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## Geopolitics of Tourism in An Era of Instability: An Integrated Crisis Management Framework For Ukraine

### *Abstract*

**RESEARCH OBJECTIVE:** This article develops an integrated seven-layer theoretical model combining Faulkner's Tourism Disaster Management Framework with geopolitical approaches to tourism Hall & Seyfi (2020), Neumayer (2004) and Lee et al. (2020). The aim was to fill this gap in the literature by combining the material and constructivist dimensions of crisis in a single model and then empirically testing it on a case study of Ukraine during the 2013–2014 geopolitical crisis.

**THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS:** The research problem was the inadequacy of traditional crisis management models to explain geopolitical crises in tourism. The empirical component employs quantitative data (UkrStat, Eurostat, Geopolitical Risk Index) and qualitative sources (BBC, EU policy documents). The research period covered the years 2013–2018.

**THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION:** A seven-layer model was developed through abductive reasoning by integrating three sources of knowledge: (1) classical models of tourism crisis management for analysing the crisis cycle; (2) theories of international relations to capture the material, institutional and discursive dimensions of the crisis; (3) a GPR Index reflecting the dynamics of political shocks.

**RESEARCH RESULTS:** The 2014 crisis caused a multidimensional shock. The GPR index jumped sharply in March of that year. Perceived safety decreased, as did international arrivals and tourism revenues. The premium segment shrank

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by 70–75%. There was a profound reorientation of tourist flows within the country. These effects were significantly exacerbated by the media, which painted Ukraine as a country engulfed in conflict and detached the perception of risk from its actual geography.

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#### **CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The integrated model proposed in this study enables the identification of key mediating processes such as GPR index, media amplification and regional spillover effects. The Ukrainian case demonstrates the model's explanatory value for understanding tourism behaviour under political instability and highlights practical implications for destination management: the need to incorporate geopolitical scenarios into crisis planning, diversify source markets, strengthen communication strategies and counteract distorted media narratives.

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#### **KEYWORDS:**

tourism geopolitics, tourism crisis management, Ukraine, Faulkner

## **INTRODUCTION**

The contribution of the tourism sector to the global economy is immense. In 2024, there were nearly 1.5 billion international tourist arrivals, generating almost \$1.8 trillion in tourism revenue. The first half of 2025 saw further growth in this area (UN Tourism, 2024). However, tourism is highly sensitive to negative stimuli, such as crises and disasters, and modern tourist destinations are increasingly affected by unpredictable events, whether natural or human-made. According to Faulkner (2001) and Laws & Prideaux (2006) a disaster in the context of a tourist destination can be defined as a sudden shock (external or internal) that turns into an unfavourable situation. This occurs when a group of interdependent businesses (e.g. hotels) are affected by a catastrophic event over which they have little control.

Issues of personal and physical safety are a priority when making travel decisions and choosing a destination. Political instability and conflicts, such as wars, coups, ethnic or religious unrest and terrorism, reduce demand for tourism (Saha & Yap, 2014; Sönmez et al., 2017). The impact of political instability on tourism has grown in recent decades (Santana-Gallego & Li, 2020). The direct consequences are significant losses in tourism spending, a decline in tourist arrivals and a deterioration in the destination's image.

Despite the large number of studies on the impact of political instability on tourism, we identified a gap in the existing literature: a lack of integrated frameworks combining geopolitical theories and crisis management in tourism in developing countries. In view of the above, the research objective is to develop an integrated theoretical model that combines Faulkner's (2001) Tourism Disaster Management Framework with geopolitical theories (Hall & Seyfi, 2020; Neumayer, 2004; Lee et al., 2020). For the application of the developed framework, we chose the annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine in 2014 as a case study of a geopolitical tourism crisis. The choice of Ukraine is intentional. Firstly, despite extensive research on tourism crises, relatively little attention has been given to developing countries, where the effects of such crises can be more severe compared to developed economies that are less dependent on tourism (Novelli et al., 2018). Secondly, the conflict that began in 2014 escalated into a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, which is ongoing and will have long-lasting effects (Quirini-Popławski et al., 2022). Thirdly, decision-makers in Ukraine can use the experiences of previous disasters around the world to improve their future crisis management and risk mitigation capabilities (Gurtner, 2016).

This study's primary research focus is the impact of geopolitical instability, specifically the 2014 annexation of Crimea, on Ukraine's tourism sector. We also ask the following key questions: (1) What mechanisms translate the geopolitical impulse into a reaction in the tourism market? and (2) To what extent do traditional/existing crisis management models (Faulkner, 2001; Faulkner & Vikulov, 2001) adequately describe and allow for the management of geopolitical crises? Our central research hypothesis is that geopolitical crises cause a synergistic interaction of three effects: (1) a material change in the level of risk, measurable using indicators such as the Geopolitical Risk Index; (2) the amplification, enrichment and expansion of the perception of this risk through media reports; and (3) a constructivist transformation of the discourse around the destination, meaning a permanent change in the way the country is perceived and described in the context of tourism.

Our research has three-dimensional implications. Theoretically, it involves integrating three previously distinct paradigms: disaster management in tourism; the geopolitics of tourism, and the

geopolitical risk index (Lee et al., 2021). In terms of practical contributions, we have developed tools for destination management organisations (DMOs) to help them respond more effectively to similar crises in the future. The empirical contribution of the work is novel, as the case study of Ukraine is the first comprehensive study of a tourism crisis caused by geopolitical factors in Eastern Europe.

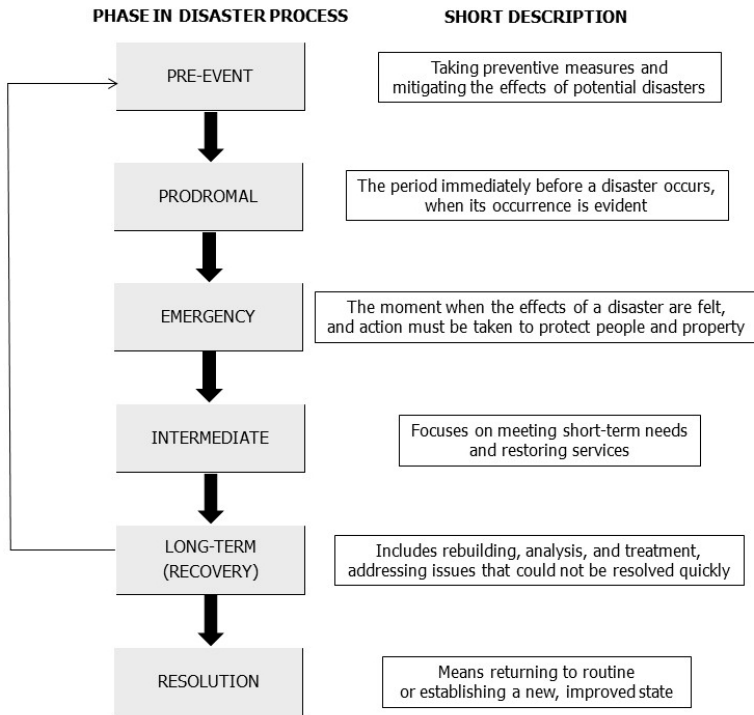
## LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

After Koh & Kwok (2022) current scientific studies usually classify crisis management models in tourism into three main categories: (1) an organisation-driven approach, which proposes a six-phase model of community response to a disaster (Faulkner, 2001); (2) an integrated approach, involving both tourism and disaster management entities. Disaster risk reduction in tourism is based on four stages: Reduction, Readiness, Response and Recovery (Becken & Hughey, 2013); (3) An approach based on public-private partnerships involving the community affected by the disaster. This includes prevention and mitigation systems, as well as disaster risk reduction perspectives (Kanbara & Shaw, 2021).

### The framework for tourism disaster management Faulkner (2001)

Following the catastrophic floods in Australia in 1998, Bill Faulkner developed a pioneering crisis management model for tourism. This model is based on the idea that tourism is a complex, open system which is susceptible to sudden external disturbances. To capture the dynamics of these disruptions, Faulkner proposed a sequential model dividing the crisis cycle into six phases: 1) the pre-event phase, which is often characterised by passivity; 2) the prodromal phase, which is a period of increasing warning signs; 3) the emergency phase, which is the moment when disaster strikes and the immediate response begins; 4) the intermediate phase, which focuses on the immediate repair of infrastructure; 5) the long-term recovery phase; and 6) the resolution phase, which marks the formal end of the crisis (Figure 1).

Figure 1. A tourism disaster management framework (simplified)



Source: own elaboration based on Faulkner & Vikulov (2001).

The model's key strength is that it moves beyond the traditional, reductionist approach to crisis management, which assumes that crises are temporary disruptions. However, some shocks cause permanent changes, rendering this approach inadequate. Crises can also lead to the emergence of new, more innovative and resilient forms of system functioning (Faulkner, 2001). It has been emphasised that effective disaster preparedness in tourism requires coordination among stakeholders. Thoroughly reviewing post-disaster management and planning practices is also important in order to reinforce positive effects and mitigate negative ones.

### *Applications and adaptations*

The Faulkner model, which was originally developed to analyse natural disasters, has also been adapted to examine man-made crises. For example, Prideaux et al. (2003) applied it to terrorism, Henderson (2004) to the SARS epidemic, Hystad & Keller (2008) to widespread fires in Canada. These studies proved the model's applicability in describing sudden disruptions in the tourism sector. Ritchie (2004), further developed the concept, arguing that effective crisis management in tourism requires a holistic, cyclical approach based on three pillars: proactive monitoring and planning; efficient implementation of strategies during a crisis; and systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of measures taken to enable continuous improvement. Additionally, the effective planning and management of crises and disasters necessitates the collaboration of numerous internal and external stakeholders. Despite its wide application, the Faulkner model has certain limitations when analysing geopolitical crises as it does not sufficiently consider political conditions (e.g. decision-making processes in conditions of political uncertainty), international relations or the role of the media.

### Geopolitical Theories in Tourism

International tourism is inherently political and inextricably linked to international relations and geopolitics. These relations shape it, and it constitutes a tool of foreign policy and a means of exerting economic pressure (e.g. sanctions and travel bans). Key theories in international relations have been applied to tourism by Seyfi & Hall (2024) (Table 1). The authors highlight the increasing acknowledgement of the critical geopolitics of tourism, which explores how tourism spatialises politics and is employed to justify particular political systems. They emphasise the role of tourism as a geopolitical practice, citing Western sanctions on Russia following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 as an example. Despite its obvious relevance, the sphere of international relations and geopolitics remains under-researched in the context of tourism. This is a significant gap given contemporary crises such as the global pandemic of 2020 and ongoing wars.

Table 1. Key Theories in International Relations (selection) and their applications to tourism

Theory	Brief description	Application to tourism	Examples
Realism	It views international politics as a competition between states vying for power. It assumes that governments' actions are driven by national interests, security concerns and the desire to maintain superiority over others.	Tourism is regarded as a means of exerting state power and engaging in competition.	Treating access to airspace as a matter of national security (the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on air routes).
Liberalism	It emphasises the potential for states to cooperate in building an international order that promotes peace and prosperity. It emphasises the importance of democracy, individual rights and freedom.	Tourism is widely regarded as a force that promotes cooperation, economic integration and peace.	Joint regional marketing strategies as a form of international cooperation.
Constructivism	It views international relations as the outcome of interactions and interpretations between states, acknowledging that ideas and power are crucial, as are security and economic development.	The tourism industry plays a key role in creating and reproducing geopolitical representations, perceptions and identities.	Creating a country's image through major tourist events.

Source: own study based on Seyfi & Hall (2024).

## Geopolitical Risk Index and risk perception

Geopolitical risk significantly affects demand for international tourism, and how it is perceived influences the choice of travel destination (Kozak et al., 2007). Research by Lee et al. (2021) provides valuable evidence of the extent of this relationship using the Geopolitical Risk Index (GPR), a quantitative measure developed by Caldara and Iacoviello (2022). This index is based on media reports and enables precise measurement of geopolitical tensions in real time. The results show that an increase in geopolitical risk statistically significantly reduces key tourism parameters; for example, a 50-point increase in the GPR index results in an average 15% decrease in tourism revenues. Furthermore, periods of pandemic amplify the negative impact of this risk. Geopolitical risk itself is a significant predictor of tourism demand in many countries and, in some cases, the relationship is bidirectional (e.g. Ukraine and Russia). One of the most important mechanisms amplifying this effect is media amplification; intensive media coverage of crises can exceed the objective risk by 20%.

Destination image and perceived political risk directly influence tourist behavior (Parrey et al., 2019). Najar et al. (2022) developed an integrated model that considers the impact of perceived risk and destination image on behavioural intentions. Their results showed that perceived political risk significantly negatively impacts both the cognitive and affective images of the destination. These images both positively influence behavioural intention and act as mediators in the relationship between political risk and behavioural intention. A simplified model of this relationship is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Perceived Political Risk Framework (model visualisation)



Source: own study based on Najar et al. (2022)

### Synthesis: the need for an integrative framework

Despite significant achievements, existing research on the relationship between instability and tourism is characterised by theoretical and methodological gaps which prevent a comprehensive understanding of this complex phenomenon. For example, Faulkner's (2001) pioneering study does not explicitly consider the geopolitical dimension as a systemic generator of shocks. Seyfi and Hall's (2024) research does not recognise the operationalisation that is useful for crisis management in the tourism sector. Lee et al. (2021) focus on the quantitative measurement of risk and omit the qualitative dimension of discourse. A comprehensive framework must therefore meet three conditions: (1) It must combine Faulkner's 'anatomy of a crisis' with Seyfi and Hall's 'geopolitical structure of crisis'; (2) It should include both objective, quantitative risk metrics (e.g. GPR) and subjective, qualitative perceptions shaped by the media and discourse; (3) It must be empirically applicable to enable case-study analysis. To address these needs, we propose the Geopolitical Crisis-Tourism Framework (for Ukraine): a seven-layer model that systematically integrates the identified perspectives. Its effectiveness has



been demonstrated through its application to Ukraine in 2013–14, covering the Euromaidan protests, the annexation of Crimea, and the initial phase of the Donbas conflict.

### METHODOLOGY

#### Research approach

The study follows a theoretical–empirical case study design, combining an analysis of the literature and theoretical frameworks with quantitative data and an examination of Ukraine’s political and geopolitical context. A triangulation strategy was applied, integrating quantitative sources (tourism statistics, geopolitical risk indicators) with qualitative materials (media narratives, policy documents, research reports). The time frame covers the years 2013–2018. The core period, 2013–2014 generated a sharp rise in geopolitical risk. The extended period (2015–2018) was included to observe early and mid-term recovery processes, following Faulkner’s (2001) approach to crisis lifecycles. The year 2012 served as a baseline. This selection makes it possible to analyse a completed geopolitical episode, avoiding the methodological challenges linked to an ongoing conflict.

The conceptualisation proceeded in three steps. First, classical models of tourism crisis management were analysed (Faulkner, 2001; Ritchie, 2004) to identify the phases of a crisis cycle. Second, realism, liberalism and constructivism from international relations theory were used to capture material, institutional and discursive dimensions of the crisis (Seyfi et al., 2022). Third, the Geopolitical Risk Index (GPR) provided a quantitative component reflecting the dynamics of political shocks.

#### Data sources

##### *Quantitative data*

1. World Economic Forum – Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Reports (2012–2018), used to analyse institutional and infrastructural trends in Ukraine and the region.

2. Ivanov et al. (2017) – a survey of 102 hotel managers and 73 travel agency managers, providing data on risk perception, demand shifts and operational changes.
3. Strategy& (2015) report, describing tourism recovery after political and economic crises.
4. UkrStat statistics – including international arrivals, tourism receipts and tourism employment (2012–2018).
5. Geopolitical Risk Index (Caldara & Iacoviello, 2022) – GPR for Eastern Europe, enabling quantitative links between political developments and market reactions.

### *Qualitative data*

1. International news media (BBC, Reuters, CNN), used to reconstruct crisis narratives and perceptions of security.
2. Policy documents, especially the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement and Ukrainian sectoral strategies.

## Methods of analysis

### *Critical synthesis of the literature*

The first stage involved a critical review of tourism crisis management literature (Faulkner, 2001; Ritchie, 2004) and geopolitical tourism studies (Seyfi et al., 2022). The review demonstrated a lack of models integrating crisis phases with geopolitical categories, which motivated the development of an integrated theoretical framework.

### *Media narrative and discourse analysis*

A qualitative media framing analysis was conducted using materials from BBC, Reuters, CNN and the European Travel Commission. These sources shape the global political discourse. Approximately 120 news items from 2013–2014 were analysed.

### *Theoretical analysis*

It included both classical crisis lifecycle models (Faulkner & Vikulov, 2001) and approaches based on chaos and complexity theory (Ritchie, 2004). Geopolitical studies (Seyfi & Hall, 2024) helped identify mechanisms through which political instability, conflict and sanctions penetrate tourism systems and shape mobility patterns and destination image. Research on political risk and tourism behaviour (Najar et al., 2022; Rather & Bhat, 2023) was used to conceptualise how perceived political threats influence cognitive and affective destination image and behavioural intentions. The review revealed a theoretical gap: the absence of a model linking crisis phases with geopolitical risk, communication dynamics and media discourse. The framework was later applied to Ukraine to map the events of 2013–2014 onto seven crisis phases and identify mediating mechanisms.

## RESULTS: APPLICATION OF THE PROPOSED MODEL TO THE UKRAINIAN CASE

### Context: Ukraine before the crisis (2013)

Before the escalation of the Euromaidan events, Ukraine functioned as one of the largest tourism destinations in Eastern Europe, with a clearly defined demand profile and a strong dependence on neighbouring markets. In 2013, the country recorded 24.7 million international arrivals, generating approximately USD 2.8 billion in tourism revenues. Tourism played an important economic role, providing employment for an estimated 400,000 people (<https://www.ukrstat.gov.ua>). Crimea was the key component of the national tourism system, attracting around 5–6 million visitors annually and serving as the country's largest holiday destination (Tomczewska-Popowycz & Quirini-Popławski, 2021). The structure of source markets was highly concentrated. Russia (42%), Poland (9%) and Germany (5%) formed the core inbound markets. This pattern made the sector highly sensitive to political and diplomatic shifts, which is consistent with previous analyses on political instability and international mobility (Neumayer, 2004).

### *Geopolitical background of 2013*

The year 2013 was marked by intensive negotiations over the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement, which aimed to open the country to a free-trade area and deeper economic integration with the European Union. During this period, tourism was presented by policymakers as both an economic sector and a strategic instrument – a tool for strengthening a European identity and signalling alignment with Western partners. In November 2013, the Euromaidan protests began as a response to the suspension of the Association Agreement. The protests were widely interpreted as a symbolic turn back towards Russia. According to Faulkner’s model, this moment corresponds to the prodromal phase, in which warning signs accumulate but the system has not yet entered full collapse.

### *GPR Index – geopolitical risk before the crisis*

The Geopolitical Risk Index (GPR) remained extremely low in 2012–2013, with values close to zero (0–0.05%). This indicates that, in the global media discourse, Ukraine was not perceived as a country exposed to conflict or destabilisation. In Faulkner’s terms, this stage represents the pre-event phase, characterised by overall stability in the tourism system (Faulkner, 2001).

These values correspond with the political reconstruction presented earlier. Despite tensions surrounding the EU negotiations, Ukraine was still seen in 2013 as a safe and predictable country, and tourism formed an important part of its international image. A slight increase in GPR in late 2013 – reaching around 0.1% – marks the entry into the prodromal phase. At this stage, media begin to register early signals of instability. Geopolitical literature suggests that even subtle changes may act as early-warning indicators, reflecting higher exposure of a country within global information networks (Seyfi & Hall, 2024). Research on risk perception in tourism shows that destination images can become fragile even at this early stage, which was later confirmed by the escalation of Euromaidan and the annexation of Crimea.

### Layer 1: Geopolitical structure (Realism – Liberalism – Constructivism)

The first layer of the proposed model integrates three major theoretical perspectives in international relations – realism, liberalism and constructivism. Each of them explains in a different way the dynamics of relations between Ukraine and Russia before the 2013–2014 crisis and the role of tourism in shaping geopolitical tensions.

#### *Realism: Crimea as a space of strategic rivalry*

From a realist perspective, Crimea was perceived by both sides as a strategically important asset. For Russia, the key elements included the presence of the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol and the ability to project military power across the Black Sea region (CSIS, 2014; Wills, 2023). The dominance of Russian tourists on the peninsula further strengthened the narrative of Crimea's "natural" belonging to Russia (Doan & Kiptenko, 2017). For Ukraine, Crimea was the country's largest tourism destination, generating a significant share of seasonal revenues. Tourism had both economic and symbolic functions, corresponding to the logic of "control through mobility" (Bianchi et al., 2020).

#### *Liberalism: European integration and tourism as soft power*

From a liberal perspective, Ukraine in 2013 was strongly oriented toward integration with the European Union through negotiations of the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement (European External Action Service, 2014). Tourism was linked to modernisation, harmonisation of standards and greater economic openness (Korsak et al., 2019; Stoika, 2020). European tourism policies supported this trajectory by facilitating visa processes, improving infrastructure and liberalising transport. The government's decision of 21 November 2013 to suspend preparations for signing the agreement triggered the Euromaidan protests (OSW, 2013). These events reflected a growing polarisation between pro-Russian and pro-European orientations.

In liberal terms, this moment represented a disruption of the integration process, which had previously contributed to stability in the tourism sector.

*Constructivism: Identity, narratives and the symbolic meaning of tourism*

Constructivist literature emphasises that competing identity narratives play a central role in Ukrainian politics (Goode & Stroup, 2015). The divide between European and post-Soviet ideological orientations could be observed in public debates, political symbols and cultural practices (Kulyk, 2016). Lviv and western Ukraine were widely associated with European identity, while Crimea was linked to the Russian sphere of influence (Jones, 2003; Le, 2019). The growth of cultural and creative sectors after Euromaidan, described by Chatham House (House, 2020), further strengthened the European orientation and supported identity-based civic mobilisation. Geopolitical crises lead to rapid transformations of symbolic landscapes and redefine the political role of tourism destinations.

**Layer 2: The geopolitical event (20 March 2014 – Annexation of Crimea)**

The annexation of Crimea in March 2014 was the most abrupt geopolitical disruption in Europe since the Yugoslav wars, and its impact on Ukraine's tourism sector was both immediate and structural. The process began in February 2014 with the appearance of unmarked military units on the peninsula, later referred to as "little green men" (Brown, 2018; Orzechowski & Jartyś, 2020). The culmination was the referendum held on 16 March and the formal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation on 20 March 2014. According to United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/262, the annexation was declared illegal, reinforcing the international dimension of the crisis. The European Union and the United States introduced their first sanction packages, while NATO expressed clear opposition to the violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity (European Parliament, 2014).

Crimea was Ukraine's largest tourism destination, visited annually by about 5-6 million people (Table 2). The annexation therefore meant not only the loss of strategic territory, but also the loss of the country's most important tourism product. Within Faulkner's model, such a development corresponds to an abrupt shift into the emergency phase, where the structure of the tourism system collapses rapidly.

Table 2. Selected tourism indicators (2013)

Metric	Value
International arrivals	24.7M
Tourism receipts	2.8-5.1B USD
Main source market	Russia (42%)
Crimea tourism	5-6M
Employment tourism sector	~400k
GPR Index	0-0,05%

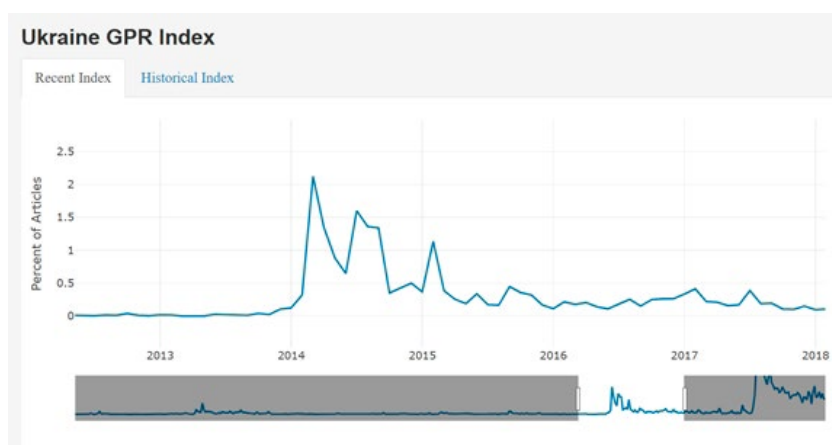
Source: own elaboration based on: <https://wtcc.org/research/economic-impact>; <https://www.oekonomus.hu/en/analyses/tourism-during-the-war-how-russian-ukrainian-and-european-tourism-changed>; <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-03-25/crimea-one-year-after-annexation-end-honeymoon>.

The dynamics of this shock are visible in the GPR Index (Figure 3). The indicator rose from values close to zero in 2012–2013 to about 2.12% in March 2014 – the highest reading in Eastern Europe since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In the case of Ukraine, international outlets such as BBC, Reuters and CNN consistently framed the annexation as a “Russian invasion of Crimea”, contributing to a sudden transformation of the country's image from a recreational to a conflict-affected destination.

The tourism sector was affected immediately. In 2014, major cruise lines (including Celebrity Cruises and Regent Seven Seas Cruises) cancelled Black Sea itineraries and Russian tour operators stopped sending tourists to Ukraine. This was devastating, given that Russian tourists had accounted for over 40% of all international arrivals (Tab. 2). The result was the loss of both the Crimean destination and a key source market. From a geopolitical perspective, the events of March 2014 align with the logic of chaos theory and systemic breakdowns. Russell and Faulkner (2004) describe such

moments as bifurcation points, where the previous development trajectory of a destination can no longer continue. For Ukraine, this permanently redirected tourism flows to the west and quickly undermined its previous model, which relied on Russian visitors and mass tourism in Crimea. In terms of the geopolitics of tourism the annexation was also the moment when tourism ceased to function as a neutral economic sector and became part of contestation over identity and the symbolic meaning of space. The change in narrative – visible in both the GPR Index and international media coverage – reframed Ukraine as a potential risk zone. This shift strongly influenced the country’s image in the following years and complicated the recovery process in line with post-conflict recovery frameworks (Reddy et al., 2020).

Figure 3. GPR Index for Ukraine (2012–2015)



Source: [https://www.matteoiacoviello.com/gpr\\_country\\_files/gprc\\_neeu.htm](https://www.matteoiacoviello.com/gpr_country_files/gprc_neeu.htm)

### Layer 3: Media amplification

Strong media amplification after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 led to one of the most abrupt shifts in destination perception in European tourism over the last decade. This process is clearly illustrated in Table 3, which shows how dramatically the image of Ukraine changed between 2013 and 2014. While in the year preceding the crisis 68%



of respondents in a European Travel Commission survey described Ukraine as a safe country, this figure fell to only 22% in 2014 (ETC, 2014). At the same time, the WEF Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2015 reclassified Ukraine from an emerging destination to a conflict-affected destination, demonstrating the systemic and lasting character of this transformation.

Table 3. Key shifts in Ukraine's destination image (2013–2014)

Dimension	2013	2014	Change	Source
Perceived safety	68% „safe“	22% „safe“	<b>-66%</b>	(ETC. European Tourism amid the Crimea Crisis (Report), 2014) – sharp decline in safety perception among EU tourists
Cognitive image	„Emerging destination“	„Conflict-affected“	<b>Negative shift</b>	WEF Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2015 - reclassification of Ukraine
Booking cancellations	Baseline (100%)	~40% increase	<b>+40%</b>	(ETC. European Tourism amid the Crimea Crisis (Report), 2014) - „Falls in arrivals by air in April and May were particularly large following the annexation of Crimea in late March“
International arrivals	24.7 mln	~19.2 mln	<b>-22%</b>	Sass (2020); Ivanov et al. (2017)
Tourism receipts	2.8 mld USD	~1.96 mld USD	<b>-30%</b>	Strategy& (2015) - report „Surviving Disaster“

Global media, especially BBC, CNN and Reuters, framed the events of March 2014 as the “Russia–Ukraine War”, presenting the crisis as nationwide, even though in the first months it was geographically limited to Crimea and parts of Donbas. On platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, hashtags like #CrimeaCrisis and #UkraineConflict quickly became widespread, reinforcing a spiral amplification effect in which media narratives are reproduced, circulated and simplified into stable perception patterns. In the context of tourism, this mechanism is crucial: media overrepresentation of risk can increase the perceived level of danger by up to 20%. In the case of Ukraine, the country's image in the minds of international tourists became detached from the actual geography of the conflict. As shown in Table 3, although active hostilities were confined to Crimea and Donbas, international arrivals dropped by 22%, while tourism receipts fell by around 30% (PwC, 2015; Sass, 2020). This suggests

that tourists perceived danger across the whole country, not just in the conflict zones.

Media amplification led to a sharp rise in booking cancellations. According to the report *European Tourism Amid the Crimea Crisis* (2014), cancellations increased by around 40% compared to the previous year, with air bookings declining particularly sharply in April–May 2014. Air travel segments collapsed immediately after the annexation, driven by decisions made by individual travellers and word-of-mouth dynamics. Research by Gabryjończyk & Kudinova, (2023) notes that a common message among families and friends in this period was “do not travel to Ukraine”, which is a typical social reaction during political crises.

From an emerging destination, the country shifted in 2014 to the category of a conflict-affected destination, as confirmed by (World Economic Forum, 2015) WEF TTCI 2015. In tourism studies, such a shift is considered a critical turning point: once the narrative of a “conflict country” becomes established, it tends to persist for many years, even if the actual level of danger decreases.

As a result, media amplification became one of the most significant mechanisms intensifying the shock described in section 3.3. In Faulkner’s model, it corresponds to the transition from the emergency phase to the early destabilisation phase of the tourism system. The data in Table 3 highlight the scale of this transformation: a drastic collapse in perceived safety, a sudden negative shift in Ukraine’s destination image, and mass cancellations of bookings. These factors paved the way for the next processes analysed in Layer 4, concerning the structural breakdown of demand and supply.

#### Layer 4: Tourist perception (Cognitive & Affective Image)

The change in tourist perceptions of Ukraine after the 2014 events was one of the most significant impacts of the crisis. Its scale is confirmed by both quantitative and qualitative data presented in Table 3. In 2013, Ukraine was widely viewed in European tourism discourse as an emerging destination – a country with growing potential, combining cultural tourism, urban tourism and the specific attractiveness of

Chernobyl-related dark tourism. The transformation of perception was both cognitive and emotional. In cognitive terms, and in line with the conceptual framework of (Yang et al., 2022), Ukraine ceased to be associated with cultural and experiential qualities (cognitive image). Instead, it became strongly linked to political risk. The affective dimension changed just as profoundly. According to the SOR model (Stimulus–Organism–Response) proposed by Asyraff (2024), affective image mediates the relationship between cognitive image and behavioural intention. In Ukraine’s case, emotional reactions became strongly negative.

The shifts were clearly reflected in tourist behaviour, with around 73% of people cancelling their bookings. This “destination switching” – explained by Hall & O’Sullivan (1996) – during times of instability is particularly harmful as it suggests that travel is being postponed indefinitely rather than definitively refused. When analysed together with previous layers, it becomes evident that tourist perception served as a key mediating factor between the geopolitical shock (Layer 2) and the destabilisation of the tourism market (Layer 5). The rapid change in Ukraine’s cognitive and affective image was a critical turning point that dictated the speed, scale and persistence of the decline in tourism after 2014.

### Layer 5: Market response

The market response to the events of 2014 was characterised by its intensity and asymmetry, which is confirmed by both quantitative evidence and the structural analysis presented in Table 4. The first and most visible element was a sharp demand shock. International tourist arrivals decreased from 24.7 million in 2013 to 12.7 million in 2014, a decline of around 50%. Tourism receipts followed a similar pattern: from USD 2.8 billion in 2013, they dropped to USD 1.96 billion in 2014 and USD 1.61 billion in 2015, amounting to a cumulative decline of 43%.

Table 4. Selected tourism metrics for Ukraine (2013–2015)

Metric	2013	2014	2015	Change 2013-2015
Arrivals (mln)	24.7	12.7	12.4	-50%
Receipts (mld USD)	~2.8	~1.9	~1.6	-43%
Employment (K)	~352	~200	~250	-30%
Premium segment (%)	100	~25-30	~20-25	-75%

Source: own elaboration based on: Eurostat, (2014); Husiatynska et al. (2022); Ivanov et al. (2017); Lyulyov et al. (2020); Strategy&. (2015); World Economic Forum. (2015).

Structural changes in demand were equally significant. The most affected segment was premium tourism, including four- and five-star hotels and high-value organised tours. According to Ivanov et al. (2017) the share of this segment decreased by approximately 70-75% between 2013-15 (Tab. 3). The premium segment is particularly sensitive to political risk and media representations of conflict—an observation repeatedly confirmed in research on high-spending tourists. In contrast, the budget segment, including hostels, backpackers and independent travellers, recorded much smaller declines of around 20%, reflecting higher uncertainty tolerance and different motivation structures. Research shows that this growth had both pragmatic and symbolic dimensions: some trips were the result of shifting demand from Crimea and eastern regions toward western and central Ukraine, while others reflected a form of “consumer patriotism”, aimed at supporting domestic tourism providers during the crisis (Husiatynska et al., 2022; Lyulyov et al., 2020). All these developments show that the tourism market’s response to the crisis was far from uniform. It varied by segment, region and structural characteristics. In Faulkner’s (2001) terminology, this stage represents the system’s transition from crisis-induced chaos to a disordered form of adaptation, characterised by volatile demand flows, redefined market segments and spatial mobility.

## Layer 6: Structural consequences

In Faulkner’s model, this layer corresponds to the phase of *long-term consequences*, in which a crisis does not only destabilise the system but also produces lasting institutional, financial and spatial

transformations. Data from 2013–2015 indicate that Ukraine entered this phase quickly, with the most important developments affecting investment, labour markets, infrastructure and regional spillover effects.

The most visible structural change was a drastic reduction in foreign direct investment (FDI) in the tourism sector. According to Kirchner et al. (2015) report on FDI in Ukraine, total FDI inflows fell from long-term average levels to only USD 300 million in 2014, which amounted to 0.2% of Ukraine's GDP. For the tourism sector, whose investment volume was already lower than that of other industries, this meant an almost complete halt in new hotel and infrastructure projects. Lyulyov et al. (2020) confirm that the tourism industry experienced severe cuts in investment, with a sharp decline in new developments. Most hotel and infrastructure projects were frozen indefinitely, and investors withdrew from previously contracted initiatives. As a result, the tourism sector entered a state of chronic underinvestment, and the lack of capital led in subsequent years to deepening infrastructure degradation, especially in coastal and leisure areas of Odesa and in regions surrounding Lviv and Kyiv.

A second key dimension of structural consequences concerned the labour market. Employment in the tourism sector fell by around 30% between 2014–15 (Tab. 4), with the most affected areas being high-standard hotels and industries linked to business and leisure travel. Long-term processes also emerged, such as the emigration of skilled workers to Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, which is documented by Husiatynska et al. (2022). This phenomenon took the form of a classic brain drain, leading to a lasting weakening of the sector's human capital.

Structural effects also included regional spillover dynamics. Lithuania experienced changes in tourism flows, although the evidence is mixed. Variakojienė & Achonen (2022) analysed the impact of the conflict on Lithuanian tourism and identified a negative influence on bookings, despite the theoretical potential for positive spillover. In contrast, Kiczmachowska, (2025) found a neutral effect for Poland: declines in arrivals from Ukraine were compensated by increases from other markets, as well as by chain travel linked to migrant families.

Crimea itself became a highly polarised destination. According to the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW, 2015), the peninsula lost

the vast majority of its international tourists in 2014, dropping from 5.9 million in 2013 to 3.8 million in 2014 (a decline of roughly 36%). At the same time, domestic tourism from Russia increased due to a large-scale promotional campaign encouraging travel to Crimea as a Russian destination (Tomczewska-Popowycz & Quirini-Popławski, 2021). *The Moscow Times* (2015) reported a 34% rise in tourism in 2015 compared with 2014, although numbers remained below pre-annexation levels.

All these processes confirm that the consequences of the 2014 crisis were systemic, affecting capital, labour, space and institutions. This layer prepares the ground for the analysis of the final phase of the framework, concerning early forms of adaptation and the first attempts at recovery in the tourism sector, which began to emerge between 2016 and 2018.

### Layer 7: Geopolitical implications

In Faulkner's framework, this phase represents the concluding stage in which the tourism system does not return to its pre-crisis state but becomes permanently transformed, often as part of broader geopolitical processes. For Ukraine, the years 2014–2018 became a period of redefining national identity, integration pathways and the symbolic role of tourism spaces.

The most visible developments occurred on the Russian side, where state authorities sought to legitimise the annexation of Crimea through the symbolic and economic incorporation of the peninsula into the Russian cultural and territorial sphere. The Russian government invested in expanding tourism infrastructure, modernising coastal resorts and promoting Crimea as a "Russian destination" within domestic tourism policy. This strategy followed the logic of territorial *ownership through tourism*, in which tourism is used to reinforce territorial claims through narratives of historical, cultural and consumer belonging. The rebranding of promotional materials, the official use of "Russian Crimea" and extensive marketing campaigns targeting the Russian middle class aimed to strengthen the perception of Crimea as an integral part of the Russian Federation regardless of international diplomatic responses.

On the Ukrainian side, the period 2014–2018 brought a clear slow-down in European integration processes in areas related to tourism and the economy. Before 2014, tourism had served as a tool of Europeanisation – a form of soft integration through economic cooperation, infrastructure development and adoption of EU standards. After the outbreak of the conflict, however, national priorities shifted towards security. As noted by WEF (World Economic Forum, 2015), Ukraine lost part of its previous momentum in the pillars of “openness” and “competitiveness”, and tourism policy increasingly functioned as a crisis management instrument rather than a mechanism of economic integration with the EU.

All these processes demonstrate that the 2014 crisis was not a temporary episode but an event that led to a permanent reconfiguration of the geopolitical role of tourism in Ukraine. Tourism became not only an economic sector but also a tool of narrative contestation, an instrument of identity building and a medium for geostrategic competition. Layer 7, which concludes the proposed framework, therefore shows that tourism – traditionally viewed as peripheral in international politics – can play an important role in political processes and be used as a strategic resource in rivalries between states.

## DISCUSSION: VALIDATION AND IMPLICATIONS

### Theoretical validation of the model

The analysis validates the proposed seven-layer model, which combines Faulkner’s crisis framework with theories of geopolitical and political risk. All phases of Faulkner’s ‘Anatomy of a Crisis’ can be seen in Ukraine, demonstrating structural compatibility. The pre-event phase, characterised by low Geopolitical Risk (GPR) values and a lack of risk-focused crisis planning, illustrates the complacency issue that is common among destinations in stable environments over a prolonged period. This is evident in Ukraine’s tourism policy and national strategies prior to 2014.

The prodromal phase, described by Faulkner as a period of early warning signals, was confirmed by the small increase in the GPR index at the end of 2013 and by rising political tensions associated

with the Euromaidan movement. The emergency phase matches the abrupt geopolitical shock caused by the annexation of Crimea and the escalation of the conflict in Donbas. Subsequent phases of disruption, adaptation and structural consequences were visible in data concerning market reactions, investment flows, tourist perception and regional spillover effects. These findings confirm that Faulkner's logic of destination resilience and response remains valid even in the context of geopolitical crises, which were not the primary focus of his framework.

A second component of validation concerns the integration of international relations theory. The realist perspective proved useful for explaining the strategic rivalry over Crimea as both a military and tourism space. Liberalism helped clarify the role of Ukraine's integration aspirations and the position of tourism as part of the country's Europeanisation in economic and image-building terms. Constructivism was crucial for capturing discursive changes after 2014, including identity transformations, the shift from a "post-Soviet" to a "European" orientation and the formation of symbolic opposition between Ukraine and Russia. The integration of these three perspectives was necessary to capture both the material and symbolic mechanisms of the crisis, demonstrating the theoretical adequacy of the model.

The GPR index also served as an important validation tool, allowing for a quantitative assessment of geopolitical risk intensity and its presence in the media discourse. Empirical evidence shows, however, that although the index accurately marked the moment of risk intensification (the sharp increase in March 2014), it did not fully capture the scale of perceptual and market consequences. Based on GPR, the expected decline in international arrivals would have been around 22%, whereas the actual decrease in tourism receipts reached 43%. This discrepancy was caused by media amplification and the withdrawal of the premium segment, as widely documented in the literature on political risk perception. It demonstrates that GPR requires complementary qualitative indicators to better reflect the dynamics of tourist reactions.

The most important element of validation is the innovative character of the proposed framework. It is the first conceptual model to operationally combine tourism crisis management with geopolitical theory and political risk analysis, creating a seven-layer structure



that captures multiple dimensions of a crisis simultaneously. The model enables both a reconstruction of the sequence of events and a theoretical understanding of the relationships between geopolitics, media, markets and tourist perception. Its empirical application to the Ukrainian case confirmed its ability to reflect real-world processes and to identify key mediating mechanisms, such as media amplification, regional spillover effects and structural consequences for investment and labour markets. In conclusion, the proposed model represents both a theoretical and methodological innovation that fills an existing gap between tourism crisis theory and the geopolitics of tourism.

### Practical implications

The findings of this analysis have direct practical consequences for destination management, public policy and the tourism industry, especially in contexts characterised by heightened geopolitical risk. First, the Ukrainian case demonstrates that DMOs must expand crisis planning to include geopolitical scenarios, which have traditionally been marginalised compared with natural disasters or health-related crises. The absence of political risk response plans before 2014 intensified the element of surprise and contributed to communication chaos. Effective destination management under such conditions requires communication strategies capable of counteracting media amplification and misinformation, as well as the rapid delivery of reliable information about the actual geography of risks. A second key implication concerns the diversification of source markets. In 2013, Ukraine heavily relied on Russian tourists, which made its tourism sector highly vulnerable to geopolitical shocks. As shown in Tables 3 and 4, the critical mass of the Russian market meant that its collapse translated into a sharp decline in arrivals and tourism receipts, which other segments were unable to offset. DMOs should therefore pursue structural diversification strategies that include both geographical markets and traveller segments, such as tourists from EU member states, neighbouring countries and non-European regions. A third dimension relates to regional strategies. The analysis demonstrated that western Ukraine, perceived as safe, was able to

absorb part of the demand redirected from Crimea and Donbas. In situations of geopolitical crisis, regional flexibility becomes crucial for the survival of the tourism sector. The final implications are for the tourism industry. The crisis highlighted the need for flexible contracts and cancellation policies that enable a rapid response to geopolitical disruptions. The sector should also develop improved crisis insurance schemes for political and war-related risks, as these remain inadequate in many countries. Furthermore, monitoring the GPR Index can act as an early warning system, helping businesses and public institutions to prepare for potential market shocks.

### Limitations and directions for future research

Despite its strong theoretical and empirical foundations, this study has important limitations. Its focus on the period from 2013 to 2014 enables the examination of a closed crisis episode, but it is unable to capture the long-term effects or developments since 2022. Second, data availability for Crimea after the annexation is limited, and the datasets from Russia and Ukraine are often incompatible, creating methodological challenges. Finally, as this is a single case study, the findings are not easily generalisable to other regions affected by geopolitical conflict.

Despite these limitations, the study opens several avenues for further research. A key direction is testing the proposed model on other destinations affected by political crises, such as Syria, Yemen, Israel and Palestine, which would make it possible to assess the universality and adaptability of the framework. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable for tracing recovery trajectories and structural transformations five, ten or more years after the crisis, helping to identify factors that determine the durability of systemic change. Another promising direction is a comparative analysis of the two waves of crisis in Ukraine – the events of 2013–2014 and those after 2022 – which would enable an assessment of how earlier experiences influenced the resilience and adaptive capacity of the tourism sector.

Finally, from a methodological perspective, expanding the framework with analytical tools based on artificial intelligence and machine learning could improve the prediction of geopolitical indicators and

the monitoring of media discourse. Integrating a sustainability dimension could further broaden the relevance of the proposed model by incorporating social, institutional and environmental contexts. Such extensions would enhance the framework's usefulness for both researchers and practitioners responsible for risk management in the tourism sector.

### CONCLUSIONS

Developing and testing this framework could help to mitigate the effects of future crises. Analysing the impact of the 2014 Crimean annexation on Ukraine's tourism sector enables us to draw structural, theoretical and practical conclusions, which confirm the need for a new conceptual approach to tourism crises shaped by geopolitics. The Ukrainian case study shows that such crises are driven by three factors that includes material political risk, media amplification and transformations in identity-related discourse. Although the GPR index recorded a 150% increase in geopolitical risk in March 2014, the actual market collapse was far deeper, with a 43% drop in tourism receipts and a 29% decline in arrivals. This gap highlights the importance of mediating mechanisms, particularly intensified media narratives and the mass withdrawal of the premium segment. Shifts in discourse, such as reframing Ukraine from 'post-Soviet' to 'European', reinforced a structural reorientation of the sector and contributed to a geographical redistribution of demand towards the country's western regions.

The practical implications apply to destination management organisations, public decision-makers and the tourism industry. The findings indicate that crisis planning must include geopolitical scenarios and that the GPR index can serve as a useful early-warning tool. Managing the structure of source markets is also essential – Ukraine's experience clearly shows that excessive dependence on a single market (in this case the Russian one) increases vulnerability to destabilisation. From a practical perspective, effective strategies include regional interventions in areas perceived as safe and the development of crisis communication mechanisms able to counteract media amplification.

The analysis allows this period to be understood as a form of “dress rehearsal” for the challenges the country faced after 2022, including testing the resilience of its tourism sector, crisis management mechanisms and state-level image strategies. At the same time, the discursive transformation and the strengthening of Ukraine’s European tourism identity may offer a foundation for long-term strategic growth based on European orientation and regional diversification.

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