

Digital Tools for Public Administration of Odesa's Tourism Potential within the UNESCO Heritage Framework

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Keywords: Administrative Mechanisms, Management, Odesa Tourism Potential, Heritage, UNESCO.

Abstract: The study examines administrative mechanisms for managing Odesa's tourism potential in the context of its inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage. Attention is focused on the challenges posed by full-scale war, particularly the damage to cultural monuments, which has significantly impacted the region's tourist attractiveness. Based on a SWOT analysis, the strengths and weaknesses of Odesa's tourism industry, its opportunities and threats, are identified, including: rich architectural heritage, potential for international funding, security risks, and insufficient promotion. A comprehensive approach to managing tourism potential is proposed, comprising six groups of strategies: institutional, regulatory, financial and economic, technological, communication, and environmental. These include the creation of a municipal tourism agency, the development of local regulations based on UNESCO standards, the attraction of grants, the introduction of digital technologies for analysing tourist flows, and the promotion of sustainable tourism. Particular attention is paid to the role of local government bodies, in particular the Department of International Cooperation, Culture and Marketing of the Odessa City Council, as a key player in administering the tourism sector. It is concluded that effective public administration of Odesa's tourism potential should be based on a balance between preserving cultural heritage and developing infrastructure, taking into account the requirements of post-war recovery and Ukraine's integration into the global tourism space.

1 INTRODUCTION

Despite the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation, the tourism industry has not come to a complete standstill and continues to contribute to the state budget through tax payments. In 2022, some tourism companies even increased their contributions compared to 2021. On average, the tourism industry paid 25.7% less tax to the state budget in the first half of 2022 than in the same period of the previous year. The number of companies decreased by 24.5%, and entrepreneurs by 13.5%. The largest revenues to the state budget were received from tax payments by hotels and sanatorium-resort establishments, which amounted to almost UAH 461 million; however, this amount was 30% lower than in the previous year [1].

Unfortunately, as a result of the Russian Federation's military aggression against Ukraine, not only the logistics, energy and social infrastructure have suffered. Ukraine's cultural and historical heritage, which is an important component of the tourism industry, has also suffered significant losses. As of 25 September 2023, the Odesa region ranked

second in terms of the number of cultural heritage sites affected by Russian aggression [2]. The historic centre of Odesa suffered the most, enduring the largest attack by Russian forces since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine during 19–23 July 2023. As a result of the shelling, significant damage was inflicted on UNESCO-protected cultural heritage sites. The Odesa city authorities reported 28 damaged buildings within the protected zone, including the Transfiguration Cathedral [1].

Even now, despite the large-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, Odesa continues to attract the interest of the international community. Therefore, it is important to develop the mechanisms for the public administration of Odesa's tourism potential as a UNESCO historical and cultural heritage site.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent scholarship demonstrates a growing emphasis on the interconnectedness of heritage protection,

urban governance, and post-conflict recovery processes. International researchers highlight that managing “living heritage” in dynamically transforming cities requires adaptive and resilient administrative approaches. In particular, the works of K. Taylor [3], N. Lanzoni [4], S. Barakat [5], M. Ripp and D. Rodwell [6] analyse how cultural landscapes evolve under social, economic and security pressures, underscoring the challenges inherent in preserving heritage within rapidly changing urban environments. Studies on wartime heritage governance further stress the need for resilience-based planning and the development of tools that enable cultural sites to withstand threats related to armed conflict.

At the same time, research in digital heritage [7], [8], [9] demonstrates the growing effectiveness of GIS systems, drone-based monitoring, and digital-twin technologies for real-time heritage documentation and risk assessment. Parallel studies in tourism governance [10] emphasise crisis communication, managerial flexibility, and coordination among key stakeholders – lessons that are directly applicable to Odesa as a UNESCO site operating under wartime conditions.

An equally important dimension is the system of public administration of the tourism sector in the Odesa region within the context of transformational socioeconomic changes. International experience confirms that the success of tourism sector development depends largely on how the industry is prioritised at the state level and the extent to which it receives systemic governmental support. Since tourism represents a multi-sectoral complex, it requires a higher degree of coordination of economic activities than many other industries. At the same time, excessive state regulation may hinder entrepreneurial initiative, which forms the foundation of competitive market development.

The strengthening of globalisation processes has led to a substantial expansion of tourism’s role in shaping transregional connections and disseminating social, political and economic dynamics across borders. For Ukraine, the formation of a positive and recognisable tourist image has become a strategic component of national interests and an important element of international information policy. As a result, tourism has acquired a more pronounced strategic significance, becoming an important factor in the socio-economic progress of the state [11].

These circumstances reinforce the need for effective public administration of tourism, where a clear understanding of the sector’s position within the regional and national economy is essential. This approach helps reduce excessive dependence on a

sector that is inherently sensitive to external shocks, including economic crises, global disruptions or military conflict [12]. In the current conditions of market development, tourism serves not only as a source of fiscal revenues for local budgets but also as a driver of regional development. At the same time, tourism imposes high ecological requirements on territories, making sustainable environmental management a prerequisite for long-term competitiveness.

Furthermore, tourism is inherently a complex service chain – accommodation, food provision, treatment, entertainment, transportation and other components are interlinked. Because tourists perceive this set of services holistically, the overall impression formed by consumers influences the perceived value of the region as a whole [13]. This highlights the importance of coordinated public administration that supports service quality, protects cultural heritage and ensures the resilience and competitiveness of the tourism sector.

3 RESEARCH GOALS

The study aims to justify and develop effective strategies for public administration of Odesa’s tourist potential in the context of its inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Particular attention is paid to ensuring a balance between the preservation of historical and cultural heritage and the sustainable development of tourist infrastructure in the context of post-war recovery.

To achieve this aim, the following objectives were defined:

- to analyse the current state of the tourism industry in Odesa, taking into account security, economic, and infrastructure challenges;
- to study international and national approaches to cultural heritage management;
- to conduct a SWOT analysis of the tourism potential of the city’s historic centre;
- to identify key directions for improving administrative mechanisms for managing Odesa’s tourism potential within the UNESCO heritage framework.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodological basis of the study is a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach that integrates methods of public administration, tourism

economics, cultural heritage studies, and strategic planning. To achieve the research objectives, both qualitative and quantitative analytical techniques were applied.

A central analytical tool used in the study is the parameterised SWOT analysis, which allowed for the systematic identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to the tourism potential of Odesa's historic centre, particularly under the external pressures caused by the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation. The SWOT framework was expanded through specific indicators, including cultural value, infrastructure condition, vulnerability level, and tourism development potential.

To ensure methodological transparency and structure, the study distinguishes several key components:

- Data sources that include UNESCO databases, municipal and regional reports, official tourism statistics, scientific literature, GIS cartographic materials, and documented assessments of damage to cultural heritage sites.
- Analytical tools that encompass parameterised SWOT analysis; comparative analysis with UNESCO-listed port cities; GIS-based mapping and spatial assessment; and content analysis of international heritage governance documents, including UNESCO and ICCROM guidelines.
- Research questions – How has UNESCO inscription reshaped governance priorities in Odesa? Which administrative mechanisms demonstrate the highest effectiveness under wartime conditions? How can cultural heritage preservation be balanced with the development of sustainable tourism during periods of heightened security risks?
- Reasoning steps comprising diagnostic assessment of heritage-tourism interactions; mapping of risks and territorial boundaries of the UNESCO site; evaluation of existing administrative instruments; and synthesis of findings into a multi-mechanism governance model.

In addition to theoretical analysis, the study relies on empirical data, including statistical indicators for the tourism sector, official information from the Odessa City Council, UNESCO documentation, and verified reports on damage to cultural heritage sites. The integration of these methodological tools made it possible to identify key directions for improving public administration mechanisms – specifically

institutional, regulatory, financial-economic, technological, communication, and environmental mechanisms – necessary for ensuring the sustainable development of tourism in Odesa as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

5 RESULTS

Odesa is the administrative centre of the region of the same name in southern Ukraine, located on the Black Sea coast. Due to its strategic location, the city is an important hub for international logistics and the economy. It is a developed infrastructure centre with a powerful port, industry, and significant scientific and cultural potential. The population exceeds 1 million people. Odesa's architecture and urban planning have been shaped by European urban planning traditions and the participation of foreign experts [8].

The historic centre of Odesa is a densely built-up area formed on the site of the former Khadzhibey, designed in the classical style with straight, tree-lined streets and two- and four-storey buildings. Its architecture reflects the city's economic growth in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The eclectic style of the buildings emphasises Odesa's ethnic and religious diversity, making the city centre a vivid example of intercultural dialogue and multicultural development in 19th-century Eastern European port cities [14].

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation has drawn attention to its cultural and historical heritage, and thus to cultural and educational tourism. Constant heavy shelling by the Russian Federation resulted in the damage and destruction of a significant number of cultural heritage sites in Ukraine. As of 26 November 2025, UNESCO verified damage to 512 sites since 24 February 2022 – 152 religious sites, 268 buildings of historical and/or artistic interest, 37 museums, 33 monuments, 18 libraries, 1 archive, and 3 archaeological sites [15].

According to UNESCO, the number of damaged historical and cultural heritage sites by region in Ukraine is as follows: the Kharkiv region – 83; the Odesa region – 63; the Donetsk region – 133; the Kherson region – 35; the Chernihiv region – 22; the Kyiv region – 44; the Zaporizhzhia region – 27; the Lviv region – 15; the Dnipropetrovsk region – 4; the Luhansk region – 47; the Sumy region – 16; the Mykolaiv region – 15; the Vinnytsia region – 3; the Zhytomyr region – 3; the Poltava region – 1 [15].

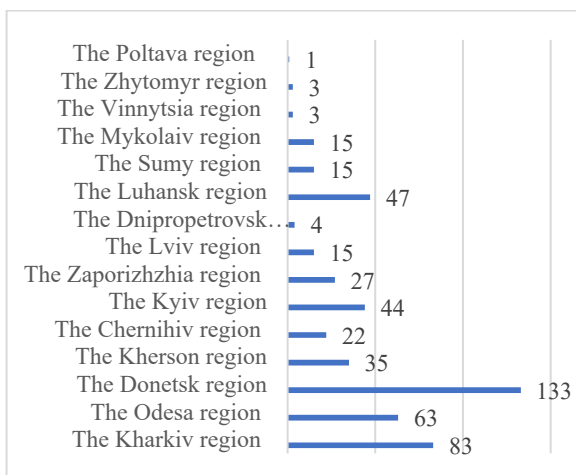


Figure 1: The number of damaged cultural heritage sites by region as a result of russian aggression, as of 26 November 2025.

On 25 January 2023, the historic centre of Odessa was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List [14].

As of 25 January 2023, the area of the nominated site - the historic centre of Odessa – was 237.5 hectares, and the buffer zone covered 1,067.5 hectares. The main territory was delineated by Torgova street, Sadova street, Sviatoslava Karavanskogo (Zhukovskogo) street, Polsky Spusk street, and the adjacent seaport. It included Primorsky Boulevard, Teatralna Square, Deribasivska Street, Gogol Street, parts of Pastera Street, Preobrazhenska Street, Havanna Street, Yevropeiska (Katerynska) Street, Lanzheronivska Street, Nina Strokata (Bunina) Street, Richelievskaya Street, and Gretska Street. The buffer zone included parts of Balkivska, Staroportofrankovska, Panteleymonivska Streets, and Frantsuzky Boulevard [16].

In April 2024, UNESCO expanded the area of the nominated site of the historic centre of Odessa to 618.54 hectares. The buffer zone covers an area of 618.8 hectares. Currently, the area of the nominated site of the historic centre of Odessa is defined by Staroportofrankovska, Panteleymonivska, Leontovycha, Primorska, Balkivska streets, and Liderosovsky Boulevard. Odessa port is located in the buffer zone of the World Heritage Site [16].

There are 1,354 monuments and cultural heritage sites located within the territory of Odessa, including 42 monuments of national significance. Of these, 1,012 are situated within the boundaries of the Central Historical Area, encompassing 977 sites of architectural, urban planning, and historical heritage at both national and local levels.

An updated inventory list, which also includes newly identified heritage sites, was compiled during the revision of the scientific and project documentation titled ‘Historical and Architectural Reference Plan, Protection Zone Project, and Delimitation of Historical Areas of the City of Odessa’ (2021).

According to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee classification, the historic centre of Odessa is considered a ‘living historic city’ – a category that reflects ongoing evolution under the influence of sociocultural and economic transformations. This dynamic nature complicates the assessment of environmental authenticity and the development of effective preservation policies [17].

Let us conduct a SWOT analysis of the tourism potential of Odessa's historic centre.

Table 1: SWOT analysis of the tourism potential of Odessa's historic centre.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Rich cultural heritage	Infrastructure condition
Historical significance	Insufficient marketing
Developed infrastructure	Security risks
Cultural events	Transportation problems
Opportunities	Threats
International financing	Military conflicts
Tourist routes	Economic crises
Digital marketing	Competition
Eco-tourism	Climate change

A detailed analysis of Table 1 showed that the following were considered strengths: the presence of numerous architectural monuments and cultural complexes of national and international significance; the great importance of the historic centre of Odessa in the context of Ukrainian and European history; well-developed infrastructure in the historic centre of Odessa, including hotels, restaurants and entertainment venues; cultural events held regularly in the historic centre despite the full-scale invasion (festivals, exhibitions and other cultural events), which in turn attracts tourists; the following were identified as weaknesses: the state of infrastructure (some historic buildings are in need of restoration and maintenance); insufficient marketing, i.e. a lack of international advertising and promotion of the tourist opportunities offered by the historic centre of Odessa, even during the full-scale invasion; security risks, i.e. the current military aggression by the Russian Federation may deter potential tourists; transport problems, i.e. the poor quality of roads and public transport, which may make it inconvenient for tourists to comfortably reach the historic centre; the opportunities included: international financing

through grants and investments for the restoration and development of the infrastructure of the historic centre of Odesa; the development of new tourist routes and excursions that highlight the unique aspects of the historic centre and link the history of Odesa with the history of Ukraine and the world; the use of digital technologies to improve the marketing and promotion of tourist products; the introduction of environmental practices in the tourism industry to attract new categories of tourists; threats included: prolonged military aggression by the Russian Federation could seriously affect the security and attractiveness of the Odesa region; global economic problems could reduce the number of tourists (especially foreign tourists) willing to travel; competition, which consists in the fact that other historical centres in Ukraine and neighbouring countries may be more attractive to tourists; environmental problems related to climate change may affect the tourist appeal of Odesa.

This SWOT analysis shows that the historic centre of Odesa has strong tourism potential, which needs to be developed and improved.

The effectiveness of tourism policy is determined not only by managerial decisions at the central level and financial support, but also by the professional activities of local specialists. It is they who adapt the national management model to the regional context. Changes in the structure of specialised departments at the national level often lead to corresponding transformations in regional management mechanisms [18].

Within the framework of decentralisation, tourism policy in Ukraine is implemented through cooperation between public authorities and local self-government bodies at the national, regional and local levels. Regional and district state administrations play a crucial role in regional management. According to the Resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine [19], [20], they are required to form specialised structural units for tourism and resorts. The type and status of such units are determined by the administration’s management under the scope of their functional tasks.

Table 2: Mechanisms for public administration of the Odesa’s tourism potential as a UNESCO historical and cultural heritage site.

Mechanism	Indicator
Institutional mechanisms	Involve establishing a clear and coordinated system of interaction between government agencies, public organisations, and private-sector stakeholders. Practical examples include the creation of a joint Odesa – UNESCO Heritage Management Office, the formation of interdepartmental coordination councils, and structured cooperation with NGOs engaged in heritage protection and sustainable tourism development.
Regulatory mechanisms	Ensure the effective development and preservation of Odesa’s tourism potential through legally grounded governance tools. These include updated conservation rules, mandatory heritage impact assessments for new interventions, and development restrictions within the buffer zone to ensure compliance with UNESCO requirements
Financial and economic mechanisms	Refer to the mobilisation of financial resources from state, municipal, and international sources to support heritage conservation and tourism development. Relevant instruments include micro-grant programmes for façade restoration, municipal tax incentives, the UNESCO Emergency Heritage Fund, and EU-based funding opportunities such as Creative Europe.
Technological mechanisms	Focus on the integration of innovative digital tools to modernise public administration and enhance the effectiveness of heritage monitoring. These include drone-based mapping of damage, the creation of digital twins of historic areas, QR-coded tourist navigation systems, and the use of artificial intelligence for monitoring structural stability.
Communication mechanisms	Relate to the formation of an effective communication strategy between authorities, businesses, local communities, and international audiences. Important measures include wartime tourism safety protocols, multilingual crisis communication systems, and global awareness campaigns that highlight Odesa’s resilience and cultural value.
Environmental (ecological) mechanisms	Aim to minimise the negative impact of tourism on cultural heritage and the urban environment. Priority measures include climate-risk monitoring, sustainable waste management practices, the introduction of energy-efficient solutions, and the development of heat-mitigating public spaces in the historic centre.

The structure of tourism administration in the Odessa region is represented, in particular, by the Department of International Cooperation, Culture and Marketing of the Odessa City Council (14, Yevropeiska Street). This executive body was established in accordance with the Law of Ukraine 'On Local Self-Government' [21] as the successor to several specialised structures, in particular the departments of culture, tourism, international cooperation and cultural heritage administration [22]-[25].

In its activities, the Department is guided by the Constitution of Ukraine, current legislation and regulations of local self-government bodies.

The Department has the following management structure: Department of Culture, Department of Tourism, Department of International Relations, Department for Cooperation with UNESCO and Cultural Heritage Protection [26].

The Department of International Cooperation, Culture and Marketing of the Odessa City Council, as a public authority, plays a crucial role in preserving the city's historical heritage.

The results of the study enabled the identification of key administrative mechanisms necessary for strengthening the management of Odesa's tourism potential as a UNESCO World Heritage site. These mechanisms are structured into six interconnected groups – institutional, regulatory, financial-economic, technological, communication, and environmental – each with specific indicators and practical applications relevant to wartime and post-war urban governance. (Table 2):

The combination of these mechanisms provides a comprehensive framework for improving public administration in the tourism sector. Their coordinated implementation will contribute to the preservation of Odesa's cultural heritage, the enhancement of its international visibility, and the sustainable development of tourism during wartime and throughout the post-war recovery period.

Thus, public management of Odesa's tourism potential as a UNESCO historical and cultural heritage site requires a comprehensive approach that combines institutional, regulatory, financial, technological, communication and environmental mechanisms. The implementation of these mechanisms will ensure the sustainable development of tourism, contribute to the preservation of historical and cultural heritage, enhance the city's international image and shape a competitive tourism strategy.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Odesa, as one of the leading tourist centres of the Black Sea region, possesses a favourable geographical location, a well-developed infrastructure, and a rich cultural heritage, further underscored by the inscription of its historic centre on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Nevertheless, the full-scale war has resulted in the destruction and damage of numerous cultural heritage sites, significantly undermining the city's tourism potential. The SWOT analysis carried out in this study confirms Odesa's considerable strengths - most notably its architectural landmarks and opportunities for attracting international funding for restoration and development. At the same time, the analysis highlights critical challenges such as infrastructure deterioration, insufficient marketing, persistent security risks, and transport difficulties, all of which constrain the city's ability to fully realise its tourism potential.

The findings of the research demonstrate that the sustainable development of Ukraine's tourism sector requires targeted investments in infrastructure modernisation, the strengthening of international partnerships, and the implementation of an effective marketing strategy to promote Odesa as a resilient cultural destination. These efforts must be supported by a governance framework that balances heritage preservation with contemporary tourism needs.

The conclusions of the study can be summarised as follows:

- 1) Odesa's UNESCO inscription confirms its global cultural value, yet wartime destruction exposes significant vulnerabilities that require urgent protective and recovery measures.
- 2) Municipal administrative capacity remains substantial, but stronger coordination, clearer institutional mandates, and deeper integration with UNESCO's governance instruments are needed to enhance effectiveness.
- 3) SWOT analysis reveals a strong heritage base and opportunities for international support, while also identifying key constraints, including infrastructure decline, weak promotion, and elevated security concerns.
- 4) The six-mechanism governance framework proposed in the study - institutional, regulatory, financial-economic, technological, communication, and environmental - offers a holistic foundation for aligning cultural heritage preservation with sustainable tourism development.

- 5) Research limitations include reliance on secondary data sources and restricted access to field-based assessments due to wartime conditions, which may affect the generalisability of findings.
- 6) Future research directions should explore the development of inclusive tourism products, the expansion of digital monitoring tools for heritage protection, and the modelling of post-war investment scenarios that could accelerate Odesa's cultural and tourism recovery.

In particular, additional analysis is required to formulate public administration strategies for inclusive tourism, ensuring that people with disabilities have full access to the historic centre of Odesa and its cultural assets.

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