ABSTRACT. The systems analytical approach to the study of integrated regional development implies a joint consideration of elements constituting the regional system and of problems associated with specific sets of regional characteristics. This requires the grouping of elementary geographic (or administrative) areas into homogeneous zones in accordance with their socioeconomic characteristics. The purpose of this analysis is to provide planning authorities with guidelines for preparing adequate socioeconomic policies.

This paper summarizes the results of a classification and grouping of approximately 130 spatial units within the U.S.S.R. into a small number of homogeneous clusters. It will be of substantive and methodological relevance for scholars engaged in integrated analyses of regional development.

1. FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM AND THE RESEARCH METHOD

1.1. Formulation of the Problem

The 26th CPSU Congress set and formulated the task of working out and implementing a special food programme, the aim being full satisfaction of the country's requirements for food and agricultural raw materials and a substantial narrowing of the gap between rural and urban living conditions. This programme is called upon to provide a comprehensive solution to problems of economic and social development in the countryside on the scale of the whole country and in each republic, region and district.

Alongside the general, national part, the U.S.S.R. food programme must include zonal development programmes that differ in their aims and, at the same time, ensure the most effective attainment of social aims. Such programmes must be comparable and of a similar type, i.e., be built on the general conception of the guidelines for the long-term socio-economic development of the countryside.

For what territories should differentiated development programmes be worked out? In other words, how is the rural territory of the U.S.S.R. to be divided into zones that differ in their socio-economic development aims? Neither the 15 Union Republics nor the 24 economic regions into which the Soviet territory is divided are suitable, for many of them differ greatly in the character of rural development. Taxonomic units on the regional level
do not suffer from this defect, but their number (130) is too great for the social programme to be broken down right to the regional level — some intermediate link is required.

For this purpose, we suggest specially constructed socio-economic zones that differ in terms of their current state of rural development and the future prospects for this. These zones have been obtained using a comprehensive typology of the country's rural regions according to the comparative acuteness of the most important economic and social problems. By uniting regions that are "similar" in this respect into types and fitting these types onto the map, we get socio-economic zones requiring different development programmes.

1.2. Research Method

To obtain a typology of regions, they must be classified depending on the acuteness of the problems to be solved by the food programme. Very important in this context is the concept of a socio-economic problem as being a substantial gap between the goal-oriented (socially necessary) and actual states of some aspect of social development. This definition helps to measure and compare the acuteness of particular problems in various regions of the country.

Defining the range of major problems involved in long-term rural development, we have employed the idea of the functions of the countryside with regard to society, which we saw as: (a) coverage of society's food and agricultural raw material requirements, (b) participation in the demographic reproduction of the population, (c) settlement and economic development of territory, (d) provision of recreational facilities and medical care through the utilisation of rural recreational resources, (e) rational spatial organisation of the activities of the rural population, (f) creation of a sufficiently wide choice of jobs of different profile and a rational employment level of the rural population in social production, (g) satisfaction of the material, social and intellectual requirements of the rural population and (h) creation of the necessary conditions for the development of rural residents as individuals through education, instruction socialisation and the fostering of socialist norms and values.

If we take the optimal discharge of functions given the available resources as the general aim of rural development, those on the second level will be ful-