

# DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM IN POST-WAR UKRAINE: A REGENERATIVE APPROACH

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**Abstract.** *Problem statement.* The present circumstances in the Ukrainian countryside are not merely a crisis; rather, they constitute a full-scale systemic destruction that is affecting many aspects of life. The war has had a profoundly detrimental impact, encompassing both the physical destruction of homes and environmental disaster. The topography is characterised by the presence of fertile soils that have been contaminated by heavy metals, in addition to extensive areas that have been mined. This study concludes that the traditional concept of "sustainable development", which has dominated academia for decades, is now fragile and potentially irrelevant to current reality. In the context of ecosystems being virtually destroyed and communities being displaced due to a loss of identity and livelihood, the passive do no harm tactic is inadequate. It is almost impossible to maintain stability within the constructs of foundational obliteration. The imperative in Ukraine transcends mere conservation or preservation of remnants; the nation requires radical and proactive restoration capable of revitalising desolate regions through the creation of new economic meanings. *Objective.* This research project aims to fundamentally rethink rural tourism and establish a new theoretical framework adapted to war-torn and post-war regions. The study aims to demonstrate that, rather than being just a service sector for quick profit, tourism can serve as a powerful lever for a complete reboot of territories. The goal is to present a model in which each visitor's presence contributes to the physical restoration of the local area, restores a sense of perspective, dignity and pride to the community and transforms the land into a place of power. *Methodology.* To ensure that this vision extends beyond theoretical reflection, the method of conceptual modelling was employed. This enabled advanced global approaches, such as Pollock's regeneration, the concept of community resilience and the Farm to Fork principles of the European Green Deal, to be integrated with today's harsh realities. The study provides a detailed analysis of the influence of visitor-local interactions on ecological health, social cohesion and economic self-sufficiency, charting a clear, logical path from depression to active renewal through regenerative practices. *Results.* This article presents the inaugural three-tier model for the development of regenerative rural tourism in Ukraine. At the ecological level, the model proposes involving tourists in authentic landscape restoration activities, ranging from regenerative farming practices to establishing local micro-reserves. At the social level, tourism is transformed into a tool for collective healing and community building through shared creative activities and therapeutic programmes. At an economic level, the model focuses on establishing autonomous local systems, such as co-operatives and joint craft brands ("Made in Village N"), as well as creating stable, non-seasonal jobs. The main conclusion is that this approach fosters resilience. This enables a village to not only survive shock, but also to emerge stronger, using former damage as the foundation for new, fundamental development.

**Keywords:** rural tourism, regenerative development, community resilience, post-war recovery, original model, environmental remediation of territories.

**JEL Classification:** L83, Q01, R51, O13

## 1. Introduction

Large-scale hostilities have dealt a staggering blow to rural life in Ukraine, with consequences that affect everyone. Widespread landmining has left fertile soils exhausted, often beyond the point

of natural recovery. The destruction of roads, buildings and homes has systematically erased the foundations of local life. Forced to flee their homes by the war, people are leaving behind communities that are now vanishing before their

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eyes. In these circumstances, saving the Ukrainian countryside requires a radical change in approach. The necessity for systemic change is twofold: firstly, to repair the damage already wrought; secondly, to construct new systems that are capable of withstanding the impact and maintaining functionality. The conventional academic notion of 'sustainable development' has proven to be inadequate in the context of Ukraine. In situations where a community has been torn apart, the ability to do no harm is not a luxury that can be afforded. It is insufficient merely to decelerate the process of decay; it is imperative to proactively facilitate the revitalisation of the affected areas. It is imperative that Ukraine implements pragmatic solutions that can effectively restore the landscape and revitalise the lives of its citizens. The present article aims to establish a theoretical foundation for a rural tourism model that goes beyond mere existence to actively restore its surroundings. In lieu of the conventional methodologies, this paper puts forward a system in which each guest's visit results in a more sustainable environment. Such a shift has the potential to become a cornerstone of Ukraine's post-conflict economic recovery. It is imperative that a transition is made from a pursuit of revenue as the primary objective. In contemporary society, the true measure of success is determined by the extent to which individuals contribute to the community. This paradigm shift involves transitioning from the exhaustion of resources to the active replenishment of these resources through practical, hands-on endeavours. In this context, tourism transcends its conventional role as a mere service, assuming the function of a collective endeavour to forge a shared future. The objective of this study is to develop a novel model for the regenerative and resilient development of rural tourism in Ukraine. To achieve this, the following objectives were set:

- 1) To analyse the current state of rural areas.
- 2) To explore the essence of the regenerative approach.
- 3) To design a three-level framework for community recovery.

The methodology is rooted in conceptual modelling and systems analysis. The logic of this research progresses from identifying the consequences of war to formulating practical mechanisms for the ecological, social, and economic renewal of the village.

## 2. The Impact of Post-War Recovery on Rural Tourism Areas

The present situation in Ukraine indicates an imminent systemic collapse in rural tourism. There has been a significant destruction of physical assets, and the environment is now in a state of full-blown catastrophe. As Lane and Kastenholz (2015) have observed, this sector is sustained by the local population; however, at present, there is an urgent need for institutional revitalisation. The destruction of infrastructure, coupled with the mass exodus of guesthouse owners, has resulted in a considerable divide between these villages and any prospect of a return to normal life.

The biggest hurdle is that nature, the main attraction for visitors, is in need of help itself. The fighting has poisoned the soil with explosives and heavy metals, effectively gutting local biodiversity (Angurets et al., 2023). In this context, the traditional sustainable recovery model is no longer sufficient. These lands don't just need to be sustained; they need to be completely reclaimed. Nevertheless, it is contended that rural tourism has the potential to be a pivotal factor in the resilience of communities, provided that the attention is directed towards the psychological well-being of the populace, as opposed to a mere reconstruction of physical structures.

Researchers now see this field as a way to bring life back to the countryside. This process works across three main areas:

– Economic Support. When traditional farming fails to deliver, tourism can provide a breath of fresh air for a village. Studies show that villagers' desire to leave for the city significantly diminishes as soon as they start hosting guests (Hopkalo et al., 2024).

– Social Cohesion. It's more than just a business; it's a powerful force that brings the community back together. According to UN Tourism (2023), tourism helps people mend broken ties and take collective responsibility for their land.

– Infrastructure Growth. Visitor interest drives the modernisation of roads and services. In Tuscany, for example, it is evident that when tourism is incorporated into landscape planning, achieving a balance between profitability and environmental protection becomes possible (Venturi et al., 2021).

Chasing quick cash will only squeeze the last remaining life out of the village. True success will only be achieved when tourism operates as

a unified system that prioritises restoring nature and ensuring social fairness.

### 3. Sustainable vs. Regenerative Approaches in Rural Tourism

In rural tourism, sustainable development and regeneration go hand in hand – it's about rethinking the relationship between people and the land. Whilst the traditional model of sustainable development focused on doing no harm, the regenerative approach goes a step further. It ensures that the place is truly restored after the guests have left.

The objective is not merely to reduce carbon emissions; it is to ensure that each journey contributes positively to the environment. The time has come to transition from mere compensation for damages to the adoption of practices that genuinely repair the impaired systems. A genuine commitment to future prospects necessitates the minimisation of one's ecological footprint. However, this endeavour only attains its objective when the act of travelling results in a net gain rather than a net loss. There has been a shift in focus from soft compensation policies towards practices that address systemic issues. At its core, sustainability is about meeting today's needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. In many parts of Ukraine, including the Carpathian Mountains and the Polissia region, people are already switching to solar panels and abandoning plastics. However, some experts warn that these efforts often just buy us more time. While they slow down the decay, they don't actually restore the ecosystem (Pollock, 2019; Bellato et al., 2022). This is where regenerative tourism comes in. It's a concept that has really taken off since the pandemic. Anna Pollock, one of the key figures behind it, describes it as sustainability's coming of age. The issue at hand extends beyond the mere application of a new coat of paint. This approach necessitates a fundamental re-evaluation of the prevailing methodologies employed in the field, with a concomitant focus on the elements that ensure the continued functionality and prosperous state of the system. As posited by Loretta Bellato (Bellato et al., 2022), tourism should play an active role in the enhancement of territories, benefiting both local populations and the environment. Dianne Dredge (2022) advocates a radical shift in mindset where tourism

becomes part of a "living Earth". Susanne Becken (2020) advances the argument that there is a necessity to move beyond the fundamental principles of sustainability. For her, the emphasis is on the local population and the importance of ensuring that human society progresses in harmony with nature. This is particularly relevant for Ukrainian villages. With the fragility of Ukraine's soil and communities, merely avoiding harm is not a viable strategy. What Ukraine needs is an active restoration model that gives it a real fighting chance. Ukraine cannot just prevent things from getting worse; it must improve the situation. After the war, it is this constant push to regenerate both nature and community life that will breathe new life into Ukraine's countryside.

### 4. Conceptual Foundations and Methodology of Regenerative Rural Tourism

The central proposition of this study is that rural tourism can serve as a catalyst for the revitalisation of war-stricken territories. The approach is founded on a novel philosophy: tourism should not merely serve as a source of revenue; it should facilitate the revitalisation of communities by restoring their physical environment, traditions, and the quotidian lives of their inhabitants. There is a necessity to shift the paradigm from cold, dry economics to living systems, where business growth is inextricably linked to the renewal of the collective.

In order to establish a connection between the theoretical underpinnings of academic discourse and the practical challenges faced by these communities in the real world, there is a necessity to adopt a conceptual modelling approach. This will facilitate the establishment of a pragmatic plan to guide the collective towards an improved state of mental well-being. The entire approach rests on three pillars:

- The Idea of Regenerative Development. In this context, travel is not perceived as a detrimental factor for the environment; rather, it is regarded as a living organism with the capacity for restoration. It is imperative that every interaction between a guest and a host contributes to the economic development of the local area (Pollock, 2019).

- The Concept of Community Resilience. The crux of the matter pertains to a community's capacity to re-evaluate its reality and emerge more resilient following a crisis. The objective does not

entail a mere return to the pre-war status quo. It is possible to transform destruction into a foundation for something fundamentally new (Bellato et al., 2022; Hussain, 2021).

– European Green Deal Principles. The present method is heavily informed by the "Farm to Fork" strategy. The objective is to construct a system in which social justice and human interests are aligned with environmental concerns. For Ukrainian villages, this initiative represents a strategy for revitalising contaminated soil and restoring natural ecosystems (European Commission, 2020).

By combining these approaches, an original model for regenerative rural tourism in Ukraine can be developed. This model provides communities with a set of concrete tools to help them transform the scars of war into new opportunities, while supporting the environment, the economy, and the social sphere.

### 5. A Model for Regenerative and Resilient Rural Tourism in Ukraine

In order to rebuild a village – not just its walls, but its soil too – a model based on regeneration and resilience is required (see Fig. 1). It's about more than just survival; it's about restoring what was lost. Here, nature, the economy and people's lives function as a single integrated system. The idea is that guests should leave behind more than just a paid bill; they should make a real mark on the village's recovery.

This approach provides a clear path for communities that aspire to achieve more than merely getting by (Pollock, 2019; Bellato et al., 2022). The model works on three levels:

The First Level – Ecological. Protecting what's left of nature isn't enough at this stage. Instead, further action is needed to breathe new life into the landscape. Here is how it can be done:

– Regenerative farming. The initiative focuses on collaborative efforts by guests and locals, encompassing activities such as tree-planting, wild meadow restoration, and riverbank clean-up.

– Micro-reserves. Bee farms and wildlife feeding stations are set up on the land, where visitors can help to track local plants and animals.

– Eco-education. In lieu of a conventional lecture, visitors are instructed in the fabrication of natural water filters and the management of compost. A substantial proportion of the financial gains from these tours can be reinvested in green projects within the specific village (Bellato et al., 2022; Dredge, 2022).

The second level is social. The focus of this initiative is to facilitate the restoration of fractured interpersonal relationships and to promote the healing process for those involved. Tourism has the potential to serve as a medium for the establishment of trust.

Key directions:

– Doing things together. Visitors to the locale partake in culinary endeavours, domestic repair,

#### Economic Sustainability

Ensuring financial independence and long-term viability

#### Social Healing

Restoring social bonds and community well-being

#### Ecological Foundation

Active nature restoration and conservation

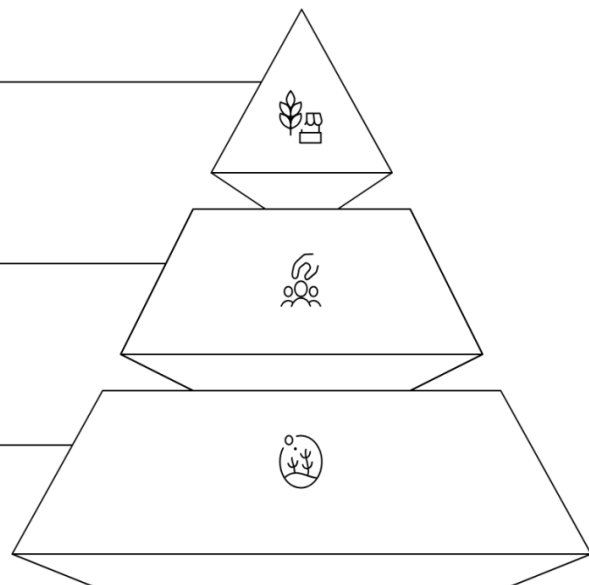


Figure 1. A Model for Regenerative and Resilient Rural Tourism Development in Ukraine Source

Source: author's own elaboration

and the facilitation of cultural events and festivals. The event fosters a profound sense of community cohesion.

- Therapy. Activities such as art sessions, nature walks and spending time with animals can help people to deal with the trauma of war.

- Identity. Open-air museums and stories about local life foster a genuine connection to the land, providing young people with a compelling reason to remain in the area. This is where guests can become part of the community and a true example of resilience (Bellato et al., 2022; Hussain, 2021).

The third level is that of economics. The primary objective is to establish a self-sufficient local economy that can function independently of external assistance.

Steps:

- Jobs for everyone. It's not just homeowners who need work, but cooks, guides, craftsmen and farmers too.

- Working together and branding. Local producers joining forces under a "Made in Village N" label and sharing profits fairly.

- Different ways to earn. Seasonal festivals, selling craft goods online, and memorial tours.

The best part is that money doesn't simply leak out of the village. It circulates within the local economy, benefiting the people in the form of improvements such as road repairs and upgrades to public spaces. This makes the village much more resilient and less dependent on external factors. Building real economic resilience means being able to rely on oneself.

For Ukraine, the adoption of this model is imperative. This phenomenon can be conceptualised as a lifecycle, wherein the rehabilitation of the land fosters the cohesion of the community. A strong community then builds a better economy, and the money generated is invested in further environmental restoration. For Ukraine, this shouldn't just be a theory – it may be the only way forward. It is evident that the potential for rural tourism to serve as a significant catalyst for economic recovery is contingent upon a re-evaluation of the prevailing regulatory

frameworks. Guests should be encouraged not only to come and relax, but also to roll up their sleeves and help leave the village in better shape than they found it.

## 6. Conclusions

A consideration of the significant challenges currently being experienced by Ukrainian villages clearly demonstrates the ineffectiveness of traditional sustainability strategies. In the context of war-torn soil and migratory communities, the principle of non-harming is no longer sufficient. Ukraine requires a regenerative model. The fundamental concept is that each phase of reconstruction should not merely replicate the pre-war status quo; rather, it should strive to establish a novel quality of life in which nature and society can be restored and flourish in symbiosis.

In this context, rural tourism has the potential to evolve beyond mere services or weekend activities. It can become a means of revitalising the countryside. The proposed model shows that tourism can effectively regenerate a territory through ecological, social and economic activity. This can be achieved when guests choose to play an active role in the revival, rather than simply being consumers. Whether they're helping to restore the landscape or supporting local craft producers, they are contributing to the revival. This keeps money in the community, making it more resilient, and gives people a reason to believe in a future on their own land.

Looking to the future, one thing is certain: no transformation can succeed without genuine government support and flexible regulations. It is necessary to support local people who are promoting environmental projects or regenerative agriculture. This is not a task for practitioners alone. Scientists also have much to consider. The way Ukraine is reviving its villages through tourism could become a unique model for study across the globe. Ultimately, only when scientific logic is combined with the genuine energy of local residents will the village be able not merely to survive difficult times, but to truly thrive.

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