INTRODUCING REGENERATIVE TOURISM

Principles and Practices

August 2025

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Glossary of terms

Co-design: A collaborative process where diverse stakeholders - especially local communities - actively participate in shaping tourism experiences, policies, and strategies. In regenerative tourism, co-design ensures that solutions emerge from the unique identity and needs of the place, fostering shared ownership, mutual respect, and outcomes that support the wellbeing of people and ecosystems.

Community Engagement: The process by which communities and organisations work collaboratively to shape decisions, actions, and experiences that affect local wellbeing. In regenerative tourism, community engagement is essential for ensuring that tourism serves the needs, values, and aspirations of local people - leading to more inclusive, resilient, and place-rooted outcomes.

Cultural sensitivity: Acknowledging the existence of cultural differences and human similarities without inputting a value to them (good or bad, better, or worse, right, or wrong).

Conscious traveller: The sustainable or conscious traveller is the tourist who supports sustainability goals and makes individual choices according to sustainable tourism practices.

Experience economy: An economic concept where businesses create unforgettable experiences for their customers, and the value lies in the experience rather than just in the product or service.

Greenwashing: Is the act of making deceptive or false claims about the environmental benefits of a product or practice. It aims to make a product, policy, activity etc appear to be less environmentally damaging than it really is, or at any rate more environmentally friendly than otherwise.

Guest: A guest, through the lens of regeneration, is a conscious visitor who enters a place with humility, curiosity, and care. Rather than consuming experiences, regenerative guests engage as listeners, learners, and contributors - aware that their presence can support the healing and flourishing of the places they visit.

Host: In a regenerative mindset, a host is not merely a service provider, but a caretaker and co-creator of experiences that reflect the deeper identity and needs of a place. A host take responsibility for stewarding relationships - with land, community, and guests - while enabling conditions for people and nature to thrive.

Living systems thinking: Seeing the world - people, places, and nature - not as separate parts, but as a connected whole. This way of thinking comes from an ecological worldview, inspired by how nature itself works: everything is interrelated, and everything depends on everything else.

Nested systems: Systems within systems, all influencing each other.

Paradigm shift: A fundamental change in worldview. In regenerative tourism, the paradigm shift means moving from a tourism model based on extraction, control, and growth to one rooted in care, reciprocity, and the interconnectedness of all life. It transforms how we see the role of tourism - from an industry focused on profit to a living system that contributes to the wellbeing of people, place, and planet.

Place: From a regenerative perspective, place is a living system - composed of culture, nature, memory, and potential. It is not a backdrop for tourism, but the foundation for all relationships. Regenerative tourism invites a deep connection with place and works to enhance its vitality, resilience, and ability to support life for generations to come.

Principles of regenerative tourism: Core values and ways of thinking that guide tourism towards healing, co-creation, and long-term wellbeing. These principles are grounded in living systems thinking and include, among others: place-based design, community empowerment, net-positive impact, cultural and ecological regeneration, and meaningful relationships. They provide the ethical and practical foundation for reimagining tourism as a force that supports life.

Regeneration: Is the idea that our activities should not just avoid damage but actively help restore and enhance the places we visit. That includes nature, culture, and communities.

Regenerative tourism: Regenerative tourism is a different way of thinking and doing tourism. It goes beyond simply reducing harm. It is about healing places, supporting life, and helping communities and nature thrive. The goal is to create conditions where people, places, and ecosystems can truly flourish.

Social entrepreneurs: Individuals or groups who use innovative, purpose-driven approaches to address social, environmental, or cultural challenges through business. In the context of regenerative tourism, social entrepreneurs act as catalysts for place-based transformation. They create tourism experiences and services that prioritise community wellbeing, ecological regeneration, and cultural resilience-blending economic viability with a commitment to healing and long-term impact.

Social inclusion: The practice of ensuring that all individuals and groups - regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, ability, or socio-economic status - have equitable access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making. In regenerative tourism, social inclusion means actively involving diverse voices in shaping tourism and ensuring that its benefits are fairly distributed, contributing to community resilience, justice, and cohesion.

Stakeholder Mapping: The process of identifying and categorising stakeholders based on their influence, interest, and involvement in tourism or broader regenerative initiatives.

Stewarding: Caring for and regenerating the **social, cultural, and ecological systems** that support life. This includes protecting traditions, biodiversity, and the health of the land and community.

The Mediterranean: A culturally and ecologically diverse regions surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, spanning parts of Southern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East.

Executive summary

Tourism in the Mediterranean stands at a crossroads. It has perked up local economies and celebrated individual diversity over the past half century at least. It has moreover been a global connection. Nonetheless, the massive consumption model has brought the region's natural and cultural resources under a kind of unceasing headache eroded community well-being left many territories increasingly subject to climate change impacts. The urgency to rethink how tourism can work for people, nature, and place has never in some ways been greater.

Regenerative tourism offers a different approach. Far from doing no harm, it strives to restore and improve the condition of ecosystems that keep culture alive and permits people find their own futures. Rooted in the concepts of living systems, it understands that tourism is not a separate industry but part of a net of interrelations between visitors, residents and the environment. The goal is to create conditions for all life to flourish.

This document, developed under the **Regenera4MED project**, introduces the core concepts, principles, and practices of regenerative tourism, with an emphasis on the Mediterranean context. It examines how regenerative tourism:

- Builds resilience against climate change by following rather than opposing the living systems of a territory.
- Puts community empowerment and local knowledge at the centre of tourism governance.
- Generates net-positive impacts that enhance the health of people, place, and planet.

Drawing on a comprehensive review of international literature and real-world initiatives, this document synthesizes theory and practice. It covers examples from six pilot territories (**Abruzzo, Catalonia, Corsica, Crete, Liguria, and Split-Dalmatian County**) both globally and close up. These stories show how regenerative principles are applicable in different contexts, providing learning examples for other Mediterranean territories.

The document is one of four elements in the Regenera4MED Blueprint, which compiles all of **Work Package 1**'s activities and deliverables:

1. **Introducing Regenerative Tourism: Principles and Practices** (A 1.1.) - the concept and practice foundation.
2. **Integrated Governance Model** (A 1.2.) - collaborative decision-making guide for stakeholders

3. **Regenerative Programme** (A 1.3.) - involving communities and actors in co-design
4. **Regenerative Tourism Journey: Self-Assessment tool (the RTJ tool)** (A 1.4.) - measuring progress towards regeneration

Together, these elements provide a comprehensive framework for embedding regenerative tourism into policy and practice, enabling territories to transition towards models that are environmentally restorative, socially inclusive, and economically resilient.

The invitation of this document is simple yet profound: to work together-across sectors, disciplines, and borders-to create tourism that leaves places better than we found them. In this way, we can ensure that Mediterranean territories and communities remain vibrant, healthy and resilient for generations to come.

Introduction

Regenerative tourism is an emerging paradigm that reimagines the relationship between visitors, host communities, and nature. It moves beyond the idea of simply reducing harm and instead seeks to restore and enhance the ecological, cultural, and social vitality of a territory. By drawing from living systems thinking, it recognises the interconnectedness between people and place, inviting tourism to become a catalyst for healing and renewal. This approach creates conditions where life (in all its forms) can flourish, strengthening ecosystems, cultural heritage, community resilience, and the wellbeing of all who live in or visit a territory.

In the **Mediterranean**, tourism has long been a source of economic opportunity and cultural exchange. Yet the region faces common challenges: the depletion of natural resources under mass-consumption models, increasing vulnerability to climate change, and the erosion of cultural identity when residents are excluded from shaping their future. These pressures call for a shift towards approaches that work with the living systems of a territory, building resilience while nurturing its distinct character and potential. Regenerative tourism offers such a pathway - one that fosters environmental regeneration, cultural vitality, and community-led governance.

This document is part of the Regenera4MED project, which brings together partners from across the Mediterranean to shape a common framework for regenerative tourism adapted to the region's realities. As one of the four elements of the **Regenera4MED Blueprint**, it offers an introduction to the concept, principles, and benefits of regenerative tourism, tailored to Mediterranean territories. Inside, you will find **the conceptual foundations of regenerative tourism and examples** drawn both from the six pilot territories and from inspiring initiatives worldwide. Together with the **Integrated Governance Model, the Regeneration Tourism Programme, and the Regenerative Tourism Journey: Self-assessment tool (the RTJ tool)**, this document provides a shared foundation for embedding regenerative tourism into practice and policy across the region.

While the document is grounded in examples from **six pilot territories - Catalonia, Corsica, Crete, Liguria, Abruzzo, and Split-Dalmatian County** - the concepts and approaches it presents are relevant across the Mediterranean and beyond. Lessons learned from these pilots will inform scalable solutions that other territories can adapt to their own context, supporting a wider shift towards tourism that actively contributes to the health of people, place, and planet.

By connecting the concepts shared in these pages to other parts of Blueprint, Regenera4MED offers an invitation: to work together across industries, disciplines and geographical boundaries so that the tourism we produce not only sustains but regenerates life for our territories - allowing them to remain vibrant and resilient long into future generations.

1. Theory: rethinking tourism for a regenerative future

1.1. What is regenerative tourism?

A new direction for tourism that helps places heal, people thrive, and life flourish

Regenerative tourism is a new way of thinking and doing tourism. It goes beyond simply reducing harm - It is about **healing places, supporting life, and helping communities and nature thrive.** The goal is **to create conditions** where people, places, and ecosystems can truly **flourish**.

Regenerative tourism is **not defined as a "type" of tourism**, but rather **as a paradigmatic shift** (Bellato and Pollock, 2023). That simply means It is a completely different way of thinking. It challenges the old, mechanistic idea that tourism is an industry focused on growth — more visitors, more revenue, more development — often at the cost of local well-being. Instead, regenerative tourism sees tourism not as an industry, but as a **catalyst for healing, connection, and renewal** — a way to support life, empower communities, and help places flourish.

This doesn't mean that the financial aspect is no longer important. For people and places to truly thrive, economic stability matters too. But in regenerative tourism, **profit is not the main purpose** — It is a result of doing the right things. The focus shifts from maximizing short-term gains **to creating long-term value for people, nature, and place**. Regenerative tourism starts by asking: **How can tourism help this place, and its people thrive?**

"Regenerative tourism is **a transformational approach** that aims to **fulfil the potential of tourism places to flourish and create net positive effects** through increasing **the regenerative capacity of human societies and ecosystems.** /.../ Tourism systems are regarded **as inseparable from nature** and obligated to respect Earth's principles and laws. In addition, **regenerative tourism approaches evolve and vary across places** over the **long term**, thereby harmonising practices with the regeneration of **nested living systems**." *(Bellato et al, 2022: 9)*

In this approach, tourism is not something that happens *to* a place. It is something that happens *with* the place — guided by the people who live there and deeply connected to the land, culture, and community.

Regenerative tourism:

- Helps nature recover and thrive.
- Supports the health and well-being of local communities.
- Builds stronger relationships between visitors and locals.
- Celebrates the uniqueness of each place.
- Encourages local people to be leaders and co-creators.

In short, regenerative tourism is about **healing**, not just sustaining. It is about **making things better**, not just slowing down the damage. And it is about working together to shape tourism that truly serves people, places, and the planet.

"Regenerative tourism, at its simplest, seeks to ensure that travel and tourism reinvest in people, places, and nature and supports the long-term renewal and flourishing of our social-ecological systems."
(Dredge, 2022)

1.2. Seeing tourism differently: Living systems thinking

A new way of thinking and doing

Regenerative tourism is built on something called **living systems thinking**. That might sound complex, but it is very natural. It means seeing the world - **people, places, and nature - not as separate parts, but as a connected whole**. This way of thinking comes from an **ecological worldview**, inspired by how **nature itself works**: everything is interrelated, and everything depends on everything else. The land affects the people, the people shape the culture, and tourism touches them all. When one part of the system suffers, the others feel it too. But when one part **heals or thrives**, the others are uplifted with it. Just like in nature, **health and resilience grow through connection, balance, and mutual support**.

This change in perspective represents more than just a new technique - it is a **paradigm shift**. As Pollock (2012) explains, the current tourism model has been shaped by a dominant industrial worldview that treats tourism as a linear, extractive industry driven by economic growth. Regenerative tourism

challenges this model by calling for a more holistic, relational, and life-centred approach. It redefines success—not by how much we grow, but by how well we support life in all its forms.

To truly understand regenerative tourism, it is important t**o reflect on the mindset that has shaped tourism until now** — and why it needs to change. For decades, tourism and development followed a **mechanistic worldview** - a way of thinking that sees the world as a machine made of separate parts. In this reductionist model, each element (such as nature, economy, culture, or community) is treated in isolation, leading to **fragmentation, specialisation, and competition** (Bellato and Pollock, 2023). The focus was on short-term efficiency, measurable outputs, and controlling outcomes - often prioritising profit and growth over the well-being of people and places (Reed, 2012; Bellato et al., 2022).

From tourism as a linear industry to tourism as a living, adaptive system

Old Way of Thinking	Regenerative Way of Thinking
Tourism is an industry	Tourism is part of a living system
Focus on cause and effect	Focus on relationships and feedback loops
Economic growth is the main goal	Supporting life and well-being is the goal
Centralized planning	Place-based co-creation with communities

Table 1: Table that summarises the "Old" way of Thinking and the Regenerative way of thinking.
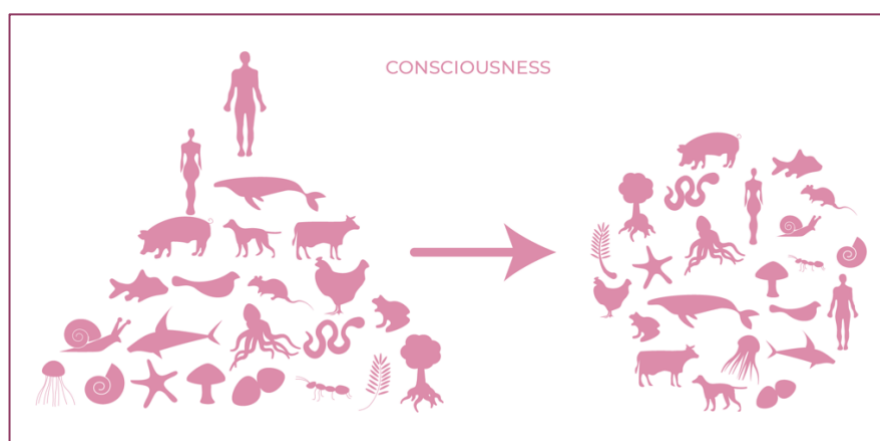*Source: Adjusted from Bellato, Frantzeskaki and Nygaard (2022), p 11.*

Figure 1: Visualising the shift: from fragmentation and control to connection and care.
Source: Adaptation from Alves (2024)

Regenerative tourism challenges this model. It sees the world - and tourism - as part of a **living system**: dynamic, interconnected, and constantly evolving. This means planning and acting in ways that foster **cooperation, reciprocity, and care**. Instead of managing separate "parts," regenerative thinking asks us to see **patterns, relationships, and potential**. This shift in mindset - from fragmentation to wholeness - is at the heart of regeneration.

In this view, tourism is not an isolated activity or industry. It is a **living, adaptive part** of a larger system:

- The **individual** visitor.
- The **community** they engage with.
- The **bioregion** that supports life there.
- And ultimately, the **planet** we all share.

This is what experts call **nested systems** — systems within systems, all influencing each other. Living systems thinking invites us to slow down, observe, and **respond to the specific needs of each place**. Instead of copying and pasting solutions, it encourages **deep listening** — to the land, to the community, and to the culture.

Pollock (2012) describes tourism as a **complex web of relationships** composed of three core components: *a **place** or setting*, ***hosts***, and ***guests***: "A place or setting, where hosts invite and care for guests who visit a place and enjoy the services of hosts." These elements interact in dynamic ways to co-create the tourism experience.

In this way, tourism becomes **a tool for co-evolution** — helping people and places adapt, grow stronger, and build relationships that last.

"Learning how to apply a regenerative approach begins not with a change of techniques but rather with a change of mind."

(Haggard, Reed and Mang, 2006 v Mang and Reed, 2012)

1.3. From growth to wellbeing: Redefining tourism's purpose

Putting life at the centre of tourism

For many years, the focus has been on growing tourism - more visitors, more infrastructure, more income. But growth does not always mean improvement. In many places this model has led to **stress on nature**, **rising costs of living**, **loss of cultural identity**, **seasonal dependency**, **community fatigue**, and growing **vulnerability to climate change** - including water scarcity, heatwaves, and biodiversity loss. These impacts raise an important question: **Is more always better**?

Regenerative tourism invites us to ask a simple but powerful question: **What is the deeper purpose of tourism?**

Regenerative tourism shifts the focus from **growing bigger** to **thriving together**. It sees tourism not just as an economic activity, but to **support life in all its forms** - human and non-human.

That means asking:

- Is the local environment healthier because of tourism?
- Are local people feeling proud, respected, and involved?
- Are visitors having meaningful, respectful experiences?
- Is this place becoming stronger for future generations?

This is what we mean by **flourishing**. It is about **creating the conditions** where people, nature, and culture can thrive - not just now, but over the long term (Dredge, 2022).

Redefining tourism's purpose - shifting from growth to wellbeing - **does not mean ignoring the need for financial stability**. Income, local jobs, and thriving businesses still matter. But in regenerative tourism, **economic success is not the end goal** - it is the outcome of doing things differently. When we care for the land, listen to communities, and create experiences rooted in local values, **lasting value emerges - economic and otherwise**.

In this way, **tourism** becomes much more than a numbers game. It **becomes a force for healing and renewal** - for supporting the **health and wellbeing of people, places, and the ecosystems** we all depend on.

"Regenerative tourism challenges the dominant growth paradigm by valuing thriving over expanding, connection over consumption."

(Songklin, 2024)

1.4. What does regeneration mean?

From doing less harm to actively making things better

Regeneration is about **renewal**. It means **creating the conditions** for **life to grow stronger, healthier, and more connected** - whether we are talking about a forest, a coastline, a village, or a local business.

In tourism, regeneration is the idea that our activities should not just avoid damage but **actively help restore and enhance** the places we visit. That includes nature, culture, and communities.

We can imagine **regeneration as a journey - from harming to healing.** This journey is often shown as a **spiral** - a symbol used to represent how systems evolve over time. To visualize this shift, imagine a **spiral** moving either downward or upward depending on our actions. This spiral is a powerful way to understand how systems — like tourism, ecosystems, or communities — can change over time. A regenerative spiral is about **building momentum toward life**, vitality, and abundance — not just less damage, but **more good**.
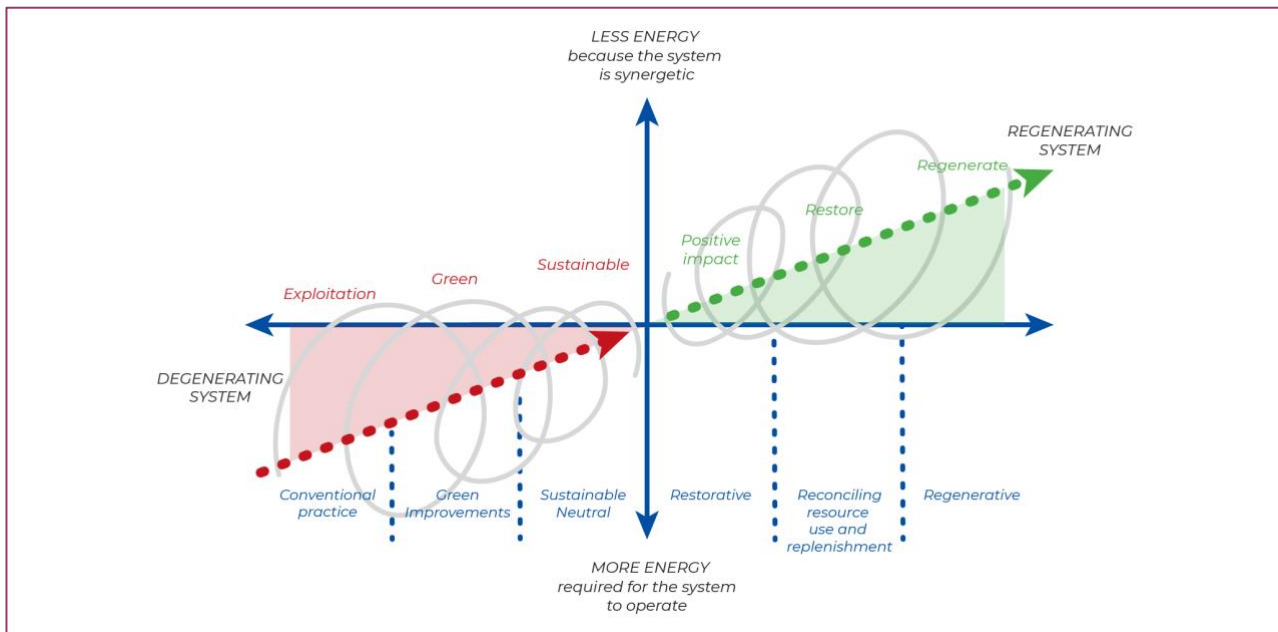
Figure 2: System regeneration
Source: Adapted from Mang and Haggard (2016)

The downward spiral (Degenerating Systems)

Here, systems take more than they give. This is when actions deplete resources, harm ecosystems, weaken communities, and focus only on short-term gains. Even with "green" improvements, if harm continues, the system keeps declining.

Key characteristics:

- Extractive, mass-market models
- Environmental degradation
- Community exclusion
- Cultural erosion

Examples:

- **Large cruise ships** overwhelming small coastal towns, causing pollution and displacing local life.
- **Construction of resorts** in ecologically sensitive zones, cutting down forests or blocking coastal access.
- **Low-wage seasonal jobs** with no reinvestment in local capacity.
- **Greenwashing** without meaningful action - e.g., hotels marketing themselves as eco-friendly by reusing towels while still depleting groundwater.

The middle zone (Sustainable & Restorative)

Here we find efforts to limit harm (sustainability) or fix prior damage (restoration). These are valuable steps, but they still fall short of fully regenerating the system.

Key characteristics:

- Harm reduction (e.g. lower carbon footprint)
- Efficiency improvements
- Reforestation or heritage restoration
- Community benefit-sharing models

Examples:

- **Eco-lodges** that minimise water and energy use but don't engage the community.
- **Heritage restoration projects** that bring back historical buildings but don't involve locals in telling their stories.
- **Offsetting emissions** through tree planting without changing core tourism business models.
- **Certification schemes** that improve standards, but still maintain volume-based growth.

The upward spiral (Regenerating Systems)

At this level, systems **actively support** life and renewal: Ecosystems become more biodiverse and resilient; Local culture and heritage get revitalized; Communities become healthier and more self-reliant.

Key characteristics:

- Net-positive impact
- Community-led governance
- Biocultural regeneration
- Deep guest-host relationships
- Long-term resilience and adaptability.

Examples:

- **Community-owned cultural experiences** that generate income while passing on traditional knowledge and strengthening identity.
- **Regenerative farming-tourism models**, where visitors learn about soil health, food systems, and support local producers (e.g., olive oil harvest, grape picking).
- **Tourism cooperatives** reinvesting earnings into local education, health, or biodiversity corridors.

- **Place-sourced storytelling** that empowers locals and fosters emotional connection and healing between guests and host communities.

By recognising where we are on the spiral, we can start moving in the right direction - towards a future where **tourism contributes to the regeneration of life, not just its consumption**. In nature, regeneration is a **natural and ongoing process**. It happens **in cycles** - growing, adapting, healing - and **continues** as long as the system is alive and evolving.

In the same way, regenerative tourism is not a one-time action or fixed goal. It is a **continuous journey** that helps **unlock the potential of a place and its people over time**. Success is not measured by reaching a final destination, but by **gradually moving forward** - each step building on the last, becoming stronger, wiser, and more resilient with every cycle (Mang & Reed, 2012).

Regeneration happens on many levels:

- **Nature** – like restoring soil, rewilding land, or cleaning rivers.
- **Culture** – like reviving local traditions, crafts, and languages.
- **Communities** – like creating jobs, trust, and pride.
- **Mindsets** – like shifting from extraction to care and collaboration.

Regenerative tourism supports **all of these at once**. It does not rely on outsiders "fixing" things. Instead, it **works with local knowledge, community leadership, and the natural rhythms of the place**. One should note that **regeneration in one level does not imply being regenerative as a whole, hence a destination or an experience cannot be called regenerative if it does not happen in the different levels**.

It acknowledges that perfect regeneration isn't the goal - **steady progress is**. It is **about taking steps, learning together**, and designing tourism that makes people and places **stronger over time**. And that progress isn't linear; It is a spiral - widening, deepening, and bringing new vitality with every turn. **Regenerative tourism is not a one-off project, but it is a continuous spiral of improvement.**

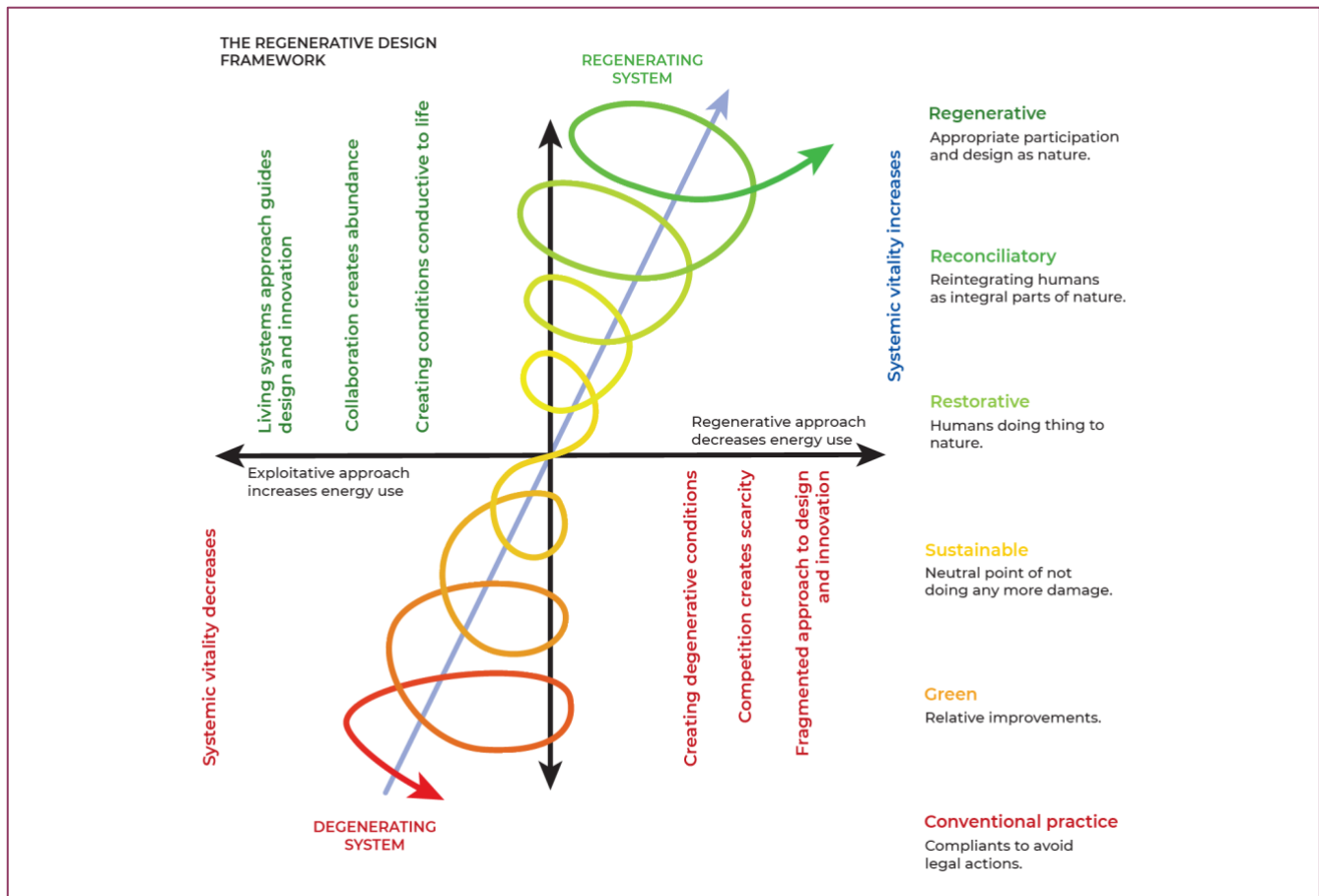*Figure 3: The regenerative design framework - a regenerative spiral*
Source: Ehrenfeld and Wahl (2016)

"Regenerative development is a process, not an event; an unfolding, revealing latent possibilities, progressing from the simpler to more advanced, mature, or complex. "Success" in regenerative development is iterative and progressive, with each cycle moving upward."

(Mang & Reed, 2012)

1.5. From sustainability to regeneration

From doing less harm to actively doing more good

Most of us are already familiar with the idea of sustainability – it is about using resources wisely so future generations can meet their needs too. In tourism, this has meant trying to reduce harm: lowering emissions, limiting waste, or protecting natural areas. But as today's social and ecological crises deepen, many people are realizing that **sustainability is necessary but no longer enough**.

Sustainability focuses on **minimizing harm** and maintaining balance, often guided by the **triple bottom line**: environmental care, social responsibility, and economic viability. It asks: *"How can we reduce the negative impact of tourism while keeping it viable?"*

Regeneration goes a step further. Derived from *regenerate* — "to restore or renew" — it goes beyond reducing harm and asks: *"How can tourism actively benefit people, places, and nature?"* It means becoming a force for good - not just avoiding damage, but **actively supporting the renewal of communities, ecosystems, and cultural traditions**. It is about making things healthier, stronger, and more resilient for the future.

What is the difference? Sustainable vs. regenerative tourism

Aspect	Sustainable Tourism	Regenerative Tourism
Main Paradigm	Minimize harm while supporting growth	Create net positive impact for communities and nature
View of Nature	Nature as a resource to protect	Humans and nature are interdependent and co-evolving
Goal	Balance environmental, economic, and social outcomes	Heal and enhance the health of whole systems over time
Approach to Place	One-size-fits-all solutions, technical fixes	Deeply rooted in local identity, potential, and relationships
Stakeholder Roles	Top-down: experts, governments, businesses	Collaborative: communities, visitors, and hosts as co-creators
Change Agents	Professionals, planners, external leaders	Hosts, local actors, community stewards, and aligned visitors
System Thinking	Manage impacts across separate sectors (eco, social, etc.)	See tourism as part of a living, interconnected system
Equity and Power	Often maintains existing structures	Aims to transform power relations and support inclusion

Aspect	Sustainable Tourism	Regenerative Tourism
Ultimate Question	How can we grow responsibly?	How can we help this place and community thrive for future generations?

Table 2: Comparison of sustainable and regenerative tourism
Source: Adapted from Bellato, Frantzeskaki and Nygaard (2022)

Case Example 1: Highly sustainable but not regenerative
EcoWave Hotel, Mediterranean Coast (fictional example)

What they do well (Sustainability):

EcoWave Hotel has achieved top-tier eco-certifications. It runs entirely on renewable energy, uses greywater recycling, has eliminated single-use plastics, and serves locally sourced organic food. Guest information materials promote water and energy conservation, and the hotel offsets its carbon footprint through certified reforestation projects abroad.

Why it is not regenerative:

Despite excellent harm-reduction measures, EcoWave's approach is largely **inward-focused** on the hotel's own operations. It does not actively contribute to the health or resilience of the surrounding territory. Local communities are engaged only as suppliers, not as co-creators of tourism experiences or governance. The hotel's environmental gains do not translate into **net-positive change** for the local ecosystem or culture, nor do they address systemic challenges in the territory.

Case Example 2 – Regenerative
Cerdanya Viva – Living Mountains Experience (Catalonia - Cerdanya, Pyrenees)

What they do (Regeneration):

Cerdanya Viva Ecoresort is more than an eco-friendly accommodation – it operates as a living laboratory for mountain resilience. Guests join nature-based wellness activities, learn traditional farming and herbal knowledge from local residents, and take part in community-led cultural events. The resort's food comes from its own permaculture garden and nearby farmers, creating a closed-loop local economy. Solar energy, zero-waste operations, and year-round employment for locals are built into the model.

Why it is regenerative:

Cerdanya Viva's work strengthens **the whole system** – ecological, cultural, and social – not just its own

footprint. It builds capacity in the local community, revives cultural heritage, regenerates landscapes, and inspires guests to become caretakers in their own contexts. The resort aligns its success with the **long-term health of the territory**, co-creating a shared vision with local actors for a thriving Pyrenean bioregion.

Key takeaway:

Regenerative tourism is about **actively creating conditions for life to flourish** – for people, nature, and culture. Unlike sustainability, which seeks to maintain balance, regeneration seeks to **enhance and restore**, ensuring the territory is healthier and more resilient over time.

Regenerative tourism provides that model by asking:

- What does this place long to become?
- How can tourism help realize that potential?
- How do we measure well-being, not just outputs?

Regenerative tourism invites us all **to rethink what success looks like**. Instead of chasing numbers, we can ask:

- Are we improving the health of this place?
- Are people feeling more connected and valued?
- Are we building long-term resilience and relationships?

It is not about doing everything at once. **It is about shifting our mindset - and starting with what we can do, together.**

"By comparison, the mechanistic worldview and industrial paradigm dominate sustainable tourism conceptualisations.

Regenerative tourism focuses its interventions on building the capacity of whole systems for regeneration, rather than managing social-ecological impacts whilst ultimately pursuing infinite economic growth.

The sustainable tourism regime primarily regards tourism as an industry and tends to prioritise top-down, standardised and compartmentalised interventions. In contrast, regenerative tourism approaches reflect and are co-created within place contexts."

(Bellato et al, 2022)

1.6. Core principles of regenerative tourism

Guiding values that help life thrive

Regenerative tourism is not about applying a fixed model or ticking sustainability boxes. It is a shift in how we see and shape tourism - as a living, evolving part of a place.

While there is **not yet a widely adopted set of practice principles for regenerative tourism**, researchers and practitioners are beginning to shape a shared foundation.

Guided by nature and local knowledge, **core principles help us move from control to co-creation**, from extraction to **care**, and from short-term fixes to **long-term wellbeing** for people, place, and planet.

1. Living systems thinking

Tourism is embedded within complex and dynamic social-ecological systems. Regenerative tourism views hosting territories as living, evolving systems - not isolated products or markets. It draws on ecological wisdom and biomimicry, recognizing that everything is interconnected and interdependent.

2. Place-based and context-specific

Regeneration begins with **honouring the uniqueness of place** and recognising it as a living subject - not just a backdrop for tourism, but a dynamic ecosystem with its own story, identity, and rhythms. A place is not just *where* tourism happens - it is *why* it happens. It is the place that first offered the conditions to be inhabited, to generate culture, to form relationships, and eventually to welcome visitors.

Regenerative tourism starts by listening deeply to this uniqueness: its landscapes and languages, its ecosystems and traditions, and - most importantly - the needs and aspirations of its communities. It is not about applying external templates or global trends. It is about allowing tourism to emerge organically, rooted in the spirit of place and shaped by those who live there.

This shift - from treating place as a resource to honouring it as a co-creator - requires us to move from a mindset of extraction to one of relationship. When we connect with place in this way, we do not just visit - we engage, learn, and grow with it.

3. Community empowerment and participatory governance

Decisions should **include the voices of those affected**. Regenerative tourism encourages collaboration between governments, businesses, residents, and other local actors - so that tourism works *with* the community, not *for* it.

Through a regenerative perspective, local communities are not passive service providers, but are hosts, knowledge holders, and stewards of place. Regenerative tourism puts them at the centre of shaping their future, valuing inclusion, shared governance, and participatory design.

4. Net-positive impact

Going beyond "doing less harm," regenerative tourism aims to **actively heal** and enhance. Whether through ecosystem restoration, cultural revival, or local economic benefits, it asks: *What good can we create together?*

5. Meaningful Relationships

Strong relationships are at the core of regeneration. When people connect deeply with place and each other, they become more motivated/involved to care for what matters. Instead of quick exchanges, regenerative tourism fosters long-term relationships. It builds trust, empathy, and mutual care - between visitors and locals, people and the land, and among communities themselves. This includes emotional, cultural, and even spiritual connections that support healing and learning.

6. Holistic Wellbeing

Regeneration is **multi-dimensional** - it includes mental, physical, emotional, cultural, spiritual, and ecological health (one Health or Planetary Health). Tourism becomes a tool for individual and collective transformation. Regenerative tourism supports personal reflection, emotional wellbeing, cultural connection, and even spiritual renewal — for both visitors and hosts.

7. Long-Term Resilience

Regenerative tourism helps communities prepare for and thrive through change. It encourages diverse livelihoods, ecosystem health, and deep local knowledge - keys to long-term adaptability and strength.

These principles align with the UN's view of regenerative tourism as a transformational, inclusive, and environmentally conscious model that benefits people and the planet. As Dredge (2023) puts it, regeneration begins by asking deeper questions, "moving from 'how do we do less harm?' to **'how do we do more good?'**".

As Bellato et al. (2023) note, various publications offer important insights. Drawing on these sources and input from practitioner consultations, Bellato and colleagues **proposed seven conceptual principles** that help guide the development of regenerative tourism in theory and practice.

These **principles** form a **conceptual foundation** that enables further development of regenerative tourism theory and practice.

1. **Draw from an ecological worldview**
   Tourism should be grounded in an understanding that humans are part of nature. This principle calls for integrating Indigenous and Western knowledge systems to support life-centred decision-making.

2. **Use living systems thinking**
   Tourism systems are viewed as complex, dynamic, and interconnected. This principle invites planners and practitioners to recognise patterns, relationships, and feedback loops rather than isolated parts.

3. **Discover the unique potential of a regenerative tourism place**
   Each place holds its own identity, culture, and ecological story. Regenerative tourism starts by uncovering this inherent potential and designing tourism in alignment with it.

4. **Leverage the capability of tourism living systems to catalyse transformations**
   Tourism can act as a catalyst for broader positive change. This principle encourages using tourism as a tool to regenerate social-ecological systems beyond the tourism sector itself.

5. **Adopt <u>healing approaches</u> that promote cultural revival, returning lands, and privileging of the perspectives, knowledges and practices of Indigenous and marginalised peoples**
Regenerative tourism must acknowledge historical and ongoing injustices. Healing means restoring relationships, returning agency, and uplifting voices that have been excluded or harmed.

6. **<u>Create regenerative places and communities</u>**
The goal is not just to reduce harm but to co-create places where people, communities, and ecosystems thrive together — generating net-positive impacts across dimensions.

7. **<u>Collaborate</u> to evolve and enact <u>regenerative tourism approaches</u>**
Regeneration is an ongoing and collective process. This principle emphasises co-creation, mutual learning, and adaptive partnerships that evolve over time.

Together, these principles provide a shared foundation for shaping regenerative tourism across diverse Mediterranean contexts, offering inspiration and direction for policy makers, tourism providers, and communities alike. They are not steps to follow - they are lenses through which to see the world and design for its renewal.

"Among its principles stand out what we call the three relationships: the relationship of man with himself, with others, and with the Earth. Developing these three relationships is essential."

(Sonia Teruel)

1.7. Community empowerment and new roles in tourism

From service providers to place stewards

In regenerative tourism, local communities are not just part of the scenery — they are **the heart of the place** and the key to shaping its future. Instead of tourism happening *to* them, regenerative tourism happens *with* them. This means shifting from extractive models toward ones that are **inclusive, empowering, and deeply place-based.**

Regenerative tourism supports **community-led governance**, encourages **participatory planning**, and builds **local capacity for stewardship**. Local communities are not just service providers - they are hosts, knowledge holders, and co-creators, with the capacity to self-organise and influence public policies based on the principles of subsidiarity and regenerative agency. When communities are empowered to shape tourism in their own place, the result is more meaningful, rooted, and resilient experiences for everyone involved.

Rather than depending on external investment or mass-scale tourism, regeneration starts with the **people of the place** — their knowledge, creativity, traditions, and care.

New roles in tourism: A shared responsibility

Regeneration isn't about doing more. It is about doing **differently**. And that starts with **new roles, new relationships, and a shared sense of responsibility** for the life of a place.

Bellato et al. (2022) propose **five interconnected roles** that make up a regenerative tourism system. These roles are not titles or jobs — they are ways of **being**, ways of **relating**, and ways of **contributing** to the well-being of people and place. They are **interdependent and often overlap**. A single person can embody multiple roles at once.

1. **Placing**
   Holding and expressing the essence of place — its landscape, culture, stories, and spirit. This role is the foundation of all others, grounding tourism in the identity and integrity of the hosting territory.

2. **Stewarding**
   Caring for and regenerating the **social, cultural, and ecological systems** that support life. This includes protecting traditions, biodiversity, and the health of the land and community.

3. **Hosting**
   Creating meaningful encounters between guests and place. Hosts help visitors connect with local values, stories, and ways of living. They are facilitators of mutual respect and learning.

4. **Guesting**
   Guests are not passive consumers, but active participants in the regenerative process. They travel with humility, curiosity, and care — open to listening, giving back, and learning from place.

5. **Communing**
   Strengthening the systems that hold community together - language, rituals, food, relationships, and everyday life. This role keeps the cultural and social fabric alive and vibrant.

What can tourism leaders do?

If you're a tourism provider, DMO, municipality, or community group, consider:

- Are we valuing and supporting these five roles in our region?
- Do we see locals as knowledge-holders and co-creators, not just providers?
- Are we building the conditions where people and place can flourish together?

1.8. Regenerative tourism governance: growing from place

Collaborative, inclusive, and rooted in place-based wisdom

In regenerative tourism, governance is not about managing people or solving problems from the top down. Instead, it is about **growing a shared sense of purpose and stewardship from within the community** - starting from place.

Mang and Reed (2012) remind us that **every place is a unique**, living system made up of land, people, culture, and history. Effective governance emerges when we **understand this complexity and work with it** - not against it. This means designing governance that is rooted in **whole systems thinking**, responsive to **local context**, and focused on **long-term wellbeing**.

Rather than treating stakeholders as external interests to be managed, regenerative approaches invite us to **grow stakeholders** - supporting individuals and groups to see themselves **as co-creators and**

stewards of their place. This kind of governance is **dynamic and developmental**: it evolves through **deep listening, shared learning, and relationships of trust.**

Three key ideas shape this regenerative approach:

- **Grow shared identity and ownership** through locally grounded storytelling and visioning.
- **Use whole-systems thinking** to see interconnections across ecological, social, and economic life.
- **Embed learning and adaptation** into everyday practices, allowing the system to regenerate itself over time.

Ultimately, regenerative governance is about **co-evolving with place**. It replaces control with **care**, and hierarchy with **collaboration**. Through **deep place-based assessment**, **participatory storytelling**, and shared conceptual frameworks, regenerative governance **creates the conditions for tourism to act as a catalyst** for ecological and cultural vitality — not just for now, but for generations to come. According to Dredge (2022), transforming tourism into a regenerative force means working across **three key areas: mindset, systems, and practice**.

In regenerative tourism, governance is not defined by static structures or top-down authority, but by **fluid, multi-level engagement** that supports learning, collaboration, and systems thinking. Dredge emphasises that traditional scientific management - characterised by individualism, reductionism, and separation - is inadequate for dealing with the complex, adaptive nature of tourism systems. Instead, **regenerative governance** must be **community-centred, holistic, and adaptive**.

Key characteristics of regenerative governance include:

- **Holistic systems approach:** Governance should not silo tourism from its social, ecological, and cultural contexts. It must acknowledge tourism as a *fractal system* that influences and is influenced by other sectors (e.g., agriculture, environment, culture).
- **Place-based, bottom-up processes:** Decisions should emerge through *deep listening and community engagement*, recognising the unique identity, challenges, and values of each place. External, template-driven strategies are insufficient.
- **Interdisciplinary collaboration:** Governance must cross traditional sectoral boundaries, involving not just tourism actors but also environmental experts, cultural practitioners, planners, and local knowledge holders. This reflects the *boundary-spanning nature* of regenerative work.
- **Principles-led practice:** The article outlines seven guiding principles for regenerative action, which also inform governance: Holistic, Nature as our teacher; Care and respect; Agency; Dynamic and evolutionary; Collaborative; Continuous learning (Dredge, 2023: 272).

- **Focus on human development and mindset shift:** Governance should invest in cultivating regenerative mindsets - moving from "me" to "we" thinking - and build capacity for ongoing reflection, sense-making, and learning.
- **Long-term co-creation and experimentation:** Governance is framed as a *learning journey*, not a fixed plan. Tools like community storytelling, deep listening, and collective visioning replace rigid strategic planning.

In essence, governance in regenerative tourism, as presented by Dredge, is less about managing outputs and more about **enabling relationships, systems change, and co-created futures**.

Multi-stakeholder participation

Regenerative tourism cannot happen in isolation. It requires **collaboration across sectors** (environment, education, health, agriculture, etc.) **and various stakeholders**. When tourism is aligned with broader goals for community wellbeing and ecological health, it becomes a powerful force for transformation.

This kind of multi-stakeholder participation is rooted in the core principles of regenerative tourism. It recognises that tourism is embedded in larger living systems, and that thriving places emerge from cooperation, not competition. Working together, stakeholders **can create conditions** where people, nature, and culture all flourish - now and for generations to come.

Bellato's regenerative tourism governance framework: Bridging theory and practice

Bellato et al. (2022) offer a foundational framework for regenerative tourism that integrates Indigenous wisdom, Western science, and practitioner insights into a practical tool for transformation.

At its core, the framework moves beyond sustainable tourism's damage-reduction logic and embraces a living systems approach that seeks to **increase the regenerative capacity of places, communities, and ecosystems.**

The framework consists of **five interrelated design dimensions**:

1. **Regeneration Mindset** – Anchoring decisions in an ecological worldview and systems thinking.

2. **Inherent Potential** – Revealing the unique purpose and possibilities of a place through deep place-based engagement.

3. **Systems Capability** – Building stakeholder capacity to respond to challenges and catalyse positive systemic change.

4. **Intended System Effects** – Ensuring outcomes are aligned with net-positive impacts for both humans and nature.

5. **Tasks and Resources** – Mobilizing tools, roles, and collaborations to bring regenerative visions into being.
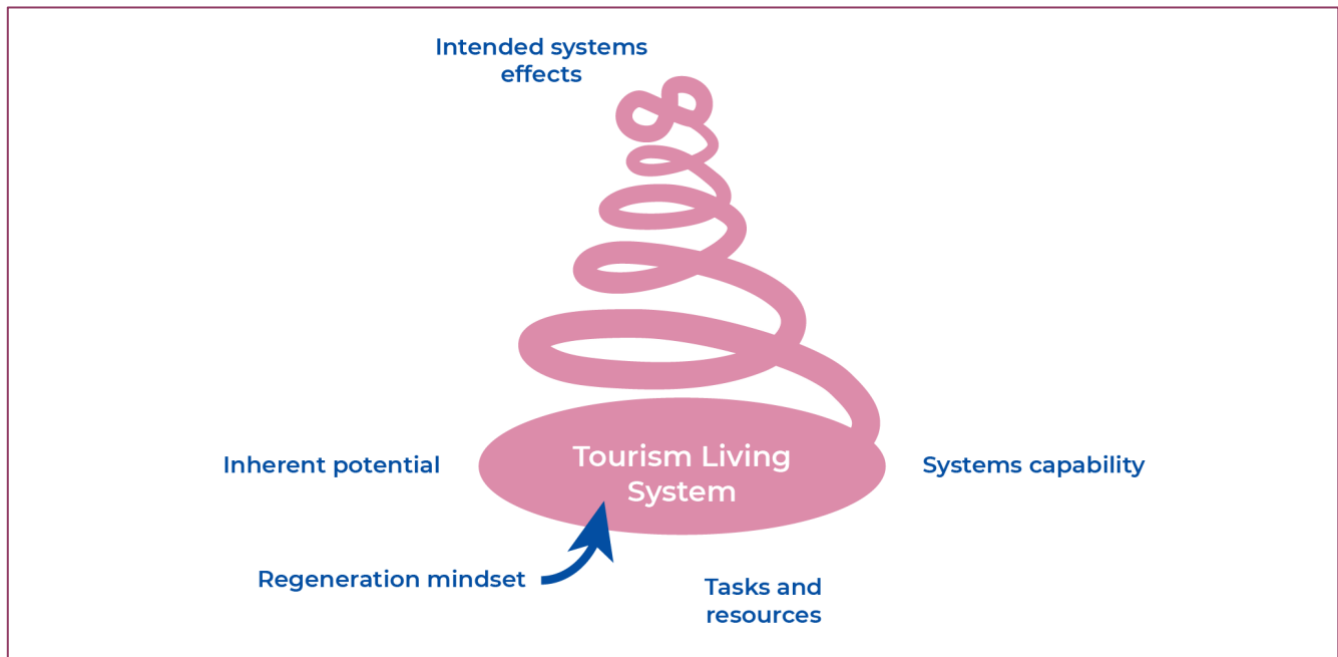

Figure 4: Regenerative tourism conceptual framework
Source: Bellato et al, 2022

This conceptual framework acts as a compass for destination managers and governance bodies aiming to operationalize regenerative tourism. It fosters shared responsibility, long-term visioning, and dynamic learning, helping to align policy, planning, and practice toward flourishing social-ecological systems.

CASE STUDY: PLAYA VIVA, MEXICO

Putting Regeneration into Practice

Playa Viva, an eco-luxury resort on Mexico's Pacific coast, is widely recognised as a living example of regenerative tourism in action. Its approach deeply aligns with the five dimensions of Bellato's (2022) regenerative tourism framework, showing how theory can be translated into practical, place-based transformation.
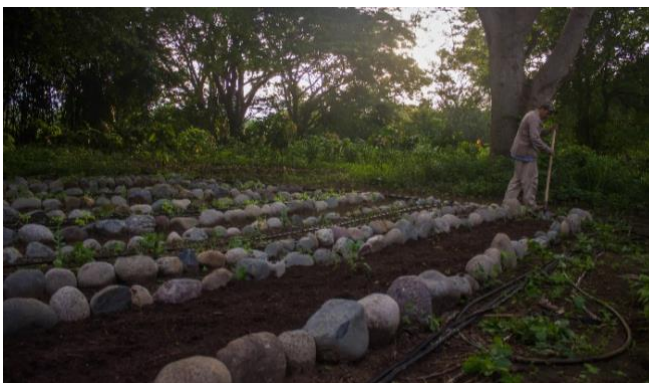

Figure 5: Playa Viva fotos
Source: https://www.regenerativetravel.com/hotels/playa-viva/#highlights-activities

1. Regeneration Mindset

Playa Viva is rooted in an **ecological worldview** that sees the resort not as an isolated business, but as part of a larger living system. Its founders adopted a regenerative mindset from the outset—asking not just how to reduce harm, but how to **give back more than they take**. This includes restoring mangroves, regenerating farmland, and reviving local water systems.

2. Inherent Potential

The project began with a deep exploration of the **unique potential of the place**—its natural rhythms, community needs, and ancestral traditions. Playa Viva engaged local people and Indigenous wisdom to understand the land's past and future. Their vision emerged from *place-sourced insight*, not imported models.

3. Systems Capability

Playa Viva invests in **building capacity within the community**. From creating livelihoods in regenerative agriculture to supporting local schooling and healthcare, the project strengthens the whole system. Importantly, it encourages **shared learning**, inviting guests to participate in educational experiences and regeneration projects.

4. Intended System Effects

The outcomes are not just economic. Playa Viva actively tracks and **supports system-wide health**—social, ecological, and cultural. This includes: Protecting sea turtle habitats, developing local leadership, enhancing food sovereignty, and hosting conscious travel experiences that promote reflection and care.

5. Tasks and Resources

Playa Viva functions as a **steward of place**. It mobilises resources across different domains—tourism, conservation, agriculture, and education—and coordinates them in alignment with regenerative outcomes. It also builds **multi-stakeholder relationships**, bridging guests, locals, NGOs, and researchers.

Playa Viva shows how a regenerative tourism project can **nurture thriving ecosystems and communities**, while still offering unique and high-quality visitor experiences. It is not a "template," but a living, evolving model that grows with the place. For Mediterranean destinations, it offers inspiration on how to adapt the **Bellato framework** to different biocultural landscapes and governance realities.

More information: www.playaviva.com; www.regenerativetravel.com/hotels/playa-viva/

Governance as a complex adaptive system

Governance in tourism can be understood as a **complex adaptive system** (CAS), meaning it operates more like a living ecosystem than a fixed structure (Farsari, 2021). In this view, territories are networks of diverse actors - governments, businesses, communities, and visitors - whose interactions shape outcomes in unpredictable ways. Rather than following linear, top-down rules, CAS governance adapts continuously through feedback, collaboration, and learning. Its strength lies in diversity, flexibility, and the ability to self-organise when conditions change. By embracing complexity, governance can better respond to uncertainty, foster resilience, and support long-term sustainability. This approach highlights that effective tourism governance is not about rigid control, but about enabling inclusive participation, trust-building, and the co-creation of adaptive solutions that help both communities and ecosystems thrive.

Understanding where to intervene for change: Multi-level coordination

Figure below illustrates how the project can work across **multiple levels of a system to bring about meaningful change in tourism**. From **the individual level** - where mindsets and worldviews begin - to **broader systems** like organisations, sectors, and ultimately the global context, each layer offers opportunities to influence how tourism is shaped. The figure is inspired by Meadows' (1999) well-known framework on "**leverage points**," which ranks 12 ways to intervene in a system, from the least (12) to the most effective (1). The deeper ones goes - towards shifting mindsets and evolving paradigms - the more transformative the change can be. In regenerative tourism, this means that while changing policies and incentives matters, **the real power lies in reshaping how we think, relate, and make meaning together**.

As Dredge (2023) highlights, *"Working at the individual level to shift the paradigm is the most effective lever for change."* In regenerative tourism, governance begins by **creating space for this inner shift** — cultivating new mindsets that value care, collaboration, and connection. It is through these **individual transformations** that broader system change becomes possible. This means governance must nurture **the conditions for reflection, shared learning, and co-creation** - inviting all stakeholders **to take an active role** in shaping thriving, place-based futures.
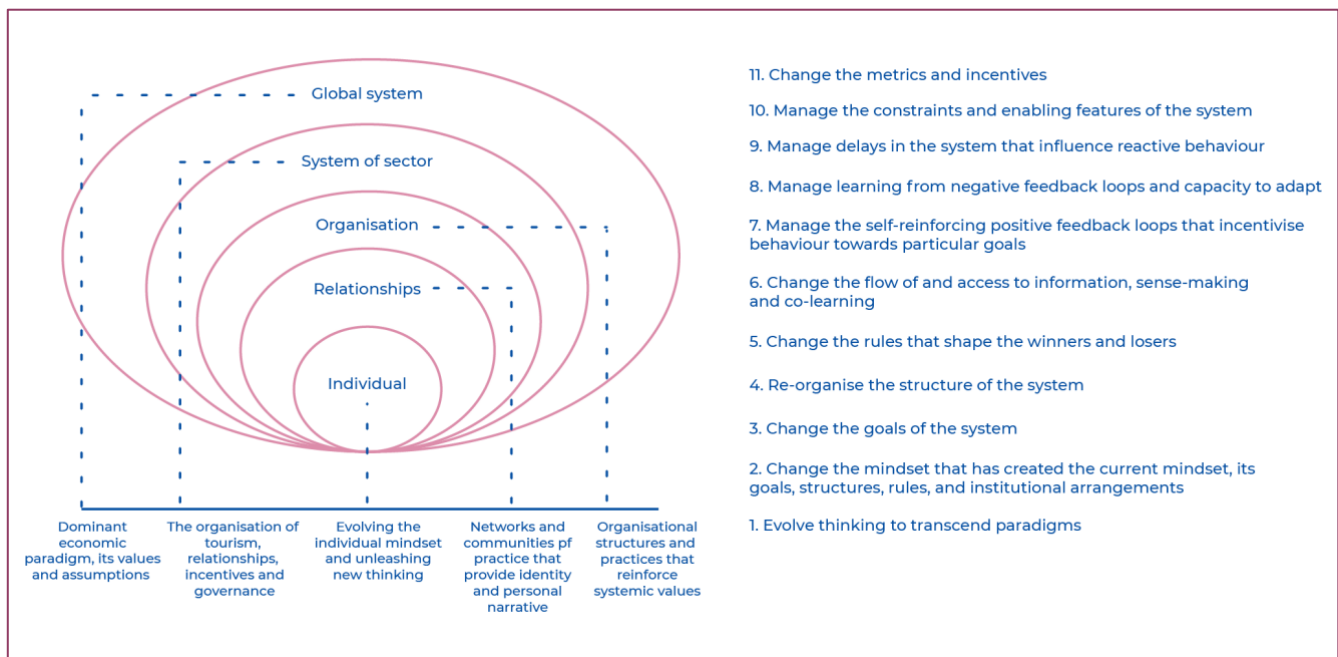
Figure 6: Working across the complex tourism system and its levers of change
Source: Dredge, 2022: 274. Working across the complex tourism system and its levers of change; Inspired by Meadows, D. (1999). Leverage points: Places to intervene in a system. https://donellameadows.org/archives/leverage-points-to-intervene-in-a-system/

Three key findings are summarised in Dredge's article (2022: 269):

1. Regenerative tourism requires **a shift in social-ecological consciousness** and depends on our capacity to evolve our thinking from "me" to "we" and to develop compassion, empathy and collaborative action.
2. Scientific management is inconsistent with the transition to regeneration. Tourism must be **managed as a complex adaptive system** and overcome the challenges of individualism, reductionism, separation and marketisation associated with scientific thinking.
3. Regenerative tourism requires **a deeply engaged bottom-up approach** that is **place-based, community-centred and environment-focused.**

"Regenerative tourism requires a deeply engaged bottom-up approach that is place-based, community-centred and environment-focused."

(Dredge, 2022: 269)

Network approaches in tourism governance

Tourism territories are best understood as networks of interconnected actors - such as governments, businesses, community groups, and visitors - rather than isolated organisations. A *network approach* to governance (Farsari, 2021) recognises that decisions emerge through relationships, trust, and collaboration across these diverse stakeholders. Instead of relying on hierarchy, it highlights the importance of cooperation and shared responsibility in shaping sustainable outcomes. *Network analysis* provides tools to study these relationships, showing who holds influence, how information flows, and where gaps or imbalances exist. Research shows that destinations with strong, well-connected networks are more resilient, innovative, and better equipped to adapt to challenges. By using network approaches, governance can become more inclusive, flexible, and effective in supporting long-term sustainability and regeneration.

Growing change together: Impact networks

In regenerative tourism, **long-term transformation** does not happen through isolated actions - it happens **through relationships, shared purpose, and collective learning**. That is why **impact networks** are becoming **essential tools for change**. This section draws from the work of The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI), which has spent over a decade exploring how networks can help communities and systems heal, evolve, and thrive.

It argues that lasting change in complex social and environmental challenges cannot be achieved by individual organisations or sectors working in isolation, but through well-connected, purpose-driven networks. Drawing from theory and practice, the report outlines principles and stages of network building, including clarifying shared purpose, mapping stakeholders, fostering trust, enabling collaboration, and supporting continuous adaptation. Practical tools and case examples demonstrate how networks can shift from fragmented efforts to coordinated action, building collective capacity for innovation and resilience. The report emphasises that effective networks are not static structures but living systems that evolve over time, requiring ongoing investment in relationships, openness, and shared learning. By reframing **governance as a collaborative and adaptive process**, TACSI provides a framework for practitioners, policymakers, and communities to create networks that can respond dynamically to challenges and achieve transformational outcomes.

What are impact networks?

Impact networks are groups of people and organisations coming together around a shared purpose to drive systemic change. Unlike traditional networks - which may share knowledge or coordinate actions - impact networks **focus on shifting the deeper structures that hold problems in place: mental models, power dynamics, and ways of working.**

In the context of regenerative tourism, impact networks enable stakeholders across different sectors - public authorities, SMEs, researchers, civil society, and nature-based organisations - **to co-create solutions that are grounded in place and aligned with local values**. They are not just partnerships; they are ecosystems of trust and transformation.

How are impact networks different from other networks?

Typical professional or sector-based networks often serve to share expertise, resources, or advocate for a specific interest. Impact networks, on the other hand:

- Prioritise relationship over representation.
- Work across silos and traditional boundaries.
- Encourage participants to "leave their logos at the door" and act from a shared commitment to regeneration.
- Embrace complexity, diversity, and long-term thinking.

Think of impact networks like ripples

Change doesn't always begin with big actions. It often starts with small shifts - new conversations, unexpected collaborations, or different questions. TACSI and other network experts describe impact networks as ripples in a system: the more the network **builds trust and alignment, the more its impact spreads** - across communities, policies, and institutions.

TACSI's Four Network Practices

To support these ripples and create fertile ground for change, TACSI has identified **four key practices that help impact networks grow and thrive:**

- **Togetherness**: Creating deep, meaningful relationships rooted in trust, empathy, and shared purpose.
- **In-betweenness**: Holding space for uncertainty and difference - allowing new ideas and wisdom to emerge collectively.
- **Emergence**: Taking small steps together, learning by doing, and adapting based on what we discover.
- **Wellbeing**: Supporting the emotional and psychological health of network members - because change is hard, and care is essential.

What does this mean in practice for regenerative tourism?

To build strong impact networks in tourism:

- Focus on building trust and shared purpose across diverse actors.
- Facilitate spaces where local voices lead and where wisdom is shared, not extracted.
- Encourage ongoing reflection, co-learning, and experimentation.
- Recognise that inner regeneration (of people, relationships, and institutions) is as vital as outer regeneration (of land and systems).

Social change: The Theory of the Critical Yeast

In regenerative tourism, lasting transformation does not always come from mobilising the largest crowds or launching massive campaigns. As peacebuilder John Paul Lederach (2005) reminds us, social change often grows from something much smaller - like **a tiny pinch of yeast** that makes the whole loaf of bread rise.

When baking bread, you combine flour, water, salt, and yeast. The flour is the largest ingredient, like the "critical mass" of people one often thinks that there is a need to create change. But flour alone stays flat. It is the yeast - small, almost invisible - that, when mixed in the right way, creates life in the dough and helps it grow.

Lederach's **Theory of the Critical Yeast** asks us to focus less on *how many* people we mobilise and more on *who* we bring together. A few strategically connected people - from different backgrounds, sectors, and perspectives - can create exponential impact if they are nurtured, connected, and embedded into the wider community.

Five lessons from bread-making for regenerative change

1. **Small can be powerful** - The smallest ingredient, yeast, has the greatest capacity to transform the whole. In regenerative tourism, a small number of well-connected, diverse actors can spark far-reaching change, more than a large group that thinks the same way.

2. **Activate before mixing** - Yeast must first come to life in a warm, slightly sweet, and safe space before joining the larger dough. Likewise, changemakers need spaces to build trust, share ideas, and prepare together before being introduced into the wider community.

3. **Sweeten and protect** - A little sugar helps yeast grow; protection from harsh conditions keeps it alive. Regenerative change needs supportive conditions - time to build trust, and positive narratives that make collaboration attractive.

4. **Mix with care and intention** - In baking, yeast must be kneaded thoroughly into the flour to make all of it rise. Dough rises and is then pushed down, only to rise again stronger. Regenerative change is tested by challenges and setbacks; its success depends on resilience and the capacity to keep moving forward together.

5. **Prepare for what is coming** - While the dough rises, the baker preheats the oven. In regeneration, this means thinking ahead and connecting current actions with future needs, so that efforts today are ready to meet the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow.

From bread to regenerative territories

In Regenera4MED, the "critical yeast" might be:

- A committed group of local fishers, tourism providers, and cultural heritage custodians co-designing low-impact visitor experiences.
- Municipal leaders willing to shift tourism policies towards ecological and cultural regeneration.
- A network of storytellers and guides who inspire visitors to act as caretakers, not consumers, of Mediterranean landscapes.

Just as a baker's goal is a well-risen loaf, our goal is thriving Mediterranean territories - socially connected, culturally alive, and ecologically healthy. The recipe for this change starts not with the biggest crowd, but with the right mix of people, working together to make the whole rise.

"The place where the critical mass and the critical yeast meet in reference to social change is not in the number of people involved but rather in creating the quality of the platform that makes exponential growth strong and possible, and then in finding ways to sustain that platform."

(Lederach, 2005)

1.9. Policy shifts for regenerative tourism

From policy control to enabling systems of care

Policy plays a powerful role in shaping how tourism is developed, managed, and experienced. In conventional models, tourism policy often reflects a top-down, economic growth mindset - prioritising competitiveness, visitor numbers, infrastructure development, and return on investment. These approaches have contributed to the overuse of resources, fragmented governance, and disconnection between tourism and community well-being.

But regenerative tourism requires **a very different kind of policy thinking**.

Instead of designing policy to control and extract, regenerative tourism calls for policy frameworks that **enable care, collaboration, and community-led transformation**. This shift involves recognising tourism not just as an economic activity, but as part of a living system - intertwined with the health of people, place, and planet.

According to the Tourism CoLab (2023), regenerative tourism policies are rooted in four key shifts:

1. From destination marketing to place care

Policy must move beyond promoting destinations toward nurturing the conditions for thriving places. This includes supporting community stewardship, biocultural regeneration, and sustainable livelihoods.

2. From economic extraction to equitable value distribution

Rather than prioritising outside investment or large-scale development, regenerative policy supports local economies, small enterprises, and fair benefit-sharing-especially in marginalised communities.

3. From centralised governance to distributed, networked action

Regenerative policy enables participation, not just consultation. It builds capacities for collaborative governance, empowering local actors to shape tourism in ways that align with their values, identity, and future vision.

4. From short-term wins to long-term resilience

Regenerative tourism policy embraces complexity and change. It favours adaptive strategies, supports innovation, and prioritises learning over fixed outcomes. It asks: *Are we building systems that will endure and evolve?*

Enabling policy environments

Creating an enabling policy environment means rethinking both what is measured and who is involved. It means integrating tourism into broader regenerative agendas, including climate resilience, social equity, land use planning, and cultural revival. Most importantly, it positions tourism as a contributor to the overall health of communities and ecosystems-not a separate sector, but a regenerative tool.

To do this, there is need policies of that:

- Embed Indigenous and local knowledge systems
- Support cross-sector collaboration and community-led planning
- Reframe success to include well-being, not just growth
- Provide long-term investment in social, natural, and cultural capital

Policy alone cannot regenerate tourism - but without policy support, many regenerative efforts will remain isolated. A regenerative future for tourism requires not just bold ideas, but the **policies to back them**.

1.10. New measures of success in regenerative tourism

Shifting from growth to wellbeing

Regenerative tourism calls for a fundamental change - not only in how we design tourism but in how we understand and measure its success. Traditional tourism often focuses on growth: more visitors, more overnight stays, more income. While these indicators may show economic activity, they rarely tell us whether a place, its people, and its ecosystems are truly thriving.

Regenerative tourism invites a different approach. It **redefines success** through the lens of **place-based wellbeing** - focusing on the health of the whole system. This means asking:

- Is the local environment healthier and more resilient?
- Are communities feeling empowered, safe, and connected?
- Are tourism experiences contributing to cultural vitality and learning?

Moving beyond extractive indicators

In mainstream tourism, success is usually measured by metrics like visitor numbers, spending, and infrastructure growth. Even within sustainability, indicators often focus on harm reduction-such as lowering emissions or limiting waste. Regenerative tourism asks deeper questions:

- **What good are we creating?**
- **Who benefits?**
- **What is being restored, healed, or renewed?**

Rethinking success: How do we measure what really matters?

In regenerative tourism, success is not defined by growth charts or tourist numbers. It is about the **health and vitality of the whole system** - people, place, and planet. That means there is a need of a different kind of measurement - one that reflects connection, care, and long-term wellbeing.

Bellato and Pollock (2023) highlight that regenerative tourism intentionally resists rigid measurement systems. Assigning predefined indicators or return-on-investment (ROI) formulas can dilute its deeper purpose. Living systems, they argue, are complex and evolving - too rich for reductionist metrics.

Pollock (2012) critiques traditional tourism performance indicators as mechanistic and growth-oriented. She calls for a shift toward what truly matters in living systems: **relationships, health, and contributions that support the flourishing of all life**.

Cave and Dredge (2020) agree that conventional economic metrics fall short. They advocate for a pluralistic model - one that measures **wellbeing, fairness, and ecological regeneration** as central to economic value.

From a design perspective, Mang and Reed (2012) remind us that regeneration is not about reaching a fixed target. Instead, it is a continuous, upward spiral of **systemic health and potential**. **Success means building the capacity of communities and ecosystems to evolve, adapt, and thrive over time.**

Dredge (2021) adds that regenerative tourism needs broader, values-based indicators - beyond visitor spending or occupancy rates. She suggests to focus on:

- **Ecological regeneration** – Is nature being restored and nurtured?
- **Community health and inclusion** – Are residents thriving and engaged?
- **Cultural resilience** – Is local heritage being honoured and passed on?
- **Local value creation and fair distribution** – Who benefits-and how?

Striving for regeneration is an **ongoing process** of nurturing regenerative mindsets, cultivating systemic understanding, and compassion.   Some outcomes may be subtle at first: **deeper relationships, increased trust, renewed rituals, returning species.** That's why regenerative success is measured not in quarters, but in **decades** - with patience, humility, and care.

By redefining what success looks like, we also redefine what tourism is for. Not just to entertain, extract, or even sustain – but to **support the ongoing health of life in all its forms**.

1.11. Technology as a catalyst for regeneration

Innovating with purpose: digital tools for deeper connection and systemic change

Regenerative tourism is rooted in human and ecological relationships - but technology, when used wisely, can enhance those relationships. When used thoughtfully, it can deepen awareness, support co-creation, and scale positive impact. From immersive storytelling to AI-powered sustainability tools, digital innovation offers new ways to bring regenerative principles to life.

Digital storytelling for emotional engagement

One inspiring example is the *"Orígenes Botânica"* project at the Ajuda Botanical Garden in Lisbon (Paiva et al., 2023). A mixed-reality game placed visitors in a future where many plant species are extinct-inviting them to reflect on the consequences of climate change through an emotionally rich and immersive experience.

Rather than provoking eco-anxiety, the experience sparked *hopeful actio*n by blending concern with beauty, and knowledge with empowerment. This kind of digital narrative can help transform passive sightseeing into reflective, regenerative engagement.

"Digital narratives can connect emotion to action, encouraging tourists to become stewards of place and agents of conservation."

(Paiva et al., 2023)

The Metaverse and virtual experiences

In another recent study, Liu and Hao (2024) explored **how avatars** in the metaverse can **promote sustainable and regenerative behaviours.** By simulating ethical tourism scenarios, visitors can experience consequences, build empathy, and learn about place-specific sustainability practices - even before arriving at a destination.

This opens opportunities for:

- **Reducing pressure on fragile ecosystems**
- **Enhancing visitor awareness pre-trip**
- **Designing virtual-first experiences for deeper connection.**

These immersive tools align with regenerative tourism's goals by encouraging learning, care, and more conscious decision-making.

Technology supporting co-creation and measurement

New technologies can also support regenerative tourism through:

- **Citizen science apps** that invite visitors to contribute to ecological monitoring.
- **AI and data dashboards** that help destinations track community well-being, carbon impact, and biodiversity trends.
- **Participatory platforms** that allow local voices to shape tourism experiences and governance.

These tools can improve transparency, foster inclusion, and provide evidence for adaptive, long-term thinking.

1.12. The rise of the eco-conscious traveller

Travel with purpose, care, and connection

Travellers today are not just looking for beautiful places. Many are looking for **meaningful experiences** - ones that connect them with nature, culture, and the people who live there.

This growing shift toward values-based travel has given rise to the eco-conscious traveller: someone who considers their environmental and social impact and wants their journey to leave a **positive footprint** on the people and places they visit.

This trend goes beyond sustainable practices. Regenerative travellers are **learners, listeners, co-creators, and active participants** in the healing of place. They're motivated by the desire to contribute, to connect, and to grow—both personally and in relationship with others.

Figure 7: Rise of eco-consciouss travellers;
Source: Freepik

What are eco-conscious travellers looking for?

They are seeking more than just relaxation. They want to:

- **Reduce their environmental footprint** (e.g. avoid waste, lower emissions)
- **Support local economies** (e.g. buy from small producers, eat local food)
- **Learn from local cultures** (e.g. attend storytelling walks or workshops)
- **Authentic connection**
- **Give back** (e.g. volunteer, plant trees, contribute to community causes)
- **Be part of something meaningful** (e.g. join projects, support regeneration)
- **Personal transformation** (gaining insight, reflection, and deeper meaning through travel)

This is supported by international research. According to *Booking.com's 2024 Sustainable Travel Report*:

- **83% of travellers** say sustainable travel is important to them.
- **71%** want to leave places better than they found them.
- **45%** believe their choices can reduce tourism's negative social impact.
- A growing majority prefers **authenticity over convenience,** and **connection over consumption.**

As highlighted in regenerative tourism literature (Bellato et al., 2022; Dredge, 2023; Hui, 2023):

- Visitors can be **active agents of regeneration**, not just passive consumers**.**
- Experiences should be designed to support **learning, emotional connection, and reciprocal exchange.**
- Regenerative travel is often a **transformative journey,** with personal and collective significance.

For tourism businesses - especially small providers, hosts, and local coordinators - this shift is a powerful opportunity to create deeper value for people and place. By embracing the growing interest in meaningful, responsible travel, you can:

- Welcome guests who value respect, authenticity, and connection.
- Strengthen relationships with your local community and environment.
- Share your place's story with honesty and care-celebrating both beauty and challenges.
- Move away from chasing volume, and toward creating experiences that contribute to local well-being.
- Take an active role as a steward of place-regenerating, not just sustaining.

Regenerative tourism invites providers to become more than service operators - it positions them as co-creators of healing, culture, and community resilience.

But be aware: today's travellers are also more sensitive to **greenwashing**. They value honesty, transparency, and genuine intent. Regenerative tourism is not about appearing perfect - It is about **sharing your journey openly**:

- What meaningful actions are you already taking?
- What challenges are you still working through?
- How can guests actively support and contribute?

This new generation of travellers wants to **travel with purpose**, not just consume. They are **ready to listen, learn, and contribute**. Regenerative tourism gives them that opportunity - an invitation to be part of something larger: a shared commitment to restoring vitality, meaning, and connection in the places we love.

1.13. Planting the seeds of regeneration

This section has looked at the concept of regenerative tourism providing the reader with an understanding of the paradigm shift that it entails. It has presented with the overall view of what Regenerative Tourism is.

Next section looks at how regenerative tourism can be applied in practice in tourism experiences. It is important to note that tourism experiences could be seen as seeds of a new paradigm that is emerging from the bottom up and that helps the tourism industry transition from degrading systems to regenerative ones. It is important to note that regenerative practices standing by themselves in a degraded environment will not create a regenerative model. This is why, despite next section focusses on tourism experiences, they can't be separated from the system they are in, and the governance and stakeholders they interact with.

2. Practice: Cultivating regenerative tourism in the Mediterranean

To help the Mediterranean regenerate, an operational model is set based on Regenerative Tourism literature and previous European-funded projects, as such capitalizing from academia and practitioners. The implementation argues for the inclusion of the following:

An Integrated Governance Model: as seen through the document, governance is a key part of regenerative tourism. In fact, **Regenerative Tourism is not understood without a governance approach** and a particular one since it is bottom-up includes a variety of stakeholders (academia, public sector, private sector, civil society organizations and environmental associations) and residents as well as tourists. To do that, the critical yeast theory (explain more), is seen as a well-suited approach. A specific document explains the Governance Approach for those destinations that would like to help their territories flourish.

The development of a Regeneration Tourism Programme: also following the narrative of critical yeast theory, the Regeneration Tourism Programme is a process of allowing communities to express themselves, it is a way to collect feedback from the territory where tourism is present.

Evaluation of Regeneration: while evaluation in the Regenerative lenses does not resonate much with quantitative indicators, this does not mean that is not helpful to evaluate the development of Regeneration of a destination. In this regard, a specific tool called RISET is created in order to help destination stakeholders assess regeneration in terms of tourism in their territories.

Training on Regeneration: as a counterpart of the Regeneration Tourism Programme, where the ideas and collective knowledge emerge, the training is key to provide information on what Regenerative Tourism is. In this regard, training, while adapted to local situations and stakeholders, is a key part of the implementation, specially to those stakeholders who are not yet familiar with the concept.

2.1. Regeneration in the Mediterranean context

Rooting regenerative tourism in place

The Mediterranean is a region of extraordinary ecological and cultural richness - and one of increasing vulnerability. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and overdevelopment are already straining many local ecosystems and communities. These challenges are deeply connected to the dominant tourism model: one focused on mass consumption, seasonal surges, and extractive practices that often prioritise short-term gain over long-term wellbeing.

Tourism plays a major role in the region's economy, with the Mediterranean welcoming around 35% of all international tourist arrivals. But the current system is showing signs of strain - both environmental and social. This does not mean we need less tourism. It means we need a different kind of tourism.

Regenerative tourism offers that shift. It invites us to move beyond simply reducing harm, toward actively restoring, healing, and creating the conditions for life to thrive. It is not about abandoning tourism but about transforming it - so that it contributes to climate adaptation, strengthens resilience, and supports the well-being of communities and nature.

Change is not only needed - it is possible. More than 70% of European citizens say they are willing to travel differently for the sake of the environment. This signals a growing readiness to embrace new, meaningful, and responsible experiences that are rooted in place, community, and care.

While each Mediterranean territory is unique, they also share common ground: deep cultural ties, interconnected ecosystems, and shared vulnerabilities. That is why cooperation across borders is essential. A shared regenerative approach - adapted to local contexts but rooted in common values - can help Mediterranean destinations co-create a new identity as leaders in the future of tourism.

By working together, we can shift from fragmented efforts to a collective movement. Regenera4MED supports this process by developing a Mediterranean-specific model of regenerative tourism. Through territorial cooperation, shared learning, and alignment with key transnational strategies, the project aims to build a foundation for long-term transformation - turning the Mediterranean into a living network of regenerative places, not just destinations.

2.2. Why regenerative tourism matters

Real benefits for people, place, and providers

While tourism has brought economic value across the Mediterranean, it also created tensions in the territories where the caring capacity could not sustain it. From the Catalan Northern Coast to Crete Island, tourism has eroded the local ecosystems and disrupted local communities.

While a distinction should be made between mature and not mature destinations, for the purpose of the current analysis, it is understood that regeneration comes from the willingness to regenerate places that were or still are degrading the systems where they operate.

The Mediterranean is one of the world's most visited regions, but also one of the most vulnerable to the impacts of mass tourism and climate change. Regenerative tourism offers **a vital opportunity to rethink the region's tourism future** — by addressing over-tourism, restoring ecosystems, preserving cultural heritage, and strengthening local economies. It supports a shift from extraction to renewal, helping Mediterranean communities build resilience, protect their identity, and create tourism experiences that benefit both people and the environment.

Tourism can help **regenerate damaged places** (destinations) or **revitalize underutilized areas** with cultural and natural potential. This approach strengthens community identity, supports local economies, and protects biodiversity.

The hospitality industry can rely on regenerative tourism to ensure its resilience to future crises. Regenerative tourism **creates a meaningful balance between local culture, natural ecosystems, hosts, and guests.**

Regenerative tourism is not just good in theory - it delivers real, tangible value. It supports long-term **resilience**, **diversified income**, **community pride**, and the **health of natural systems**.

Regenerative tourism offers a path forward - not a one-size-fits-all solution, but a **place-specific, value-driven approach** rooted in the identity and resilience of each territory. Regenerative tourism in the Mediterranean is about **healing, rebalancing, and reweaving relationships** - between coast and hinterland, visitor and resident, nature and economy. It calls for **bioregional thinking**, **community stewardship**, and the revitalization of **place-based models** that work with the land, not against it. Regenerative tourism is not about consuming a place. It is about connecting with it, caring for it, and regenerating it - together.

This chapter outlines the **key benefits** of regenerative tourism, especially for those working on the ground: local businesses, cooperatives, small farms, youth initiatives, and tourism SMEs.

Benefits for nature and ecosystems:

- Supports rewilding, biodiversity, and ecosystem restoration.
- Reduces pressure on sensitive landscapes.
- Encourages nature-positive business practices.
- Connects tourism with conservation and land care.
- Recognises nature as an active partner, not a passive backdrop.
- Reinforces the vitality of living systems by supporting ecological succession and regeneration cycles.

Benefits for communities:

- Builds social cohesion and sense of belonging
- Revives cultural practices, crafts, and local food traditions
- Strengthens self-determination and local governance
- Inspires intergenerational knowledge exchange
- Offers dignified work based on care, values, and identity
- Creates space for communities to define tourism on their own terms.

Benefits for tourism providers and SMEs:

- Attracts mindful travellers looking for authentic, meaningful experiences
- Strengthens relationships with local stakeholders and networks
- Adds purpose and story to business models
- Opens access to niche markets (e.g. slow food, regenerative retreats, experiential tourism).
- Enables a shift from service provision to relationship facilitation.

Regenerative tourism helps people thrive, nature recover, and communities rediscover their strength. Regeneration doesn't mean giving up income - it means **earning differently**. it repositions it as **one outcome among many**, grounded in purpose, care, and connection. It reframes success from "growth at all costs" to **viability with integrity**:

- Local businesses can **retain more value** by offering distinctive, place-rooted experiences.
- Income circulates **within communities**, supporting multiple livelihoods.
- Guests stay longer, return more often, and recommend meaningful experiences.
- Regenerative businesses become **more resilient** to market shocks and ecological risks.
- New funding and support mechanisms - especially EU programs - are starting to prioritize regenerative and circular economy projects.

"In regenerative models, profit is not the goal; It is a by-product of doing the right thing, in the right way, for the right reasons."

(Cave and Dredge, 2020)

2.3. A cross-sectoral approach to regenerative governance

Working Together for Thriving Places

To regenerate tourism systems, we must also regenerate how decisions are made. The Regenera4MED project introduces an **Integrated Governance Model (IGM) -** a dynamic and inclusive approach rooted in **living systems thinking**. At its heart is the **8-Helix model**, a regenerative stakeholder architecture designed to reflect the interdependence of people, place, and planet.

This model moves beyond traditional governance to recognise that transformation happens when **diverse actors** collaborate - not in isolation, but as part of a **living, evolving system**. It brings together eight interconnected helices:

- **Public Administration & Agencies** - Provide strategy, regulation, and resources to support regenerative transitions.
- **SMEs and Local Enterprises** - Deliver grounded experiences and drive circular, place-based innovation.
- **Civil Society Organisations** - Represent local values, foster social inclusion, and build trust.
- **Academia & Research** - Generate knowledge, monitor impacts, and co-design solutions with communities.
- **Environmental & Cultural Associations** - Advocate for biodiversity, heritage, and ecological justice.
- **Residents** - As long-term stewards of place, they hold vital knowledge, identity, and emotional connection.
- **Tourists** - Reframed as co-creators, guests are invited to participate meaningfully and act with care.

- **Nature** - Recognised as a stakeholder in its own right, nature is safeguarded and regenerated through policy, proxies, and ecological insight.

This governance model shifts from **top-down control to co-creation**, from sectoral silos to **networked relationships**, and from linear planning to **adaptive, participatory stewardship**.

By embedding the 8-Helix model throughout the project lifecycle, Regenera4MED ensures that tourism is **designed with and for the whole system -** human and more-than-human. It offers a roadmap for Mediterranean hosting territories to grow governance that is inclusive, context-sensitive, and deeply regenerative.

*For a deeper understanding of this approach, the full Regenera4MED **Integrated Governance Model for Regenerative Tourism document** provides detailed principles, roles, and implementation guidance.*

2.4. Rethinking community engagement in regenerative tourism

CASE EXAMPLE: THE ISLANDER WAY, TASMANIA
Community Engagement Done Differently

On Flinders Island, part of Tasmania's remote Furneaux Group, the Islander Way project is showing what community-led regenerative tourism can look like in practice. Rather than seeing community engagement as a one-off consultation, this initiative embraces it as an ongoing relationship - one built on trust, shared purpose, and local leadership.

What makes it regenerative?

- **Co-design from the ground up:** Instead of asking for feedback on pre-made plans, the project empowers the community to shape tourism from the start. It values local voices, listens deeply, and builds confidence and capacity over time.
- **A broader definition of 'community':** Engagement goes beyond the usual suspects (tourism operators, officials) to include residents, cultural leaders, youth, Indigenous groups, and those who may have felt left out of previous processes.

- **Wellbeing as a compass:** Guided by Tasmania's Wellbeing Framework, tourism is measured not by how many visitors it brings, but by how it contributes to health, belonging, identity, and ecological care.
- **Earning back social licence:** The project recognises that tourism must regain the trust of communities. That means being transparent, inclusive, and accountable-especially in places where past tourism models have caused harm or fatigue.
- **Creating space for dialogue:** Instead of forcing consensus, the Islander Way makes space for honest conversations and different views. It fosters empathy and allows new ideas to emerge through mutual learning.

Figure 8: Flinders Island (Tasmania) hosted a community-led response to the Islander Way project
Source: https://www.islanderway.co/post/community-engagement Strait Gallery

Why it matters

This case shows how regenerative tourism grows from within. It starts by asking: *What does this place-and its people-really need to thrive?* From there, tourism becomes a tool for healing, co-creation, and long-term wellbeing.

Lessons for Regenerative Tourism:

This approach shows that **community engagement must be continuous, inclusive, and emotionally intelligent**. It takes courage, deep listening, and a willingness to share power. Community engagement is not just a method - it is a **social contract** and a key pillar of regenerative tourism.

2.5. From experiences to regeneration journeys

Planting seeds for long-term flourishing

In regenerative tourism, we do not treat experiences as final products or checklist items. **Regeneration is not a label - it is a process, a journey.** One that unfolds over time through relationships, learning, and collective care.

As introduced in **Chapter 4 – What Does Regeneration Mean?**, the *regenerative spiral* reminds us that tourism can either degrade or uplift systems. At one end, it takes more than it gives - depleting resources, weakening communities, and focusing only on short-term profit. At the other, it supports the ongoing *renewal and resilience* of life: ecosystems thrive, cultural identity is revitalised, and people are connected through purpose.

Tourism experiences as entry points

While a single activity cannot "regenerate" a place on its own, tourism **experiences can act as catalysts** - seeds planted within the system to spark awareness, connection, and positive change.

A **regenerative tourism experience** is designed with the **intention to restore, revitalise, and co-evolve** with the local place. It is rooted in a **living systems perspective**, acknowledging the interconnectedness of all elements - ecological, social, and cultural (Bellato & Cheer, 2021; Pollock, 2020).

These experiences are **place-based and community-led**, not generic or top-down. They are **co-created with locals** who serve not only as hosts, but as storytellers, stewards, and designers of the experience. Visitors are not passive consumers - they become **active participants** in learning, sharing, and healing (Sheldon, 2020; Dredge, 2023).

Tourism experiences that move toward regeneration

Experiences that move toward regeneration often include:

- A **clear intention** to create net-positive impact.
- **Immersive, transformative encounters** that deepen awareness and spark personal or collective change.
- **Storytelling rooted in place** - local identity, culture, and history.
- **Hands-on learning** with land, food, traditions, or community knowledge.
- **Support for local livelihoods,** small producers, and traditional knowledge holders.
- **Respect for ecological rhythms and limits.**
- A **commitment to equity, care, and reciprocity.**

As Pollock and Bellato point out, **regenerative tourism requires asking different questions:** *How does this experience serve the place? What conditions allow the community to thrive?*

It is less about ticking boxes, and more about **nurturing relationships, restoring systems, and building shared meaning**.

Rooted in the uniqueness of place

Regenerative experiences are **always specific to place**. They honour the unique story, rhythms, and capacity of the land and its people. They do not replicate what works elsewhere - they emerge from the **living context** of the hosting territory.

Ultimately, regenerative experiences are not defined by marketing labels, but by their **ability to contribute to the ongoing health, identity, and resilience** of the place - socially, culturally, environmentally, and economically.

2.6. Walking the regenerative path: Local examples in action

DELTA POLET'S ECO-CULTURAL SAFARI

Territory: EUROPE, Mediterranean, Spain, Catalonia-Ebro Delta

Short introduction

Delta Polet is a family-run initiative rooted in the Ebro Delta, one of Europe's most important wetlands. The Polet family is committed not only to offering guided experiences but also to preserving and promoting the traditions, ecosystems, and cultural heritage of the delta. Through immersive, educational, and participatory tourism, they help visitors build a deeper connection to the territory.

What is the experience?

The Eco-Cultural Safari is a half- or full-day immersive journey for small groups, combining environmental education, cultural storytelling, and interactive agricultural workshops. Visitors explore the delta's wetlands by eco-vehicle, observe rich birdlife, and engage in activities such as manual rice farming and Catalan skittles. Additional formats include gastronomic tours (featuring local, chemical-free rice), scientific birding, family-friendly games, and multi-day walking routes.

How it contributes to regeneration?

- **Living systems thinking:** The Safari reveals the Ebro Delta as a living system shaped by centuries of co-existence between humans and nature.
- **Hands-on learning:** Visitors actively participate in rice planting, bird monitoring, and traditional games, gaining both ecological and cultural literacy.
- **Community-led experience:** Local residents are guides, educators and knowledge holders - ensuring that the benefits stay within the community.
- **Environmental stewardship:** The tour highlights low-impact practices and educates visitors on preserving fragile ecosystems.
- **Transformative engagement:** Guests move from passive observers to active stewards, cultivating empathy and personal responsibility for the land.

Figure 9: Photos of Delta Polet Tourist experience.
Source: www.deltapolet.com

What makes it unique?

Delta Polet combines educational tourism, cultural immersion, and agroecological stewardship into one coherent experience. What sets it apart is its deep familial and local grounding - this is not an external tourism product, but a story and legacy shared from within the community. The use of traditional games, hands-on farming, and environmental science all create an emotionally and intellectually rich encounter.

What can we learn?

- Regeneration is a collective act, grounded in local leadership and shared storytelling.
- Tourism can help protect fragile ecosystems - when it uplifts traditional knowledge and puts place at the centre.
- Nature and culture are inseparable - protecting one requires honouring the other.

- Tourism can be a tool for ecological and cultural revival when co-created with communities and ecosystems in mind.
- Small-scale, high-impact experiences can contribute meaningfully to long-term resilience.

Position on the regenerative spiral

Restorative → Regenerative.

Delta Polet's Safari demonstrates regenerative intent and action across several dimensions: ecological stewardship, cultural revitalisation, community participation, and transformative learning. With its strong local leadership and focus on place-based knowledge, it actively contributes to the health and resilience of both people and ecosystems.

For more information: *www.deltapolet.com*

CERDANYA VIVA - LIVING MOUNTAINS EXPERIENCE
Territory: EUROPE, Mediterranean, Spain, Catalonia - Cerdanya, Pyrenees

Short introduction

Cerdanya Viva Ecoresort, nestled in the high Pyrenees of Catalonia, embodies a deep-rooted commitment to regenerative tourism. The resort is more than an accommodation - it is a living ecosystem where well-being, nature, and community converge. Cerdanya Viva promotes local vitality, eco-conscious living, and intergenerational connection to landscape and culture. Set in la Cerdanya, it aims to foster mountain resilience through education, immersion, and holistic practices.

What is the experience?

Cerdanya Viva offers immersive experiences rooted in the rhythms of mountain life. Guests engage in:

- Nature-based wellness practices (forest bathing, yoga, ancestral therapies)
- Local product tasting, farming and permaculture workshops
- Community-led events celebrating Pyrenean traditions
- Activities such as herbal walks, storytelling circles, and environmental volunteering
- Family programmes that promote eco-literacy for all ages

These experiences are co-designed with local actors and rooted in Cerdanya's seasonal cycles, combining leisure with meaning.

How it contributes to regeneration?

- **Living systems thinking:** Experiences reveal the Pyrenean valley as a co-evolving system of human and more-than-human relationships.
- **Cultural and ecological restoration:** Visitors learn from local experts how to forage, cook, farm, and ways to internally heal and take care of the environment.
- **Community anchoring:** Local SMEs, farmers, and craftspeople are active co-creators and direct beneficiaries.
- **Decarbonised practices:** Solar energy, zero-waste protocols, own vegetable permaculture-based garden and a local food chain define the resort's operations.
- **Transformative hospitality:** Guests are not only cared for but also inspired to carry regenerative practices home.

Figure 10: Photos of Cerdanya Viva
Source: www.cerdanyaecoresort.com

What makes it unique?

Unlike conventional rural resorts, Cerdanya Viva fuses hospitality with purpose. It operates as a regenerative living lab that tests, refines, and shares practices for climate resilience and community thriving. The integration of eco-therapy, cooperative learning, and slow tourism within a place-based governance model makes it a referent of systemic regeneration in high mountain zones.

What can we learn?

- Regeneration is not just restoration - it is co-creation with local people and places.
- Eco-resorts can be testing grounds for systemic innovation, where tourism becomes education.
- Nature-based healing can re-anchor tourism in planetary and intergenerational care.
- Rural hospitality can counter depopulation by fostering local entrepreneurship and circular economies.
- Regenerative destinations are born from **shared values**, not just infrastructure.

Position on the regenerative spiral
Restorative → Regenerative → Catalytic

Cerdanya Viva sits at the Catalytic stage of regeneration. It initiates system-wide change by aligning public, private, civil, and ecological actors around a shared bioregional vision. The experience model has ripple effects across wellness, education, agriculture, and tourism - becoming a node of resilience for the Pyrenees.

For more information: www.cerdanyaecoresort.com, https://www.youtube.com/@cerdanya_viva

TERRA MEERA

Territory: EUROPE, Mediterranean, Croatia, Šibensko-kninska županija, Skradin

Short introduction

Terra Meera is a regenerative tourism initiative rooted in a small village near Skradin, Croatia. Founded by sustainability visionary and academic Dr. Irena Ateljevic, it blends regenerative agriculture, community empowerment, and personal transformation. This micro-scale, locally owned experience serves as a living model for how tourism can co-evolve with land, culture, and people.

What is the experience?

Visitors to Terra Meera take part in immersive, land-based experiences including planting indigenous trees, learning about regenerative agriculture, joining creative workshops, and engaging in reflective retreats. The experience encourages hands-on involvement and heartfelt connection - between self, others, and place.

How it contributes to regeneration?

- **Regenerative mindset:** Terra Meera operates with a clear mission to regenerate land and awaken human potential. It sees nature and people as part of a living, co-evolving system.
- **Community co-creation:** Local residents and visitors collaborate on land restoration and creative programming, fostering mutual learning and respect.
- **Place-based identity:** Rooted in local ecology and memory, the project honours traditional wisdom, seasonal rhythms, and the biocultural landscape of inland Dalmatia.
- **Positive environmental impact:** Nearly 300 native fruit trees have been planted, abandoned farmland revitalised, and biodiversity restored.
- **Systems thinking & collaboration:** Through its partnerships with international regenerative networks and local NGOs, Terra Meera acts as a connector and catalyst for systemic change.

What makes it unique?

Terra Meera is not only a tourism product - it is a regenerative learning ground. It combines art, ecology, education, and leadership into a single, living experience. What sets it apart is its deeply personal story, its holistic design philosophy, and its commitment to building a values-based community rooted in interbeing.

Figure 11: Terra Meera video
Source: https://vimeo.com/462997669?p=1s

What can we learn?

- Regeneration begins with mindset - and Terra Meera embodies this by combining inner transformation with land healing.
- Locally rooted, small-scale tourism can restore damaged landscapes, revitalise culture, and build resilient communities.
- Deep storytelling, slow experiences, and hands-on learning invite visitors to reflect, reconnect, and reimagine their role in shaping a regenerative future.

Position on the regenerative spiral
Firmly Regenerative.

Terra Meera exemplifies a high level of regenerative maturity: it engages in ecological restoration, fosters long-term resilience, promotes community co-creation, and facilitates deep transformation among visitors. With a clear mission and aligned practices, it stands as a regenerative lighthouse in the Mediterranean context.

For more information: *www.terrameera.com*

EUMELIA ORGANIC AGROTOURISM FARM

Territory: EUROPE, Mediterranean, Greece, Laconia, Gouves

Short introduction

Eumelia Organic Agrotourism Farm is a pioneering regenerative tourism initiative in rural Laconia, southern Greece. Locally owned and operated, Eumelia is not only a sustainable retreat, but a living classroom and working farm where visitors, locals, and the land co-evolve. With a deep commitment to ecological design and community empowerment, it demonstrates how rural agritourism can restore landscapes and livelihoods.

What is the experience?

Guests are immersed in farm life - harvesting olives, making natural cosmetics, cooking traditional Greek recipes, and engaging with biodynamic agriculture. The farm also hosts workshops on permaculture, wellness, and sustainable living, creating a slow-paced, hands-on experience that connects people to land and local knowledge.

Figure 12: Eumelia Organic Agritourism Farm video: our story
Source: https://youtu.be/-pCx1TUbJ-o?si=MtesKpQdkBvryz7X

How it contributes to regeneration?

- **Living systems thinking:** Eumelia integrates architecture, food systems, farming, and hospitality into a holistic regenerative design.
- **Revitalising culture and ecology:** Biodynamic farming practices and the cultivation of ancient olive varieties restore soil health while reviving heritage crops and traditional knowledge.
- **Community empowerment:** Local producers and artisans are actively involved in co-creating the experiences, from storytelling to production.
- **Positive visitor impact:** Visitors are not passive observers - they learn, contribute, and reflect, transforming their understanding of agriculture, sustainability, and Greek culture.
- **Networks and collaboration:** Eumelia partners with local cooperatives and international permaculture networks, making it a hub for regenerative exchange and innovation.

What makes it unique?

Eumelia is one of the few tourism enterprises in Greece that explicitly embraces regenerative principles. It combines elegant eco-accommodation with purposeful engagement in farming, food, and community. The model blends hospitality with ecological restoration and cultural renewal and does so with clarity of mission and depth of practice.

What can we learn?

- **Regeneration starts with the soil:** Healing ecosystems from the ground up can also regenerate local identity, pride, and opportunity.
- **Small-scale, rural initiatives can be system-changers:** Eumelia shows how even micro-enterprises can influence visitor mindsets and spark long-term transformation.
- **Community-led co-creation is key:** Inclusion of local voices and talents creates richer, more resilient experiences - for all involved.
- **Slow tourism invites deeper connections:** When guests are invited to participate in meaningful, hands-on ways, the tourism experience becomes one of care, learning, and stewardship.

Figure 13: Photos of Eumelia Organic Agrotourism Farm
Source: www.eumelia.com

Position on the regenerative spiral
Firmly regenerative.

Eumelia demonstrates a clear regenerative mindset, systems-based design, active local collaboration, and net-positive ecological and cultural impacts. Its focus on transformation - of land, people, and perception - places it well into the regenerative zone of the spiral.

For more information: www.eumelia.com

CAMMINO NELLE TERRE MUTATE

Territory: EUROPE, Mediterranean, Italy, Marche-Umbria-Lazio-Abruzzo

Short introduction

Cammino nelle Terre Mutate (The Path in Changed Lands) is a unique long-distance walking experience that weaves through Italy's central Apennine towns affected by the 2009 and 2016 earthquakes. This path is more than a route - it is a living network of solidarity, memory, and place regeneration. Developed by local associations such as Movimento Tellurico, FederTrek, and APE Roma, the initiative brings visitors into direct contact with communities working to rebuild not only structures but social fabric and hope.

What is the experience?

The experience is a multi-day walking trail across earthquake-impacted regions, combining nature immersion with meaningful community encounters. Travellers visit small towns, meet local people, and witness both the scars and strength of places in transition. The journey is punctuated by slow, mindful movement and moments of storytelling, reflection, and shared meals.

Figure 14: Il Cammino nelle Terre Mutate video;
Source: https://youtu.be/vNOLJZNgL4Y?si=HQz2H0HZOd1IlCAZ

How it contributes to regeneration?

- **Regenerative Mindset:** It fosters a culture of care, empathy, and shared responsibility. The walk embodies a shift from consumption to contribution.
- **Place-Based and Context-Specific:** Deeply rooted in the identity of earthquake-struck territories, the trail brings visibility to forgotten places and supports cultural and ecological restoration.
- **Community Co-Creation:** Local communities help co-design the path, guide visitors, and share their lived experiences, strengthening local agency and pride.
- **Resilience Building:** It supports emotional and economic resilience through sustainable tourism income, cultural revival, and human connection.
- **Holistic Approach:** Nature, culture, and memory are intertwined into a living system where people walk not only across landscapes, but through layers of meaning.

What makes it unique?

Unlike typical hiking itineraries, *Cammino nelle Terre Mutate* is a civic and cultural journey. Each step becomes an act of solidarity. Visitors are not just guests - they are witnesses, supporters, and participants in the region's healing. The slow rhythm encourages deeper reflection and mutual exchange, transforming both visitor and host.

What can we learn?

- **Regeneration can grow from crisis:** This path shows how tourism can become a tool for rebuilding after disasters - economically, emotionally, and socially.
- **Storytelling is healing:** Personal stories shared along the trail reconnect people to place and deepen understanding.
- **Hospitality as resilience:** The willingness of communities to host and share, despite hardship, is a regenerative act in itself.
- **Tourism as a civic act:** Walking these lands is a gesture of presence, support, and care. It demonstrates how tourism can be an ally in long-term reconstruction and healing.

Figure 15: Photos of Il Cammino nelle Terre Mutate (The Path in Changed Lands)
Source: www.camminoterremutate.org

Position on the regenerative spiral
Strongly Regenerative.

The initiative embodies several regenerative principles: it strengthens community identity, supports ecosystem care, facilitates transformation in visitors, and operates from a place of deep relationality. While infrastructure may still be recovering, the cultural and human elements of regeneration are powerfully in motion.

For more information: *www.camminoterremutate.org*

OUTBE: ENGAGING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE PORTOFINO AREA

Territory: EUROPE, Mediterranean, Italy, Liguria, Portofino, Cinque Terre, and surrounding areas

Short introduction

OutBe is a purpose-driven benefit company based in the Portofino and Cinque Terre area, offering immersive, nature-connected experiences under a shared mission: to live, know, and protect nature. Through projects like Outdoor Portofino and WildSteps, they promote regenerative values via education, eco-sports, and corporate wellbeing journeys that reconnect people to place. In recognition of their social and environmental commitment, OutBe became a certified B Corp in 2024.

What is the experience?

Outdoor Portofino offers guided hiking, mindfulness treks, kayaking, forest bathing, and snorkeling tours - all designed to be deeply connected to the local environment. WildSteps extends this vision into corporate and group experiences, offering team-building and leadership programs rooted in nature, mindfulness, and regeneration principles. Participants explore land and sea through slow adventure, guided by local experts and rooted in respect for nature. These activities invite both personal growth and deep connection with local ecology, culture, and community.

How it contributes to regeneration?

- **Living systems thinking:** The experiences reveal how natural and social systems are interwoven - visitors engage not just with nature, but with the stories, values, and traditions of place.
- **Community co-creation:** Local guides, producers, and stakeholders co-design and deliver experiences, ensuring shared value and authentic representation.
- **Nature-positive practices:** Sustainable sports (kayak, SUP, hiking) are practiced with minimal impact, contributing to marine conservation and landscape stewardship.
- **Empowerment and education:** Visitors are not passive spectators - they learn, reflect, and leave transformed, equipped with knowledge and awareness that influence future choices.
- **Wellbeing and Inclusion:** The model promotes mental and physical wellbeing through outdoor activities, with attention to accessibility and equity in all experiences.

Figure 16: OutBe company manifesto video
Source: https://youtu.be/dDIngC1C12U

What makes it unique?

OutBe blends eco-adventure with regenerative purpose. Its dual platform - Outdoor Portofino for individuals and WildSteps for organisations - targets diverse audiences with a consistent message: *nature is not a playground, but a partner in wellbeing*. Its storytelling invites visitors into a larger mission of respect, care, and regeneration.

What can we learn?

- **Regeneration starts with awareness:** By fostering sensory, emotional, and intellectual connection to nature, these experiences build inner shifts that ripple outward.
- **Sport as a tool for stewardship:** Engaging with landscapes through movement enhances respect and fosters care.
- **Multi-stakeholder collaboration matters:** Local partnerships anchor the experience in real community benefit, cultural vitality, and knowledge sharing.
- **Corporate regeneration is possible:** WildSteps shows that team-building can evolve into place-based, transformative learning that serves both business and ecosystem resilience.

Figure 17: Photos of Outdoor Portofino and WildSteps
Source: www.outdoorportofino.com; www.wildsteps.com

Position on the regenerative spiral
Regenerative.

OutBe's model operates with a strong regenerative intent - nurturing ecological literacy, community connection, and long-term stewardship. While continuous improvement is always part of the path, the initiative clearly exceeds sustainability and demonstrates a systemic, evolving approach grounded in wellbeing and care.

For more information: www.outdoorportofino.com, www.wildsteps.com

BLACK BARN FARM: REGENERATING LAND, FOOD, AND COMMUNITY

Territory: AUSTRALIA, Victoria, Stanely

Short introduction

Nestled in the small village of Stanley–once a vibrant orchard community–Black Barn Farm is a micro-enterprise and educational hub blending regenerative agriculture, hands-on learning, and community revival. Founded by Jade Miles and Charlie Showers, this family-run initiative is breathing life back into local food systems, biodiversity, and rural identity.

What is the experience?

Visitors are welcomed into a living landscape of heritage orchards and food forests. The experience includes pick-your-own fruit, seasonal grafting and fermentation workshops, nature-based learning camps, and hands-on sessions in regenerative farming. Guests can also stay on-site, participate in community events, and connect with like-minded changemakers.

Figure 18: Black Barn farm: "Why we do it" video
Source: https://youtu.be/rbpdEQkvC54?si=n-q8loonrRP3t3h9

How it contributes to regeneration?

- **Regenerative Mindset:** Grounded in permaculture and biodiversity principles, Black Barn Farm regenerates both soil and human connection to food systems.
- **Reviving Local Identity:** Reclaims Stanley's orchard heritage, making fruit-growing a pillar of local culture and economy once again.
- **Community Co-Creation:** Locals and visitors collaborate through workshops, events, and storytelling - everyone contributes and learns.
- **Cultural and Ecosystem Regeneration:** Rare apple varieties are preserved and celebrated, while healthy soil and seasonal rhythms are restored.
- **Partnerships & Networks:** Collaborates with over a dozen regional producers, educators, and NGOs to grow a resilient food and tourism ecosystem.

Figure 19: Photos of Black barn farm tourist experience

Source: www.blackbarnfarm.com.au ; https://www.victoriashighcountry.com.au/listing/black-barn-farm-stanley/; https://www.visitmelbourne.com/regions/high-country/eat-and-drink/local-produce/black-barn-farm

What makes it unique?

Black Barn Farm's six-pronged approach – **Eat, Learn, Stay, Grow, Pick, and Consult** – makes it a rare model of circular, regenerative tourism. It's not only a place to visit, but also a learning community that nurtures ecological consciousness, youth engagement, and rural resilience. The Greener Grass Camps for children are especially impactful, reconnecting the next generation with land, food, and community.

What can we learn?

- Regeneration starts with reconnecting people to land and food through practical experience.
- A small-scale farm can become a catalyst for regional resilience and cultural renewal.
- Hands-on learning, storytelling, and intergenerational connection are key to meaningful visitor experiences.
- Tourism can be a platform for systems change - not just leisure.

Position on the regenerative spiral
Regenerative

Black Barn Farm embodies regenerative intent and tangible action across ecological, social, and cultural dimensions. Its deep community anchoring, educational focus, and system-thinking approach position it confidently within the regenerative stage of the spiral. It generates net-positive impact - nurturing both place and people.

For more information: www.blackbarnfarm.com.au

AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND: A REGENERATIVE TOURISM MODEL ROOTED IN INDIGENOUS VALUES

Territory: OCEANIA, New Zealand (Aotearoa)

Short introduction

Aotearoa New Zealand is globally recognised as a trailblazer in regenerative tourism. Following the disruptions of COVID-19, the country embraced a paradigm shift - away from extractive tourism and toward a values-led model grounded in Indigenous Māori worldviews, care for place, and intergenerational wellbeing. Regeneration is not a niche product here - it is a system-wide cultural, ecological, and policy transformation.

What is the experience?

Regenerative tourism in Aotearoa is expressed through a variety of interconnected initiatives. These include immersive Māori-led experiences (e.g., *The Seventh Generation Tours*), national campaigns for responsible visitation (e.g., *Tiaki Promise*), storytelling platforms (e.g., *Good Awaits Podcast*), and host territory plans that integrate ecological, cultural, and social wellbeing into strategy. Visitors are invited not only to travel - but to participate in a regenerative journey with care, humility, and purpose.

How it contributes to regeneration?

- **Regenerative Mindset:** Deeply rooted in a living systems worldview shaped by Māori concepts such as *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship) and *manaakitanga* (care for others).
- **Community Co-Creation:** Indigenous communities are not consulted but lead - designing experiences that reflect their values, identity, and aspirations.
- **Ecological and Cultural Vitality:** Policies and practices support biodiversity, climate resilience, cultural revival, and local wellbeing.
- **Learning and Transformation:** Visitors are invited into relationships with place, through storytelling, codes of conduct, and hands-on cultural learning.

What makes it unique?

New Zealand's model stands out for its systemic coherence. It is not a series of individual projects but an interconnected ecosystem of actors - from local tourism providers to government and Māori iwi - working together to redefine the purpose of tourism. It bridges tradition and innovation, aligning ancestral wisdom with modern regenerative tools.

What can we learn?

- Regeneration is most powerful when led by Indigenous values and local stewardship.
- Transformation is not about scaling up one model, but aligning across sectors and scales.
- Tourism can become a vehicle for healing and restoration - of land, culture, and human relationships.
- National-level frameworks (like the *Tiaki Promise*) can guide visitor behaviour and inspire global standards.

Position on the regenerative spiral

Regenerative

Aotearoa sits firmly within the regenerative stage. Its initiatives are based on living systems thinking, intergenerational responsibility, Indigenous governance, and net-positive outcomes. It regenerates not only ecosystems and culture - but the very logic of tourism itself.

For more information: *www.newzealand.com/int/tiaki-promise, www.goodawaits.podbean.com, https://www.seventhgenerationtours.com/*

Source: Adjusted from information in Fusté-Forné & Hussain (2022). Regenerative tourism futures: A case study of Aotearoa New Zealand, Journal of Tourism Futures.

Conclusion

The Mediterranean holds an extraordinary richness of life - its diverse landscapes, vibrant cultures, and deep-rooted traditions are treasures shaped by centuries of connection between people and place. Tourism has the power to honour and nurture this richness, but only if it evolves beyond extractive models and embraces approaches that give back more than they take.

Regenerative tourism offers such a pathway. It is not a fixed formula, but an ongoing process of listening, learning, and co-creating with the living systems of a territory. It invites all of us - public authorities, tourism providers, civil society, researchers, environmental stewards, and visitors - to take shared responsibility for ensuring that tourism strengthens the very foundations on which it depends: healthy ecosystems, thriving communities, and resilient cultures.

The insights, principles, and examples presented in this document provide a starting point for that journey. They show that regeneration is possible, and that it can take many forms - whether it is restoring a coastal habitat, reviving traditional farming practices, reimagining governance through community participation, or creating visitor experiences that inspire care and connection.

As part of the Regenera4MED Blueprint, this document stands alongside the Integrated Governance Model, the Regeneration Tourism Programme, and the Regenerative Tourism Journey: Self-assessment tool (the RTJ tool) to offer a comprehensive foundation for change. Together, they support Mediterranean territories in moving towards tourism models that are climate-resilient, socially inclusive, and culturally grounded.

The work ahead will require patience, collaboration, and creativity. But the rewards - a Mediterranean where tourism actively contributes to the health of people, place, and planet - are worth the effort. By taking steps now, and by working together across sectors and borders, we can ensure that tourism becomes a true force for regeneration, leaving a legacy of vitality and resilience for generations to come.

Annexes

Sources, tables and figures

List of sources

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