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Prospects For the Use of a Methodology to Assess the Potential for Integrating Archaeological Sites into Tourism Activities on the example of the Rostov Region

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Abstract

Introduction. This article examines the prospects for using the author's methodology for assessing the potential for incorporating archaeological sites into tourism activities. The methodology presented here is based on ideas found in scholarly publications by Russian and foreign authors on assessing the condition of archaeological sites, the tourism and recreational potential of a given area, and the development of archaeological tourism.

Materials and Methods. Archaeological sites in the municipal districts of the Rostov Region were evaluated based on five criteria: transportation accessibility, infrastructure availability, hosting of events, availability of guided tours, and public engagement. The evaluation criteria were developed based on the potential recreational qualities of the archaeological sites, the realization of which could, in the future, contribute to their inclusion in tourist itineraries. The study employs general theoretical methods and approaches: synthesis, analysis, modeling, as well as dialectical and comparative-historical approaches.

Results. Based on the derived comprehensive assessment, patterns of territorial differentiation of archaeological resources in the Rostov Region were identified for each district. It was found that the administrative districts located in the southwest of the Rostov Region have the greatest potential, due to the traditionally high level of economic development in this area, its dense population, and, consequently, its well-developed infrastructure. At the same time, an overall decline in the assessment was observed along the “center-periphery” axis.

Discussion and Conclusion. The study proposes the development of archaeological tourism routes throughout the Rostov Region based on the results of the methodology employed, and outlines measures to help regions with low ratings reach the level required for the inclusion of local archaeological sites in the tourism industry. The study also highlighted the geographical proximity of the highest-rated archaeological sites to tourism infrastructure, such as major transportation routes, lodging facilities, and other amenities. The results of the assessment served as the foundation for proposing potential archaeology-themed tourist routes throughout the Rostov Region, which were also identified in the study. The versatility of the presented methodology makes it possible to anticipate its application in other regions of the Russian Federation.

Keywords: assessment methodology, Rostov Region, tourism, archaeological tourism, archaeological sites, regional differentiation, tourist route, prospects for development

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Перспективы использования методики оценки возможности вовлечения археологических объектов в туристскую деятельность на примере Ростовской области

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Аннотация

Введение. Статья посвящена вопросам перспектив использования авторской методики оценки возможности вовлечения археологических объектов в туристскую деятельность. В качестве базиса для представленной методики рассматриваются идеи, представленные в научных публикациях российских и зарубежных авторов по вопросам оценки состояния археологических объектов туристско-рекреационного потенциала территории и развития археологического туризма.

Материалы и методы. Археологические объекты муниципальных районов Ростовской области были оценены по пяти параметрам – транспортная доступность объекта, инфраструктурная обеспеченность, проведение событийных мероприятий, наличие реализуемых экскурсий, публичная активность. Параметризация оценки была сформирована на основе потенциальных рекреационных свойств археологических объектов, реализация которых в перспективе может способствовать привлечению их в туристские маршруты. В исследовании применяются общетеоретические методы и подходы: синтез, анализ, моделирование, диалектический и сравнительно-исторический подходы.

Результаты исследования. На основе выведенной интегральной оценки для каждого района были выявлены закономерности территориальной дифференциации археологических ресурсов Ростовской области. Было выявлено, что наибольший потенциал имеют административные районы, располагающиеся на юго-западе Ростовской области, в следствие традиционного высокого уровня экономического развития данной территории, плотной заселенности и, соответственно, развитой инфраструктуры. В то же время общее снижение оценки зафиксировано по вектору «центр – периферия».

Обсуждение и заключение. Предложено формирование археологических туристских маршрутов по территории Ростовской области, базирующиеся на результатах использованной методики, обозначены меры по достижению районами с низкой оценкой уровня необходимого для включения локальных археологических памятников в туристскую индустрию. Также было отражено территориальное сорасположение археологических памятников, получивших наиболее высокую оценку с объектами туристской инфраструктуры – транспортными магистралями, средствами размещения и другими. Результаты проведенной оценки послужили фундаментом для предложения потенциальных туристских маршрутов археологической направленности по территории Ростовской области, также обозначенных в исследовании. Универсальность представленной методики позволяет прогнозировать возможность ее применения на территории других субъектов Российской Федерации.

Ключевые слова: методика оценки, Ростовская область, туризм, археологический туризм, археологические объекты, территориальная дифференциация, туристский маршрут, перспективы развития

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Introduction. Within the field of geographic research, the study of tourism and recreational resources from the perspective of developing potential itineraries plays a special role. These issues have gained renewed relevance in the 2020s for several reasons. The first reason is the publication of the “Strategy for the Development of Tourism in the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2035,” whose primary goal is “... the comprehensive development of domestic and inbound tourism in the Russian Federation by creating conditions for the development and promotion of high-quality tourism products that are competitive in both domestic and global markets” [1]. Achieving this goal is impossible without an objective assessment of the condition and logistical connectivity of tourism resources, particularly in regions that have not previously been utilized, or have been only minimally utilized, in the tourism sector.

The second reason is the observed shift in the government’s focus toward the development of domestic tourism, given the objective impossibility of organizing tours to a number of international destinations and the need for comprehensive economic development of the regions of the Russian Federation. In light of this, the development of new domestic tourism

destinations in specific regions of the country through the use of their unique tourism resources appears to be a promising and important endeavor.

Optimal utilization of tourism resources requires an adequate methodological assessment of their condition. This assessment, in turn, must be based on objective criteria regarding the potential for integrating these resources into the region's tourism industry.

Such resources include archaeological sites and landmarks, the use of which in tourism has long not been a priority for certain regions, despite the significant tourism potential of these sites. In particular, archaeological sites are among the main attractions for tourists in certain destinations, such as Rome, Athens, Machu Picchu, Beirut, and others. At the same time, despite Russia's significant archaeological potential, which stems from centuries of cultural and historical development across its territories, archaeological tourism has not yet become widespread, developing primarily in the Chelyabinsk Region, the Republic of Crimea, the Krasnodar Krai, the Pskov and Novgorod Regions, and the Perm Krai.

According to the author's interpretation, archaeological tourism is a type of tourism involving organized visits to archaeological heritage sites, specially equipped excavation sites, and archaeology-focused museums for educational and/or popular science purposes, with the possibility of participating in special events. It should be noted that the authors' interpretation focuses specifically on the educational component of archaeological tourism, rather than on the possibility of tourists' direct participation in excavations. The latter, in the authors' opinion, falls under the category of scientific (not popular science!) tourism and should be the subject of specialized research. Archaeological tourism, in particular, has the potential to become a "growth driver" for the development of domestic tourism in Russian regions, as it integrates historical, cultural, ethnographic, social, demographic, and other aspects; consequently, this type of tourism may be of interest to enthusiasts of various types of educational tourism products.

In the Rostov Region, despite the significant number of cultural heritage sites (11,292), archaeology-focused tourism has not yet been developed. The existing tourist route, "The Golden Ring of the Bosporan Kingdom" [2], covers only a few sites in the southwestern part of the Rostov Region, such as the "Tanais" Archaeological Museum-Reserve, as well as the cities of Azov, Rostov-on-Don, and Taganrog. It appears that the noted low level of involvement of archaeological sites in the region's tourism sector is a consequence of the lack of comprehensive information about the significance of these sites and the possibilities for their recreational use. It is believed that this problem can be solved, including at the scientific and methodological level.

Materials and Methods. This study draws on research by Russian and international scholars addressing issues such as the assessment of archaeological resources and tourism and recreational potential, including at the level of individual territories. Regarding the assessment of the condition of archaeological sites, the authors drew on the works of A. Kairišs and I. Oļevska [3], which focus on archaeological sites in Latvia, as well as those of Y.Y. Kurashov [4], who studied issues related to the assessment of cultural heritage sites. These publications served as the basis for developing the assessment parameters for sites in the methodology presented in this article.

With regard to the use of archaeological sites in tourism, the research was based on publications by B. Afkhami [5], which focus on the characteristics and functions of archaeological tourism, as well as those by D. Ross, G. Saxena, F. Correia, and P. Deutz [6], who examined the foundations of the development of archaeological tourism, as well as G. Ismagilova, L. Safiullin, and I. Gafurov [7], N. Huete-Alcacer [8], L. Heau [9], who focus on the involvement of archaeological sites in tourism activities in specific regions. The study also drew on the works of A.V. Minenkova, A.E. Potapova [10], and A.A. Filobok [11], which address issues related to the use of archaeological sites in the tourism industry across various regions of Russia.

As fundamental research in the field of assessing the tourism and recreational potential of territories, the authors drew on publications by L. Wang, D.M. Liu, L.E. Wang, H. Zhu, and J. Lin [12], who studied regions of China; N. Farsani [13] and others, who investigated the tourism attractiveness of Asian territories; M. Doğan [14], who developed the concept of tourism attractiveness for eco-regions in the United States; G. Ramírez-Guerrero [15], who investigated the parameters of cultural sites' attractiveness; and Sinclair-Maragh [16], who conducted similar studies in European regions. Among domestic studies, we note the works of T.P. Rozanova and co-authors [17], as well as L.N. Kazmina, E.M. Shevchenko, and Yu.V. Osipova [18].

At the level of the Rostov Region, specialized studies were conducted by G.E. Ekinil and L.N. Kazmina [19], focusing on the innovative activities of museums in the Rostov Region as a factor in tourism development; O.A. Khoroshev, I.V. Kedrova, and L.V. Karich [20], who examined the potential for using archaeological sites for guided tours in an urban setting (using the city of Rostov-on-Don as an example).

From a methodological perspective, the authors draw on the work of A.A. Fedulin's research group [21], whose contribution to research in this field is defined by the identification of methodological approaches to the assessment of

cultural and historical tourism resources, as well as on their own previous publications devoted to the development of tourism in the Rostov Region [22].

The study employs general theoretical methods and approaches: synthesis, analysis, modeling, as well as dialectical and comparative-historical approaches.

Results. The unique nature of archaeological resources intended for tourism – which lies primarily in their considerable age (up to several millennia) – underscores the importance of assessing their state of preservation and the prospects for their use in tourism in their current form. There is also the issue of physical access to these sites for tourists, which is determined by their location below ground level. Often, these sites are hidden from potential tourists, and only a small portion of them is visible above ground as a result of excavations. Therefore, a certain level of attractiveness, i. e. the availability of guided tours and special events, is particularly important.

It should be noted that archaeological sites are often located outside urban areas, in rural settings, which requires a special focus on the issue of transportation accessibility. We would like to emphasize that for a number of archaeological sites, due to the specific characteristics mentioned earlier (their location below ground level), the issue of accessibility for tourists in general is relevant; however, this parameter is not included in the methodology, since its zero value renders the assessment based on the other parameters meaningless. As a result, the developed methodology is, a priori, focused on sites that are physically accessible to visitors.

An important component of the appeal of archaeological tourist sites is their visibility in the public sphere (their so-called public presence) without which most potential tourists will lack knowledge about the site, its significance, the services it offers, and the events it hosts.

Given these circumstances, the authors have developed a methodology for assessing the potential involvement of archaeological sites in tourism, comprising five criteria: transportation accessibility, infrastructure availability, the organization of special events, the availability of guided tours, and public visibility. The validity of this methodology is determined by its applicability to any archaeological site, regardless of its geographic location.

This methodology, which includes certain parameters typical of tourism site assessments, is unique due to its specific focus on archaeological sites and its application to a specific territory, which defines the originality of the study.

At this stage of the study, the methodology described was tested in the Rostov Region. The evaluation was conducted on a scale of 0 to 3. As a result, an overall score in the range of 0–1 was designated as “unsatisfactory,” 1–2 as “satisfactory,” and 2–3 as “good”. Consequently, all 43 municipal districts were evaluated based on the criteria listed above. The evaluation parameters are presented in Fig. 1.

The parameters presented were selected to assess the potential for incorporating archaeological sites into tourism activities, given their recreational significance. Thus, to create a tourist route, the sites included in it must be logistically connected, including having accessible access roads and parking areas, be safe for tourists, offer a certain range of services (including those tied to specific dates), and be actively promoted in the region’s and the country’s overall information landscape.

While the possibility of selecting additional parameters is permissible (which, undoubtedly, may be a subject of academic debate), the specified set of parameters can be considered optimal, given the specific nature of the objects under analysis (archaeological sites) and the subject of the study (their potential for use in tourism).

In addition to the recreational significance of the selected parameters identified earlier, a key priority was the ability to calculate them for all analyzed sites, regardless of their geographical location (most sites are located at a relatively great distance, which limits the application of certain possible parameters, such as their inclusion in tourist routes). At the same time, each parameter carries equal weight in the evaluation process, given the apparent impossibility of adequately determining their relative importance for tourism development.

For each region, five archaeological sites were selected from the register of archaeological heritage sites of federal significance located within the Rostov Region [6]. In addition to our own research, the selection of sites in the regions was based on consultations with historians, archaeologists, and tour operators in the region. To ensure a diverse range of archaeological significance, sites were chosen that represented as wide a variety of cultures and eras as possible. It should be noted that five sites from the district may be considered insufficient for a comprehensive analysis; nevertheless, there is an objective limitation on the number of potential sites due to their scarcity in certain districts (we emphasize that we are referring to sites that can be evaluated according to all criteria).

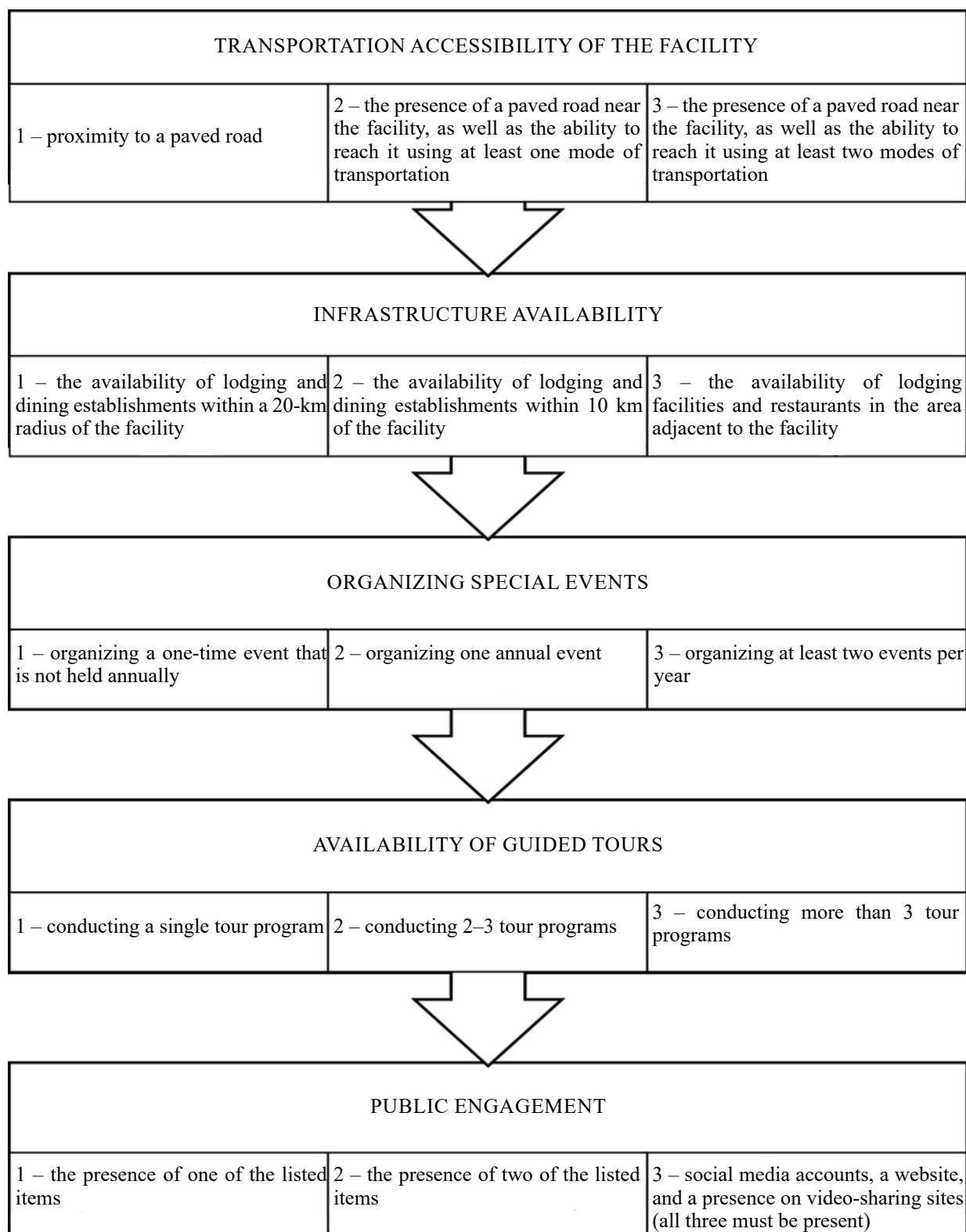


Fig. 1. Methodology for Assessing the Potential for Incorporating Archaeological Sites into Tourism

Discussion and Conclusion. The assessment conducted revealed a number of patterns in the geographical distribution of archaeological sites based on their potential for integration into tourism activities. The main pattern is that the overwhelming majority of areas that received relatively high ratings are located in the southwestern part of the Rostov Region. The main reasons for this phenomenon include the presence in this territory of the region's most urbanized zone, centered on the Rostov metropolitan area. The historical development of this zone has led to the presence of appropriate infrastructure here – including transportation, hospitality, cultural and entertainment facilities, and others – which has a positive impact on the state of the tourism sector. At the same time, the region's location in the most densely populated

area facilitates the hosting of events, including those held at archaeological sites, which also had a positive impact on the assessment.

Special mention should be made of the presence of well-developed archaeological sites in the southwestern part of the region, in particular the “Tanais” Archaeological Museum-Reserve and the “Lost World” Ethno-Archaeological Complex. There is also an extremely low rating in districts located at a considerable distance from the region’s economic center (with the exception of the Verkhnedonsky and Martynovsky districts). At the same time, the number of sites in these districts appears sufficient to develop archaeological tourism routes. However, limiting factors include the lack of a fully developed tourism infrastructure and lodging facilities, as well as a shortage of information about these sites in the regional information sphere.

The methodology presented here is of great importance for the practical development of tourist itineraries, as it provides a structured approach to assessing the suitability of archaeological sites for inclusion in guided tours. By systematically evaluating factors such as transportation accessibility, infrastructure development, the availability of events, the organization of guided tours, and public engagement, tour program organizers can make informed decisions about which archaeological sites to select for their own itineraries. It should be clarified that the focus here is specifically on integrating sites into itineraries and specialized tours, as local tourism development is already taking place at a number of sites.

Provided that the assessment process takes into account requirements for the preservation of cultural heritage, this methodology will help preserve historical memory among the local population and tourists visiting these destinations.

To further develop the methodology for assessing the potential for integrating archaeological sites into the tourism industry, several avenues for research appear feasible. One suggestion for improving the methodology is to expand the set of criteria beyond the five factors currently identified, with the aim of including additional indicators relevant to tourism development, such as environmental sustainability, cultural receptivity, visitor amenities, and economic impact. Furthermore, one effective way to improve this methodology is to refine the scoring system to produce more accurate assessments.

It is also important to take into account the views of stakeholders (local government officials, historical heritage experts, tourism management bodies, and environmental organizations) to gain diverse perspectives and identify the current priorities.

Based on the results of the study, a number of conclusions can be drawn.

1. The methodology developed by the authors for assessing the potential involvement of archaeological sites in tourism consists of five criteria, each of which is rated on a scale from 0 to 3. The main indicators used in the analytical assessment include: transportation accessibility, infrastructure availability, the hosting of events, the availability of guided tours, and social activity on the Internet.

2. Compared to other regions, the Rostov Region has a large number of cultural heritage sites (11,292), which creates favorable conditions for the development of archaeological tourism. Despite this, at most of the existing archaeological sites, the tourism potential is not being developed sufficiently, or is not being realized at all.

3. The study revealed a pattern showing that most of the districts with a relatively high ranking, based on an assessment of the potential for archaeological sites within their territory to be integrated into tourism, are located in the southwestern part of the Rostov Region. This is primarily due to the location of the region’s most urbanized area, which is concentrated around the historic center of Rostov-on-Don.

First and foremost, this differentiation is due to historical factors, since it was precisely in this area that the largest ancient sites were located, such as the ancient city of Tanais, the Elizavetovskoye settlement, the Azov Fortress, and others. In addition, this area has the most developed infrastructure in the Rostov Region, which also influences the development of tourism, as it is home to the majority of lodging facilities, restaurants, parking spaces, and paved roads.

4. The practical significance of the methodology for assessing the potential for integrating archaeological sites into tourism activities involves implementing a number of specific measures. These include using the assessment results to plan tourist routes, organizing the development of tourism infrastructure near archaeological sites to improve them, and collaborating with government agencies and other stakeholders to jointly develop the tourism industry and preserve cultural heritage.

The methodology developed can also be used to compile a registry of archaeological sites and assess their integration into tourism activities for the purpose of organizing tourist events. Compiling this registry could serve as a “growth point” for sustainable tourism development and an important source of information for tour operators, enabling them to identify archaeological sites with significant potential for inclusion in excursions and tours. Incorporating into the Rostov Region’s tourism products those sites that received the highest ratings and are therefore best suited for welcoming tourists – will help optimize the region’s tourism sector.

5. To further develop a methodology for assessing the potential integration of archaeological sites into the tourism sector, expanding the system of indicators appears to be a promising approach. These indicators could include environmental sustainability, cultural receptivity, visitor comfort, and economic impact.

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