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DIGITAL TOURISM ECOSYSTEMS AND PLATFORMS: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

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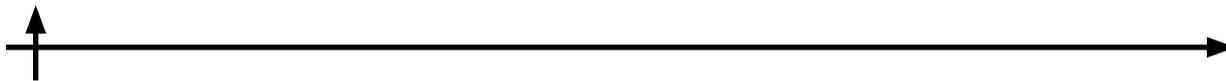
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Abstract. This research considers the issues of digitalization of tourism. The need to create a universal digital platform in Russia as a result of the ecosystem approach is discussed at various levels, including state, education, and commerce. This study proves to be highly relevant because different strategies and investment initiatives are actively being undertaken in the industry. The attractiveness of the Russian regions is also increasing, thus contributing to the development of domestic tourism. The authors present a top-level comparative analysis of existing digital platforms and their limitations in meeting the needs of key stakeholders, and develop an algorithm of requirements gathering for the creation of a universal digital platform. As a result, a structured model for the development of a digital tourism platform is proposed, including the interests of stakeholders, functional roles of tourism market participants, as well as the necessary digital infrastructure. The obtained results can serve as a methodological basis for the development of a tourism ecosystem that promotes the interaction of market participants and increases the availability of industry tourism services.

Keywords: digitalization, ecosystem approach, digital platforms, tourism, tourism digital platform, integrative model

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ЦИФРОВЫЕ ТУРИСТИЧЕСКИЕ ЭКОСИСТЕМЫ И ПЛАТФОРМЫ: ТЕОРЕТИКО-МЕТОДОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ АСПЕКТЫ

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Аннотация. Данное исследование посвящено вопросам цифровизации сферы туризма. Необходимость создания в России универсальной цифровой платформы в результате применения экосистемного подхода, обсуждается на государственных, образовательных и коммерческих уровнях. Актуальность исследования подтверждается стратегиями развития и инвестиционными инициативами отрасли, а также политикой повышения привлекательности регионов России и развития внутреннего туризма. В рамках исследования представлен верхнеуровневый сравнительный анализ существующих цифровых платформ, их ограничения в удовлетворении потребностей ключевых стейкхолдеров. Сформулирован алгоритм сбора требований для создания универсальной цифровой платформы. В результате предложена структурированная модель разработки цифровой туристической платформы, включающая интересы стейкхолдеров, функциональные роли участников туристского рынка, а также необходимую цифровую инфраструктуру. Полученные результаты могут послужить методологической основой для разработки туристической экосистемы, способствующей взаимодействию участников рынка и повышению доступности услуг отраслевого туризма.

Ключевые слова: цифровизация, экосистемный подход, цифровые платформы, туризм, туристская цифровая платформа, интегративная модель

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Introduction

The potential for the development of domestic tourism in Russia has been widely discussed in recent years. Since tourism products with service forms are significantly sensitive to the economic environment (Evgrafov, 2017; Artamonova, 2019), the development of the tourism market is positively influenced by the decentralization of economic routes to the regions, government support, changes in consumer preferences, increased interest in domestic travel, and the creation of new tourism infrastructure. In addition to creating and maintaining infrastructure for tourists, an important task is the digitalization of tourism, which is also actively encouraged by the state. Formation of a single economic space as a result of the integration of tourism market participants and processes within the digital ecosystem will provide domestic tourism with new opportunities and development prospects (Iliina, 2013; Golovina, 2019; Prasanth, 2024).

Recently, new tourism trends have been developing, arising at the junctions of industries (e.g., industrial tourism, ecotourism). This complicates the task of creating a single integrative model of tourism, making it cumbersome and difficult to grasp. Existing examples of tourism-related digital platforms, although successful, are limited in both tools and data volume. At



the same time, the mentioned issues of tourism, which are at the nascent stage, cannot be fully covered by existing solutions and require the application of innovative design tools in service activities (Ilyina, 2016).

In this regard, this research aims to develop an algorithm for creating a digital tourism platform as a tool for industry development, which will take into account international experience in the field, theoretical and methodological foundations of the ecosystem approach, and the latest tourism trends. This model could be adapted to different segments of the tourism market.

Materials and Methods

As a methodological basis of this research paper the authors relied on the ecosystem approach to the design of digital solutions in tourism (Serdukov, 2023; Voronova, 2024). In order to collect information on the experience of the development and functioning of tourism platforms, the tourism platforms of different segments of the tourism market were analyzed, including “Industrial Ring of Moscow Region,” “Online Guide to Industrial Tourism in Russia,” “Digital Ecosystem of Zheleznovodsk,” “Svoye Farmstvo,” “RUSSPASS,” and “Turizm.rf”. The methodology of this paper also employs the following research methods: analysis, deduction, induction, and description.

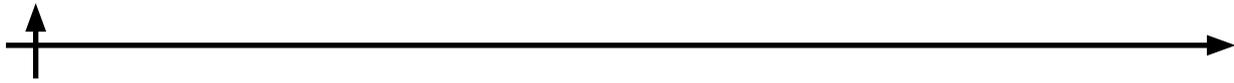
Results and Discussion

A tourism ecosystem is defined as “an innovative entrepreneurial ecosystem, where a group of interconnected stakeholders share tourism resources and infrastructure of a territory in the process of creating, promoting, and realizing competitive tourism products, goods, and services for tourists to achieve mutually beneficial goals, including joint creation and use of digital platforms” (Serdukova, 2023; Kalabukhova, 2020; Матульковб, 2024).

Existing research on digitalization of tourism by designing digital ecosystems focuses on the analysis of individual platforms and their functionality but does not provide a unified approach to their development (Gu, 2024). Examples of platforms such as RUSSPASS, VisitBritain, and other national tourism services demonstrate successful practices but remain restrained in their ability to adapt to new types of tourism. Table 1 summarizes the major features of Russian digital platforms for further analysis.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of online travel platforms

Platform	Description	Main functions	Target audience	Benefits	Drawbacks
"Industrial Ring of the Moscow Region" online service	Portal for booking trips to the enterprises of the Moscow region	Aggregation of routes to industrial sites, booking of trips	Tourists, industry, government	-highly specialized platform; -promotes industrial tourism in the region; - supported by the government	- territorially limited; - no integrated booking system, only external links
Online guide to industrial tourism in Russia	All-Russian database of excursions to enterprises	Information on excursions, routes and businesses	Tourists, guides, businesses	- wide database; - convenient interface; - promotes the development of industrial tourism in the regions	- lack of personal accounts for tourists; - complicated mechanisms of business interaction with the platform



Platform	Description	Main functions	Target audience	Benefits	Drawbacks
Zheleznovodsk digital ecosystem	Travel platform focused on regional vacations, bookings and itineraries	Tourist navigation, reservations, events	Tourists, businesses, local authorities	- full-fledged smart city ecosystem with various services	- territorially limited; - focused on one city; - aimed mainly at urban tourism and trade
RUSSPASS	Digital service for travel planning in Russia	Personalized itineraries, hotel and trip bookings	Tourists	- high integration with other services; - convenient route planning	- limited opportunities for non-standard tours (e.g. industrial or agritourism); - focus on large cities
“Own Farming” (Svoye Fermerstvo)	A platform to promote agricultural tourism and farms	Agritourism platform, booking farm tours	Tourists, farmers	- local business support; - user-friendly interface	- insufficiently developed booking and itinerary functionality
Tourism.rf	Government platform on tourism in Russia, includes routes, attractions, events	Information portal about tourism, routes and attractions	Tourists, investors, businesses	- large database; - government support; - easy information search	- does not include booking; - weak content personalization

Overall, existing digital solutions successfully fulfill the following functions:

- aggregation of data on attractions, events, businesses, and excursions;
- booking of excursions through external sources or deferred booking;
- access to interactive maps with possibilities to create complex tourist itineraries;
- commercial and partnership relations with representatives of local businesses;
- popularization of domestic tourism (history, video content, virtual tours).

At this stage, the digital environment of tourism in Russia is in the phase of active development. It successfully fulfills the tasks of popularizing domestic tourism, simplifying navigation of tourist resources, and increasing the economic attractiveness of regions. The existing digital solutions are mainly focused on cultural and recreational tourism and, despite the limitations, meet the needs of users to a large extent.

At the same time, the existing systems require modernization and expansion in order to catch up with the requirements and needs of sectoral areas of tourism, such as industrial, agricultural, educational, and others. Despite the narrow specialization of sectoral areas of tourism, its contour includes a greater number of participants, stakeholders, and the system of their interactions. In this regard, the conditions for the effective functioning of the platform expand. In order to realize the algorithm for the development of a universal digital platform, it is advisable to consider the interests of all stakeholders in different systems of their interactions to form the most complete map of interests. Table 2 summarizes the limitations of existing platforms from the perspective of each stakeholder.

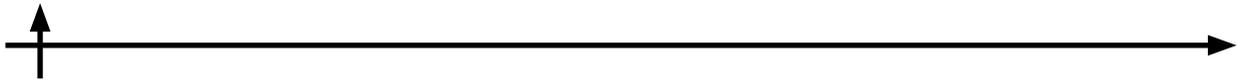


Table 2. Limitations of existing systems

Stakeholder	State	Businesses - enterprises of the tourism industry (tour operators, travel agencies, hotel sector, tour guides, transportation companies, restaurant business)	Enterprises of other industries (plants, factories, farms, scientific centers, etc.)	Tourists (individual, groups, corporate, etc.)
Limitations of existing systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of sectoral tourism analytics, complexity of collecting a lot of information; - low level of integration with GIS; - low level of involvement of enterprises and businesses in sectoral tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of understanding of the needs of industry travelers; - lack of tools and data to analyze consumer behavior; - limited opportunities for promotion and advertising integrations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of effective communication channels with target audiences and partners; - lack of a single transparent mechanism of the process of organizing excursions and interaction with tourists; - difficulties in elaboration of routes at the enterprise and excursion material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - limited information about excursions, disparate information on different platforms; - lack of convenient tools for creating individual itineraries; - insufficient integration with digital services, which complicates the process of booking, buying tickets and other services.

Despite the active development of digital platforms in tourism, their functionality remains fragmented and does not comprehensively take into account the needs of different stakeholders, especially in the field of industry tourism. To address this issue, this study proposes to create a structured algorithm for gathering requirements in a future platform as a preparatory stage for the development of a universal digital platform. The requirements for the platform should take into account not only the interests of stakeholders but also the complex interaction between interested structures.

Defining the goals of the future platform and the target audience is the first step of requirements gathering. The format of interaction on digital platforms can vary: B2B, B2C, and hybrid format.

The B2B format consists of interaction between businesses—travel companies, enterprises, educational institutions, etc. Such a format will be convenient for corporate groups of tourists who, for example, work in different industrial enterprises of the same industry and want to regularly share best practices and technologies with each other (Linton, 2020; Raxmanova, 2024; Nurulla, 2021; Baggio, 2014). However, it does not take into account the interests of a large proportion of independent travellers, who do make up the bulk of consumers. The B2C format is focused on the interaction of business with the end consumer—tourists. These are the platforms that were analyzed in the framework of this study earlier, and their limitations were identified. The mixed model implies the presence of different mechanisms of interaction both between businesses and businesses directly with tourists. This format is most appropriate for the realization of a platform with the possibility of complex interaction of stakeholders.

Identification of the main and possible stakeholders with a description of their interests and



pains can be considered one of the most important stages of the elaboration of the image of the future platform. The key stakeholders of the tourism ecosystem have been described in Table 2:

- tourists—end users of tourist services (individual tourists, groups of tourists, corporate tourists);
- businesses—tour operators, hotels, excursion bureaus, transportation companies, restaurateurs, and other business representatives providing comfortable conditions and additional services for tourists;
- government—bodies responsible for tourism development, regulation of standards, and business support (Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Russian Federation, Government of the Russian Federation, President's Office);
- enterprises: factories, production complexes, scientific and industrial centres, agro-industrial complexes, and other enterprises interested in conducting excursions.

In the future, the platform's toolkit can be expanded due to the increasing needs of stakeholders. Thus, the following participants can be added to the system:

- educational institutions—universities, colleges, centres of additional education, and other educational institutions interested in organizing educational tours;
- cultural and scientific organizations—museums, research centres, innovation clusters;
- online project offices—interested in supporting and scaling innovative solutions.

The business model of the platform will determine the availability of functions and roles, as well as regulate the relationship between the platform holder and other stakeholders. If there is public participation in financing, the use may be free of charge for participants, as it is implemented according to state strategies for regional and domestic tourism development. Commercial models can be built on subscription (users or businesses pay a subscription for access to additional features) or on transaction fees (monetization through a percentage of bookings, ticket sales, and excursions). Of course, in addition, a hybrid model is also possible—which will combine several sources of income; for example, for tourists and businesses, access to the platform is free, businesses that place their services need to subscribe, and monetization of transactions will be carried out according to the terms of digital services.

Defining and describing the functionality of the platform is impossible without first drawing up a list of active roles on the platform. They can be: tourist—an end user booking services; guide, tour guide—a person or a company offering excursion programs or who can respond and make a personalized itinerary; business companies—organizations promoting their own services that improve the experience of tourists (hotels, restaurants, transport companies, cultural centres); enterprise—a factory, farm, or other organization ready to host tourists; platform administrator—content moderation, data management.

The design of the digital infrastructure of the platform should be done in terms of platform usability, roles, and the most necessary actions. The main function is the aggregation of data on tourism destinations, businesses and attractions to visit, collective accommodation facilities, restaurants and cafes, guides and tour guides, available dates, etc. The platform's main function is the aggregation of data on tourism destinations, businesses, and attractions to visit; collective accommodation facilities; restaurants and cafes; guides and tour guides; available dates; etc. The personal account is one of the key features, thanks to which will be implemented not only the separation of roles but also personalized recommendations depending on the behaviour on the platform, as well as access to additional functionality necessary only for this ecosystem member. Search filters have now become an integral part of any online service (Popova, 2023; Cassia, 2020; Pencarelli, 2020; Khairtadinova, 2022; Baggio, 2020). Interactive maps with customized itinerary options, as well as virtual visuals such as AR/VR tours, will attract users to



the platform. In addition, it makes sense to think about optimizing the platform for different devices (computer, smartphone, tablet), as well as to determine the need for a mobile app.

In addition to the basic functionality of the platform, the ecosystem should minimize transitions to external services by integrating them into a single platform. It is advisable to consider connecting state information systems such as Gosuservices, Rosakkreditation, etc. for convenient identification and obtaining data on permits and licenses; payment systems to support online payment; online booking systems to make the process transparent and minimize manual processing of applications; and services for purchasing tickets for transport, events, and excursions.

Thus, the formation of a digital ecosystem of tourism requires an integrated approach that takes into account the interests of all stakeholders and provides convenient interaction between them. Defining the format of the platform, its business model, and active roles, as well as key and additional functionality, allows us to lay the foundation for the further development of a universal digital solution. The architecture of such a solution is presented in more detail in Voronova O. V. Vasiliev V.N. (2024).

The next stage is the formation of an algorithm for creating the platform, which will ensure the step-by-step implementation and integration of all necessary components. This algorithm covers the key stages of design, starting from conceptual planning and ending with the implementation of digital tools that ensure the usability and efficiency of the platform.

The algorithm for developing a digital platform for industry tourism is as follows:

1. Defining the objectives of the platform and key stakeholders. What problem does the platform solve? For whom is it being created? What is the format of interaction between the participants of the ecosystem? Which stakeholders are key, and which can be included in the ecosystem in the future?

2. Defining the business model. Will the platform include paid services, for whom, and in what format? What sources of revenue and monetization will be used? What will help ensure the cost-effectiveness and sustainability of the platform?

3. Defining the functional requirements of the platform and digital infrastructure. What main services should be implemented and integrated? What additional services could be useful in the long term? What roles for users should be prescribed?

4. Integration of external services. What services should be integrated: GIS, license registries, payment systems, online booking systems, etc.?

5. Platform testing, error correction, and launch. What methods will be used to test the platform after launch—feedback forms, surveys, tracking consumer behaviour?

6. Scaling the model, potential areas for development. What are the key areas of platform scaling, and what is their priority? What services are expected to be integrated in the future?

The algorithm of the digital ecosystem of tourism is presented in Figure 1.

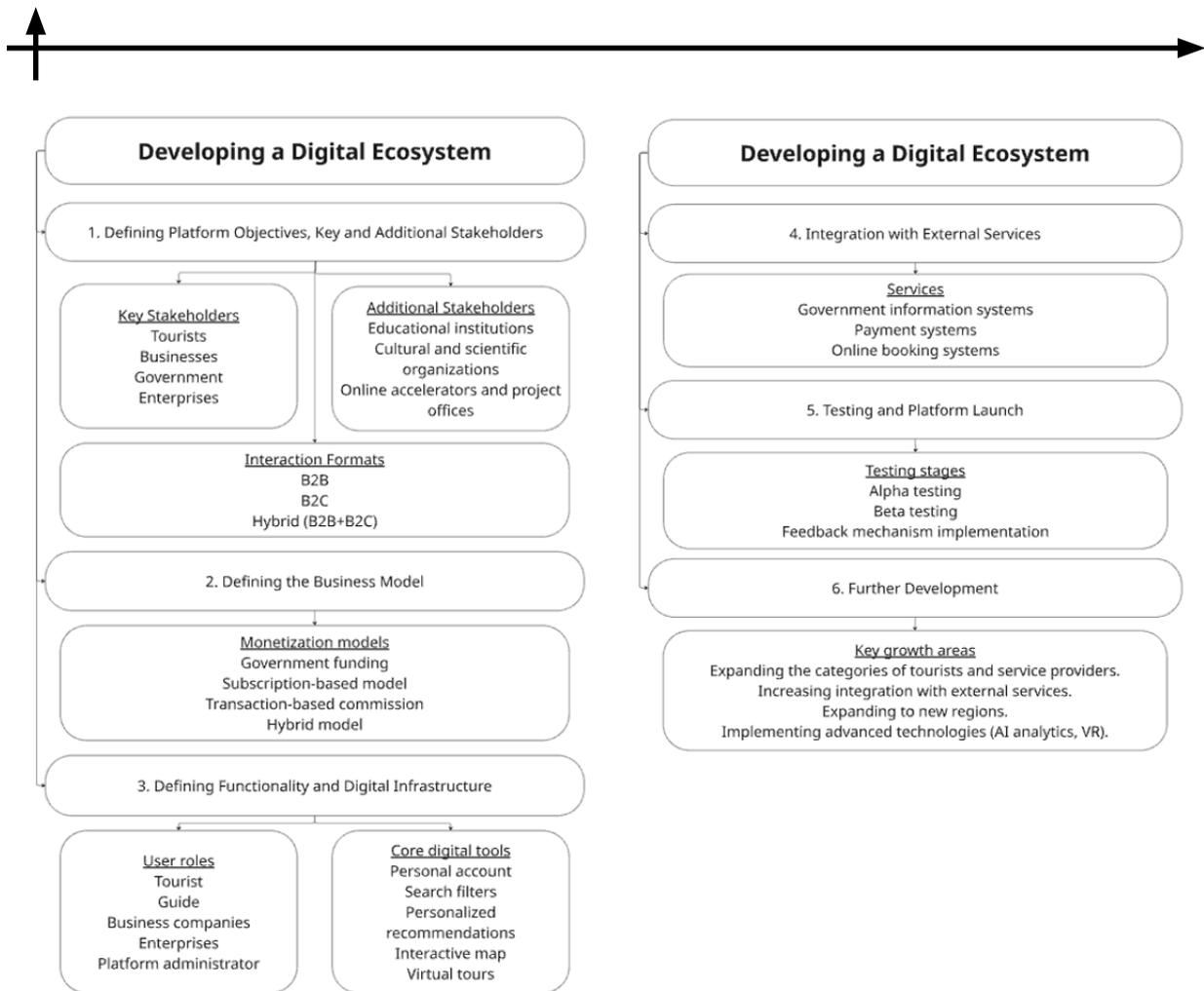


Fig. 1. Model of digital tourism ecosystem.

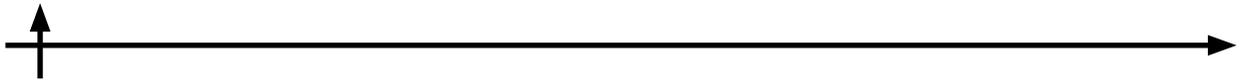
The developed algorithm for creating a universal digital platform for industry tourism is a structured model aimed at systematizing the processes of interaction between key stakeholders and providing an effective digital environment for the development of specialized tourist destinations. The application of this algorithm will allow:

- creating a digital ecosystem that ensures the integration of various industries into tourism;
- increasing the accessibility of sectoral tourism through personalized navigation and booking tools;
- stimulating the development of small and medium-sized tourism-related businesses by providing convenient mechanisms for promotion and interaction with customers;
- providing government agencies with analytical data for effective planning and support of sectoral tourism;
- promoting deeper integration of educational, industrial, and agricultural facilities into tourism activities.

Conclusion

The proposed algorithm can be applied as a methodological basis for the development of national and regional digital platforms aimed at the development of domestic tourism. Its application is especially relevant in the conditions of the digital transformation of the economy and the need to diversify tourism products.

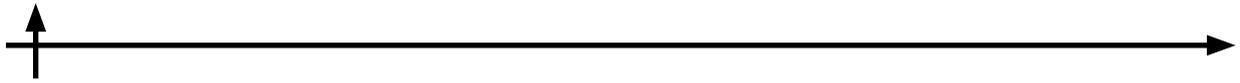
Thus, the presented model of developing a digital platform for sectoral tourism not only meets the needs of key market participants but also contributes to the formation of a sustainable



and a win-win ecosystem capable of adapting to the changing conditions and requirements of the modern tourism sector.

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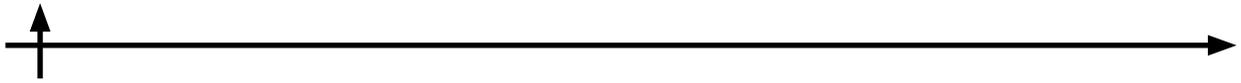
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