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Recreational Landscape Value in Tourism Development of Central Yakutia

Liudmila Zamorshchikova, Viktoriia Filippova,
Antonina Savvinova, Marianna Samsonova and
Elena Totonova

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Abstract

Tourism is a significant element of Russia's social and economic development. Northern territories play an important role in the development of the Russian national economy in general and of the tourism industry in particular. Northern tourism involves careful observance of environmental and social sustainability, promotion of traditional native knowledge and value systems, and preservation of native cultural heritage and cultural landscapes. This article provides an analysis of the promotion of the tourism potential in Yakutia. Russia's northern territories are rich in natural resources and economic potential but lack effective tourist infrastructure due to harsh climates and vast permafrost areas. This research is funded by the Russian Science Foundation (project # 15-18-20047 "Landscape ontology: semantics, semiotics, and geographic modeling"). This article presents the results of an analysis of the recreational landscape of "Orto Doidu" tourist complex, which is open year-round and located in the Khangalassky region of Central Yakutia. The main factors for tourism development were determined to be a set of landscape characteristics (the unique nature of the Lena River, the biological diversity of flora and fauna), ethnocultural and historical context, and infrastructural considerations (proximity to the capital city, inexpensive transportation, and engineering systems).

Keywords: landscape, recreational value, tourism development, cultural and natural heritage

1. Introduction

Territorial differences create various predispositions for regional development in the context of natural conditions, resources, and historical heritage. The North is the largest of the

remaining territorial reserves; its resource potential is tremendous. Tourism development in the North could be viewed as one of the ways to explore the new northern lands, where each of the northern nations has its unique regional characteristics. Regional potential depends on the territory's attractiveness, level of national economic development, infrastructure, national mentality, and legislation.

Recently there has been a considerable increase in the number of tourists wishing to visit the North. The growing popularity of environmentally sustainable recreation has resulted in new forms of tourism, as well as in new forms of recreational offerings in the sphere. Among some of the key reasons for the increasing popularity of northern tourism are significant overloading of the traditional mass tourist routes, global warming, and transport development. Environmental and ethnographic factors play a key role in the development of northern tourism. The native population has preserved their traditional lifestyle, while traditional natural resource management is becoming the primary factor in Northern entrepreneurship promotion [10].

The unique natural resources found in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Russia, greatly enable the development of tourism, which is thus capable of becoming an alternative type of economic activity and income source. In Yakutia, one can enjoy the wild density of taiga forest, vast reaches of tundra, the severe beauty of mountain ridges, the icy landscapes of the Arctic, and the unique cultures of the native peoples. Although local climactic conditions do not favor many types of recreation, among some of the most promising forms of tourism are environmental, sport, cruise, ethnographic, social, rural, business, research, and discovery traveling [9].

1.1. Tourist potential of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)

The tourist market in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) is relatively new due to the territory's geographic remoteness from the major tourist centers and weak transport infrastructure. According to 2013 data, there were 83 travel companies in the republic. 4.8% of those acted as tour operators, 54% as travel agents, and 6% combined the above types of activities, while 34.9% were involved in tour and excursion planning. The revenues from paid tourist services increased significantly (433.2 mln roubles in 2013, which is 60% more than the revenue gained in 2005). The average number of personnel employed by travel companies was 356 people (apart from those employed on part-time basis and subcontractors) [12, 14].

Inbound tourism emerged in Yakutia with the beginning of perestroika, the socioeconomic and political transformations starting in 1985, when the Republic was visited by up to 1.8 mln tourists per year. During the recession years, this number fell drastically to only 60 visits. Nowadays there is a stable growth and development of both inbound and internal tourism in the Republic. According to 2013 data, 3 000 international tourists visited the republic, which is 66% less than in 2005 (4 700 tourists). The majority of visitors come from Germany (26.4%) and China (23.8%). International tourists prefer extreme voyages, such as visits to Oymyakon village ("Pole of Cold" tour), to Verkhoyansk (ascending the sacred Kisilyakh mountains), as well as to the Lena Pillars and Buluus national parks [11].

As airfares increase one may observe a stable growth of domestic tourism in the republic. Just 5–6 years ago, the local travel companies predominantly dealt with outbound tourism. Nowadays domestic tourism keeps evolving as new travel routes open in various regions of the republic. Among the most popular tours are Lena Pillars river cruises, hunting and fishing trips, the “Pole of Cold” festival, visits to preserved territories (national parks, Ust-Lena preserve), as well as “Yakutsk and its surroundings” cultural and discovery tours. The main types of domestic tours are weekend tours, event tours, and various activities centered on social tourism, such as youth or senior tours [Op.cit.].

The domestic tourism market in the republic is seasonal, peaking in July and early August, when weekend tours to the regions surrounding Yakutsk, Lena River cruises, and rafting tours are in particular demand. The domestic tourism market predominantly comprises vacationing natives of the republic, mostly urban citizens. Over the recent years, there has been an increasing demand for the Republic’s tourist products on the part of Russian tourists from large cities like Moscow, St. Petersburg, Ekaterinburg, and Novosibirsk, among others. According to the Republic’s Federal Statistics Service data from 2013, 8 700 people used the services of tourist companies to travel within Russia. This is 24.5% of the total number of tourists. The most popular domestic tourism destinations were Krasnodar Territory (21.3%), Moscow (10.6%), and Altai Territory (4.7%). Internal republic tourism makes up 61% of the total number [14].

The specificity of tourism in Yakutia defines the principle of five “Es”: ecology, ethnos, extreme, exotic, and exclusive, noted the ex-minister of Entrepreneurship and Tourism of Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) Ekaterina Kormilicina [2]. Today, the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) attracts international tourists, thanks to its ethnic culture and elements of exoticism.

The leader of tourism development in the Republic is the Khangalassky region. Its tourist attractions are subdivided into three clusters: Orto Doidu tourist and recreational complex, Samartay, and Lena Pillars Nature Park. In 2013 200 000 tourists visited the region. Khangalassky region hosts a strong tourist and recreational potential, with unique nature complexes located in proximity to the capital, marked by a convenient transport scheme, and located on the banks of the Lena. The latter helps to promote environmental, fishing/hunting, adventure, historical and cultural, as well as several other forms of tourism. This is the reason tourism in the region is viewed as one of the high-priority spheres of the municipal economy, along with building materials manufacturing and agriculture.

2. Recreational landscape of Khangalassky region

2.1. Natural heritage

Recreational resources are resources of all types that can be used in satisfying the population’s need for recreation and tourism. Khangalassky region is an example of convenience from the viewpoint of both tourist infrastructure provision and availability of resources necessary for tourism development. Its territory has a rich natural potential for active tourism development, in mass, as well as exclusive forms. Due to the abundance of hills in the area, athletic tourism

(activity-based, recreational, and extreme) is particularly popular in Khangalassky region. Some examples are river rafting, snowboarding, and mountain skiing.

Its geographical position and characteristics of its hunting grounds and resources make Khangalassky region the most visited and desirable area for hunting enthusiasts. Management and planning of amateur/professional hunting and photographic tours have great potential for the development of tourism and services on the part of the local hunting centers.

The dominant natural resource is “Lena Pillars” park (included in UNESCO List of World Heritage Sites in 2012) (**Figure 1**). The Pillars present a system of vertically elongated rocks, stretching for many kilometers along the banks of the Lena River across the Prilenskoye plateau. Within the borders of the nature park, one can find stratotype sections of formations from the Lower Cambrian tier of the General Stratigraphic Scale. These formations are unique due to the abundance of their faunistic characteristics. Cambrian sediments are exposed in uniquely picturesque cliffs that reach up to 350 m in height. The park administration takes an active part in developing and promoting tourist products on the park’s territory. In 2014 the park offered 12 routes differing in lengths, pricing, and levels of sophistication.

Another paleontological monument is the Oy-Muran reef mass. It is the world’s oldest reef mass and clear evidence of the Earth’s oldest reef ecosystem, as well as of its fossil flora and fauna. The Oy-Muran reef is a Lower Cambrian rock bioherm where fossilized archaeocyatha and epiphyton-type limestone algae are abundant. The length of the reef is 3 km, with a width of 0.2 km. This natural monument is located 13 km above Iedyai village, on the left bank of Lena, and 2 km below the issue of Mukhatta River (a left tributary of the Lena).

“Sinsk Pillars” present an example of a geological monument. The rocky banks known as “Pillars” stretch for many kilometers. At 70–100 m high, they form quite fantastic shapes. Here one can observe a miraculous combination of breathtakingly beautiful places. At the source of Muustakh Khandaa (Kyryytas) spring lies a large icy buildup, 3–4 m thick in winter months and presenting an unforgettable sight. In some places the left bank of the river is decorated with tall sandy slopes (Kyrtastar) with sandy and pebbly beaches on the banks; its bed is abundant in rapid rifts.



Figure 1. Lena Pillars. The photo is taken by Antonina Savvinova.

Another unique geological object, the hydrogeological natural monument Buluus, is located 3 km to the southeast of Kysyl-Uruie village (**Figure 2**). The source of the mineral spring is represented by three groups of emersions. The compound of the water is hydrocarbonated and calcareous. It forms ice buildups of clear fresh water, which do not melt even on hot summer days at temperatures above +30°C. Some years the depth of buildup in July reaches 3 m. Drawn from a 67-m-deep well, the water of Buluus is the cleanest fresh water. Its quality has been monitored since 1939.

Among the interesting geocryological objects of the area are tukulans—typical sandy formations of the cryolithic zone marked with peculiar vegetation and presenting large dynamic wind-born sandy masses determined by their geographic environment (**Figure 3**). There are two tukulans on the territory of Khangalassky region: “Kysyl Elesin,” located on the bank of Lena 8 km from the mouth of the Buotama river, 14–25 m above water level, and “Saamys Kumaga” 40 km away from the first tukulan. The latter is about 5 km long and 850–900 m wide in its widest section. It is presented as an interdigitation of hollows, banks, and ridges; some of the hollows are rich in vegetation.

Unique landscapes are presented by the largest valleys: that of Erkeny and Samartay, the only right-bank Lena valley. Erkeny stretches more than 50 km from the northwest to southeast and is surrounded by Prilenskoye plateau hills on its western side. The Lena lies on its eastern side; it is 10 km wide. Erkeny is the home of the ancestors of the Sakha people and home to many sacred sites. One such site is the Ysyakh complex where the people of Khangalass conduct sacred rites. Every summer, people gather to celebrate the summer solstice and to worship the Sun, nature, and the upper divinities or Aiiyy. Located in the center of the valley is Orto Doidu zoo, which is very popular among both people of the republic and its guests. Tekhtur sports and entertainment complex is the center of active, extreme, and family recreational activities. The mountains in this location are round and elongated,



Figure 2. Buluus. The photo is taken by Antonina Savvinova.



Figure 3. Tukan. The photo is taken by Antonina Savvinova.

which makes them very popular among avid skiers and helps to promote skiing as recreational activity. The prepared track is 450 m long. Snow canons allow the prolongation of the skiing season well into May, as well as its opening in September. Stunning views and close proximity to the city help to promote active recreation among city dwellers. Samartay valley lies on the right bank of Lena. It is home to unique natural attractions like Buluus, the rocky bank of the Lutenge river (Turuk Khaia), Kuruluur water fall on the Menda river, and other places.

Stratigraphical natural monument “Isit” is an open-pit mine which is a hydrostratotype of the Tommot formation of the lower Cambrian system, as well as a stratotype of regularis and lenaicus-primigenius archaeocyte zones. The lower border of the formation is concealed; lower reaches of the pit are exposed by a wellbore in the source of Bydyngaia spring and not far from the source of Kysy-Taas spring. The pit exposes the upward-directed top residuals of Tolbin and variegated (Tommot formation) sets, as well as of Nokhoro band (Atdabanian formation).

2.2. Cultural heritage

Historical and cultural potential is an important advantage of the Khangalassky region. It is the home of numerous sites of cultural heritage, the specifics of which are defined by their predominant archeological and ethnocultural character which have a significant social function: archeological materials are exhibited in local museum complexes; annual festivals are held; the historical heritage of post stations once located along the Irkutsk-Yakutsk post passageway is preserved and used in creating tourist goods.

The cultural landscape includes architectural monuments, archeological excavation sites, museums, monuments, and so on. Some of them are included in the Single National Registry of Objects of Cultural Heritage of the Peoples of Russia, while others are still in the process of undergoing certification. Historical heritage objects found on the territory can be subdivided into following groups:

2.2.1. Archeological monuments

There are four of them on the territory of Khangalassky region: “Kullaty” site, “Diring Uryakh” archeological monument, and two petroglyphs—the Sinsk petroglyphs and Toion-Aryy petroglyphs.

1. “Diring Uryakh” is one of the unique archeological monuments located on the territory of “Lena Pillars” park. It represents the Ymyiakhtakh culture of II c. B.C. It is located at the estuary of the Dirirng-Uryakh river on the right bank of the Lena at the altitude of 105–120 m. It was discovered in 1982 and was studied by the Prilenskaya archeological expedition headed by Svetlana A. Fedoseieva. In 1982–1983 five late Neolithic burials were found there. They were in the form of stone boxes in which men and children were buried. The barrow is unusual not only in displaying the signs of burial ceremony uncharacteristic of Yakutia’s ancient cultures but also in the wealth of burial inventory [4].
2. “Kullaty” is considered as the historical home of the ancestors of Yakut people—Tygynites dating from the Neolithic age, paleometals, and early Yakut time.
3. Sinsk petroglyph (Sinskoie, according to A. P. Okladnikov) is located at the mouth of the Sinyaya river, on the rocks of its right bank and right under the village of Sinsk. It includes three groups of drawings. The first group, known as “Sinsk frieze,” is represented by a group of drawings “predominantly crimson-red in color” and anthropomorphic in shape, where the figure of an elk stands out clearly. The second group of drawings is represented by a mysterious shape or fragment reminiscent of either a face shape or a ladder. The third group is significant for the depiction of 13 vertical long and short “sticks” located on “a separate protuberance” [7].
4. Toion-Aryy petroglyph is located on the left bank of the Lena, 1778 km from its mouth. The rocky ridge around the drawing is composed of rectangular embedded plates of dark-gray limestone and stretches from the small valley of an unnamed creek from Ulakhan-An village for 2 km to the village of Toion-Aryy. Located opposite the rocky outcrops with the drawings and across the creek is Toion-Aryy island. In the petroglyph one surface with ten drawings stands out: zoomorphic creatures drawn and filled in with solid color, elks in skeletal style, and anthropomorphic figures with shaman attributes drawn in dark-red, light-red, and light-crimson ochre. There are singled out six drawings: zoomorphic skeletal figures of elks and three stylized anthropomorphic figures with shaman attributes. In 2001 four previously unknown drawings were discovered: three zoomorphic figures and one diagonal line, hardly visible under the layer of organic buildup. Stylistic characteristics of the drawings allow the object to be dated from II–I c B.C. to between I c.A.D. and the Middle Ages [1].

2.2.2. City building and architectural monuments

This group includes wooden constructions dated to XIX c.: St. Nicholas wooden church and the Fortress—a two-story barn with loopholes.

1. St. Nicholas church (the wooden church) in Kachikatsy was built in 1892. Its construction was funded by parishioners and charity donations. It is a wooden church with an adjoining bell tower. The Kachikatsy St. Nicholas church represents a type of wooden church widespread in Yakutia in the XIX c. It has two domes with six smaller heads and an adjoining two-story bell tower. The building is oriented from west to east along its length. Its total length is 25.65 m and mid-width 9.76 m. The log construction in its middle part is 5.58 m tall, while the height of the bell-tower construction is 7.04 m. The construction is made of big larch trunks 30–40 cm in diameter. The church entrance is located on the western side and runs across the lower construction of the bell tower. The total area of the church is 188.80 m². In 1920 the Kachikatsy church was closed, and its crosses and domes were removed; the building itself was used as a literacy center. Nowadays the church building is part of the municipal history and ethnography complex “Satal.” Thanks to the joint efforts by the administrations of Kerdem village and Khangalassky region, the roofing, bell tower, domes, and heads of the church with crosses on them have been restored [5].
2. A wooden two-story barn fortress with loopholes is an architectural monument of the nineteenth century located in Myndyly not far from Kerdem village. It presents a typical construction equipped with special loopholes for arrow shooting on the second story.

2.2.3. *Historical monuments*

The largest group of historical monuments represents 81.4% of the total number of historical and cultural objects of the region. The majority of these objects are monuments dedicated to the Great Patriotic War heroes (51.8%) and Civil War heroes (29.6%). The remaining monuments honor prominent personalities. Great Patriotic War monuments commemorate events or military and civilian heroes and are found in nearly every community of Khangalassky region. Conversely, Civil War monuments can only be found in locations of mass graves of Soviet heroes.

3. Ethnic culture as factor of tourism attractiveness

Yakutia is primarily known in the world as one of the most recognizable cold inhabited places on the planet. However, lately there is an active ongoing development of summer tourism in Yakutia. The majority of tourists arrive in late June in order to attend the Ysyakh festival. The festival, which nowadays is attended by 150 000 people over the course of 2 days, is one of the best examples of successful regeneration and reconstruction of traditional cultural practices and spiritual heritage which had been partially lost during the Soviet period.

The Yakut national festival of the summer solstice Ysyakh was declared a national holiday in the early 1990s in the republic. Ysyakh is the only ethnic festival displaying native Siberian celebrations that preserved its original character even through the Soviet period. It clearly reflects the ecological culture of the Yakuts, with its complex ideological reverence of nature and respect for all living things. A dialog between humans and the world of nature and the environment created a coded link where a person was incorporated in nature, correlating it with their economic, social, ritual, and biological life. Ysyakh is an ancient ritual festival. It is mentioned and

described in old texts of the Olonkho—the ancient Sakha epic. It reflects the cult of the Sun and its annual cycle. It is also known as the “festival of white abundance,” for the sacred drink of Ysyakh is mare’s milk-based kumys. Sakha are horse breeders and cattle breeders, whose ancestors divided each year into summer and winter time. The long and exhausting winter with its harsh frosts is tiresome both physically and mentally. Thus, the arrival of warmer months brings a certain feeling of awakening and regeneration after a long winter [6].

April ends the Yakut calendar year and marks the beginning of the spring rites. These rites are based on traditions dictated by work cycles, as well as by observations of nature and seasonal changes. Ysyakh (from Yakut verb “ys” — “to sprinkle”) is the main Sakha festival. It was celebrated during the summer solstice, on June 21. This day marked the peak of summer for the ancestors of Sakha people. From this day on, the solar day starts to shorten; this also means the arrival of the longest, hottest days and white nights. It was believed that on this day the Aiiyy spirits, creators of the world and embodiments of good and creation, approach the Middle world (the world of people) in order to bless them. Thus people gather, dressed in traditional Yakut costumes, to perform the circular dance of “osuokhai”; this is when one can hear the sounds of khomus (mouth harp) and taste fermented mare’s milk (kumys) and national dishes [5].

3.1. “Orto Doidu” cultural and historical complex

One of the popular places of Ysyakh is located near the capital city of Yakutsk in Khangalassky region in the area of Orto Doydu. The name of the area is closely linked with the division of the world into the Yakut mythology, the Upper, Middle, and Under Worlds. Orto Doydu means “a Middle World,” in which people live, as opposed to the Upper World, the abode of gods, and the Under World populated by abaahy—monsters and devils.

The choice of the site for the annual national holiday Ysyakh is not accidental. The determining factor for this was the historical significance of the place which special beauty and structure of the landscape fits well the rites and ceremonies of the festival, as well as the transport infrastructure for the organization of major cultural events of the regional and now the national level.

Historically, this area is also marked. It is the Erkeeni valley where first stayed and lived ancestors of the Yakut. The old name of the terrain is Ebeh Aana. The word “ebah” in the Yakut language means “grandmother” and is used for flattery addressing and naming of large water basins, rivers, and lakes, which play an important role in the economic life of the family. The word “aan” — “a door entry” — in geographical aspect means “the entrance to some area or out, or located at the entrance, in front of something.”

The terrain on the west side is surrounded by mountains (Yakut. “myraan”), which are considered to be a primordial bank of the Lena River; probably in ancient times, the old mouth of the Lena River flowed near this area. This hill has been successfully woven by organizers with esthetics and philosophy of the event: on the mountainside there was constructed a sacred tree Aal Kuduk Mac in the form of nine circles, representing the ancient Yakut calendar and at the same time an eternal circle of life.

According to the legends and historical documents, in early seventeenth century, Tygyn Darkhan, the legendary leader of the Yakut tribes, relying on the strength of Kangalassky tribes and Bootur warriors invited from other places, subdued many Sakha tribes and clans to combine them into “IL” — Yakut “state.” That was his attempt to create a unified state of Sakha people but, as historians and the facts prove, did not achieve its great goal.

3.2. Principles of landscape and architectural organization

The “Ysyakh” complex as a part of “Orto Doidu” tourist and recreational complex is situated 50 km away from Yakutsk, on the left bank of the Lena (**Figure 4**). The place for Ysyakh is selected in accordance with ancient traditions. As a rule, it is a big flat field, open on the east side in order to perform the sun greeting ceremony. The local topography is used to the benefit in “Orto Doidu”: on its east side, a wide valley borders with the river; its western side is closed off by a ridge of high hills.

This complex takes up a vast territory where the ancient traditional housings (urasas), and a composition depicting cranes and the regional totem, an eagle—are located. The hill has been successfully woven by organizers into the esthetics and philosophy of the event: on the mountain side, the sacred tree Aal Kuduk Mas appears in the form of nine circles, representing the ancient Yakut calendar.

The design of the complex is based on traditional architecture. This is particularly true for ritual constructions.

The space around Ysyakh festival is based on old legends and, in particular, the olonkho. According to folkloric tradition, the festival projects the Yakut myth of Ellei, a cultural hero and forefather of the Sakha nation. The corpus of mythological texts cited by G. V. Ksenofontov’s “Elleiead” (1977) allows for a reconstruction of the primary plot of the festival [3].



Figure 4. Ysyakh complex. Photo is taken by Antonina Savvinova.

The kumys festival “Ysyakh” of the Sakha people, the world’s northernmost horse breeders, presents a system of nature divination based on the worship of the sky, the water, and the Earth. It includes:

- Production cults (linked to cattle breeding).
- Fertility cults (beginning, birth, and regeneration of life).
- Protection cults (protection of humankind).
- Cults of hearth keeper (harmony at home and piece in the family).
- Cult of good luck and well-being (blessing of life).
- Cult of protection against evil spirits (purification and healing).

When designing the complex, its authors were guided by five principles of recreational activities’ spatial organization: concept of value, informational provision, ethnocultural directive, dynamic architecture, and coexistence of spaces. The latter is viewed by the authors as coexistence of natural space and artificial (functional) space. Using the definitions of the postindustrial world, it links several spaces of various structural origins:

- Natural space, historically determined as sacred landscape.
- Ethnocultural directive in design—recreation of space in historical aspect.
- Dynamic architectural space—as an event-oriented phenomenon in contemporary public life.
- Introduction into modern virtual space.
- Emergence of new conceptually valuable cultural space of the region and its introduction into the global cultural space.

According to the vision of Viliam F. Yakovlev, the creator behind the design of “Orto Doidu,” the complex is thus divided into three main areas:

1. Northern, adjoining the lower terrace of the mountain ridge—“Ceremonial.”
2. Southern side of the valley space—“Guest.”
3. Southern, adjoining the highway and beyond—“Parking.”

The main ritual centers of the Ceremonial area are located along the landscape on the higher points. The rites of “Greeting the Sun” and “Drinking Kumys” take place there. The sun greeting rite is the culmination of the festival. Traditionally Ysyakh is celebrated on the longest day of the year (June 21–22). The sun greeting takes place as a collective communion ritual on the night of June 21–22. This is the moment awaited by all who want to “charge” themselves with solar energy for the whole year and to ensure the favor of gods who listen to people’s prayers

on these days. Yakuts believe that words of prayer uttered in the hour before dawn are heard by powerful and benevolent deities. As a rule, it is the ritual part of the festival that gathers the majority of participants; it is the ritual that fulfills the festival's primary meaning, allowing people to come closer to nature and to take a philosophical perspective on their lives, to wish good upon themselves and loved ones, to regenerate spiritually and physically (**Figure 5**).

Located in the quieter and cozier places of the same area are "Olonkho" and "Osuokhai" tusulge. Here one can listen to the narrators of olonkho—the ancient epics of the Sakha—and take part in a ritual circle Osuokhai dance. The notion of *tusulge* is central to understanding the space of Ysyakh, which is divided into many thematic tusulge. It is a form of an open-air altar (its entrance faces east where the white deities live), surrounded by the young birch trees, or *chechir*, forming the sacral border forbidden to a sinner. Sacred salama are hung on the birches—these are ritual ropes made of horsehair and colored pieces of cloth with symbols of bounty and well-being made of birch bark. In the center of the kumys-drinking area, in the middle of tusulge, there are three or four horse-tying poles, or *serge*, connected by crossbeams hung with large leather vessels filled with kumys. All the vessels and plates must be wooden, made of a single piece of birch trunk. In general, it is the Ceremonial area which is the spiritual center of the festival. It is a place where an individual participates in the magical rite of Ysyakh, forgetting oneself, becoming one with nature, feeling one with the eternal and endless world [13].

It should be noted that the original plan had undergone a number of changes; eventually, a construction symbolizing the Yakut calendar in a circular spiral shape with poles depicting the 11 Yakut months was built on the slope of the hill. The spiral, counting time rotates toward the outside along with the sun, thus embodying and stating the infinity of life and being. 365 people (in accordance with the number of days in a year) dressed in stylized costumes ascend the Aal Kuduk Mas which is represented by nine circles of Yakut hedge built on the slope of the hill. They represent days and months of a year. Having ascended the complex which represents the eternal circle of life and ancient Yakut calendar, they change costumes as seasons change (**Figure 6**).

Ysyakh intertwines mythology and religion, esthetics, and moral values of the Sakha people. Today Ysyakh is the unifying symbol of rebirth not only of the traditional culture of the Sakha people but also of humanistic trends in national projects of the new Russia.



Figure 5. Yakut people in traditional costumes. The photo is taken by Antonina Savvinova.



Figure 6. Ancient calendar. The photo is taken by Mikhail Mestnikov.

4. Creation of tourist cluster in Khangalassky region

In order to promote further tourism development, the administration of the Khangalassky region has elaborated a tourism development project, which in its turn may become the pilot project for building a series of effective tourist enterprises in the republic.

The cluster approach is the basis for tourism development in Khangalassky region. Its territory is subdivided into three clusters:

- Tourist-recreational cluster “Orto Doidu,” located at the 49th km of Pokrovsk tract in close proximity to Yakutsk
- Tourist-recreational cluster “Samartai” which includes the museum complex “Samartai,” tourist complex “Buluus,” “Kuruluur,” and water-park “Kysyl Syyr”
- Tourist-recreational cluster “Lena Pillars” which includes Diring-Yuryakh, rivers Sinyaya and Buotama, and hotel complex “Serkeen Sehen,” as well as some others

Currently the following can be found within the “Orto Doidu” tourist-recreational cluster: “Tekhtur” sports and entertainment complex (skiing center), ice complex “Oktem-park,” sport and entertainment complex “Orto Doidu” consisting of a restaurant and shooting ground, ritual complex “Ysyakh Erkeeni,” and “Orto Doidu” zoo. In addition, 16 entrepreneurs work on the territory involved in sales and catering. Tourists are attracted by the historical sites of Kullaty, Yakut national traditions, culture, epics, lifestyle, beliefs, and legends, as well as by the unique landscapes of the region. In addition, the territory of Orto Doidu cluster is the site of traditional annual celebrations, which attract more than 30 000 people from all over the republic and other areas.

“Tekhtur” sports and entertainment complex is a resort with developed infrastructure located at the 46th km of Pokrovsk tract, not far from Tekhtur village. A relaxed atmosphere, beautiful landscape, and proximity to the city all contribute to building the right conditions for active recreation. The hills in the area have soft and long slopes, which makes them particularly popular among mountain skiing and snowboarding enthusiasts.

“Orto Doidu” cultural and ethnographic complex is located at the 49th km of Pokrovsk tract on the territory of “Orto Doidu” tourist and recreational cluster. Here, in Erkeeni valley

people are drawn to the uniquely beautiful and clean natural environment, as well as by opportunity of being involved in healthy recreational activities.

“Orto Doidu” zoo presents a vast sphere of various activities for researchers, university, and school students. Students of the NEFU Faculty of Biology and Geography and Yakut Agricultural College annually hold research observations here, while those studying at the College of Arts and Arctic Institute of Arts come here to make sketches.

“Oktem-Park” ice complex is aimed at promoting tourism as well as at increasing the quality of the tourist service industry and its availability to all members of community. The complex is located at the 49th km of Yakutsk-Pokrovsk highway across the road from “Orto Doidu” zoo.

“Kosmopark” tourist center, “Khangalas-Sakha Omuk Ytyk Sire” museum complex is located at the 49th km of Yakutsk-Pokrovsk highway across the road from “Orto Doidu” zoo. Its main attraction is a planetarium. It occupies 1.13 ha of land. The site is not completed yet.

“Tuekey Myraana” is a scientifically proven location of the Tygynit familial burial ground, among whom are Masary Bazekov and Sofron Syranov. It is located at the 55th km of Yakutsk-Pokrovsk highway, opposite the Kuudu farm, across the road on the hill. There is a need to commemorate the location, perhaps with a monument.

“Kullaty”—the historical home of the ancestors of Tygynites, including Tygyn Munnian Darkhan’s father. Since the location is in close proximity to a main tourist route, it should be made part of the tourist-recreational cluster “Northern World.”

5. Conclusion

The analysis of tourism development in Khangalassky region shows that this sphere is capable of becoming the locomotive of local development. The promotion of tourism is also quite significant from the perspective of building a positive image of the region and the republic. This, in its turn, may attract not only tourists, but also investments into other spheres; tax inflow into local budgets, as well as creating jobs locally; and an improvement in the educational and cultural environment. Tourism development in the region faces the following challenges: costly transportation expenses, underdeveloped infrastructure, lack of qualified specialists, the need for more research and effective market monitoring, and disunity among stakeholders and participants.

The OECD Tourism Committee emphasizes that the culture is important for tourism and for the attractiveness of destinations. “The most successful destinations are those that can create a positive synergy between culture and tourism. But this synergy does not happen automatically: it has to be created, developed and managed” [8]. For instance, today Khangalassky region faces a lack of tourist-excursion services due to low levels of activity which limits the term of stay to a single day only. That is why one of the priority aspects of “Orto Doidu” cluster development is expanding the range of tourist services, development of tourist and hotel offerings aimed at motivating tourists to prolong their stay. “Orto Doidu” tourist-recreational cluster is analyzed as a project which should reveal the full ethnocultural potential (traditions, practices, traditional production, and culture) of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). Therefore,

the basic element of positioning the tourist product of Khangalassky region is the ethnocultural component with added environmental and entertainment components.

Natural and cultural resources, as well as their concentration form a recreational landscape—a natural landscape—aimed at and transformed for recreational activity.

One of such examples of recreational landscape is “Orto Doidu” tourist-recreational cluster. It is based on the Olonkho epic which in 2005 was granted the status “Masterpiece of oral and non-material heritage of the humankind” by UNESCO. The project is an ethnocultural complex, revealing the culture, traditions, and beliefs of the Sakha people.

The location of Khangalassky region as the republic’s main tourist region makes it particularly important to make additional efforts aimed at increasing the quality of tourist services and guaranteeing the safety of tourists. It is also important to conduct marketing research on the tourism potential with particular focus on the demand, high-priority spheres in tourism, potential for the development of municipal units, certification of tourist routes, and establishment of tourist information centers in the region. A powerful positive territorial brand will enable the clusters of “Orto Doidu,” “Lena Pillars,” and “Samartai” to be more recognized on the local market and to establish a possibility for entering the outer market, including international.

Therefore, tourism development perspectives in Khangalassky region will generate income, part of which is distributed to nature and culture preservation where not only direct costs of various activities are covered (fully or partially) but other areas as well. In its turn nature and culture preservation provides renewable resources for further tourist development. Nature preservation is an essential part of culture preservation, since it promotes the sustainability of traditional uses of natural resources. Thus century-old traditions of rational nature use by the territory’s native population are preserved.

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Author details

Liudmila Zamorshchikova¹, Viktoriia Filippova², Antonina Savvinova^{1*},
Marianna Samsonova¹ and Elena Totonova¹

*Address all correspondence to: sava_73@mail.ru

1 North-Eastern Federal University, Yakutsk, Sakha Republic, Russian Federation

2 Institute for Humanities and Indigenous Studies of the North, Siberian Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences, Yakutsk, Sakha Republic, Russian Federation

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