges regarding human capital reproduction in rural areas, rural employment, agricultural sector diversification, regional development through the creation of local agro-industrial and agritourism clusters.

The issues of creating a system of measures aimed at developing agritourism at the federal and regional levels remain beyond scientific conceptualization; therefore, it necessitates scientific

research in order to develop a conceptual framework for the state policy on agritourism development, as well as a methodology for its implementation at the federal and regional levels.

An in-depth analysis should be conducted with regard to the composition and structure of effective mechanisms of regulation and support of this segment of the tourism market by using a systematic approach. The tools for implementing the state policy on agritourism development should also be subjected to an in-depth analysis, in particular, the creation of agritourism clusters.

The methodological basis of this study is the general scientific methods such as grouping, analysis and synthesis, deduction method, system analysis method, comparative analysis, cluster approach and graphical method.

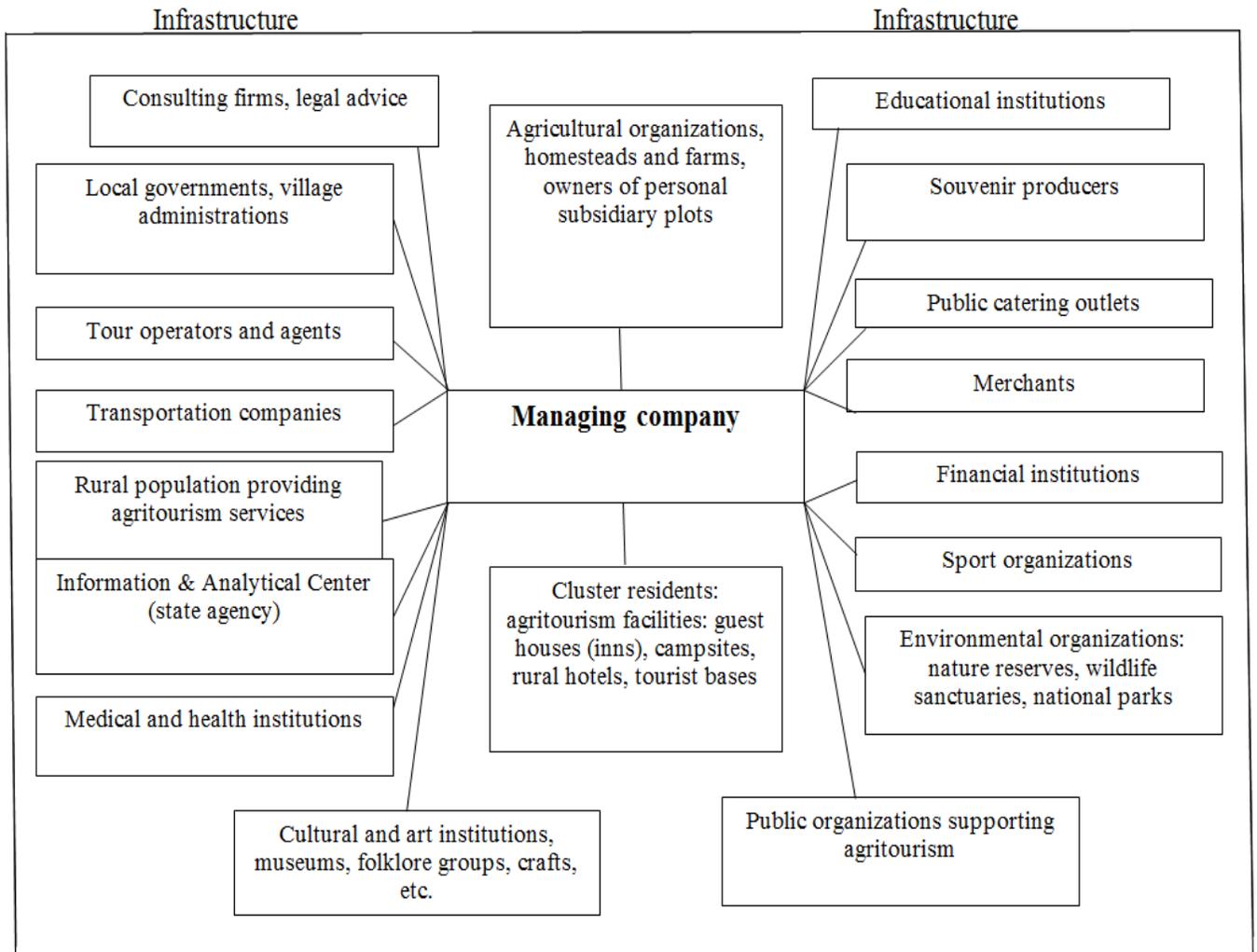
The object of this study is the development of agritourism as one of the areas in which the economy of rural areas may be diversified in the process of their sustainable development.

The subject of this study is a complex of administrative, organizational and economic relations in the field of agritourism.

Results.

As a tool to stimulate the development of agritourism, the authors propose the creation of relevant regional clusters (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Agritourism cluster structure.



The key activities of a cluster may include:

- Development and implementation of advertising strategy, branding, marketing.
- Development and implementation of a system of voluntary categorization of agritourism facilities.
- Development of tourist routes in cooperation with tour operators.
- Development of a comprehensive tourism product and its further promotion.
- Development of projects as part of regional and local agritourism programs in cooperation with public organizations.

- Submission of grant program related proposals to the regional agencies regulating investment activities (reorientation of their work towards the issues of interest to the cluster, proposal of relevant topics).
- Holding exhibitions, fairs, open-house days in estates, and other events aimed at attracting tourists to the region.
- Performance by cluster members of joint work aimed, for example, at ensuring legal support.
- Implementation of other activities aimed at developing agritourism in the region.

The main purpose of a cluster will be to promote agritourism and attract tourists, as well as to address other operational issues directly related to the attraction of tourists.

The first part of this study was devoted to analyzing the features of agritourism in Russia and identifying the key problems of its development.

In its current form, agritourism in the world has been actively developing for more than 40 years, since the 70s of the 20th century. Today, the leading positions in the world are occupied by the countries of the European Union, primarily Italy and France. Less than 50% of European farmers receive the main income from selling agricultural products. Tourist services account for 35-75% of total sales. Agritourism is a significant sector of the global tourism industry (12%-30% of the world's tourist flow).

Ulanov (2013) studies conducted by the European Federation for Village Tourism suggest that over the past 10-15 years the average annual growth rate of rural tourism (excluding excursions) has been 10-15%, which is much higher than that of the European tourism as a whole (4-5%). Up to 20% of total accommodations is occupied by eco-tourists; moreover, the direct tourist spending in agritourism exceeds 2.5 billion rubles, whereas the overall effect on rural economy exceeds 4.5 billion rubles. According to the World Tourism Organization, agritourism is one of the strategic areas of tourism development until 2020.

Currently, agritourism in Russia is not common yet, accounting for merely 2% of the total domestic tourist flow (Vakhitova, 2014). It is mainly developing in the Altai and Krasnodar regions, the Republic of Karelia, Kaliningrad, Leningrad, Pskov and Novgorod regions, as well as in Yakutia.

As estimated by the Federal Tourism Agency, agritourism account for as little as 2% of the tourism market. According to expert estimates, there are about 4 thousand agritouristic facilities. Meanwhile, the population's demand for rural recreation is much higher, which is satisfied to a mere 12-15%.

An example of the successful development of agritourism in Russia is the creation of an association “the most beautiful villages of Russia” in 2014. International tourist brand “the most beautiful villages” appeared in France in 1982, and then the idea spread around the world. The purpose of this association is to develop agritourism and involve rural residents in the processes of self-development, as well as to increase the attractiveness of rural areas. The Association “the most beautiful villages of Russia” brings together rural settlements with outstanding historical, cultural and natural heritage (Trukhachev, 2016).

According to the agritourism growth forecasts issued by the National Association of Rural Tourism, “the number of citizens who prefer to spend their free time in the village is steadily growing and in the future the percentage of such tourists in the total domestic tourist flow of Russia can reach the European level (15-20%)”.

To achieve the potential of Russian culture and traditional Russian hospitality through the development of agritourism is one of the main challenges facing the Russian agricultural community. Based on the European experience, the potential of agritourism in Russia in the next 10-15 years can be estimated at 50 billion rubles.

Nowadays, agritourism in Russia is a kind of exclusive destination with a relatively narrow and segmented target audience. In contrast to European rural tourism, which offers recreation to an average family during the whole vacation, the Russian format of agritourism often occupies a niche of weekend getaway.

In Russia, agritourism exists in the form of recreation offered to urban residents in guest houses (inns) created by peasant families on the basis of their own houses and land plots. However, it should also be noted that the most popular agritourism destinations in Russia are farms created by the townspeople who have moved to the village; thus, urban residents provide rural recreation for urban residents.

Although, there is practical experience of implementing agritourism projects in Russia, there is no legal framework for its regulation, nor there are any standards and regulations applicable to agritourism as a separate segment of the tourism industry, which generates income from additional non-agricultural activities carried out by the rural population. In Russia, those standards and regulations are currently in place for hospitality industry and cannot be applied to agritourism without proper revision and analysis. In the existing federal regulations, governing Russian tourist industry, there is no mention of agritourism or its other forms which are used in Russian and international practice to define this type of tourism activity.

Neither regulatory nor conceptual-categorical mechanism has been developed to articulate the concept of agritourism as one of the supported non-agricultural activities in rural areas. The term “agritourism” is mentioned only in some state standards and it has been introduced by a separate amendment to the Federal law “On peasant (farm) economy”.

In addition to the lack of a regulatory framework, the challenges in organizing agritourism in Russia can be attributed to:

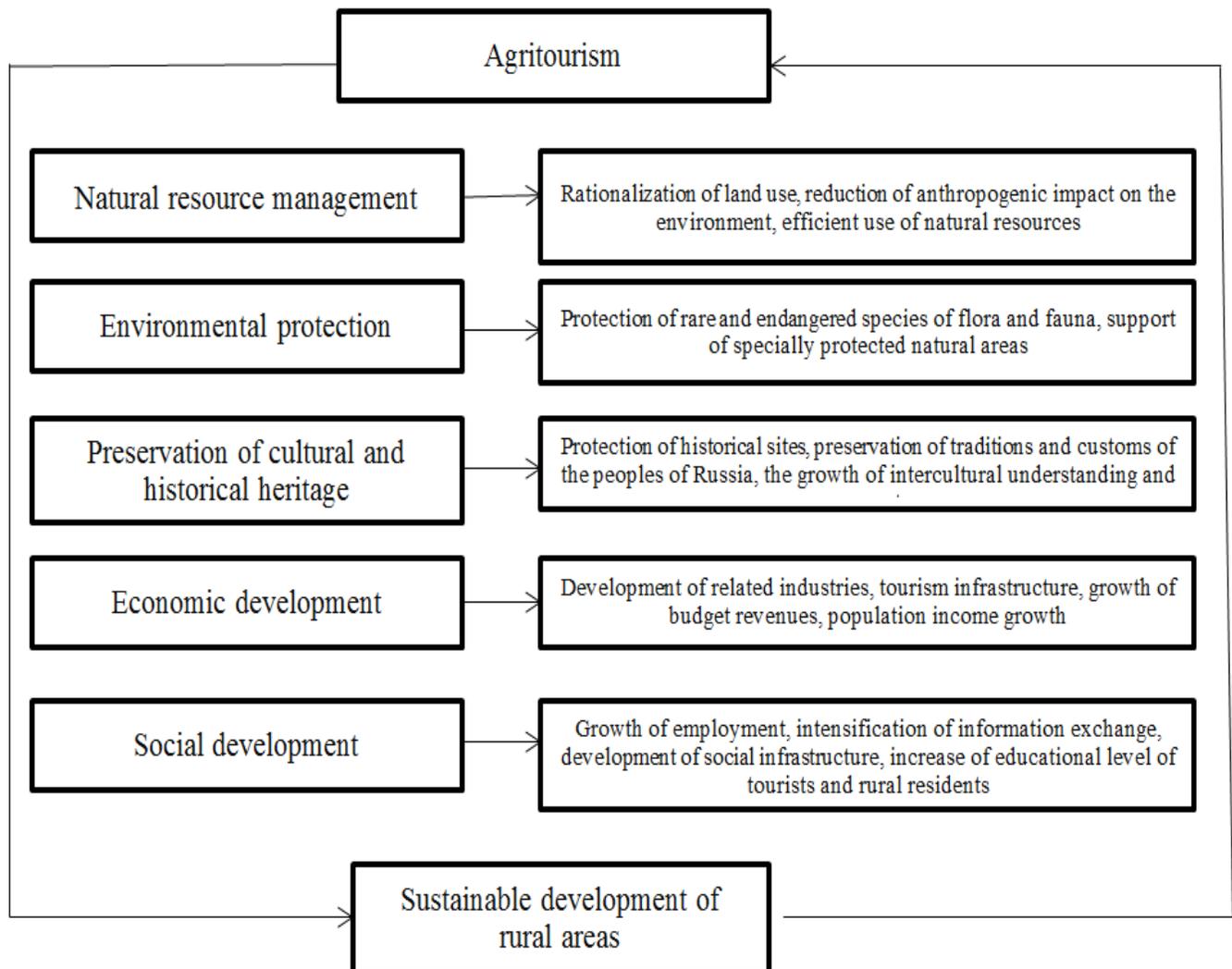
- The lack or underdevelopment of infrastructure in most rural areas.
- The lack of awareness of rural residents about agritourism and the benefits of its development.
- The migration of rural population to cities, lack of qualified personnel for the development of agritourism.
- The lack of both social and commercial advertising of agritourism.
- The lack of safety guarantees for tourists in rural areas.
- The lack of a system of interaction and well-established mechanism of cooperation between the organizations providing recreation for tourists in rural areas and the rural residents.
- The lack of a single national program and financial support for the development of agritourism (Ulanov, 2013).

The second part of this study assesses the benefits of agritourism development for all stakeholders (interested parties).

Agritourism is a tertiary sector which is the closest to the environment in its broadest sense. This is reflected in closer ties with many areas that are important for the sustainable development of individual territories and the world system as a whole.

The concept of sustainable development is particularly relevant in the current environmental crisis. The development of agritourism is associated with the change of environmental management models. It contributes to the protection of nature and culture, as well as to the development of social and economic spheres. These elements form systems and influence each other (Figure 3).

Figure 3 –The relationship between agritourism and sustainable rural development.



The industry not only benefits from its development, but also experiences the influence of other sectors of the socio-economic sphere and creates its own external effects. The development of agritourism leads to the rationalization of land use. When used for tourism, many territories generate much more income than if used for agriculture and production. In many rural areas, agritourism can be a significant tool for balanced economic development, as is the case in some agricultural areas of developed countries.

Despite the significant number of challenges associated with the development of agritourism in Russia, the implementation of large-scale projects in this area will have a serious socio-economic significance and will be accompanied by a considerable economic effect for various economic entities (Table 1) (Ulanov, 2013).

Table 1. Effects from agritourism development.

| For state | For rural population | For tourists |
|--|--|---|
| Development of alternative activities and production in the agricultural sector | Additional legal sources of income | Possibility to improve physical health, relieve stress and psychological tension |
| Growth of tax revenues | Higher level and quality of life of the villagers | Familiarization with the specifics of rural life |
| Reduction of social tensions in rural areas | Lower unemployment | Cultural development, awareness about the history, traditions, religion, rituals, cuisine of the local population |
| Creation of additional jobs in the agricultural sector | Development of small and medium-sized businesses in rural areas | New knowledge and skills regarding traditional rural areas |
| Reduction of migration from village to city, attraction of young people to the village | Expansion of sales of agricultural products | New places for recreation |
| Preservation of rural settlements | Support of the underprivileged (socially vulnerable groups of the population) | Long stay in nature, contacts with the local flora and fauna |
| Revival and preservation of national cultural traditions | Better housing | |
| Revival and promotion of traditional moral and cultural values, lifestyle | Development of ties and gradual removal of socio-economic and cultural boundaries between the city and the village | |
| Development of folk crafts | Awareness of the historical and cultural significance of their "small homeland", promotion of national pride and fame in Russia and abroad | |
| | | |

For tour operators, agritourism is viewed as one of the options to offset a part of their profits lost from other destinations.

The development of agritourism in Russia should involve the creation of a system of state regulation in this area. Such system could act as a kind of “trigger” for launching intensive development of the industry. However, of no less significance is the task to attract or create major players in the market of tourist services.

For a number of reasons, the current agritourism is of no serious interest to major Russian tour operators. In particular, tourist companies are not in a hurry to develop new, “exotic” destinations during the crisis. It should also be noted that there is an almost complete lack of agritourism marketing in Russia. The main marketing tools today are “word of mouth” and personal Internet sites of innumerable agritourism facilities. There is a kind of Catch-22 situation, whereby agritourism cannot go beyond the limited target audience due to the low awareness on the part of other segments of potential consumers about its services, and tour operators, in turn, do not try to promote agritourism due to low demand and lack of prospects for quick money.

As international experience shows, in such cases the promotion is undertaken by professional associations. However, today in Russia there are only two agritourism associations, and none of them declares that the promotion of agritourism is their goal. Not only there is no single concept of promoting agritourism, but also there is not even a single Internet resource that would bring together all facilities of the agritourism infrastructure. Currently, at the level of individual enthusiasts, attempts are being made to create an analogue of the Italian www.agriturismo.it, which enables a client to choose a agritourism facility in any region of the country within a few minutes, to get information about the services and their prices offered there depending on the season, to see photos and send a booking request. However, such resources are not devoid of all the shortcomings of amateur projects and suffer from underfunding (Pecheritsa and Kolotilin, 2013).

The third part of this study describes activities that may contribute to the development of agritourism in Russia.

In our opinion, the implementation of the following measures could contribute to the development of agritourism in Russia:

1. Creation of regional networks of agritourism enterprises based on public-private partnership, which involves, on the one hand, the promotion of family business, small and individual entrepreneurship on the basis of existing tourism resources of rural areas, and, on the other hand, the creation of a system of state support for such entrepreneurship at the regional level.
2. Creation or restoration of socio-cultural environment of historical settlements on the basis of tourist resources of rural areas, e.g. national village, Cossack village, nobility and merchant estates, monasteries, farmsteads, etc.
3. Creation of cultural and historical complexes and other large and medium-sized specialized agritourism facilities aimed at providing recreation in rural areas.
4. Creation of multifunctional “agricultural parks” on a public, private and mixed ownership basis, which combine production, tourism, culture promotional, exhibitory, advertising and expositional functions, as well as have the necessary infrastructure and accommodation facilities. Such agritourism models are presented as an alternative for “guest networks”, to which the state has yet to provide the necessary support, whereas agricultural or cultural and historical theme parks, ethno-cultural complexes, etc. could be of serious interest to large private investors.

Each of the above models has to be implemented, because it is necessary to meet a number of key conditions that require specification for each of them. However, defining priority models, conditions and resources necessary for the implementation of these models should be stipulated in the state program document. The concept of development of agritourism in the Russian Federation can become

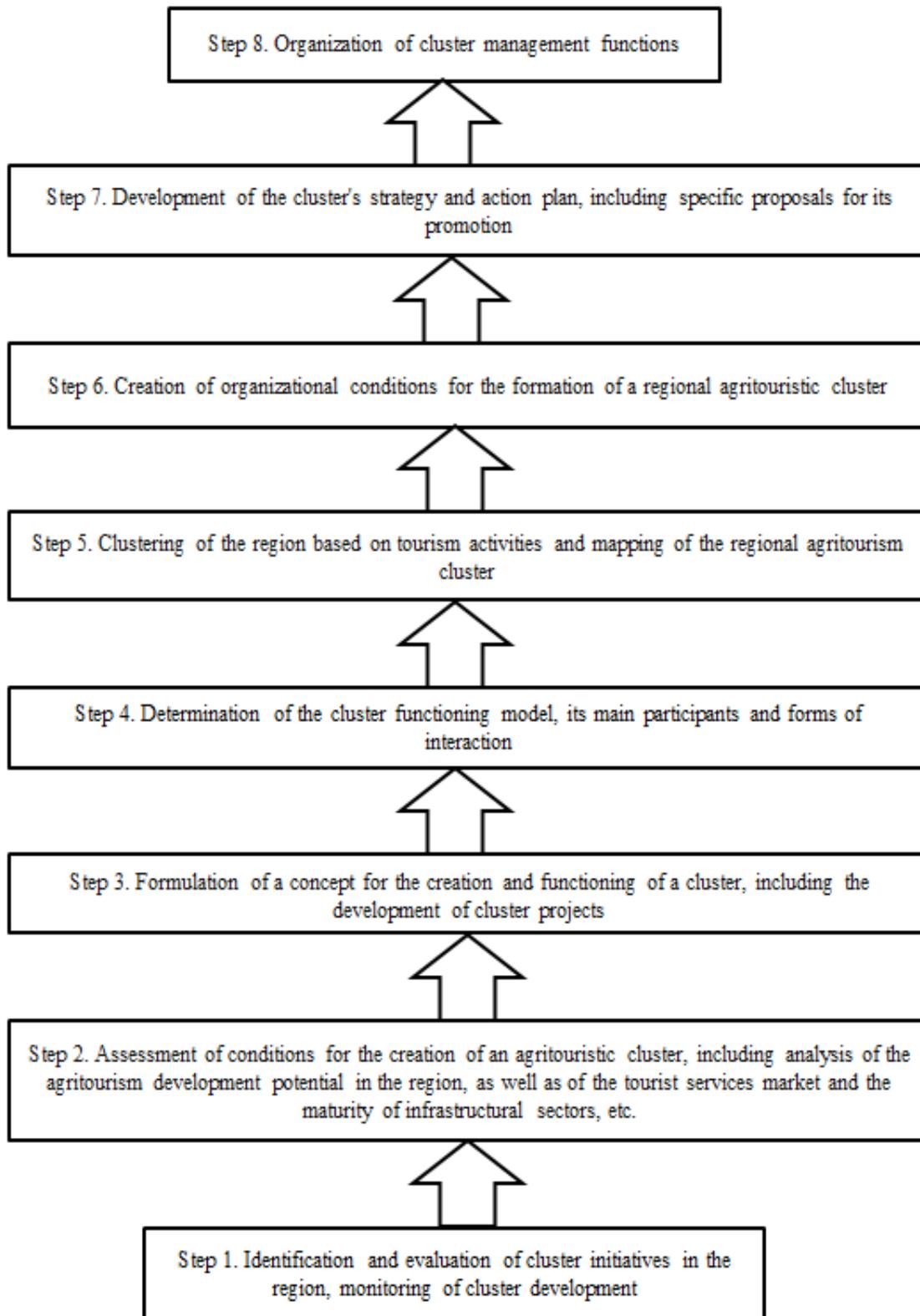
such document. It is also necessary to integrate agritourism into federal and regional programs (Vakhitova, 2014).

In order to develop a strategy for marketing, branding, advertising of agritourism and other issues related to its development, in an agricultural region (area or territory) a working body should be created in the form of an Agri touristic cluster with offices in each district. Such cluster involves the interaction and cooperation between enterprises of the tourism market and related areas, as well as with other enterprises, organizations and public institutions of agriculture, culture, science, education, etc., geographically located in rural areas. Such interaction and cooperation should be implemented with the direct participation of authorities at various levels.

Thanks to the geographical proximity of the cluster members, the processes of production cooperation are simplified, stable information, marketing and business relations are established between them; the possibility of promoting collective interests when cooperating with public authorities and other stakeholders is enhanced, which results in lower transaction costs and in synergetic and multiplicative effect at the regional and interregional level. The algorithm for creating a regional cluster of rural tourism is shown in Figure 4.

As international experience shows, an Agritouristic cluster can act as an effective mechanism designed to support small and medium-sized businesses for which it is oftentimes difficult to compete with large chain organizations operating on the tourism market. If all cluster members unite when transferring the factors of production, it will contribute to the growth of their market capitalization, increase the interest and enhance the trust in small and medium-sized businesses on the part of existing and potential business partners; thus, improving overall competitiveness of the cluster members.

Figure 4 – Agri touristic cluster creation algorithm.



Such unification of economic entities in an Agritouristic cluster can be achieved both within a particular rural area, district or region, and a group of districts or several regions, because there is a critical mass of agritourism entities acting as the core of the cluster. However, cluster projects can be implemented on the basis of certain Agri touristic models or a combination thereof, including separate elements such as landscape tourism (ecotourism), agritourism and agricultural knowledge tourism, ethno and event tourism, rural lifestyle (heritage) tourism, rural leisure and entertainment tourism, medical and health tourism (Dondokov, 2010).

In our opinion, the most optimal option is to create district based Agri touristic clusters and then to create a regional cluster. A special feature of the cluster is that it will be responsible for coordination between all stakeholders, because the cluster represents the interests of the owners involved in agritourism. Also, this organization will interact with clusters of agricultural complexes, tourism cluster, etc., in order to form a positive image of the region for a tourist. The cooperation between related industries at this level (at the same time at the level of the regional cluster and at the level of districts and cluster members) can be more consistent and effective.

CONCLUSIONS.

The issues related to the sustainable development of each particular region should be addressed taking into account the specifics of this territory and its resources, the trends in human development, the natural, transport and other conditions that affect the processes of sustainable production growth which acts as a determining factor in achieving socio-economic sustainability. The levers of state and market regulation used in this process should ensure harmonization between the interests of regions and the country as a whole as part of sustainable development management at the macro and meso-level, as well as ensure the equality of all forms of ownership, the guarantees and incentives for increasing entrepreneurial activity, including the mitigation of disruptive factors.

Diversification of the sectoral structure of the most important industries of the national economy may be considered as priority tasks of such regulation. The issue of diversification is particularly relevant for the economy of rural areas, sustainable development of which is impossible without expanding the sectoral structure of the economy through non-agricultural activities.

According to the authors, one of the areas of such diversification, which has shown high efficiency in developed countries, is the development of agricultural (rural) tourism. It contributes to the sustainable development of rural areas by addressing social issues of rural areas and supporting farmers, who oftentimes operate slightly better than at the break-even point. At the same time, it acts as a tool for promoting domestic tourism.

The study identified the following challenges arising during the implementation of Agritouristic projects in Russia:

1. The lack of a regulatory framework governing agritourism as a separate sector of the tourism industry, which generates income from additional non-agricultural activities carried out by rural population.
2. The lack of a system of economic and information interaction and a well-established mechanism of cooperation between organizations that provide recreation for tourists in rural areas and the local residents, as well as the lack of developed infrastructure in rural areas.
3. The lack of a single national program and financial support for the development of agritourism.

According to the authors, these challenges can be met both through the implementation of the cluster approach, whereby the competitiveness of an agricultural region is achieved through the operation of a cluster of related industries in its territory, in particular, an Agritouristic cluster, as well as through state support in the matters of legislation, taxation and overall regulation.

International experience suggests that the implementation of a cluster policy results in the growth of productivity and innovation activity of the cluster members, as well as in the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, the growth of direct investment and the sustainable socio-economic development of the regions where the clusters operate. Thus, the development of Agritouristic clusters can contribute to the modernization of the economy and become a “trigger” and driver for economic growth not only at the meso-level, but also at the macro one.

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