

## REVIEWS/RAZGLEDI

**DEVELOPMENT OF GEOTOURISM AND RURAL TOURISM FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF AKTOBE OBLAST, REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN**

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/GV95204>

UDC/UDK: 338.48:55:502.131.1(574)

COBISS: 1.01

ABSTRACT

**Development of geotourism and rural tourism for sustainable development of Aktobe Oblast, Republic of Kazakhstan**

This article deals with the sustainable development of rural tourism based on geotourism. Geotourism makes it possible to preserve geological and geomorphological features and use them effectively for tourism. In the Aktobe Oblast administrative region, these features are effectively used for the development of rural tourism. Geological and geomorphological features in the region are not protected by the state, so it is important for the future development of geotourism and rural tourism to protect them. In order to effectively evaluate the development of rural tourism and geotourism, the Delphi method was applied and a SWOT analysis was conducted. With the SWOT analysis, the strengths and weaknesses of geotourism and rural tourism of the Aktobe Oblast are assessed.

KEY WORDS

geotourism, rural tourism, sustainable development, Delphi method, Aktobe Oblast, Kazakhstan

**IZVLEČEK****Razvoj geoturizma in podeželskega turizma za trajnostni razvoj Aktobske oblasti, Republika Kazahstan**

Članek se osredinja na trajnostni razvoj podeželskega turizma, ki temelji na geoturizmu. Geoturizem omogoča ohranjanje geološke in geomorfološke dediščine ter njeno učinkovito uporabo v turistične namene. Geološka in geomorfološka dediščina se na območju Aktobske oblasti učinkovito uporablja za potrebe razvoja podeželskega turizma. Za nadaljnji razvoj geoturizma in podeželskega turizma je pomembno, da se tovrstna dediščina s strani države zaščititi, kar trenutno ni. Za oceno razvoja podeželskega turizma in geoturizma je bila uporabljena metoda delfi in izvedena analiza SWOT. Ocenjene so prednosti in slabosti geoturizma in podeželskega turizma na območju Aktobske oblasti.

**KLJUČNE BESEDE**

geoturizem, podeželski turizem, trajnostni razvoj, metoda delfi, Aktobska oblast, Kazahstan

*The article was submitted for publication on August 5, 2023.*

*Uredništvo je prispevek prejelo 5. avgusta 2023.*

## 1 Introduction

Among the many forms of tourism geotourism has developed rapidly in recent years. In its most general form, it involves visiting unique geological and geomorphological features to satisfy one's interest in natural phenomena (Vujičić et al. 2011, 363; Hurtado, Dowling and Sanders 2013, 609). Such sites are selected natural objects that represent a variety of geological and geomorphological features, e.g., etalons and unique stratigraphic sections, characteristic landscape features or a combination of them that indicate specific stages in the formation of the relief, minerals, mineral or rock associations, textural or structural features of rocks, traces of the activity of past organisms, springs, waterfalls, caves, places associated with the work of early explorers, evidence of early exploitation, areas with current exploitation (Gałka 2019, 181; Tomić et al. 2019, 359–369; Štrba et al. 2020, 5–9; Braholli and Menkshi 2021, 64–67). Geotourism is a lesser-known but thriving branch of tourism based on traveling and enjoying places with unique geological and geomorphological character and its activities are compatible with rural tourism (Hose et al. 2011, 339–342; Ghazi, Ólafsdóttir and Tongkul 2013, 30–32; Manyuk 2016, 182; Ólafsdóttir and Tverijonaite 2018, 10–14).

There is great interest in geotourism in Kazakhstan, but this type of tourism is underdeveloped. In practice, geotourism services are rarely offered. However, the ongoing reorientation of the industry towards domestic tourism will undoubtedly require diversification, which can also lead to the development of geotourism. Appropriate resources are available for this. However, for the successful development of geotourism, various factors must be taken into account, rural tourism being one of them.

The development of rural tourism can contribute to sustainable development by protecting nature, agriculture and culture, creating jobs for the local population, especially women, promoting local entrepreneurship, increasing income and supporting the economy as a whole. The benefits of rural tourism lie in the preservation of identity and traditions in an acceptable way and in the presentation of rural heritage to tourists. Visitors expect rural tourism product with authentic and special experiences (Kóródi and Dávid 2019, 25; Ariyani and Fauzi 2023, 5–8; Gajić et al. 2023, 3–6).

The characteristic feature of rural tourism is sustainability. Sustainability in tourism means a positive overall balance of the environmental, socio-cultural and economic impacts of tourism, as well as the positive impacts of visitors on each other.

Rural tourism needs long-term financial and technical support (Plokhikh 2017, 54). Therefore, rural tourism needs additional support from other types of tourism, such as geotourism, to increase its chances of success. As rural tourism needs to be supported by entrepreneurs and the government, scholars have identified several steps to promote its utilisation, development, planning, conservation, marketing (Davardoust and Karahan 2021, 5–8; Saputro et al. 2023, 19–20):

- **Utilisation:** The work undertaken to enhance the benefits of rural life for tourists should focus on activities that focus on characteristics, nature, including geological and geomorphological features, culture, history and rural life.
- **Development:** It should serve the inhabitants of rural areas for protection and incentive purposes. For example, new uses of the geological and geomorphological features in the Mugalzarskiy, Baiganinskiy, Kargalinskiy, Shalkarskiy, Irgizskiy and Khromtauskiy districts could create additional use and income opportunities for farms and also help to restore land abandoned since the 1990s and open up new opportunities for rural development.
- **Planning:** There is a need to plan new tourist attractions, determine their locations and create conditions for their effective use in geotourism and rural tourism.
- **Conservation:** The most valuable asset of this tourism is the rural areas. Thus, the beneficiaries of rural tourism should provide political and practical support for policies and programs aimed at protecting and improving rural areas.
- **Marketing:** The tourism industry should strive to deepen people's understanding and awareness of advertising, information and marketing initiatives to create a sense of appreciation and enjoyment.

The peculiarity of Kazakhstan's emerging rural tourism is that it is being built »from the bottom up« – practically without the involvement of central structures and without nationwide programs and financial support. The need to create an effective environment for the development of rural tourism, as well as mechanisms and methods of its support by local authorities, brings to the fore the task of its theoretical and practical development, which determines the relevance of the research topic.

The main objective of the study is to develop a new approach to assessing the potential for the development of geotourism and rural tourism in the Aktobe Oblast administrative region (Kazakhstan). The developed practical recommendations will make it possible to solve the regional problems in the future. In recent years, visits to geological and geomorphological features in the Aktobe oblast have been

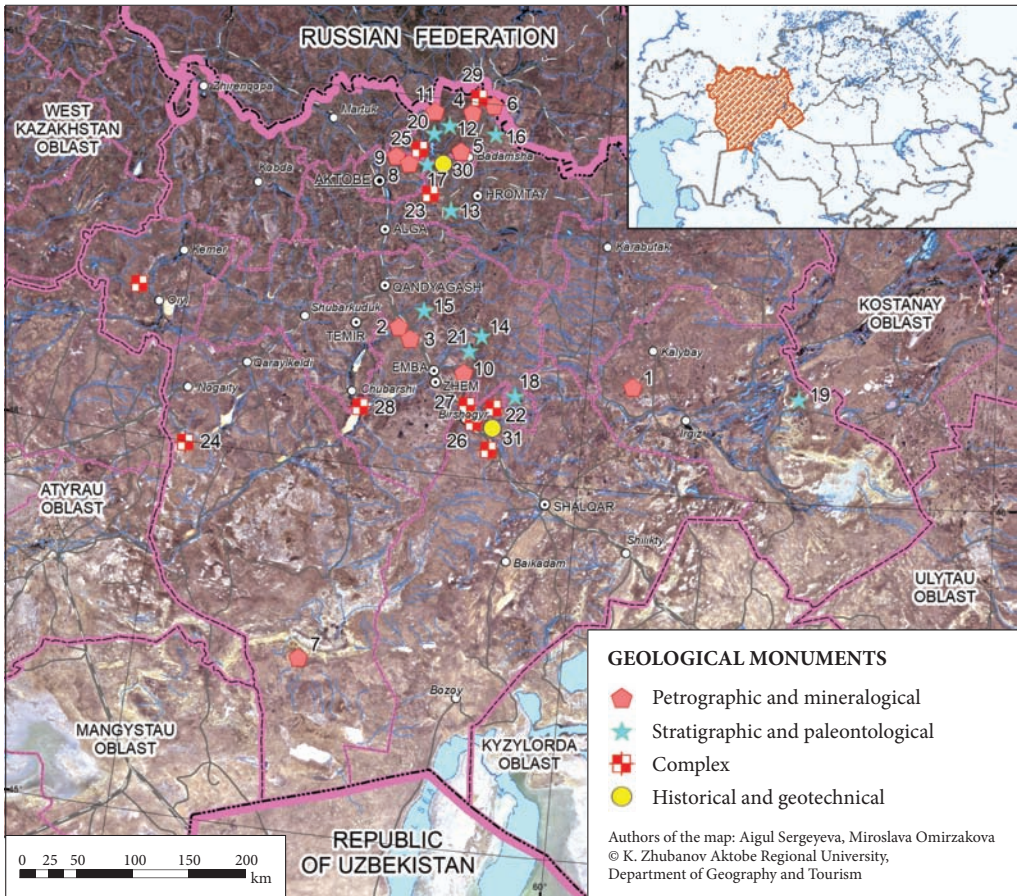


Figure 1: The location of studied areas. Petrographic and mineralogical sites: (1) Zhamanshin, (2) Shili, (3) Zhylansai, (4) Chaushka, (5) Kuagash, (6) Shandasha, (7) Donyztau, (8) North Alexandrovka, (9) West Petropavlovsk (10) Massif Aulie, (11) Serpentinite melange; Stratigraphic and paleontological sites: (12) Medet River, (13) Ornectassay (14) Kenkuys, (15) Karakol, (16) Romankol, (17) Aktasty River, (18) Tikbutak, (19) Shalkarnura, (20) Dombar Hills, (21) Kysyltobe, Complex, (22) Shuyldak, (23) Aidarlyasha, (24) Aktolagai, (25) River Zhaksy Kargaly, (26) Bortebai, (27) Paleovolcano Zhalgызtau, (28), (Kokzhide), (29) Ebeyti River, (32) Akshatau, (33) Big Boktybai; Historical and geotechnical sites: (30) Aktastinsky reef, (31) South Zhamantau.

steadily increasing. This growth is accompanied by a violation of the rules of nature use (e.g., non-protection of geological and geomorphological features, intensive weathering process due to the chaotic organization of jeep tours) with exceeding the recreational capacity of the existing tourist routes, which reduces the recreational and tourist value of the region. Exceeding the recreational capacity not only impairs the touristic attractiveness of these areas, but also their management.

## 2 Study area

Aktobe Oblast is located at the southern end of the Ural fold system and is the most extensive and diverse region of Western Kazakhstan in terms of its geological structure. Within this area, geological and geomorphological regions known as the Kazakh Urals and its periphery and the Caspian Depression and its periphery are distinguished. The region includes such natural landscape formations as the Or-Ilek Upland, Mugalzhar, Northern Prearalie, PreIrgizye, and the western side of the Turgai Depression and its rim (Abdullin 1981, 100–105). Thus, it has unique areas for the development of geotourism and rural tourism with considerable potential for rural development. The Aktobe Oblast receives about 65,000 tourists due to its geotourism potential.

There are 33 natural geological monuments in the Aktobe Oblast (Figure 1), 15 of which are located in the Ural-Mugodzhar Mountains and 3 in the Pre-Ural Depression and on the northwestern edge of the Caspian Syncline. This corresponds to 9.4% of the total number of geological monuments in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Another 15 geological objects are proposed by the Aktobe Scientific Research Geological Oil Institute to receive the status of regional significance: (i) geological: Shili, Zhylansai, Chaushka, Kuagash, Shandasha, Donyztau, North Alexandrovka, West Petropavlovsk, Akshatau, Big Boktybai, and (ii) paleontological: Medet River, Ornectassay, Kenkuys, Karakol, Romankol (Shakirov 2012, 806; Sergeyeva et al. 2022, 115). Not all geological monuments in the Aktobe Oblast are sufficiently protected. Therefore, the development of mineral resources near geological monuments is in full swing. For example, oil, gold, gravel and other minerals.

Rural tourism is an activity that benefits not only the entrepreneur, but also the rural area. To begin with, the inhabitants, with their special knowledge of their region, can help in the search for tourism resources and socio-economic planning. Therefore, an analysis of areas suitable for tourism was carried out in the Aktobe Oblast. Kargaly, Baiganin, Mugalzhar, Khromtau and Shalkar districts have the potential for the development of geo- and rural tourism, as these areas have unique geological features, rural areas with relatively untouched nature, where tourists can taste traditional and local food and get acquainted with cultural attractions. Although all the selected areas have common characteristics, each of them has a special feature. For example, the rural areas of Kargaly district have agricultural land, the villages of the Baiganinskiy district have traditional values, etc.

## 3 Research materials and methods

This study uses the Delphi method to identify important factors for assessing the sustainable development of rural tourism. It consists of thirteen indicators (Table 1) in four categories: quality of services (5 indicators), environment (3 indicators), management system (2 indicators) and results (3 indicators). The indicators will be useful for future rural tourism development activities at all planning levels. These indicators clearly reflect the tourism situation in the region. For the Delphi method, a questionnaire was prepared to assess the development of geotourism and rural tourism in the Aktobe Oblast. Expert opinions were obtained with the participation of eight experts (tour operators, geologists, geographers). The Delphi method is used to develop indicators that measure the sustainable development of rural tourism. It systematically combines expert knowledge and opinions in order to



reach a consensus on a complex topic. It identifies important factors for assessing the sustainable development of rural tourism.

The sustainable tourism indicators measure the actual impact of sustainable tourism development measures. It also improves the overall understanding of the issues facing the region and identifies environmental, social and economic problems, gaps in management strategies and lack of facilities in the region.

As mentioned, the expert opinions were evaluated in four categories, with each category being divided into separate indicators that were analysed separately:

- (1) Quality of services: accessibility of geological features, availability of GPS navigators, availability of guesthouses in rural areas close to geological monuments, possibility of payment with credit cards, availability of catering services in the accommodations.
- (2) Environment: uniqueness of landscape diversity, exposure to relief forms, existence of an inventory of geologically valuable sites of regional importance.
- (3) Management system: insurance for visitors, online sales promotion (social media, targeting).
- (4) Result: satisfaction of villagers, satisfaction of visitors, importance of geological features for the development of rural tourism.

The experts gave one of the following answers for each of the thirteen indicators: »excellent«, »good«, »average«, »below average«, »unsatisfactory«. The answers were awarded points: 2 points for »excellent«, 1 point for »good«, 0 points for »average«, -1 point for »below average«, and -2 points for »unsatisfactory«. If 100% of the experts answers are in high agreement and, as mentioned, the total score for agreement is 2, the maximum score is 16 (percentage = 100%). And for the indicator »accessibility of geological features«, the experts rated the accessibility of geological features (remoteness of features) according to the following scale: 2 points from 30 to 50 km, 1 point from 51 to 100 km, 0 points from 101 to 150 km, -1 point from 151 to 200 km, and -2 points from 201 km. The collected answers are shown in Table 1. The score for each indicator was then calculated on the basis of the above rating (see Figure 2).

## 4 Results and discussion

Tourism and leisure activities aim to improve the quality of life of the population and social development in general and are an important indicator of the standard of living. Rural tourism and geotourism can be developed symbiotically in this regard. Rural tourism is particularly attractive to local residents for several reasons: the relatively high cost of tours, the possibility of creating additional jobs, and the development of infrastructure, the service sector, the production of souvenirs and the development of handicrafts (Koutsouris et al. 2014, 95; Popescu et al. 2022, 10–15; Guo et al. 2023, 8–10).

Tourism makes a major contribution to the country's economy, especially to the development of rural areas. Accordingly, research on the development of rural areas is being carried out as part of the topic under consideration (Trukhachev 2015, 30–54; Zyrianov and Semiglazova 2021, 25–27).

The importance of geotourism and rural tourism for sustainable development is determined by a complex of factors and conditions, including: economic (increasing the income of the population, increasing the competitiveness of the economy), social (combating poverty, promoting employment), environmental (preserving geological features, developing environmentally friendly production and technology systems, producing organic food), political and legal (securing control over the territory, forming and developing institutions of local self-government, maintaining political stability) (Bruno et al. 2014, 302; Çelik Ateş and Ateş 2019, 208–210; Santangelo and Valente 2020, 2).

Based on the assessment results obtained (Table 1 and Figure 2), proposals were made for the studied regions as rural tourism destinations. These proposals will serve as principles for future tourism development for regional and local stakeholders in the tourism planning phase.

Table 1: Evaluation of indicators for sustainable geotourism and rural tourism in Aktobe Oblast.

Category	Indicators	Percentage (%)			
		-2 point	-1 points	0 points	1 points
Quality of services	Accessibility of geological features	25	25	50	0
	Availability of GPS navigators	20	70	10	0
	Availability of guesthouses in rural areas close to geological monuments	30	50	20	0
	Possibility of payment with credit cards	0	0	20	50
	Availability of catering services in the accommodations	30	20	50	0
Environment	Uniqueness of landscape diversity	0	0	10	50
	Exposure to relief forms	0	20	30	50
	Existence of an inventory of geologically valuable sites of regional importance	20	50	30	0
Management system	Insurance for visitors	0	20	50	30
	Online sales promotion (social media, targeting)	0	0	20	50
Result	Satisfaction of villagers	0	0	10	40
	Satisfaction of visitors	10	30	50	10
	Importance of geological features for the development of rural tourism	0	0	40	50

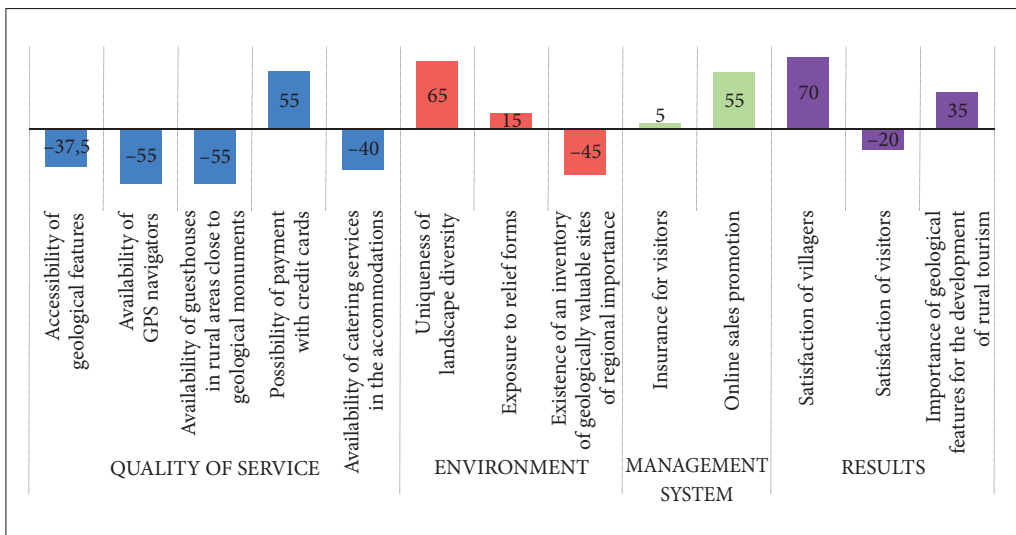


Figure 2: Evaluation of the individual indicators for sustainable geotourism and rural tourism in Aktobe Oblast (in %).

The assessment of the indicator »accessibility of geological features« shows that most geological features are between 101 km and 150 km away from the settlements, while the most inaccessible features are 201 km and more away. Similarly, the percentage was calculated for other indicators shown in Figure 2.

The functioning of GPS navigators depends on the availability of the internet. As all geological features are located in rural areas, internet coverage is an acute problem. 10% of the experts gave a score of average, while the rest of the experts rated this indicator as low. This shows that most rural areas near geological sites do not have access to the internet.

For rating in the category »availability of guesthouses in rural areas close to geological monuments« for the level of service quality, the number of rural guesthouses for tourists was primarily taken into account. In these areas, residents transform their homes into shared multifunctional spaces for themselves and for tourists. The experts answered that the number of guest houses is mostly below average (low rating) – 50%; 30% of the experts answered unsatisfactory and 20% gave an average rating. The results show that the owners of rural guesthouses in the regions have not taken any initiative or planned any work in this regard. The possibility of using a credit card was then examined and compared with similar previous responses, revealing that online payment is widely used in rural areas.

According to the results of the survey, the indicator »availability of catering services« is at an average level, as there are no special places for catering services in rural areas, but tourists mainly eat in guesthouses together with the locals.

The »Environment« category comprises three indicators. The experts gave the category »uniqueness of landscape diversity« a high rating. Many natural formations with unique a geological character were identified in the Aktobe Oblast. There is also potential for more universal rural tourism. However, there are currently no plans for the development of rural tourism and geotourism. Therefore, for sustainable development, including geotourism and rural tourism, development programs should be elaborated with the participation of local government bodies.

The relief of Aktobe Oblast is predominantly flat. This reduces the exposure to relief forms to a low level (50% of the experts indicated a low degree of exposure to relief forms).

The survey results show that geological features are not included in the inventory of local regional importance. 50% of the experts rated this category as below average. One of the main problems is that these features are not included in the spatial planning map, are not taken into account in the cadastre, and are not under protection obligations. The long period between the issuing of the decision and the execution of all necessary documents can lead to a loss in value of these features. For example, the ancient Alabas volcano (»Shuyldak paleovolcanic region«, No. 22 in Figure 1) was partially destroyed by mining, while five factories for the extraction of crushed stone were operating in the Shalkar district in 2011 (Figure 3). The feature »algae reef limestones of the Lower Permian age of the Aktastin reef« (No. 30 in Figure 1) is also exploited by a quarry. At present, the northern, eastern and western parts of the reef body are partially preserved, while the southern part has been quarried for building material. The exposed walls of the quarry allow a qualitative study of the inner structure of the reef body. In addition to the effective protection of the above-mentioned features, the official recognition of the protected status of promising natural monuments of regional importance is of significance. In our opinion, an additional inventory of geological objects is necessary. One of the candidates for protection status is the peak of the Mugalzhari Ridge (Figure 3) – Bolshoi Boktybay (657 m), which is located in an area of intensive mining.

With regard to »insurance for visitors«, the experts' responses (50%) gave an average rating, 30% a good rating and 20% below average rating. The results show that this point is largely in need of improvement.

The indicator »online sales promotion« for local products was rated as good by 50%, excellent by 30% and average by 20%. Nowadays, social networks are one of the most popular and effective chan-



nels for marketing. The priority of social networks as a promotional tool lies in the openness of information and direct interaction with customers, which allows the company to thoroughly and quickly research the audience and its reaction to the product offer, as well as to develop a competent marketing strategy. The relatively high score in this category is directly related to the widespread use of social networks for sales promotions in the Aktobe Oblast.

There is a positive trend of 70% in the ratings in the category »satisfaction of villagers«. Respondents often consider the relative increase in the number of visitors to the Aktobe Oblast, the use of guesthouses and the role of tourism in the family economy as an additional source of income alongside agricultural to be important. The second component of this category is »satisfaction of visitors«. The tours organized by the tour operators »Zere Tour«, »Visit Aktobe« and »Four tour« were used as a basis for the analysis of this indicator. Geological tours in rural areas are often organized from April to the end of October. It is known that the most visitors want to visit geological monuments such as Aktolagai, Zhalgызtau paleovolcano, Aulie Massif, Aidarlyasha and Chaushka (Figure 1), located in Bayganin, Kargaly, Mugalzhар and Khromtau districts. Therefore, the representatives of the tour operator, who participated as experts, were able to speak openly about various problems that we considered.

Geologists note that the protection of geological monuments is rarely tackled. Tour operators also share this view. The experts noted that 50% of visitors rated the level of service in rural areas as average, 10% were satisfied with rural tourism activities, but 30% noted a below average level, and 10% gave an unsatisfactory rating. This could be due to the fact that the living conditions in the guesthouses in rural areas still need to be improved and it is necessary to work on creating comfort for tourists.

The impression that people form when they first encounter natural phenomena determines their subsequent attitude to various aspects of the use, study and protection of the environment. The importance of geological features for the development of rural tourism is rated at a high level by the experts, with 50% giving good rating. The diversity of geological features is able to satisfy the needs of different categories of tourists. The Aktobe Oblast, due to its diversity of geological features and vast territory, offers many opportunities for the development of tourism in rural areas, which could become successful and profitable commercial projects with appropriate advertisement and support from the state and business.

Figure 3 shows the potential rural areas for the development of rural tourism and geotourism identified by the results of the study. The experts' responses to 7 indicators (out of 13) were rated positively (percentage above zero) (Figure 2). Zero or negative scores indicate the need to develop approaches and experiences in order to avoid deficiencies. Moreover, as these areas are rural, it is difficult to find local human resources, e.g., those who speak international languages and can use the information and communication infrastructure for tourism purposes or sell local products on social networks.

Based on the research, a SWOT analysis was conducted to assess the development of geotourism and rural tourism in the Aktobe Oblast (Table 2). The results show many strong points and a long list of opportunities that indicate the great potential for the development of geo- and rural tourism in a sustainable model in the rural areas of Aktobe Oblast. Awareness of the existence of problems in infrastructure, promotion of the territory and quality of services for tourists seems to be the biggest challenges that create obstacles to the implementation of this type of tourism.

*Figure 3: Potential rural areas for the development of rural tourism based on geological monuments. Rural areas of Kargaly district: (1) Rodnikov, (2) Zheltau, (3) Kos-Estek, (4) Velihov, (5) Alimbet, (6) Ashilysai, (7) Akzhar, (8) Abay; Rural areas of Khromtau district: (9) Don, (10) Kopa; Rural areas of Irgiz district: (11) Irgiz, (12) Nura; Rural areas of Shalkar district: (13) Kaulzhыр, (14) Aktogai, (15) Bershigыр; Rural areas of Mugalzhар district: (16) Kayndy, (17) Mugalzhар, (18) Zhyryn, (19) K. Zhubanov; Rural areas of Baiganin district: (20) Miyaly, (21) Kopa; Rural areas of Uil district: (22) Uil. ► page 108*

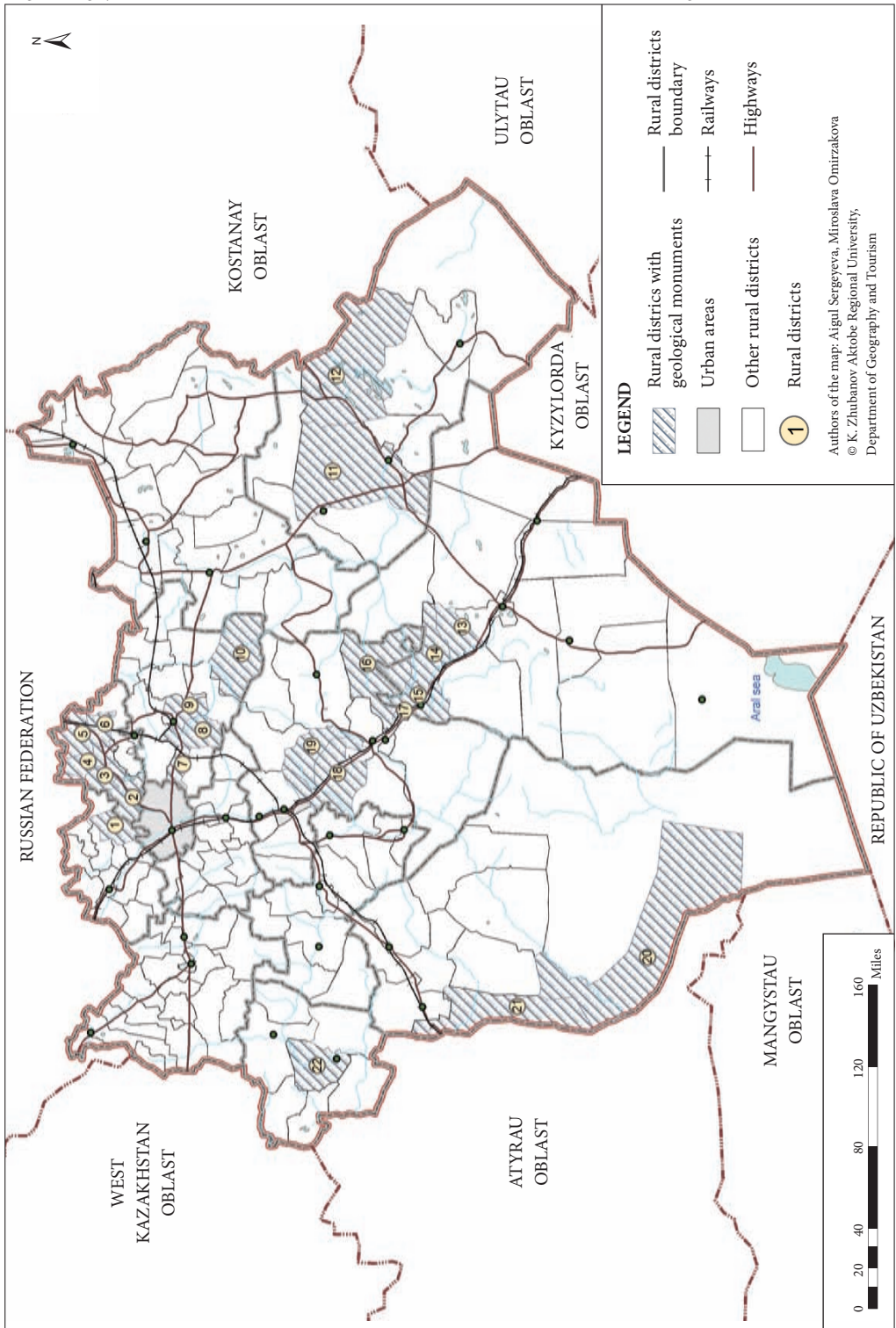


Table 2: SWOT analysis to assess the development of geotourism and rural tourism in the Aktobe Oblast.

S – STRONG SIDES	W – WEAK SIDES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• intellectual development of the rural population in connection with new creative works;</li> <li>• many unique geological monuments;</li> <li>• the predominantly flat relief reduces exposure to relief forms for tourists in rural areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• underdeveloped road infrastructure;</li> <li>• low level of branding and territorial promotion;</li> <li>• lack of internet coverage on the way to attractions, contributing to the lack of GPS navigators;</li> <li>• low availability of guesthouses in rural areas for tourists;</li> <li>• lack of inventories for the conservation of geological features</li> </ul>
O – OPPORTUNITIES	T – THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• employment opportunities for the inhabitants of rural areas;</li> <li>• promotion of entrepreneurs in rural areas;</li> <li>• promotion and marketing of local products</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• deterioration of already unsuitable roads and road safety;</li> <li>• environmental degradation;</li> <li>• inadequate budget funding</li> </ul>

## 5 Conclusions

Geotourism is the most important form of tourism in the rural areas of Aktobe Oblast. Selected indicators were used to assess and monitor sustainable rural tourism in order to support regional and local stakeholders in planning rural tourism. The participation of local residents is of great importance as they are the main stakeholders in rural tourism destinations. From a practical point of view, the quality of services, facilities, village management, environmental protection and tourism outcomes are all urgent issues that require an effective solution.

The result of the sustainable rural tourism assessment using the Delphi indicators can be used for rural tourism activities in the Aktobe Oblast and help the government to regularly monitor the interaction of stakeholders and avoid wrong decisions that could hinder the sustainable development of rural tourism.

The Aktobe Oblast has numerous geological and geomorphological features. However, many of these features are not protected, although the geoheritage sites often have significant tourism and recreational potential.

The effective implementation of geotourism principles in rural tourism and the promotion of geoheritage should contribute to the development of tourism on the one hand and the protection of natural heritage on the other.

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## 7 Povzetek: Razvoj geoturizma in podeželskega turizma za trajnostni razvoj Aktobske oblasti, Republika Kazahstan

(prevedel B. Abdullina)

Med številnimi vrstami turizma se v zadnjih letih hitro razvija tudi geoturizem, pri katerem gre za obiskovanje edinstvene geološke in geomorfološke dediščine. To so izbrane naravne vrednote, ki predstavljajo različne geološke in geomorfološke oblike in procese, kot so na primer stratigrafski prerezi, različne reliefne oblike, minerali in kamnine, sledovi nekdanjih organizmov, izviri, slapovi, kraške jame, točke, povezane z delom prvih raziskovalcev, točke, kjer je potekalo zgodnje izkoriščanje teh naravnih virov in kjer poteka danes.

Interes za geoturizem v Kazahstanu je precejšen, vendar je ta oblika turizma šele v povojih, saj se le redko ponuja. V prihodnosti zna biti drugače, saj bo razvoj domačega turizma nedvomno zahteval raznovrstnost, kar je priložnost tudi za geoturizem. Za njegov uspešni razvoj je treba upoštevati različne danosti, med katerimi izpostavljamo podeželski turizem, s katerim je geoturizem močno združljiv.

Geoturizem in podeželski turizem sta pomembna za trajnostni razvoj, saj vplivata na njegov gospodarski (rast dohodkov, večanje konkurenčnosti gospodarstva), socialni (zmanjšanje revščine, spodbujanje zaposlovanja), okoljski (ohranjanje naravnih vrednot, razvoj okolju prijaznih proizvodov) in politično-pravni vidik (zagotavljanje nadzora, oblikovanje in razvoj ustanov lokalne samouprave, politična stabilnosti).

V zadnjih letih obisk geološke dediščine na območju Aktobske oblasti v Kazahstanu nenehno narašča. To rast pa žal spremljajo okoljske obremenitve, saj prihaja do preseganja zmogljivosti obstoječih turističnih poti. Preseganje zmogljivosti pa vpliva tako na turistično privlačnost kot na ohranjanje naravnih vrednot.

Posebnost razvijajočega kazahstanskega podeželskega turizma je, da se razvija »od spodaj«, praktično brez sodelovanja državnih organov oziroma vsedržavnega programa ali finančne podpore.

Prav potreba po ustvarjanju učinkovitega okolja za razvoj podeželskega turizma postavlja v ospredje njegovo teoretsko in praktično preučevanje. Cilj je zato razviti metodo za ocenjevanje potenciala za razvoj geoturizma in podeželskega turizma. Na obravnavanem območju ni niti splošnega sistema upravljanja niti kazalnikov za redno spremljanje družbenih, političnih in ekonomskih sprememb. S kazalniki trajnostnega turizma lahko namreč spremljamo dejanski učinek politik, krepi pa se tudi splošno razumevanje okoljskih, socialnih in gospodarskih izzivov ter razumevanje vrzeli v strategijah upravljanja in pomanjkanju zmogljivosti.

V raziskavi je bila na podlagi trinajstih kazalnikov, razdeljenih v štiri kategorije uporabljena metoda delfi, z namenom ugotoviti, kako lahko destinacija postane zanimiva za geo- in podeželski turizem. Za potrebe raziskave je bil izdelan poseben vprašalnik, mnenja pa so bila pridobljena s sodelovanjem strokovnjakov, ki delujejo na preučevanem območju.



Kazalniki so bili razdeljeni v štiri kategorije:

- (1) kakovost storitev: dostopnost geološke dediščine, možnost GPS navigacije, razpoložljivost gostišč v bližini, možnost uporabe kreditne kartice za plačilo storitev, razpoložljivost gostinskih storitev v namestitvah;
- (2) okolje: pokrajinska pestrost, nevarnosti za obiskovalce, obstoj registra geološke dediščine regionalnega pomena;
- (3) sistem upravljanja: zavarovanje obiskovalcev, možnost spletne prodaje (socialni mediji);
- (4) rezultati: zadovoljstvo vaščanov, zadovoljstvo obiskovalcev, pomen geološke dediščine za razvoj podeželskega turizma.

Pomen geološke dediščine za razvoj podeželskega turizma je po mnenju strokovnjakov vključenih v raziskavo na visoki ravni – 50 % jih je dalo oceno »dobro«. Aktobska oblast ima zaradi raznolikosti geološke dediščine velike možnosti za razvoj tovrstnega turizma, ki bi ob ustrezni informiranosti ter podpori države in gospodarstva lahko postal uspešen.

V okviru raziskave je bila izvedena tudi analiza SWOT za oceno razvoja geoturizma in podeželskega turizma na preučevanem območju. Analiza je pokazala številne prednosti, predvsem pa podala seznam priložnosti, ki kažejo na velik potencial za razvoj geo- in podeželskega turizma po trajnostnem vzorcu. Pomanjkljiva infrastruktura in promocija ter kakovost storitev so največji izzivi in ovire za razvoj obravnavane vrste turizma.