

**RURAL TOURISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN:
THE USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES**

**ҚАЗАҚСТАН РЕСПУБЛИКАСЫНДАҒЫ АУЫЛ ТУРИЗМІ:
ЦИФРЛЫҚ ТЕХНОЛОГИЯЛАРДЫ ПАЙДАЛАҢ**

**СЕЛЬСКИЙ ТУРИЗМ В РЕСПУБЛИКЕ КАЗАХСТАН:
ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ ЦИФРОВЫХ ТЕХНОЛОГИЙ**

A. TLEUBAYEVA*

Ph.D

Y. RSALDIN

Ph.D student

A. ZHAKUROV

Ph.D

L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Kazakhstan

**corresponding author e-mail: aitolkyn.t@mail.ru, tleubayeva_at@enu.kz*

A.T. ТЛЕУБАЕВА*

Ph.D докторы

Е. РСАЛДИН

Ph.D докторанты

А.А. ЖАКУПОВ

Ph.D докторы

Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Астана, Қазақстан

**автордың электрондық поштасы: aitolkyn.t@mail.ru, tleubayeva_at@enu.kz*

A.T. ТЛЕУБАЕВА*

доктор Ph.D

Е. РСАЛДИН

докторант Ph.D

А.А. ЖАКУПОВ

доктор Ph.D

Евразийский национальный университет им. Л.Н.Гумилева, Астана, Казахстан

**электронная почта автора: aitolkyn.t@mail.ru, tleubayeva_at@enu.kz*

Abstract. *The aim* is to assess the potential of rural tourism as an instrument of socio-economic development of rural areas of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The study is aimed at identifying the main factors influencing the expansion of agritourism sphere. *Methods* - the authors used various ways of analyzing the tourism market, review of domestic and foreign literature sources. Existing projects related to the tourism industry, statistical data to determine the degree of influence of the tourism industry sector on the development of rural areas of the country are considered. *Results* - on the basis of international and Kazakhstani experience it is noted that, although tourism agribusiness has significant potential, its spread in Kazakhstan faces many difficulties, digital systems are of fundamental importance. Existing programs do not fully contribute to the renewal of infrastructure, there are high costs and the inability of tourist facilities to function consistently throughout the year. At the same time, Eco-Village "Toksumak" is identified as an example of effective rural tourism, demonstrating the benefits and attracting foreign tourists. *Conclusions* - ecotourism is necessary for the revitalization of rural settlements. It is a global trend of the third millennium. Integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) will improve the quality of tourism services and increase their accessibility. By focusing on these aspects of tourism activities, a wide network of tourism firms with information and advisory support for farmers can be created in the Republic of

Андапта. *Мақсаты* - Қазақстан Республикасының ауылдық аудандарын әлеуметтік-экономикалық дамыту құралы ретінде ауыл туризмінің әлеуетін бағалау. Зерттеу агротуризм саласын кеңейтуге әсер ететін негізгі факторларды анықтауға бағытталған. *Әдістер* - авторлар туристік нарықты талдаудың әртүрлі тәсілдерін, отандық және шетелдік әдебиет көздеріне шолуды пайдаланған. Туристік салаға байланысты қолданыстағы жобалар, туристік индустрия секторының республиканың ауылдық аумақтарын дамытуға ықпал ету дәрежесін айқындау үшін статистикалық деректер қаралуда. *Нәтижелері* - халықаралық және қазақстандық тәжірибе негізінде туристік агробизнестің елеулі әлеуеті болғанымен, оның Қазақстанда таралуы көптеген қиындықтарға тап болатыны, цифрлық жүйелердің қағидатты маңызды мәні бар екені атап өтіледі. Қолданыстағы бағдарламалар инфрақұрылымды жаңартуға толық көлемде ықпал етпейді, жоғары шығындар және туристік объектілердің жыл бойы тұрақты жұмыс істеуге қабілетсіздігі орын алып отыр. Сонымен қатар, Eco-Village «Toksumak» артықшылықтарын көрсететін және шетелдік туристерді тартатын ауылдық жерлердегі тиімді туризмнің мысалы ретінде сәйкестендірілген. *Қорытынды* - экотуризм ауылдық елді мекендерді жандандыру үшін қажет. Бұл - үшінші мыңжылдықтың жаһандық тренді. Ақпараттық және коммуникациялық технологияларды (АКТ) интеграциялау туристік қызметтердің сапасын жақсартады және олардың қолжетімділігін арттырады. Туристік қызметтің осы аспектілеріне назар аудара отырып, Қазақстан Республикасында фермерлердің ақпараттық-консультациялық қолдауымен туристік фирмалардың көң желісін құруға болады. Авторлар әсіресе өңірлерде сандық платформаларды табиғи агротуризмге қолдану құзыретіне ие мамандардағы «кадрлық тапшылық» деп аталатынын көрсетеді. Цифрлық трансформацияда ауқымды мақсаттар қою, тиімділік көрсеткіштерін белгілеу, бизнес-процестердегі шығындарды жою маңызды.

Аннотация. *Цель* – дать оценку потенциала сельского туризма как инструмента социально-экономического развития сельских районов Республики Казахстан. Исследование направлено на выявление основных факторов, влияющих на расширение сферы агротуризма. *Методы* - авторы использовали различные способы анализа туристского рынка, обзор отечественных и зарубежных источников литературы. Рассматриваются существующие проекты, связанные с туристской отраслью, статистические данные для определения степени влияния сектора туристской индустрии на развитие сельских территорий республики. *Результаты* – на основе международного и казахстанского опыта отмечается, что хотя туристский агробизнес имеет значительный потенциал, его распространение в Казахстане сталкивается со многими трудностями, принципиально важное значение имеют цифровые системы. Существующие программы не в полной мере способствуют обновлению инфраструктуры, имеют место высокие затраты и неспособность туристских объектов стабильно функционировать в течение года. В то же время Eco-Village "Toksumak" идентифицирована как пример эффективного туризма в сельской местности, демонстрирующего преимущества и привлекающего иностранных туристов. *Выводы* – экотуризм необходим для оживления сельских населенных пунктов. Это – глобальный тренд третьего тысячелетия. Интеграция информационных и коммуникационных технологий (ИКТ) улучшит качество туристских услуг и повысит их доступность. Сосредоточив внимание на этих аспектах туристской деятельности, в Республике Казахстан можно создать широкую сеть туристических фирм с информационно-консультационной поддержкой фермеров. Авторы указывают на так называемый «кадровый голод» в специалистах, владеющих компетенциями применения цифровых платформ в природный агротуризм особенно в регионах. В цифровой трансформации важно ставить масштабные цели, устанавливать показатели эффективности, устранять потери в бизнес-процессах.

Keywords: rural areas, agrarian tourism , tourist services, model of agritourism activity, farm-hotel, digital technologies, socio-economic development.

Түйінді сөздер: ауылдық аумақтар, аграрлық туризм, туристік қызметтер, үлгі агротуризмдік іс-шаралар, ферма-қонақ үй, цифрлық технологиялар, әлеуметтік-экономикалық даму.

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Introduction

The modern concept of tourism development in the Kazakhstan identifies several key areas, including cultural and educational tourism, religious and spiritual tourism, social tourism, as well as tourism for children and youth. Also among the main types of tourism are sports, medical, business (MICE), beach, hunting and fishing, agrotourism, camping, auto tourism and caravan tourism, and others. Foreign tourists are increasingly interested in Kazakhstan, attracted by its abundant resources, vast landscapes, strategic location along the Great Silk Road, and its rich history and unique traditions.

Modern tourism includes not only historical and cultural attractions, natural and hunting parks, but also aspects such as the processing of agricultural products (livestock, crop

production), products with ancestral roots, traditional dishes (national and regional), including tastings and the cooking process, as well as the daily lives of villagers and farmers, and, most importantly, cultural traditions (Sarina B.S., Akimbekova G.U., Erkinbayeva N.A.) [1].

In this regard, the Head of State K. Tokayev discussed the development of attractive tourist destinations in our country for both foreign and domestic tourists, including the development of ethnotourism. This is because today, many foreign tourists are interested in learning about the culture, customs, traditions, and history of various peoples, as frequently highlighted in the media ((Tleubayeva A.T.) [2]. In our country, 10 tourist objects are classified as priority tourist areas (table 1).

Table 1 - Priority tourist areas in Kazakhstan

| Tourist sites | Tourist potential (per year) |
|---|---|
| Lake Alakol | has a tourist potential of 2 500 000 (current flow – 772 000 tourists per year) |
| Almaty region's mountain cluster | has a tourist potential of 2 500 000 (current flow – 500 000) |
| Shchuchye-Burabay resort area | has a tourist potential of 2 000 000 (current flow – 750 000) |
| Bayanaul resort area | has a tourist potential of 450 000 (current flow – 200 000) |
| Imantau-Shalkar resort area | has a tourist potential of 400 000 (current flow – 130 000) |
| Lake Balkhash | has a tourist potential of 400 000 (current flow – 130 000) |
| Charyn Canyon | has a tourist potential of 1 000 000 (current flow – 100 000) |
| Turkestan historical and cultural tourism | with a tourist potential of 1 500 000 (current flow – 500 000) |
| Mangystau beach tourism | has a tourist potential of 750 000 |
| MICE tourism in Astana | has a tourist potential of 1 000 000 |
| Note: developed based on source (Tourism development in Kazakhstan) [3] | |

Literature Review

Some researchers emphasize that digitalization contributes to more effective management of tourist flows, especially in rural areas where tourist sites are vulnerable to the negative impact of mass tourism. The role of digital platforms such as online booking systems and digital guides in maintaining sustainable tourism and minimizing the ecological footprint (Gretzel U., Reino S., Kopera S.) [4]. In Kazakhstan, such technologies can help regulate the flow of tourists to rural sites and make them more accessible.

Researchers explore changes in tourist behavior influenced by digitalization, including increasing their awareness and service level require-

rements. The need for digital tools to offer more personalized services, which may be especially important for us, where rural tourism is just beginning to develop and must meet the expectations of modern tourists (Buhalis D., Sinarta Y.) [5].

Some authors note that modern technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data can play a key role in rural tourism management by analyzing data on tourist preferences and helping to predict tourist flows (Mariani M., Di Felice M., Mura M.) [6]. The application of these technologies in our conditions could improve the prediction of seasonality and help in the development of more personalized tours for tourists.

Scientists explore the importance of social media and online platforms for promoting rural tourism. Social media provides an inexpensive and effective way to promote rural destinations, especially for small tourism businesses (Hussain T., Wang D., Li B.) [7]. In our conditions, where travel companies often face limited budgets, the use of social networks can help attract new tourists and create a positive image of rural sites.

Researchers emphasize that digital technologies play an important role in increasing the sustainability of rural tourism by facilitating access to information and improving the planning of tourist routes (Zeng H., Chen J., Geo Q.) [8]. This is especially important in our country, since digitalization will help overcome the problem of remoteness of many rural sites, ensuring the availability of information about them and improving travel planning.

Some authors explore how digitalization can improve customer engagement and enhance the quality of travel services, focusing on the need for digital tools such as mobile apps and virtual tours that can enhance the perception of the travel experience (Sigala M.) [9]. In our republic, this will help make rural tourism more attractive to tourists, creating opportunities for comfortable booking and information about facilities.

Thus, we are focusing on digital tools as a means of mitigating the problems of seasonality in rural tourism, offering ways to attract tourists all year round. The use of digital marketing platforms allows you to promote various seasonal events, supporting the sustainability of rural tourism facilities. In Kazakhstan, this can help make the tourist flow more stable and predictable (Sarina B.S., Akimbekova G.U., Erkinbayeva N.A.) [1].

Research shows that digitalization of rural tourism can significantly increase its sustainability, improve management and expand accessibility for tourists. Kazakhstan can use these technologies to overcome its unique difficulties, such as the remoteness of facilities and seasonality. The introduction of information and communication technologies will help not only support rural tourism, but also contribute to the broader socioeconomic development of the country (Sigala M., Tleubayeva A., Shokhan R., Karatayev D.) [9,10].

Materials and methods

As research methods: A review of publications by both domestic and foreign authors was conducted using bibliographic analysis on the topic under consideration. The conditions that facilitate the development and formation of rural tourism were subjected to

analysis. The development of rural tourism in Kazakhstan was investigated using a combination of content analysis, statistical methods, measurement and comparison.

To date, no single definition of the concept of 'rural tourism' has been established. It is challenging to identify a definitive definition, as the term is subject to interpretation in different national contexts. The tourism industry employs a variety of definitions and classifications, which are contingent upon the specific context of a given country. Nevertheless, we have endeavoured to proffer our own interpretation of this concept.

Rural tourism can be defined as a form of tourism that can be developed in a manner that is consistent with a variety of leisure activities held in rural areas. The objective of rural tourism is to advance business interests, generate new employment opportunities, provide local residents with the chance to earn supplementary income, enhance social and economic conditions in rural communities, and guarantee sustainable rural development. This form of tourism encompasses a diverse range of services that enable visitors to gain insight into rural life, daily routines, national cuisine, local traditions, and folk customs, as well as to participate in guided tours, national festivals, and sporting events (Tleubayeva A., Shokhan R., Karatayev D.) [10].

Results

Special attention is being given to the development of tourism in Kazakhstan. For this purpose, a specially established national company is engaged in promoting the historical, cultural, and spiritual values of our vast country abroad and attracting investment.

To achieve the objectives, a plan was developed to create 6 regional tourist clusters that span across the entire country in a geographically targeted manner: Cluster "Astana – heart of Eurasia" (1st cluster); "Almaty-Cultural Center" (Almaty city and Almaty region – 2nd cluster); "Pearl of Altai" (center of East Kazakhstan and Ust - Kamenogorsk Cluster-3rd cluster); cluster "Modernization of the Great Silk Road"; known territories of Kyzylorda, South Kazakhstan (Turkistan), Zhambyl regions – 4th cluster; known territories of Kyzylorda region; known territories of South Kazakhstan (Turkistan) region; known territories of Zhambyl region; "Caspian gate" (5th cluster): cluster center of Aktau, all Mangystau region; known territory of West Kazakhstan region; known territory of Atyrau region; cluster

aspects of the rural region: economic, social, and environmental. This type of tourism has the additional benefit of facilitating the development of other sectors, thereby contributing to the advancement of the wider economy. In the USA and Western European countries, rural tourism was initiated to help rural areas recover from crises. In Kazakhstan, the focus is often on developing agriculture, agro-industrial complexes, and the overall economy of the region to address the crisis in rural areas. Therefore, various programs have been adopted in Kazakhstan to develop rural areas (table 2).

the overall economy of the region to address the crisis in rural areas. Therefore, various programs have been adopted in Kazakhstan to develop rural areas (table 2).

Table 2 – Stages of Rural Area Development in Kazakhstan within the Framework of Government Programs

| Phase I: 1991-2000 years | Phase II: 2004-2010 years | Phase III: 2010- 2014 years | Phase IV: 2013-2017 years | Phase V: 2017-2021 years |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| The “Auyl” (Village) State Social and Economic Development Program for 1991-1995 and the Vision for 2000 | State Program for the Development of Rural Areas for 2004-2010 | Law on state regulation of the development of the agro-industrial complex and rural areas | State Program for Regional Development until 2020 | “Auyl – el besigi” (“Village - the cradle of the country”) Program; State Program for Regional Development until 2025 (project) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Typology was conducted for rural areas. - Scales for relocating people from less developed to more developed areas were determined. - Between 2000 and 2002, 300 underdeveloped, sparsely populated RS¹ were eliminated. - With the assistance of UNDP², methodologies and classification criteria for rural areas ("strong," "average," "weak") were developed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RS were classified and passported based on their level of socio-economic development. - State support measures aimed at infrastructure development for RS with high development potential. - Focus on large and medium-sized RS that have maintained their social infrastructure. | <p>The priority of the development of production potential and the growth of income from agricultural activities, diversification of agricultural production, the introduction of modern technologies are established.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of a method that will support the development of RS with sufficient production and social infrastructure to ensure the necessary social standards of living of the population. - Within the framework of the unified regional development program until 2020, a roadmap for employment and business has been developed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of an action plan for the implementation of the special project "Auyl - el besigi", which will ensure the survival of rural residents of the RS, modernize the socio – economic infrastructure of the RS in accordance with modern standards of quality of life. - Target indicators are defined: reaching the level of satisfaction with living conditions by 64% of the rural population in 2021; reaching 80% in 2030; increasing the volume of goods and services by at least 2.5 times compared to 2017 in 2030. |

¹ RS – rural settlement;
² UNDP – United Nations Development Programmed

Note: compiled based on source (Tleubaveva A.T.) [2]

Despite the adoption of programs and projects in the agricultural sector aimed at rural development, as shown in (table 2), many of these efforts have not significantly contributed to the comprehensive development of rural areas. Moreover, for some farming enterprises and rural residents, these projects have proven to be ineffective. Traditional livestock farming plays a crucial role in our country. The evolution of each rural area is inextricably linked to the advancement of the agricultural sector. Currently, many villages are still struggling to recover fully from the crises experienced in the 1990s. Although the agricultural sector is a vital part of the economy, it remains in a crisis compared to other sectors.

Due to a prolonged and deep crisis, rural areas have suffered greatly. For instance, many rural residents, having become unemployed and consequently without income, have left their native lands and moved to cities. As a result, the population in rural areas has started to decline. Until 2023, the rural population accounted for 40-45% of the total population of the country, while the urban population was 61.8% and the rural population was 38.2%, but by 2024 the share of the city's population increased to 62.2%, while the share of the rural population decreased to 37.8%.

Furthermore, during the crisis period, all public, cultural, entertainment, and household centers, as well as some educational institutions, kindergartens, hospitals, and production-distribution organizations in rural areas were closed. The vacated buildings were looted. Overall, across the entire country and in all rural areas, there was a social and economic decline affecting all aspects of life.

As a result, many of our villages fell into decay during the 1990s. The villages of Kazakhstan have lost their former strength. Once, collective farms and state farms were engaged in breeding pedigree horses, dairy and beef cattle, poultry, and more, while other farms were known for producing vegetables, fruits, and grain crops. These once-prominent activities have lost their former prestige. Additionally, the share of agriculture in the GDP structure has significantly decreased each year.

According to statistical data, if agriculture accounted for 34% of GDP in 1990, by 2019 it had fallen to approximately 5%, and in 2023 it was 4.1%. According to official data in 2009, as the overall social and economic situation in the country gradually improved, the rural population began to gradually normalize. During this period,

the standard of living in rural areas has improved compared to the situation in the 1990s. New jobs, commercial enterprises and infrastructure have been created. Additionally, various buildings, including industrial and commercial facilities, public centers, and cultural-educational clubs, began to be gradually restored (Overview of agricultural development...; Official statistical service data) [11, 12].

However, despite these improvements, the potential to transform the social well-being of rural areas solely through agriculture remains limited. Therefore, one of the most effective methods to support the socio-economic conditions of rural areas beyond agriculture is to promote and develop rural tourism.

At the beginning of the new millennium, starting from the 2000s, a new phase of development began to accelerate in the overall economy in our country. Nevertheless, despite the social and economic progress observed in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the situation in rural areas has not undergone noticeable improvements. To date, the low wages offered in rural areas have prompted many young people to move to urban centers in search of better job opportunities. As a result, a significant number of villages are still in a relatively poor state. In order to achieve comprehensive rural development in our country, it is vital to prioritize the sustainable growth of rural tourism. This can contribute to the development of villages through effective management and organization of this distinctive business sector.

We agree with scholars who argue that rural tourism can become a stable source of income and benefit the country. For instance, the dynamic development of rural tourism in our country stimulates an increase in tourist flows. This is crucial because currently, the outbound tourism balance far exceeds the inbound tourism balance, and the outflow of funds abroad remains a significant issue, negatively impacting the growth of the domestic tourism market.

Recently, more tourists began to come to Kazakhstan. So, in 2023, the country received more than a million foreigners. A year earlier, the number of foreign tourists who came to Kazakhstan was 156 thousand less, according to the Ministry of Tourism. According to the ministry, 17% more foreign tourists visited the country in 2023 than a year earlier. In 2022, 928 thousand foreigners came to the country. The number of domestic tourists in Kazakhstan has also increased. Compared to 2022, their number increased by 647 thousand and grew to 7.5 million people. This is 1.7 million more tourists

than it was during the pandemic in 2019. Most of the tourists choose Almaty for travel. In total, more than two million tourists visited the city in 2023, 540 thousand of them foreigners (Official statistical service data) [12].

Kazakhstan ranks 66th out of 117 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Tourism Competitiveness Index. As of the first nine months of 2023, the number of domestic tourists reached 5.4 million, which is 552.0 more compared to the previous year, and the number of foreign tourists increased by 225.0 to a total of 835.0. Since 2019, active efforts have been made to develop the Top 10 priority tourist areas. Considering the growing demand for domestic vacations, this number has been expanded to cover 20 areas across all regions. International air traffic has been restored on 80 routes, and visa-free travel for 74 countries has been renewed, with plans to increase this number to 100 countries (Tourism indicators) [13].

According to statistical data, the majority of Kazakhstanis prefer to vacation abroad. Experts believe that the main reason for this is the inadequate level, scope, and cost of tourism services in our country. The high cost of tourism services in Kazakhstan is primarily attributed to the fact that many tourist facilities operate only during the summer months. Despite the fact that some tourist sites have reached a level of operational sustainability throughout the year, the number of tourists visiting these sites decreases significantly during the winter season.

It would be useful to pay more attention to rural tourism in domestic tourism development programs. The creation of a strong rural tourism sector can contribute to sustainable rural development.

In recent years, one can notice an increase in the number of foreign tourists arriving in Kazakhstan with the specific intention of exploring the natural beauty of the country and getting an idea about the relations of the Kazakh people with the land, their cultural heritage, traditions and lifestyle. Unfortunately, the absence of designated caravan areas complicates travel for foreign tourists seeking to explore our country. Through rural tourism, these visitors can experience the essence and uniqueness of Kazakh culture, which may encourage more tourists to come. Foreign tourists tend to be more interested in experiencing the authentic lifestyle, culture, and traditions of a country in its rural areas, rather than simply admiring skyscrapers and urban architecture in major cities. For example, tourists

can witness the true essence of the Kazakh people, their ethno-culture, national traditions, and beliefs in authentic Kazakh villages. Tourists visiting cities could embark on tours offered by ethnographic, ecological, and educational tourism to RS.

Under the project "Strengthening the Potential for Organizing Tourism and Rural Tourism Business Based on Inclusive Economic Development in Central Asia for 2017-2019," a unified Central Asian network was established to facilitate cross-border trips in the region (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan), which took several years to implement. Currently, due to the active development and increasing popularity of ecological and rural tourism, the demand for hotel accommodation services is growing. Today, more than 90 hotels are open and operating in the regions of Astana, Almaty, Karaganda, Turkistan, Akmola, and Abai. The experience of opening hotels to serve tourists is a good business case for promoting mass entrepreneurship in regions and rural areas (Concept for the development of the tourism industry...) [14].

Kazakhstan is the ninth largest country in the world by area, with a substantial amount of land suitable for a wide range of agricultural activities (agricultural land accounts for 102.6 million hectares, or 39.3%). Agriculture is a vital sector of Kazakhstan's economy and one of the largest industries, employing a significant portion of the population. Furthermore, private subsidiary farms contribute to the processing of 70% of the country's livestock products (Seken A., Duissembayev A., Tleubayeva A. et al.) [15].

While rural tourism has not yet seen extensive development at the national level, various forms of this tourism type have emerged in rural areas near cities like Astana, Almaty, Karaganda, and others in recent years. These include Russian cultural tourism, health and wellness tourism, ecotourism, entertainment tourism, and more.

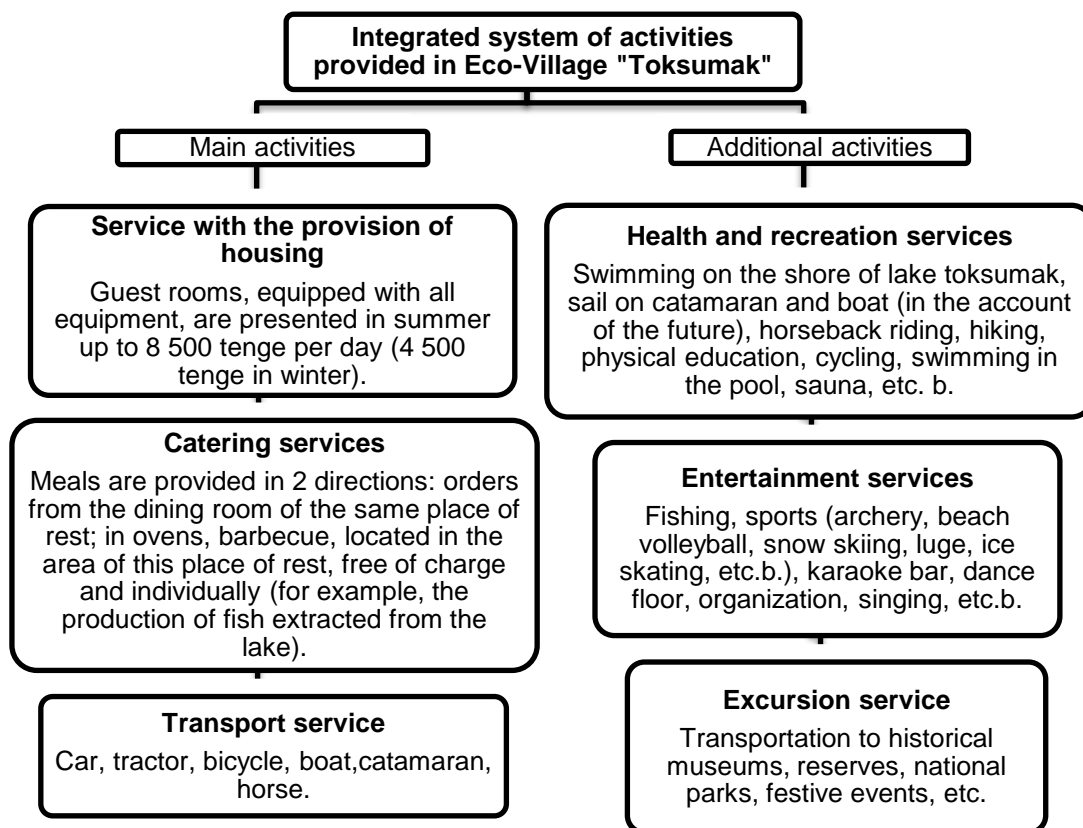
Furthermore, projects focused on advancing rural tourism have begun to appear in certain regions. For instance, the "Golden Altai – the Wealth of Our Region" project, covering the period from 2014 to 2017, included the East Kazakhstan region. This project, aimed at developing rural tourism in the Kazakh Altai, was financially supported by the EU Machaon International association. The main objective was to create a tourism services market with the help of local residents and interested partner organizations. It also aimed at sustainable development of remote

areas based on rural tourism and social programs. The project was intended to be implemented in villages located in the Katon-Karagai National Park area and near the West Altai Reserve. Moreover, East Kazakhstan region, with its 24 nature protection areas of national importance covering 1.7 million hectares, over 600 historical monuments, and more than 100 tourism monuments, is a region with high tourism potential in our country (Rural tourism is being developed...; The natural beauty of East Kazakhstan...) [16, 17].

Among the developed models of rural tourism in Kazakhstan, the Eco-Village "Toksumak" stands out as a true example. The "Toksumak" farm is situated in the village of Ozerny, within the Osakarovka district of the Karaganda region. Various types of rural tourism and its subtypes, as well as other forms of tourism, are implemented here. The rural tourism model of Eco-Village "Toksumak" can be fully developed as an example for all rural areas in our country.

Currently, Eco-Village "Toksumak" is the only example of advanced rural tourism in Kazakhstan. Agrotourists from all over the world come to the "Toksumak" farm, work, and get to know the Kazakh people, their land, traditions, and cultural peculiarities.

During the research, it was observed that the "Toksumak" farm engages in livestock and crop farming. This includes the operation of the Eco-Village "Toksumak" tourist recreation center. This enterprise is run by local entrepreneur Olzhas Omarov and offers a full range of services typical about today's rural tourism (figure 1). It offers guests and tourists fully equipped rooms, a sauna, a karaoke bar, a cafe, a small farm for breeding pets, barbecue equipment facilities with pots and pans, cooking amenities, a swimming lake, and various other amenities. The farm has its own agricultural field and is equipped with all necessary agricultural machinery, from tractors to combines.



Note: the information about the "Toksumak" farm-hotel is based on an interview with its head O. Omarov (Tleubayeva A.T., Seken A.S., Yeshenkulova G.I.) [18].

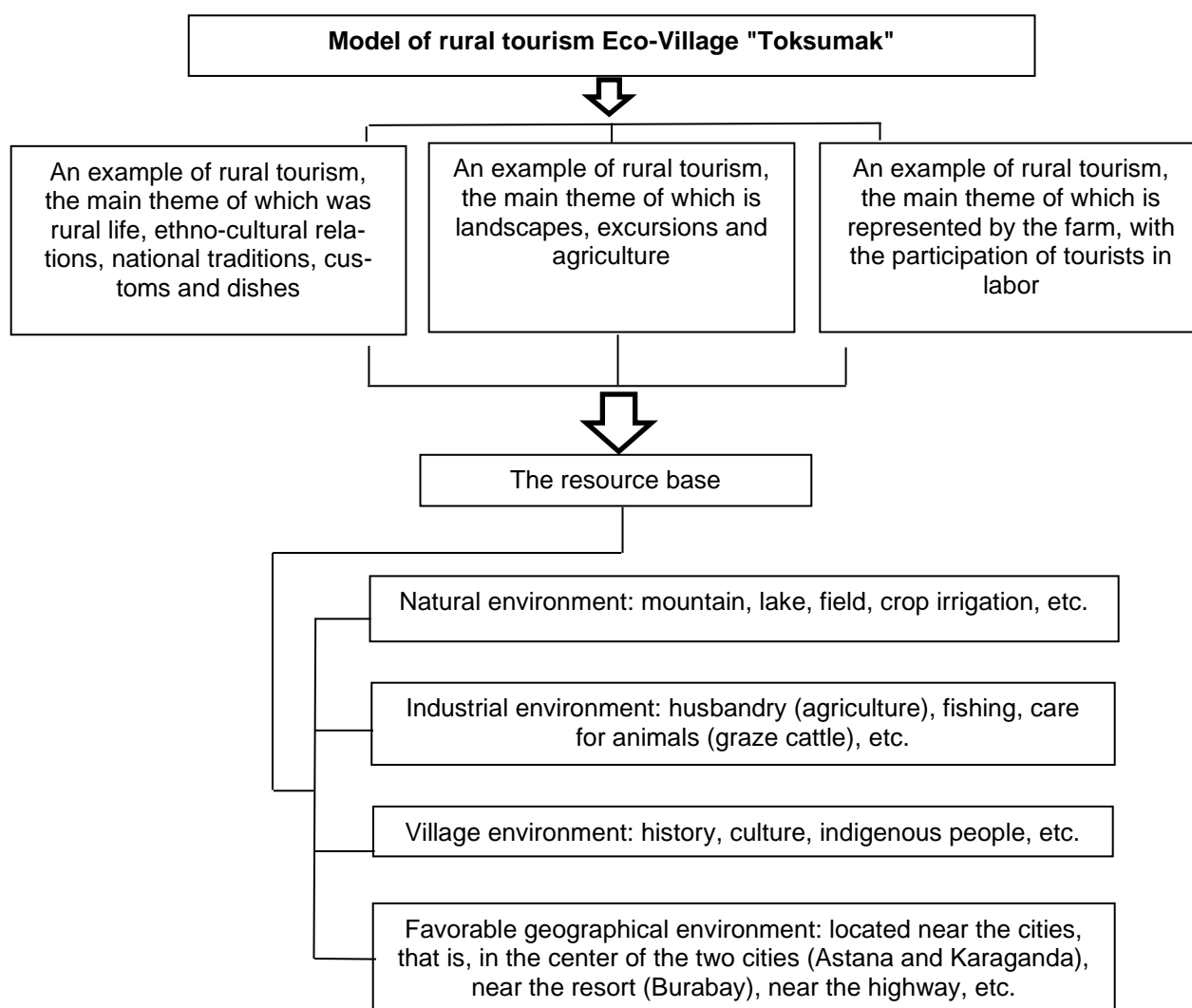
Figure 1 - System of services provided in Eco-Village «Toksumak»

One of the advantages is that this tourist site is located between Astana and Karaganda. The "Toksumak" farm-hotel is accessible by car from Astana through Osakarovka village (via an asphalt road) covering 93 km, or through Eraly village (via a gravel road) covering approximately 80 km of gravel roads.

Today, this tourist site encompasses and harmonizes various forms of tourism, the tourism sector encompasses a multitude of sub-sectors, including rural tourism, agrotourism, ecotourism, beach tourism, fishing tourism, sports tourism, labour tourism, educational tourism, and horse-back riding tourism, and many others. It represents a unique model of rural tourism in Kazakhstan.

The majority of visitors to this recreational facility are foreigners. Over the past three to four years, the Eco-Village "Toksumak" has received visitors from more than 30 countries, including Canada, the USA, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Poland, Austria, Australia, the Czech Republic, the UK, France, Italy, Spain, Denmark, New Zealand, Slovenia, Malta, South Korea, Singapore, Turkey, Russia, Ukraine, and others.

Thus, based on the analysis of the operations of "Toksumak" Eco-Village, we have developed a model (figure 2). This model of rural tourism, exemplified by "Toksumak" Eco-Village, can be replicated and developed in villages across all regions of our country.



Note: developed during the course of the research (Tleubayeva A.T., Seken A.S., Yeshenkulova G.I.) [18].

Figure 2 - Model of Rural Tourism Eco-Village «Toksumak»

Rural tourism models are among the methods for developing rural areas and tourism. In

2019, Olzhas Omarov's efforts were recognized with the "Best in Kazakhstan's Tourism Industry"

award from the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the national association of public organizations "Kansonar" for his contribution to the country's tourism sector.

One of the reasons for showcasing such significant rural tourism to other countries is the development of digital systems in our country. Moreover, information and communication technologies (ICT) in rural tourism help disseminate information to a wide audience with minimal costs and time. The increasing need to share information with various stakeholders necessitates the integration of ICT in the tourism industry. The integration of ICT and tourism is becoming increasingly important for the develop-

ment of the tourism industry (Kumar S., Asthana Sh.) [19].

In addition, the digitalization of tourism contributes to increasing the value of travel products and experiences, creating many new business opportunities, as well as achieving competitive advantages and customer satisfaction.

Discussion

Thus, various sources of data indicate that our republic has the potential to develop its tourism industry, including the rapid growth of rural tourism. It is extremely important to systematically eliminate the factors that hinder its development (table 3).

Table 3 - Aggregate potential of rural tourism development in Kazakhstan

| Potential of rural tourism | Positive side | Brake sides |
|--|--|---|
| Agricultural potential | 1. General provisions 80% of the country is characterized as agricultural land (200 million hectares). 2. Crop production is profitable. | 1. General provisions underutilization of agricultural land (80% of the territory is only 40% or 96 million hectares in agricultural turnover). 2. Frequency of agriculture. 3. Uneven development of rural areas in some regions. |
| Natural and climatic potential | 1. General provisions availability of rich natural and recreational resources. 2. Diversity of nature in each region. | 1. General inability to make targeted and effective use of available natural resources. 2. There are problems of pollution. |
| Organizational and liquidation potential | 1. General provisions the cheapness of rural tourism from other types of tourism. 2. Small costs of rural tourism. 3. Increased interest in rural areas. 4. Ability to work in a large direction of agriculture. 5. The ability to recoup the investment cast in the shortest possible time. | 1. General provisions low level of service in rural areas. 2. The lack of information on rural tourism. 3. Expensive advertising. 4. Ineffective implementation of the policy of rural tourism. |
| Socio-demographic potential | 1. General provisions large amount of labor force in rural areas. 2. Propensity of the population to study. | 1. General provisions departure of rural residents in the city. 2. Shortage of highly qualified personnel. 3. Low wages in agriculture. |
| Cultural and historical potential | 1. General provisions the presence of historical and cultural monuments of the world level. 2. The presence of unusual traditions of the Kazakh people Development of national crafts. 3. Development of traditional economic activity. | 1. General provisions due to the fact that some rural residents have no desire to go to innovation, to accept new services, to make changes in life. 2. In the understanding of some people there is an opinion about the low attractiveness of rural areas. 3. Distrust of the rural population to introduce new types of farms in the villages. |
| Material and technical potential | 1. General provisions the presence of a large number of vacant premises for the villagers. 2. Availability of agricultural machinery in some families. 3. Some families have long been found national dishes, equipment, tools. | 1. General provisions degradation of premises in some rural areas. 2. Low infrastructure in villages. 3. The presence of agricultural machinery in disrepair. |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Institutional and economic potential (from state and local governments) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Within the framework of such "programs" as the state program "Agribusiness-2020", it is possible to solve the issues of rural tourism development. 2. The possibility of implementing investment projects also through local authorities. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The concept of "rural tourism" has not been formed legally. 2. Ignorance of the population about the activities of rural tourism. 3. Failure of local authorities to take measures to develop rural tourism. 4. The lack of tax and credit privileges to finance rural tourism. 5. Non participation in the association of farmers by local authorities. |
| Note: developed during the research (Seken A., Duissembayev A., Tleubayeva A. et al.) [15] | | |

During this period, the sustainable development of the village, the region and the country as a whole will be fully ensured by solving and optimizing problems in the economy, social sphere and environmental aspects. As shown in table 3, it is recommended to eliminate the factors hindering the development of rural tourism in our country through a number of measures. These include the development of legislative and regulatory acts related to the tourism under study, and the organization of a competition for individual entrepreneurs specializing in projects to promote rural tourism and providing state support for the most promising initiatives; promoting agrotourism by utilizing unused land in agricultural regions; incorporating rural diversification and the development of remote villages into the rural tourism concept and programs; and offering training courses for rural residents to enhance agrotourism in these areas.

By studying domestic tourism in our country, we analyzed the general development of tourism and rural tourism in our state based on specific data. We must acknowledge that the current programs for developing domestic tourism recognize the weak mechanism for establishing rural tourism.

The findings of this study suggest that rural tourism in Kazakhstan has substantial potential as a tool for socio-economic development, particularly through the integration of digital technologies. By facilitating access, enhancing service quality, and attracting a broader audience, digital tools can bridge the geographical remoteness of rural areas and improve tourism sustainability. The challenges, however, are significant and include infrastructure deficiencies, high operational costs, and the seasonal limitations of many rural tourism facilities. These limitations hinder consistent year-round operations and reduce the economic resilience of rural tourism enterprises. The Eco-Village "Toksumak" serves as a successful model, showcasing how combining rural

tourism with digital marketing and service tools can draw international attention and promote various tourism activities.

While there are several initiatives aimed at rural development, the impact of these initiatives on tourism is still limited. Investments in infrastructure and the creation of favorable conditions for digital engagement are essential. Digitalization offers a unique opportunity to overcome these obstacles by making remote locations more visible and accessible. Social media and online booking platforms, for example, can play a vital role in promoting rural areas and creating a stable tourist inflow.

Conclusions

1. The study concludes that rural tourism, coupled with digital technologies, could be a transformative force for Kazakhstan's rural areas, promoting sustainable socio-economic development.

2. To fully realize this potential, it is essential to address infrastructure issues and develop targeted policies to encourage digital adoption in rural tourism.

3. Programs that support digital training and access to technology for rural tourism providers could greatly improve the competitiveness of Kazakhstan's rural tourism sector.

4. Through these efforts, Kazakhstan can establish a thriving rural tourism industry that not only boosts local economies but also supports cultural preservation and environmental sustainability.

Authors' contribution: Tleubayeva Aitolkyn: initiator and head of the study, and is primarily responsible for developing the concept and structure of the study, analyzed the literature and interpreted the data, examined examples from international experience and presented the results in the context of Kazakhstan, as well as developed basic recommendations, participated in the analysis of the case of the Eco-Village «Toksumak» and the development of a model of rural

tourism based on his example; Rsaldin Yerlan: participated in the collection and analysis of statistical data related to rural tourism and the introduction of digital technologies. He also participated in the analysis of current tourism development programs in Kazakhstan and the preparation of a section on the challenges facing rural tourism in Kazakhstan; Zhakupov Altynbek: contributed to the processing and visualization of data such as tourism clusters and priority tourism zones in Kazakhstan.

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- ## Аграрлық саясат: іс жүзіне асыру механизмі

**Information about authors:**

Tleubayeva Aitolkyn – **The main author**; Ph.D; acting Associate Professor of the Department of «Tourism»; L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University; 010008 K. Satpayev str., 2, Astana, Kazakhstan; e-mail: aitolkyn.t@mail.ru, tleubayeva_at@enu.kz; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5749-4289>

Rsalidin Yerlan; Ph.D student of the Department of "Tourism"; L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University; 010008 K. Satpayev str., 2, Astana, Kazakhstan; e-mail: rsldnrln@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6496-2353>

Zhakupov Altynbek; Ph.D; Associate Professor of the Department of "Tourism"; L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University; 010008 K. Satpayev str., 2, Astana, Kazakhstan; e-mail: jakypov-alt@mail.ru; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0381-6799>

Авторлар туралы ақпарат:

Тлеубаева Айтолқын Тлеубайқызы – **негізгі автор**; Ph.D докторы; «Туризм» кафедрасының доцент м.а.; Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті; 010008 Қ. Сәтпаев көш., 2, Астана қ., Қазақстан; e-mail: aitolkyn.t@mail.ru, tleubayeva_at@enu.kz; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5749-4289>.

Рсалдин Ерлан; Ph.D докторанты «Туризм» кафедрасының; Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті; 010008 Қ. Сәтпаев көш., 2, Астана қ., Қазақстан; e-mail: rsldnrln@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6496-2353>

Жакупов Алтынбек Аманжолович; Ph.D докторы; «Туризм» кафедрасының доценті; Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті; 010008 Қ. Сәтпаев көш., 2, Астана қ., Қазақстан; e-mail: jakypov-alt@mail.ru; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0381-6799>

Информация об авторах:

Тлеубаева Айтолқын Тлеубайқызы – **основной автор**; доктор Ph.D; и.о. доцента кафедры «Туризм»; Евразийский национальный университет им. Л.Н. Гумилева; 010008 ул. К. Сатпаева, 2, г. Астана, Казахстан; e-mail: aitolkyn.t@mail.ru, tleubayeva_at@enu.kz; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5749-4289>

Рсалдин Ерлан; докторант Ph.D кафедры «Туризм»; Евразийский национальный университет им. Л.Н. Гумилева; 010008 ул. К. Сатпаева, 2, г. Астана, Казахстан; e-mail: rsldnrln@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6496-2353>

Жакупов Алтынбек Аманжолович; доктор Ph.D; ассоциированный профессор кафедры «Туризм»; Евразийский национальный университет им. Л.Н. Гумилева; 010008 ул. К. Сатпаева, 2, г. Астана, Казахстан; e-mail: jakypov-alt@mail.ru; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0381-6799>