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## A Multilevel Universal Model of the Rural Tourism Cluster: Implementation at the Local Level

**Abstract.** In order to scientifically support the process of forming rural tourism clusters in Ukraine it is important to develop both universal and end-use applied models relating to clusters of the type “the village rest” as well as rural tourism type. They are classified as follows: by the aim – as conceptual and applied ones, by structural peculiarities – as structural (institutional), structural-functional and factor (determinant). A multilevel universal model of the rural tourism cluster with basic structural levels: base, partner and accompanying ones is offered for research and practice. This model was approbated for two cluster initiatives in the Carpathian (a cluster of rural tourism “Boykivski Gazdy”) and Nadsiania (a cluster Goat farm of “Fromages of d’Elise”) regions. Possibilities to use different types of research models in order to introduce cluster initiatives of the rural tourism in Ukraine on the regional and local levels are investigated.

**Keywords:** rural tourism, cluster, multilevel universal model, cooperation, implementation

### 1. Introduction

Forming and functioning of clusters of rural tourism is a pressing research and practical range of problems. There exists a necessity of introduction of projects of innovative type related to formation of cluster structures in the sphere of rural tourism in Ukraine. It is connected with organizational disunity of agricul-

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tural dwellings, insufficient development of basic and auxiliary infrastructure, low standard of services as well as poor informational and advertising activity in promotion of products and services. Introduction of the projects of innovative type aimed at improvement and promotion of rural tourism products and localities, including those related to formation of cluster structures, is of utmost importance for the rural tourism in the present context.

In the last decade, cluster initiatives formed by the criteria of the farmsteads associations, agritourist economies and local attractions in rural areas appeared in Ukraine. Scientific and methodological support of their activity involving research structures (universities, academic institutions) has not yet become an important constituent when developing cluster initiatives and providing functioning of operating types of clusters of rural tourism. There is a necessity of the detailed analysis of research models in relation to forming of cluster structures in rural tourism and development of the conceptual (universal) and applied models that can serve as the base for introduction of cluster initiatives.

Conceptual institutional cluster model of the rural tourism cluster development as well as possibilities for its implementation on the local level is grounded in the given research. This model was developed on the basis of foreign and Ukrainian conceptual and applied cluster models analysis.

The work was carried out within the framework of the project of the Rural Green Tourism Development Union “Rural green tourism – from divided farmsteads to territorial clusters” which was supported by the UNDP Ukraine Project Strengthening Small and Medium Enterprises Business Membership Organizations and the USAID Project Agriculture and Rural Development Support.

## **2. Tourism and agritourism cluster models – their classification and use**

Cluster models in tourism have their own specific features. In most cases they rest on basic Porter’s model as a geographically localized grouping of mutually related enterprises which enable raising their competitiveness [Porter 1990; 1998]. This approach was used in a cluster tourism model E. Smeral [1996] where competitive features of a tourism destination are determined by supplier quality and structure, network alliances, strategies and purposes as well as demand conditions. The tourism destination competitiveness model (TDC) where the determining factors are the main resources, destination management, planning and development policy, as well as amplifying factors (location, infrastructure, accessibility) [Ritchie & Crouch 2000], is the most popular topic for research. This model enabled transition from traditional approach based on the destina-

tion attractiveness to purposeful competitive approach [Fundeana 2015]. Of great importance for practice is Tourism Cluster Development Model for Global Competitiveness [Kim & Wicks 2010], where four components of tourism destination mentioned in J.R. Ritchie and G.I. Crouch scheme [2000], as well as structural-functional elements: universities, companies, authorities connected in different ways (informal, cooperative) are presented as important compounds. Besides, they put emphasis on the role of transnational corporations.

The mentioned models of tourism clusters are mainly of a conceptual character and used as an important scientific and constructive instrument when justifying specific tourism clusters.

Another group of tourism cluster models is application oriented and connected with specific tourism products as well as with presenting of the structure and functioning of acting tourism clusters. This group comprises cluster models of rural tourism development (agritourism). Among the well-known models are the Concept of integrated rural tourism (IRT) according to M. Cawley and D.A. Gillmor [2008], entrepreneurial and public approaches according to S. Wilson et al. [2001]. These models take into account the factors important for functioning of agritourism profile destinations. A special aspect concerns forming rural tourism cluster models as compounds of regional and local development [Štoković & Gržinić 2007; Cunha & Cunha 2005].

As the conducted research shows, basing on the peculiarities of building, conceptual tourism cluster models and tourism product clusters models (the applied ones) may be divided into structural (institutional), structural-functional, factor (determinant). To develop rural tourism clusters mainly structural-functional and factor models are used. As it is, research of existing and development of potential rural tourism cluster formations in Ukraine is based mostly on institutional and structural-functional models [Hrycku-Andriyesh 2010; Lytvyn & Nek 2013; Milashovs'ka & Goblyk-Markovych 2013; Vasilyev et al. 2017].

In the focus of the presented research there is development of rural tourism cluster model which refers to the models of institutional type taking into account certain functional ties. This model results from generalization of existing foreign and Ukrainian developments on cluster problems in rural tourism. Its universal character is related to possibility of being used for two main types of rural tourism: "village rest" and agritourism [Sznajder & Przezbórska 2006].

Based on the use of the constructive-logistical approach, the hierarchical structural model of rural tourism clusters formation, taking into account its base, partner and accompanying members, was justified. To introduce this model in specific destinations, the algorithm of actions (logical-structural succession) with concrete stages was specified.

The range of problems of introduction of the worked out tourism cluster models is examined in different aspects: by means of development of structural-

logistic of stage-by-stage realization of cluster initiative, creation of management plan of cluster formation or through specially created administrative structures.

### **3. Analysis of research models of rural tourism clusters and development of multilevel universal model**

Foreign and Ukrainian experience of scientific developments of models for rural tourism clusters and the ways of their implementation testifies to a great diversity of approaches. In particular, rural tourism cluster models may embrace certain regions (agricultural areas) of the countries, such as Austria, Switzerland, Poland [Roman 2013; Mazurek 2014; Borkowska-Niszczoła 2017], Croatia [Štoković & Gržinić 2007; Lukić 2013], Brazil [Cunha & Cunha 2005] as well as take into consideration both general resources and social-economic characteristics of rural areas and main factors of rural tourism product competitiveness.

The issue of developing models of rural tourism clusters is rather debatable in Ukraine. Among the organizational and functional models of rural tourism clusters, the following types have been distinguished: conceptual, of general participant structure, clusters of different hierarchical level (locality, region) and functional structural ones.

In particular, in the study of I. Lytvyn and M. Nek [2013], the conceptual structure of business entities is represented by the following set: entrepreneurs - owners of rural dwellings, trade and service facilities, catering, a shop producing souvenirs, entrepreneurs providing transport services, travel agencies, local authorities, health and educational institutions. In this structural model, entities are considered to be equivalent, without being divided into certain hierarchical levels according to their significance in the cluster's functioning.

Structural and functional models of the proposed tourist cluster for the Transcarpathian [Milashovs'ka & Goblyk-Markovych 2013] and Chernivtsi [Hrycku-Andriyesh 2010] administrative regions show that authors envisage, as the main subjects of the cluster, accommodation facilities, agricultural producers, catering, transport enterprises, tourism management bodies in the region and educational institutions. The effect of their interaction should result in the creation of a tourist product of the region. In these proposed regional models of rural tourism clusters, interaction is important both at the regional level and among the main actors of this specialized association.

The most common models are the structural functional schemes of existing cluster initiatives in various regions of Ukraine (West, South, East), which were previously analyzed. The study of this type of models [Vasilyev et al. 2017;

Zinko, Malska & Solski 2018], that is, existing clusters and cluster initiatives, has allowed the authors of this paper to offer their typology based on the criterion of smart-specialization.

The below models of RT clusters and cluster initiatives in Ukraine are based on the structure of the participants, specific types of their interaction and smart-specializations. Organizational functional disadvantages of these types of models include: lack of differentiation of participants according to their functions (leading, affiliate, secondary), insufficient emphasis on the resource and infrastructure basis of clusters (tourist attractions and material base), as well as the lack of definition of the main vectors and specific participants of interaction.

**Multilevel universal model of RT cluster.** For implementation of cluster initiatives on rural tourism with due regard for the actual state of activity of the subjects of the clusterization process in rural areas of Ukraine, we proposed a multi-level, universal structural and functional model of the rural tourism cluster. This model provides for the allocation of the main hierarchical levels of the cluster subjects (basic, affiliate, accompanying) with their resource support and the main levels of interaction (inter-level, intra-level). This model was approbated on the example of two clusters – the mountainous one in the Ukrainian Carpathians and in the Nadsiania region (the Baltic sea basin).

In terms of content, this universal model envisages three main levels:

- basic level – defines specialization (key idea) of the cluster and includes its main subjects (owners of rural homes, providers of agritourism services, agricultural enterprises) and tourist attractions of the area (natural, historical, cultural, socioeconomic). The interaction between actors at this level can be manifested through the development of agritourist networks, local agritourist products, provision of tourists with traditional food and local agricultural products;

- affiliate level – can be represented in the cluster by partner structures aimed at the comprehensive provision of tourist services in the countryside. They usually provide additional services (traditional and alternative transportation, organization of leisure and local festivals, services for participants interested in active, educational, recreational and gastronomic tourism);

- accompanying level – in the cluster of rural tourism it is associated with organizations and structures that facilitate the development of the cluster and promote its services on the market (self-government and government agencies, research and educational institutions, information and advertising centres, investment campaigns). The organizational formation of the cluster and its material and financial support through the implementation of projects within the framework of regional, national and international programs depends on this level.

This universal model of the rural tourism cluster with its main content components can be visualized in the form of appropriate concentres (Fig. 1). The basic level of the rural tourism cluster can be represented as an internal concentre



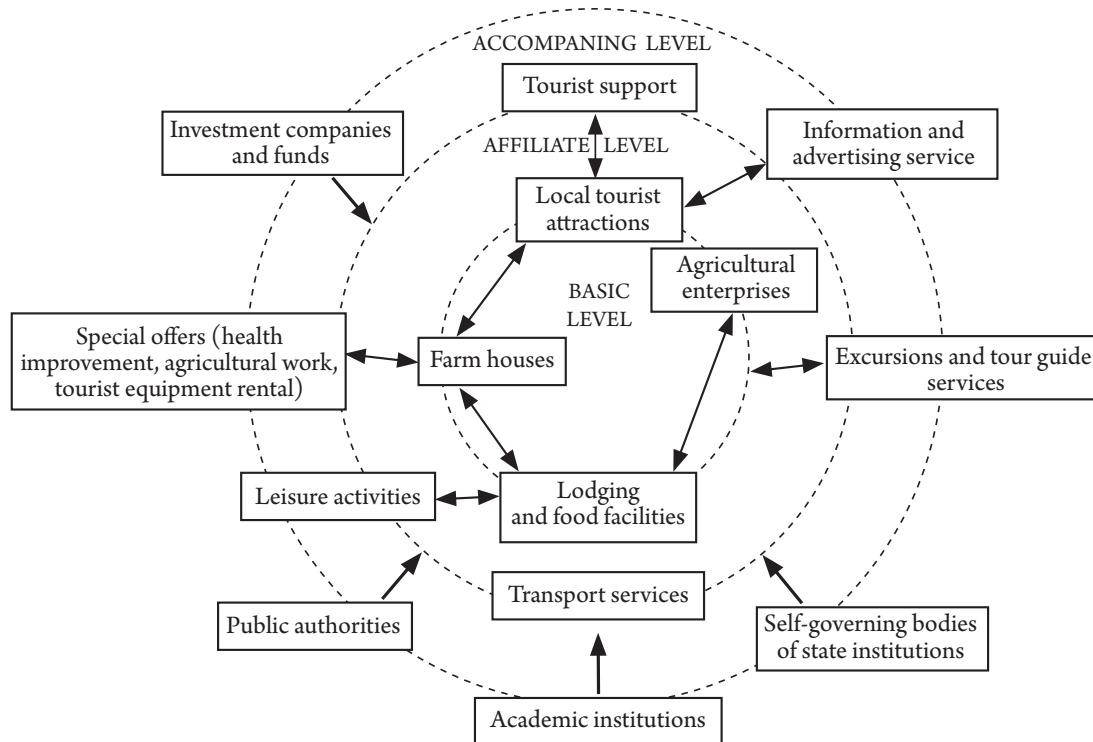


Figure 1. Multilevel universal model of the rural tourism cluster

Source: own elaboration.

(core) in the graphic model. The constituents of this concentre are providers of basic services and maintenance of the main tourist attractions of the area.

The following intermediate concentre graphically represents partner structures that provide additional services for tourists in the countryside. It is important for them to cooperate with the basic subjects of the cluster of the internal concentre.

In the graphical model of the cluster, the organizations and structures that support activities of the cluster are graphically represented by a peripheral concentre. For the accompanying level, the relationships between partners and entities providing core and complementary services in the cluster are important.

#### 4. Step-by-step implementation of cluster initiatives in the Carpathian and Nadsiaonia regions

For introduction of universal multilevel model of the rural tourism cluster the algorithm of actions was worked out with certain stages in relation to specific rural

tourism and agritourism destinations. It envisages five basic stages in forming the cluster:

**I stage** is an authentication of the base subjects of the cluster through the study of tourist potential of a territory and establishment of basic services providers (agricultural dwellings and farms owners) and degree of ties among them.

**II stage** is an analysis of possibilities of partner organizations and additional services providers as well as the character of ties among them (supportive, cooperative).

**III stage** is an evaluation of possibilities of supporting (accompanying) organizations that will assist organizational, financial and marketing support of cluster initiative.

**IV stage** is informative-educational and scientific-innovative providing of cluster initiative by means of seminars and trainings for base, partner and accompanying participants.

**V stage** is development of cluster strategy and action programme as well as formalization of the cluster in the form of business associations, public organizations, cooperative societies.

Approbation of the developed model was carried out on an example of two local destinations representing the night quarters and gastronomic objects of rural tourism of the “village rest” type in mountain areas (Skole district in Ukrainian Beskids) and farmer enterprises and agricultural dwellings (Nadsiannia).

As mentioned above the multilevel universal model of the rural tourism cluster was approbated on the example of cluster initiatives on rural tourism in the Carpathian region (ethno-ecological tourist cluster type the “Boykivski Gazdy” and in Nadsiannia (agritourism cluster Goat farm “Fromages d’Elise.”

The “Boykivski Gazdy” ethno-ecological tourist cluster. The idea of cluster initiative on rural tourism in Skole district has become possible within the framework of the “Rural green tourism - from divided farmsteads to territorial clusters” of the Rural and Green Tourism Association which was supported by the UNDP project in Ukraine entitled “Strengthening of business associations of small and medium enterprises” and the USAID Project “Agrarian and Rural Development Support Programme.” The idea of cluster development was supported by the association of rural homes owners of Skole and neighbouring villages (northern part of Skole district). This territory of the cluster initiative has a significant potential for the development of rural tourism, which will ensure its specialization and will serve as an alternative to ski specialization in the southern part of the region (Slavske and Plai ski centres).

The idea of the cluster lies in voluntary joining of efforts of all interested parties in rural tourism to create a new tourist product in Skole district. The purpose of the cluster is to focus on the development of ethnographic, ecological and recreational tourism based on cooperation between farm houses and mini-hotels,

catering, manufacturers of traditional and environmental products, amateur folk groups, and nature and history protection institutions.

The territory of the cluster initiative covers the northern and central parts of Skole district, where the majority of villages and the district centre of Skole provide rural tourism services on the basis of private rural homes, cottages, mini-hotels, and hotel and restaurant complexes [Vasilyev et al. 2017; Zinko, Malska & Solski 2018]. In the last decades, cooperation is being established there between nongovernmental bodies, catering facilities, producers of traditional and environmental products, folklore ensembles, nature conservation and cultural institutions, and public organizations to develop new products and a spectrum of services. This cooperation has become the basis of the cluster of rural tourism as an effective tool for promoting the territory in the tourist market. As a result of meetings and consultations, priority was given to the development of attractions and services related to ethnographic, ecological and leisure activities, that is, to a local product of the cluster. As to its specialization, the cluster belongs to lodging and food (farm houses) type with an ecological and ethnographic product (Photo 1).

First three stages of introduction of the mountain cluster “Boykivski Gazdy” on the base of lodging sites (agricultural dwellings) were focused on bringing in of base, partner and supporting participants.

In terms of the market potential of the “Boykivski Gazdy” rural tourism cluster, it was necessary to identify its main participants in qualitative and quantitative aspects and the main types of tourism activities according to the proposed model. The **basic level** of the cluster is made up of the owners of farmsteads, cottages, and hotel and restaurant complexes. The **affiliate level** of the cluster is represented by the producers of traditional and environmental products, craftsmen, ethno-folk ensembles, as well as by business people providing transport, excursions and additional services. An important part of this level of the cluster “Boykivski Gazdy” is formed by the providers of services, related to excursions, environmental protection (the “Skolivski Beskydy” national park) and history and culture (“Tustan” State Historical and Architectural Reserve), as well as travel agencies of Lviv. The **accompanying level** of the cluster includes local self-government bodies (district and village councils), state bodies (departments of tourism and agri-industrial complexes of district state administrations, district employment centre), a number of public organizations (Association of Entrepreneurs of Skole district, “Impulse” training and production complex, the Agency for Regional Development, local branch of the Rural Green Tourism Association), and educational institutions (the Stryi Agrarian College, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Lviv Institute of Economics and Tourism, Bydgoszcz Economic University (Poland)). The total number of cluster participants was 43 in the beginning of 2018.





Photo 1. Traditional Boyko dwelling and costume as a brand of ethnographic-ecological cluster “Boykivski Gazdy” (author V. Pryndak)

Informative-educational and skilled-innovative provision through conducting working meetings and seminars with participation of base, partner and accompanying representatives became an important stage of forming the rural tourism cluster “Boykivski Gazdy.” In organizing and implementation of these events a considerable role was played by experts and trainers from the Association of promotion of rural green tourism in Ukraine, scientists of Lviv educational establishments and leaders of public organizations of regional development.

The marketing profile of the cluster is shaped by the following offers: rest in traditional Boyko farm houses; eating traditional Boyko dishes; tasting and purchasing ecological produce of the mountain region; participation in traditional entertainments and holidays; local festivals; local souvenirs, visiting folk craftsmen and master classes; rehabilitation and rejuvenation according to the recipes of folk medicine (bathing in vats, apitherapy, phyto-tea); trips to the protected areas of the “Skolevski Beskydy” National Park (mountain valleys, virgin forests, waterfalls, rocks, caves, aurochs); learning the history of Boyko ethnical group and visiting the unique wooden rock fortress “Tustan”; practising various types of active tourism: skiing, trekking, equestrian and water tourism, cycling. At the special strategic session the final name of the cluster as well as its smart-specialization was ratified by the potential participants of the cluster (V stage of introduction). Strategy and annual programme of the cluster development with corresponding events was worked out and approved.



Photo 2. Goat farm “Fromages d’Elise” (farm “Shevret” on cheese production of Belgian Bernar Willem) (<http://chevrette.com.ua/>)

The first stages such as: forming the base level as well as forming the partner participants network for to the cluster of agritourism initiative “Agritourism cluster of Goat of farm »Fromages of d’Elise«, where agricultural enterprises (goat farm) and households constitute the base, were carried out.

The basis of promising agritourist cluster in Nadsiania will be the goat farm “Fromages d’Elise” (farm “Shevret” on cheese production of Belgian Bernar Willem) (Photo 2). The tourist component will base on servicing tourists on the farm during excursions and tasting products.

## **5. Models of rural tourism clusters and their application for regional and local development**

The modern tendency of development of the rural tourism cluster models testifies to considerable attention to the models of structural-factor type. It is emphasized, that the specifics of cluster models for rural areas is provided by such factors as integration into the local systems and specific use of resources [Lukić 2013], that distinguishes them from the forms of mass tourism. Apart from it, a considerable role in their development is played by rural communities, where community management and participation of local self-governance play a signifi-

cant part. Importance of administrative factors including presence of the leading body of the cluster and policy of its activity planning is emphasized in many models.

Households characteristics (financial, human, social capitals), as well as variety of land use [Lukić 2013; Santana-Jiménez et al. 2011] is of great importance for tourism cluster development in rural areas. In order to strengthen rural tourism destinations competitiveness, ecological factor, that can serve as their important brand at the market of services, is significant.

Alongside, it is worth mentioning that in the models of structural-factor type the cluster participants selection, their meaningfulness (hierarchy) and interrelations is reflected insufficiently. Further development of rural tourism cluster models is seen in two aspects: through detailed development and hierarchization of the subjects of development in factor models as well as “enriching” of structural (institutional) and structural-functional models by the factors (determinants) of competitiveness. These tendencies are fixed in a number of modern models of tourism clusters development [Kim & Wicks 2010; The Andalucía Tourism Cluster 2011].

An important scientific-methodical and practical problem for development of clusters of rural tourism is their introduction at regional and local levels. From scientific-methodological point of view it takes place by means of creation of end-use cluster models, in particular, influence of cluster activity on regional and local development [Cunha & Cunha 2005], alongside with development of analytical, organizational and services instruments [Štoković & Gržinić 2007]. Another group of models represents existing clusters at local and regional levels through the specifics of their structural and structural-functional organization [Hrycku-Andriyesh 2010; Vasilyev et al. 2017].

Practical issues of implementation of the developed cluster models at the regional and local levels are provided by a certain system of recommendations in the form of implementation of specific steps (stages). Here emerge the problems of approaches to cluster formation as follows: the choice of the scheme “from top to bottom” by the initiative of the authorities, tourism associations or “bottom-up” with broad involvement of the village community and its public figures. The issue of formalizing the local-level rural tourism clusters (business associations, cooperative societies, public associations) is of utmost importance. As experience of creation and operation of rural tourism clusters of Poland and Ukraine testifies, the two identified approaches to the creation and provision of clusters of rural tourism both with the participation of administrative bodies (“from above”) and local communities (“from below”) were combined [Roman 2013; Borkowska-Niszczoła 2017].



## 6. Conclusions

The analysis of research on the range of problems of tourism clusters development testifies to the importance of working out of different types of their models of both conceptual and applied character. By peculiarities of the structure, they can be divided into structural (institutional), structural-functional and structural-factor (determinant). The mentioned types of models are widely used when forming cluster initiatives in rural areas and generalization of functioning of existing rural tourism clusters.

Based on the analysis of scientific-methodical approaches and practice of functioning in relation to clusters in rural tourism, the universal multilevel (institutional) model of development of rural tourism clusters taking into account base (granting basic services), partner (granting additional services) and accompanying (scientific institutes, supporting government bodies) members and ties among them is grounded in the article. In a graphic form this model is presented by a concentric chart with the list of participants and ties among them. Universal character of this model is related to the fact that it can be used for creation of the clusters referring to the basic forms of rural tourism (village rest and agritourism). This structural model can be a constituent base for structural-functional and factor models that are widely used in research of cluster range of problems in rural tourism. At the same time, this model has corresponding practical potential when used at regional and local levels. It can be used for forming of two types of clusters: village rest and agritourism. A logical-structural sequence of its stage-by-stage implementation for cluster initiatives of the “village rest” and agritourism types is proposed.

An example of the use and stages of implementations is provided for cluster initiatives in Ukraine: of the mountain cluster in Beskids and agritourism cluster in Nadsiania.

Further research on the range of problems of development and introduction of rural tourism cluster models should be focused on detailed development of structural, functional and factor (determinant) constituents for their conceptual varieties and expansion of spectrum of the applied models with a special purpose setting. For scientific accompaniment of the process of rural tourism clusters formation in Ukraine, an improvement of the two types of applied models related to the “village rest” and agritourism itself is of utmost importance. The range of problems relating to clusters creation is up-to-date when diversifying these types of agrarian economy of Ukraine.

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## **Wielopoziomowy uniwersalny model klastra turystyki wiejskiej: wprowadzenie na poziomie lokalnym**

**Streszczenie.** W artykule przedstawiono analizę modeli badawczych klastrów turystyki wiejskiej na Ukrainie. Reprezentują one różne typy: koncepcyjne, hierarchiczne według kryterium terytorialnego i funkcjonalno-strukturalne. Do celów naukowych i praktycznych zaproponowano wielopoziomowy uniwersalny model klastra turystyki wiejskiej o poziomach strukturalnych: podstawowym, partnerskim i towarzyszącym. Model ten został przetestowany na bazie dwóch inicjatyw klastrowych w regionie karpackim (skupisko turystyki wiejskiej „Boykivski Gazdy”) oraz w Nadsianni (klastr Goat Farm „Fromages d’Elise”). Podkreślono konieczność wykorzystania w badaniach klastrów turystyki wiejskiej zagranicznych doświadczeń ich rozwoju i funkcjonowania.

**Słowa kluczowe:** turystyka wiejska, klastr, wielopoziomowy model uniwersalny, interakcja, wprowadzenie