

# THE CONCEPT OF REGIONAL TOURISM SYSTEMS IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract.** The study explores the concept of Regional Tourism Systems (RTS) within the framework of sustainable development, emphasising the challenges posed by global instability, technological advances and socio-economic shifts. The *research aims* to modernise the RTS concept by introducing the RTS 2.0 model, which integrates digital technologies, adaptive management strategies and sustainability principles. *Methodology.* The present study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining theoretical and empirical research. The theoretical foundations of the study are established through an extensive literature review, which analyses key studies on regional tourism, sustainable tourism, and tourism management models. Empirical investigation is facilitated by case studies, with a particular focus on Ukraine, and these examine the impact of crises such as the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 and the ongoing war on regional tourism systems. A comparative analysis is employed to evaluate the discrepancies between conventional RTS and the proposed RTS 2.0 framework. In addition, data synthesis and trend analysis are utilised to identify the key drivers and barriers to sustainable tourism development. The *primary objective* of the present study is to analyse, modernise, and propose strategic solutions for developing RTS and ensuring their resilience in the face of global uncertainties. Specifically, the research defines the essential components of RTS and their role in sustainable tourism, examines the impact of instability (political, economic, and environmental) on RTS, develops and proposes RTS 2.0, an updated conceptual framework emphasising digitalisation, community engagement, and sustainability, and offers strategic recommendations for integrating sustainability into RTS while ensuring adaptability to crises. *Results.* The study finds that traditional RTS models are inadequate to address the dynamic challenges posed by global instability. The RTS 2.0 framework introduces several innovations. First, digitalisation and smart tourism use online platforms, virtual tourism and AI-driven analytics to enhance destination marketing and crisis management. Second, sustainable infrastructure development promotes environmentally friendly accommodation, renewable energy sources and waste management systems in tourism regions. Third, community involvement and local empowerment strengthen the role of local communities in tourism planning and management, and ensure the equitable distribution of economic benefits. Fourth, crisis adaptability establishes risk management frameworks for RTS, allowing for rapid adaptation to political conflicts, pandemics and economic downturns. Finally, holistic branding and destination management promote regional tourism clusters, linking tourist attractions for greater competitiveness and resilience. The study concludes that RTS 2.0 is a necessary evolution in tourism management, combining sustainability, digital innovation and resilience strategies. By adopting adaptive tourism governance, regions can increase their global competitiveness, attract more tourists and sustain economic growth even in times of uncertainty.

**Keywords:** regional tourism systems (RTS), sustainable tourism, tourism crisis management, digitalisation in tourism, community-based tourism, tourism competitiveness.

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## 1. Introduction

The development of regional tourism systems (RTS) has gained significant scientific and practical relevance in the context of global challenges and increasing economic and environmental instability. The evolving nature of tourism, influenced by technological advancements, security concerns and sustainability imperatives, necessitates an updated conceptual framework that aligns with contemporary realities. The study of RTS, particularly within the sustainable development framework, is crucial for ensuring long-term regional growth, economic resilience, and social stability.

The present study is distinctive in its emphasis on the modernisation of regional tourism systems. The study introduces the "RTS 2.0" model, which integrates digital technologies, adaptive management strategies, and sustainability principles. In contradistinction to conventional models, RTS 2.0 accentuates the role of networked destinations, digital marketing, community engagement, and flexible crisis response mechanisms in enhancing tourism competitiveness and resilience.

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To achieve this objective, the study sets the following tasks:

- 1) To review existing literature on regional tourism systems and sustainable tourism development.
- 2) To identify the primary factors influencing the stability and sustainability of RTS.
- 3) To analyse the impact of external challenges, such as economic crises and geopolitical instability, on tourism development.
- 4) To propose the conceptual framework of RTS 2.0 and its key features.
- 5) To outline strategies for implementing sustainable and adaptive regional tourism systems.

The research methodology employed in this study combines theoretical and empirical approaches, incorporating a comprehensive literature review, comparative analysis, case studies, and data synthesis. By examining global trends and regional case studies, primarily from Ukraine, this study aims to provide insights into the evolving dynamics of RTS and offer recommendations for their modernisation.

The logical structure of this paper is systematic, commencing with a review of the literature. The logical

structure of this paper provides a theoretical basis for RTS. This theoretical basis is. The study commences with an examination of the challenges and sustainability aspects of RTS in conditions of instability. The study introduces the RTS 2.0 concept, emphasising the challenges posed by unstable conditions and the advantages offered by the RTS 2.0 model. Finally, the paper discusses strategies for integrating sustainability into RTS and presents conclusions on the future development of regional tourism systems.

The present study contributes to the ongoing discourse on sustainable tourism development by addressing these aspects. It provides a foundation for future research and policy formulation in regional tourism systems.

## 2. Literature Review

Many scholars and researchers in tourism and geography have developed and used the concept of regional tourism systems.

Brian Garrod was one of the first to use the term "regional tourism system" in his academic work. In particular, Garrod B. and Fyall A. (1998) discuss the challenges and opportunities of sustainable tourism in the context of regional tourism systems. They argue that sustainable tourism requires a holistic and integrated approach that considers the economic, environmental and socio-cultural dimensions of tourism within a region.

Manuel Rodríguez-Díaz and Tomás F. Espino-Rodríguez (2008) have also employed the term "regional tourism system" to develop a model for strategic evaluation of a tourism destination based on internal and relational capabilities.

Concurrently, the conceptual principles of regional tourism systems analysis employed by these scientists and their peers were founded on the methodological principles of regional tourism development that had been previously established in the works of prominent scholars in the field, including Richard Butler, Jafar Jafari, and Geoffrey Wall.

Richard Butler is recognised for his contributions to the "tourism area life cycle" model (Butler, 1980), which pertains to the notion of the contemporary regional tourism system. Jafar Jafari is widely regarded as a pioneering figure in the field of regional tourism studies. He has contributed to the development of "tourism destination systems" (Jafari, 1989). Geoffrey Wall is recognised for his seminal contributions to the conceptualisation of "tourism regionalization" (Wall, 1997).

Concurrently, there has been a significant body of research conducted on the materials of regional tourism systems in different countries in recent decades. In particular, in Ukraine, the research of V. Papp (2015), A. Holod (2017), and O. Pidvalna

(2020), among other scientists, is focused on this research direction.

Recent studies have systematised the available experience. The essence of a "regional tourism system" was substantiated as a complex, open, partially self-regulating system formed under the influence of tourist flows. It consists of social, resource, infrastructural, organisational, managerial, scientific, educational and informational subsystems, the main purpose of which is the modernisation of the region's tourist sphere. Accordingly, the system-forming part of the regional tourism system is actual tourism activity in the sectoral and spatial dimensions. Its components are the spheres of activity within the regional economy that have direct or indirect connections with tourism activity. The region's natural complexes, settlement system, and spatial infrastructure form the substrate of the regional tourism system, providing the basis for carrying out tourist activities within its borders (Holod, 2017).

At the same time, due to the growing global instability caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and now by war, the concept of regional tourism systems needs to be updated, further structured and diversified in order to respond to today's challenges and ensure the sustainable development of regions.

### 3. Sustainable Development of RTS in Conditions of Instability

The results of the analysis of scientific approaches indicate that the regional tourism system is a complex and dynamic system that includes various components that interact to create and support tourism in a particular region. Some of the main features of the regional tourism system include:

1. Tourist demand (tourist flows). The level and characteristics of tourist demand represent critical components of the regional tourism system. The tourist flows that are observed can be conceptualised through various factors, including the number and type of tourists visiting the region, their motivations and preferences, and the seasonality of demand.

2. Tourism attractions. The region's natural, cultural and artificial attractions play a pivotal role in the regional tourism system. These attractions encompass a diverse array of elements, including national parks, museums, historical sites, festivals, and other distinctive characteristics that serve to attract tourists to the region.

3. Infrastructure and tourism services. The availability and quality of infrastructure and services are also essential components of the regional tourism system. The infrastructure and tourism services that are available to visitors can be categorised into several distinct types, including transportation networks, accommodation options, food and beverage services, and recreational facilities.

4. Destination management and marketing. The effective management and marketing of destinations are critical components of the regional tourism system. This encompasses a range of activities, including destination branding, promotion, pricing, and the facilitation of coordination and co-operation among various stakeholders within the tourism industry.

5. Local communities (hromadas). Local communities' attitudes, behaviours and interests can also play an essential role in the regional tourism system. Local communities are instrumental in the establishment of factors such as community involvement and support for tourism development, in addition to the impact of tourism on the local economy and culture.

6. Tourism education and science. It is evident that these activities play an essential role in the structure of regional tourism systems by providing the knowledge and skills necessary to manage and sustainably develop tourism effectively. The field of tourism education and science is multidisciplinary, encompassing a range of disciplines including, but not limited to, tourism management, geography, economics, environmental science and cultural studies.

The components of the regional tourism system are interconnected and dynamic, and they can influence each other in complex ways. A comprehensive understanding and effective management of these components is imperative for the sustainable development of tourism in a specific region.

The development of regional tourism systems in unstable conditions can present significant challenges. Nevertheless, sustainability remains a pivotal concept in ensuring the tourism industry's long-term viability in such circumstances. The principle of sustainability in tourism is predicated on the balancing act of economic, social and environmental considerations, the overarching aim of which is to ensure that tourism development is environmentally responsible, socially acceptable and economically viable over the long term.

The sustainability of the regional tourism system becomes even more critical in unstable conditions such as political conflicts, economic downturns or natural disasters. The tourism industry is often one of the first sectors to be affected by instability and a decline in tourist arrivals, and revenues have a significant economic and social impact on the region.

In the context of unstable conditions, the development of a sustainable regional tourism system necessitates the consideration of several factors. Primarily, the emphasis on tourism's long-term economic and social advantages, as opposed to the pursuit of immediate gains, is paramount. The development of tourism products and services that are unique to the region has been demonstrated to promote local culture and traditions, whilst offering visitors high-quality experiences. In addition,

investment in the necessary infrastructure and facilities to support sustainable tourism development is imperative. The provision of adequate transportation, accommodation, and recreation facilities, as well as the result of sustainable tourism practices, is instrumental in minimising the negative impacts of tourism on the environment.

Another valuable objective is to involve local communities in the development and management of the regional tourism system. This activity involves building local capacity in tourism management and involving local communities in the planning and implementation of tourism initiatives. By involving local communities, the benefits of tourism can be more widely shared and its negative impacts minimised.

Finally, it is essential to work with other stakeholders in the regional tourism system, such as government agencies, non-governmental organisations and the private sector. This principle can help build partnerships that promote sustainable tourism development and provide support and resources to the regional tourism industry in times of instability.

**4. Regional Tourism System 2.0 Concept**

The necessity to implement the novel conceptual framework of regional tourism development arises from the challenges and opportunities presented by the rapidly changing tourism industry. Tourism constitutes a significant economic sector for numerous regions and countries, undergoing constant evolution in response to visitor demands, technological advancements, and security concerns. Consequently, regional tourism systems are compelled to adapt and innovate in response to these changes and challenges.

In light of the findings from recent studies on the modernisation of Ukraine's regional tourism systems (Holod, 2017; Moroz, 2019), along with the

escalating security challenges and the pursuit of sustainable tourism development, there is an evident necessity to formulate and operationalise a contemporary concept, which can be designated as "Regional Tourism System 2.0" (RTS 2.0). Table 1 presents the results of a comparison of the conceptual foundations of traditional and updated concepts.

RTS 2.0 can be defined as an updated and innovative approach to the management and development of regional tourism systems. It takes into account the latest technological advances and trends in the tourism industry. It emphasises the use of digital technologies and the integration of digital platforms, social media and other online tools to create more personalised and engaging visitor experiences.

RTS 2.0 also involves a greater focus on sustainability, both in terms of environmental sustainability and social sustainability. Such processes include the development of sustainable tourism practices, such as responsible tourism and ecotourism, as well as the promotion of social responsibility and community involvement in tourism development.

The RTS 2.0 concept places significant emphasis on the collaboration and partnership of stakeholders, encompassing local communities, governments, and private sector companies. The integration and sustainability of tourism systems is a key benefit of this collaboration, which is relevant to all stakeholders.

Another critical aspect of RTS 2.0 is its focus on innovation and creativity in the development of tourism products and services. This encompasses the utilisation of advanced technologies, including virtual and augmented reality, to engineer immersive and interactive visitor experiences. Furthermore, it encompasses the development of novel and distinctive tourism products and services, with a view to showcasing the region's cultural and natural heritage.

Table 1

**Comparison of the conceptual foundations of RTS and RTS 2.0 development**

RTS	RTS 2.0
It is formed situationally, with the participation of regional authorities and local self-government, business and other organisations.	It is formed with the involvement of the global information environment (Internet) and marketing mechanisms.
Its role is to adapt to global and national trends in the development of tourism and to respond to social challenges.	It functions to maximally satisfy the needs of consumers (tourists) in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.
It is based on the region's tourism resources and tourist flows.	It is based on a network of destinations linked by tourist flows.
Prioritise types of tourism that are already developing and have sufficient resources.	Differentiation of the tourist offer through new and alternative forms of tourism, search for new resources.
The enhancement of the region's tourist potential is instrumental in ensuring safety and stability.	Security is guaranteed by the flexibility and adaptability to take advantage of all development opportunities.
It is based on the well-known tourist brands of the region and the existing tourist image.	It is based on the development of a holistic tourism brand for the region and its coordination with destination brands.
It involves coordinating the interests of key stakeholders (government, business, education and science, public organisations, etc.) and forming clusters.	It involves the broad involvement of local communities, the spread of self-organising processes, mainly through social networks, and the formation of tourist communities at different levels of organisation.



In the context of post-crisis development, as evidenced by the case of Ukraine, the fundamental components of the RTS 2.0 concept encompass security, image, competitiveness, sustainable development, diversification, virtualisation, and interactivity.

At the same time, some areas of this concept can be implemented in the current crisis period, in particular, within the framework of the strategy of anti-crisis management of regional tourism development, which was developed taking into account the concepts of security and sustainable tourism development (Figure 1).

It is important to emphasise the innovative nature of such a strategy, which is reflected in the proposed directions and mechanisms for its implementation. The strategy's performance in managing regional tourism development in times of crisis should lead to the formation of RTS 2.0, which can only function in conditions of relative stability.

**5. Sustainability in the Development of RTS 2.0**

Sustainable development is defined as the concept of satisfying the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their own needs (Our Common Future, 1987). The concept is comprised of three fundamental components: economic growth and poverty reduction,

social inclusion and well-being, and environmental protection. In this sense, economic growth must be inclusive, not come at the expense of social welfare, and not destroy the natural environment.

Tourism is one industry with the potential to play an essential role in sustainable development, providing economic benefits while preserving cultural heritage and the natural environment. The concept of sustainable tourism, frequently characterised as "tourism that respects both residents and travellers, cultural heritage and the environment" (UNWTO, 2017), aspires to mitigate adverse impacts and optimise the tourism industry's beneficial contributions to the environment and the local community.

Sustainable tourism initiatives can include activities such as supporting the local economy by using local businesses and promoting fair trade; minimising environmental impacts by reducing waste and pollution and conserving natural resources; respecting and preserving cultural heritage by promoting cultural sensitivity and understanding among tourists and supporting the preservation of historical sites and cultural monuments; and promoting community involvement and expanding opportunities by involving local communities in tourism planning and decision-making.

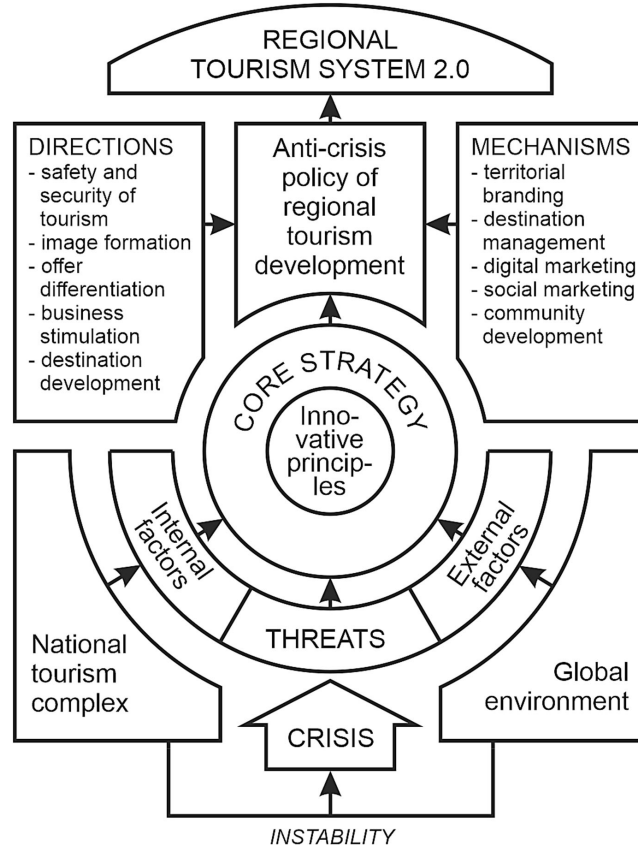


Figure 1. The concept of RTS 2.0 in the framework of the strategy of anti-crisis management of regional tourism development

It is important to note that tourism can have both negative and positive impacts on sustainable development. The key is therefore to balance it so that benefits are maximised and negative impacts are minimised. Such a balance is best achieved by taking into account the safety and security of tourism.

Based on an analysis of world experience, eight main principles of sustainable tourism development at the regional level can be identified (Table 2).

These principles are widely recognised and promoted by international organisations to help governments and communities (*hromadas*) build sustainable tourism at a regional level.

The role of local communities is important for the sustainable development of tourism at a regional level. These communities are often the direct beneficiaries and have a direct influence on tourism development, so they should play an important role in the planning and management of tourism activities in their area. Involving local communities in tourism development can help ensure that tourism supports and enhances the well-being and livelihoods of local people, rather than undermining them.

Drawing upon the findings of a study of tourism development challenges in Ukraine's regions from 2017 to 2019, several key ways to involve local communities in sustainable tourism development have been identified. Firstly, consultations and active community participation are identified as being of paramount importance, as local communities should be meaningfully engaged in the planning and decision-making processes related to tourism development in their respective areas. This encompasses the contribution to the formulation of tourism plans, the selection of development sites, and the design and management of tourism activities. Secondly, the promotion of community-oriented tourism enables

local communities to assume ownership and manage tourism initiatives, thereby enabling them to benefit directly from tourism activities. Thirdly, it is imperative to ensure the equitable distribution of benefits, whereby local communities are entitled to share in the advantages accruing from tourism development, including employment opportunities, income from tourism-related enterprises, and financial support for community initiatives. Fourthly, the preservation of cultural heritage is of paramount importance, as local communities can contribute to the safeguarding and promotion of their cultural identity by participating in tourism activities that highlight the region's history and traditions. Finally, the provision of access to educational and scientific programmes has been demonstrated to enhance the comprehension of tourism development amongst local communities, thereby equipping them with the requisite knowledge and skills to manage and optimise tourism-related activities in an effective manner. Collectively, these strategies serve to reinforce the role of local communities in sustainable tourism development, thereby fostering economic growth while preserving cultural and natural resources.

The involvement of local communities in the sustainable development of tourism has been demonstrated to be a strategy that can support economic growth and improve the standard of living of the local population. This is achieved while preserving cultural heritage and the natural environment.

In the context of the information society, the importance of marketing tools in regional tourism policy is increasing. The RTS 2.0 concept posits that marketing instruments can also be utilised to promote sustainable development in the tourism sector.

First and foremost, it is imperative to recognise the pivotal role of destination branding in this context.

Table 2

**Principles of sustainable development of tourism at the regional level**

Principles	Meaning
1. Regional planning and management	Tourism development should be integrated into overall regional planning and decision-making processes. This strategy includes involving local communities ( <i>hromadas</i> ) and stakeholders in the planning and management of tourism activities.
2. Economic development	Tourism should be used as a tool for economic development in the region, creating jobs and increasing income for local communities ( <i>hromadas</i> ).
3. Environmental protection	Tourism development must be compatible with the conservation of natural and cultural resources and minimise negative impacts on the environment.
4. Social and cultural sustainability	Tourism development should respect the culture and way of life of the local community and not lead to social displacement or other negative impacts on the community ( <i>hromada</i> ).
5. Access and equity	Tourism development must be inclusive and accessible to all, especially marginalised groups.
6. Capacity building	Local communities ( <i>hromadas</i> ) and other stakeholders should be supported to build their capacity to plan and manage sustainable tourism development.
7. Long-term vision	Tourism development needs to be planned and managed with a long-term perspective to ensure the continued sustainability of the tourism industry in the region.
8. Monitoring and evaluation	A system should be established to monitor the impact of tourism development and evaluate the effectiveness of sustainable tourism initiatives.

The development of a robust and sustainable brand can contribute to the enhancement of tourism sustainability by emphasising a destination's distinctive cultural, natural, and historical attributes, along with its dedication to sustainable development. Furthermore, the promotion of responsible tourism can serve to raise awareness among tourists of sustainable tourism practices, thereby encouraging them to make more ecological travel choices.

The necessity of green certification and labelling is also imperative. Such eco-certification and labeling can inform tourists about the sustainability of a particular tourism product or service, such as a green hotel or tour operator. This activity can help distinguish sustainable tourism products and services from less sustainable alternatives. The innovation and design of eco-tourism products and services are also important because they should be convenient and easily recognizable.

The involvement of stakeholders (i.e., travel agents, tour operators and mass media) is an essential marketing tool for promoting sustainable tourism. It is imperative that all stakeholders, in conjunction with authorities and educational and scientific institutions, formulate their activities around market research. Such research can assist in identifying target market segments' needs, preferences, and behaviour, as well as understanding the factors that influence travel choices. The implementation of such a process is instrumental in the development of more effective sustainable tourism marketing strategies.

In the contemporary context, the competitiveness of both individual tourism entities and regions in general is contingent on the efficacy of digital marketing strategies. The utilisation of social networks, websites, and information portals has emerged as a pivotal strategy for promoting sustainable tourism and facilitating effective communication with tourists.

Marketing has been identified as a potent instrument in the promotion of sustainable tourism and the stimulation of demand for sustainable tourism products and services. However, it is imperative to ensure that marketing endeavours are congruent with the tenets of sustainable development and do not

engender a "greenwashing" effect, wherein tourism activities are not managed sustainably but are marketed as such.

## 6. Conclusions

It is therefore vital to adopt a long-term perspective when developing a sustainable regional tourism system in unstable conditions, in order to balance economic, social and environmental considerations. By focusing on the region's unique characteristics, investing in sustainable infrastructure and practices, engaging local communities, and building partnerships with other stakeholders, a resilient tourism industry that can continue to provide economic and social benefits to the region over the long term can be developed.

The studies on sustainable development and safety of tourism, using the example of the regions of Ukraine, proved the need to change the paradigm of tourism development at the regional level from object to subject. According to the new paradigm, the central role in regulating the development of tourism in the region should be played not by executive authorities and tourism enterprises, but by local communities and institutions of civil society. It is only in such conditions that partial self-regulation and self-development become a possibility. Consequently, the modernisation of regional tourism systems in the face of external threats, coupled with the reduction of state funding for tourism development in Ukraine, emerge as the prevailing strategies to ensure the international competitiveness of the national tourism complex.

In this context, the implementation of the RTS 2.0 concept is imperative to ensure the long-term sustainability and success of regional tourism systems in the face of rapid industry changes and threats of instability. The incorporation of state-of-the-art technological advancements, the promotion of sustainability, and the fostering of collaboration and innovation are pivotal in ensuring the continued competitiveness and relevance of regional tourism systems within the context of a constantly evolving tourism market.

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