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PECULIARITIES OF AGRITOURISM DEVELOPMENT: A REGIONAL VIEW

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Annotation. The article is devoted to the study of the peculiarities of agrotourism development at the regional level. Some features of the current state and regional trends in the development of agritourism in the Zakarpattia region are considered. It is emphasised that there is a significant tourist potential and specific prerequisites for ensuring the development of the tourism industry, including the uniqueness of its geopolitical and geo-economic location (bordering on the EU countries: Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Romania), which enhances the potential of the tourism sector in terms of the possibility of intensifying trans- and cross-border cooperation, attracting foreign tourists, sharing experiences, the possibility of organising joint tourist events, etc. The unique interaction of the natural and climatic and resource potential of Transcarpathia gives impetus to the intensification of various types of tourism, hospitality industry, combining the interests of related spheres and types of economic activity, including the development of agritourism, providing jobs for the inhabitants of the region, and at the same time forming a multiplier effect, as a set of results considered through external factors of influence on ensuring effective management in the field of agritourism.

Key words: development, agritourism, regional Bibliography.

Statement of the problem. The sphere of tourism development is currently gaining particular relevance despite the difficult transformational conditions of economic management, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and the limited number of citizens travelling abroad for recreation. In view of the above, there is a need to fully use the existing regional potential to ensure the effective development of multifaceted types of tourism, recreation and hospitality industry within local territories. At the same time, it is expedient to intensify the development of business entities in other areas that may be related to tourism. Thus, the development of agritourism, which has all the potential opportunities and prerequisites for ensuring its development in the Zakarpattia region, is gaining importance. At the same time, in defining common interests, interaction on the development and modernisation of the

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agritourism sector, and solving problematic issues of regional development in general, is mutually determined.

Analysis of publications. Scientific research to identify the features and current trends in the development of the agrotourism sector has been carried out by both domestic and foreign scholars. Among them are I. Ivanenko, V. Voznyak [4], M. Polyakova [5], O. Stakhovska, I. Maltseva, I. Chub [14], O. Chepyki [18], who studied the current state of agritourism development at the national level, the features of the existing potential and the prerequisites for ensuring this development at the regional level. Separate studies conducted by T. Kolesnyk, O. Blazhko [6], T. Kurenna, Y. Vovk [7], L. Rybalko, V. Kuzmenko [12], concern the peculiarities of agrotourism development within rural areas, where there are all favourable conditions for its activation with enhanced capabilities of the reproductive capacity of ecosystem protected areas.

The regional peculiarities and prospects of agritourism development are considered in detail by scientists L. Gazuda, A. Balian, M. Gazuda, N. Voloshchuk, S. Gazuda [2], where the existing agritourism potential of spatial development is substantiated with an emphasis on the need for expanded reproduction of nature protection and ecosystem formations, the possibility of using the border location of the region and international cooperation with the EU member states. The expediency is determined by the formation of an integrated approach that will be acceptable to the agritourism business and combine the interests of many participants in the process of ensuring interaction between agricultural producers and tourism organisations, create a kind of model of influence on the provision of the agricultural sector within regional economic systems, including in the context of European integration transformations [20; 21].

Foreign studies by S. Medlik [22], E. Rilla [23], who focused on the peculiarities of the functioning of agricultural entities and the development of the tourism industry, considered through the prism of travel in different countries, are noteworthy. Given the considerable scientific research on the development and prospects for ensuring the effective functioning of tourist facilities with their agricultural orientation, additional research requires comprehensive approaches to highlighting the features of the studied area at the regional level.

The **purpose of the article** is to study the peculiarities of agrotourism development at the regional level.

Summary of the main material. Each of the regions of Ukraine has certain properties or peculiarities of tourism development in accordance with the existing potential of the territory, with its natural resource prerequisites, socio-economic and environmental conditions, and outlined prospects for ensuring a balanced development in the future. In this context, the Zakarpattia region has all the favourable prerequisites and specific features for ensuring the development of the tourism industry, including the uniqueness of its geopolitical and geo-economic location (bordering on EU countries: Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Romania), which enhances the potential of the tourism

sector in terms of the possibility of intensifying trans- and cross-border cooperation, attracting foreign tourists, sharing experiences, organising joint tourism events, etc.

A unique feature of Zakarpattia is the presence of large areas of mountainous terrain, where mountains and foothills cover almost 80% of the region. The highest point of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Carpathians is located in the region – Mt. Hoverla with an altitude of 2061 metres. It is located on the border of Rakhiv district of Zakarpattia region and Nadvirna district of Ivano-Frankivsk region, 17 km from the Romanian border [8]. There are 698 water bodies in Zakarpattia, including 9 multi-purpose reservoirs, 645 ponds, and 44 lakes. Among the lakes, Synevyr Lake is the largest, with an area of almost 7 hectares, a depth of 15-16 m, and an altitude of 989 m above sea level [16, p. 8].

It is worth noting the favourable natural and climatic conditions of Zakarpattia, which are characterised by a mild temperate continental climate, as the region is protected by the Carpathian range in the north, the Tatras in the northwest, and the western Romanian Mountains and the Maramoros massif in the south. In relation to other regions of Ukraine, the region is separated by passes ranging from 931 m to 1614 m above sea level (Yablonsky, Vyshkivsky, Uzhotsky, Veretsky and Volovetsky) [16, p. 8]. It should be noted that the region is ecologically unique, as there are no large industrial facilities, transport routes and, at the same time, relatively high forest cover.

The region's location within the Carpathian mountain system with significant areas of forested and protected areas is outlined by four major protected areas, including the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve, Synevyr, Uzhansky and Enchanted Valley National Parks. The Ukrainian Carpathians, and the region in particular, are home to Europe's largest intact natural ecosystems, beech virgin forests, unique flora and fauna of the Ukrainian mountains and alpine meadows of the Carpathian peaks. The forest and virgin forest ecosystems of the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve are among the most valuable ecosystems on the planet of international importance, which are classified as UNESCO biosphere reserves [16, p. 8]. By the way, it is worth noting that the interest of tourists in the peculiarities of the functioning of the national parks of the region is high, as evidenced by the information data, in particular, in the first half of 2023, national parks received 52,738 guests, where the Synevyr National Park was visited by more than 40 thousand tourists, the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve by more than 11.5 thousand [15].

The uniqueness of the natural, climatic and resource potential of Transcarpathia gives impetus to the intensification of various types of tourism, the hospitality industry, combining the interests of related areas and types of economic activity, including the development of agritourism, providing jobs for residents of the region, and at the same time forming a multiplier effect, as a set of results considered through external factors of influence on ensuring effective management in the field of agritourism.

Along with the natural potential of the region, the tourist attraction of the Zakarpattia region with its ancient traditions, customs, culture, rituals and way of life is becoming increasingly important. Particular attention should be paid to the historical and architectural monuments of the region, the uniqueness of Transcarpathian cuisine, which combines a multifaceted range of culinary traditions of different nationalities and minorities living in the region.

In this context, it is necessary to note the significant achievements of business entities in the field of agritourism in the region, including successfully operating local facilities, in particular:

- Buffalo eco-farm and tourist complex “Paradise” located in Khust district (Zakarpattia region of Ukraine, Horinchovo village), where there are more than 15 species of wild and domestic animals and exotic birds, including 17 buffaloes (4 bulls and 13 buffaloes), sheep, roe deer, horses, hares, wild boars, wild and domestic ducks and chickens, pheasants, peacocks and ostriches. The farm produces organic products such as cheeses with various flavours, offers tasting of aromatic fruit liqueurs, among which the most popular are Kalkanovka, apricot, cherry, nettle, and also offers traditional Transcarpathian dishes made according to authentic recipes [11];

- “Carpathian Buffalo” – a buffalo farm (Oleshnyk village, former Vynohradiv district of Zakarpattia region, now part of the enlarged Berehove district). The buffalo farm is now the largest in Zakarpattia, located on the outskirts of Vynohradiv. The farm not only keeps Carpathian buffaloes, but also restores their population. Buffalo milk is used to make dairy products, including mozzarella cheese, sour cream, butter, kefir, and yoghurt. You can taste and buy the products directly on the farm. This approach will attract tourists, as each of them wants to bring home a piece of the trip that impresses them after purchasing a certain product [1];

- snail farm, which is the first in the region to launch such an unusual tourist business. The farm is located in Khust district (Nyzhnye Selyshche village), has been operating since 2017, growing 3 types of snails (fodder and climatic), with a production volume of about 10 tonnes of snails per year. This business practice is popular in European countries where tourism is widely developed [10];

- Selyshche Cheese Factory (1994), which is the first Ukrainian artisan cheese factory. It is of scientific interest that it was launched on the basis of an established social project between residents of the village of Nyzhnye Selyshche (Khust district) with the active participation of the Association of Shepherds of Khust district and Longo Mai, a well-known European cooperative that, based on its own experience, managed to combine the interests of these project participants without the involvement of state and regional authorities, grants or international development programmes. It is significant that the management and employees of the cheese factory are interested in preserving the traditions and authenticity of cheese making, promoting sheep farming, and attracting young people to continue traditions and ancient crafts. At the same time, many tourists are interested in the

process of producing craft dairy products, including cheeses, which are made on an ecological basis using Swiss technologies, as well as in tasting and purchasing them on the spot. The cheese factory's products are already known far beyond the region, and its branded products are appreciated by consumers [13; 17].

Opportunities to combine the interests of the two spheres of agriculture and tourism create high efficiency of their mutually reinforcing activities. Often, such local facilities are located close to each other, for example, the snail farm and the Selyske cheese factory are only 20 metres away, which enhances interaction and may be of greater interest to tourists, investors, etc.

Today, family holidays are widely popularised in the tourism and recreation sector, especially for residents of large cities or megacities who want to relax in the lap of nature, contemplating the beautiful landscapes and ecosystems that the territory of Zakarpattia fully possesses. It is in this context that agritourism as a type of tourism is gaining prospects for expanded reproduction and development. The provision of services in the field of agritourism includes not only accommodation, catering and meals for tourists, but also opportunities to explore the authenticity, traditions and customs of different locations and areas, and to learn about the peculiarities and diversity of European and Ukrainian cuisine based on old recipes. In addition, the process of growing crops and fattening livestock can also be a tourist attraction.

The practice of supporting the development of agritourism and family tourism within local territories by regional authorities is successful. For example, the Khust District Council implemented a project to develop the Izalis trout farm, including UAH 4.3 million in funding, of which UAH 0.5 million was allocated from the local budget of the village of Iza. The practice of supporting tourism development is an important component of the successful implementation of pilot projects within the framework of rural tourism development in Khust district. At the same time, there is a possibility of implementing tourism projects with the assistance of international EU projects, such as [9; 13; 17]: "Resource Centre for Tourism Development – Centre of the Network for Sustainable and Comprehensive Development of Rural Communities in the Cross-Border Area"; "Arrangement of a recreation area on the shore of the Tereble-Ritske HPP reservoir" (Vilshany village, Khust district); Tourist complex for family recreation with trout farm "Izalis".

However, such a practice has prospects for implementation throughout the region, given that the development of agritourism is more inherent in rural (mountainous) areas, where almost 63.0% of the population in Zakarpattia live. These territories require special attention from the authorities and local governments both to preserve them and to enable their expanded reproduction. The expediency is determined by a systematic approach to solving the problematic issues of the studied territories and the prospects for their further growth. Some scientists [3, pp. 80-81], with whose opinion we agree, propose to expand the boundaries of national

nature parks (NNPs), in particular, the NNP “Zakarpatska Lowland” within Berehove, Uzhhorod and Mukachevo districts, which can acquire the status of an international biosphere reserve due to the borderline nature of the first two districts, as well as the regional nature park “Zakarpatski Beskydy”, the expansion of which will affect part of the mountain forest ecosystems of the region and natural ecosystems of the The common interests of the border states will make it possible to strengthen environmental protection activities on both sides of the border, develop the tourism sector while preserving unique natural ecosystems, and solve employment problems, especially for rural residents, where this problem is quite significant. In addition, such an approach can form a motivational factor for young people who decide to carry out their own activities within rural (mountainous) areas by starting their own agritourism business.

The existing potential for agritourism development in the region will help to expand the possibilities for introducing different types of tourist services. For example, a novelty is the use of modern types of attractions, in particular quest attractions, which are characterised by innovative approaches to the provision of tourist services. In the field of agritourism, the functioning of a quest restaurant establishment may be acceptable, which will be implemented in a small cafe or restaurant, where to obtain the ordered dish you will need to perform certain actions, for example, collecting the necessary ingredients according to the recipe [19] with the opportunity to participate in its preparation. Such an establishment would be most appropriate in rural areas, where it is possible to collect the necessary ingredients directly in the natural environment on the basis of an agricultural company that grows agricultural products. This approach, in our opinion, will contribute to the development of family tourism, as children like to participate in the process of completing a certain task.

Conclusions. The study has revealed that the peculiarities of regional development of the agrotourism sector in the Zakarpattia region are determined by the uniqueness and advantageous location of the region both in geo-economic and geo-strategic terms in terms of combining the interests of neighbouring states and international cooperation in the field. At the same time, additional efforts and attention are needed to address the problematic issues of infrastructure support for the tourism, recreation and hospitality industry. The development of tourism, in particular agritourism, will help reduce unemployment, especially in rural areas, improve the welfare of rural residents, and thus contribute to the balanced socio-economic development of the region.

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