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The Hotel Yearbook

Foresight and innovation in the global hotel industry

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Regenerative Hospitality: Embedding People, Place, and Planet

Regenerative hospitality

EHL Research
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EHL

The EHL Research Team argues that hospitality must move beyond "doing less harm" toward regenerative hospitality, where hotels actively restore ecosystems, strengthen communities, and create net-positive impact. Using their Regenerative Hospitality Canva playbook, they show how place intelligence (local nature and community) and people intelligence (transformative guest–host interactions) can turn regeneration into a viable business model, not just a philosophy.

Sustainability has long been an important issue for the hospitality industry. Environmental initiatives, regulations to reduce greenhouse gases, and increasingly scarce resources such as water have provoked a rethink among businesses, guests, and consumers alike. Consumer interest in eco-tourism, sustainable practices, and green travel has grown, while such options have also become more accessible and affordable. A study from the Business & Economics School ISG in Portugal shows that hotels that are perceived as more sustainable enjoy higher guest loyalty, while a study from the Northeastern Agricultural and Resource Economics Association finds that consumers are even willing to pay a surcharge (~6%) on restaurant bills for carbon emission reduction programs.

However, whereas for many years striving for a net-zero impact has been the guiding principle in the industry, a growing body of research and practice suggests that "doing less harm" is no longer enough. In fact, studies now show that guests increasingly expect *more* than sustainability.

Enter **regenerative hospitality**, a mindset shift from **net-zero** to **net-positive**, which aims to actively restore ecosystems, strengthen communities, and create net-positive outcomes **for people and places**.

Where sustainability measures success by what is reduced or avoided – less carbon, less water, less waste – regeneration, in contrast, focuses on what is given back. Not only that, but at its core, regenerative hospitality applies the logic of **interconnected living systems**: the idea that everything around us can be understood as part of a living system – whether, social, relational, economic or ecological – and that all these different systems are deeply interconnected, meaning that a change in any given system (i.e. the social system) will have an effect on another (i.e. the ecological system). A hotel, for example, is not an isolated business, but is connected to its surroundings, the natural landscape, local food producers, cultural traditions, and the well-being of guests, staff and community.

As EHL Professor **Dr. Alessandro Inversini**, co-author of the study The Rise of Regenerative Hospitality, explains, *"regenerative economics starts from interconnectedness. Hotels are not single entities; they are embedded in a community and an environment. Regeneration is about making that connection visible, tangible, and positive for all."*

Another recent study from the Stenden University of Applied Sciences, Assessment of Regenerative Hospitality, identifies seven pillars – regenerative mindset, interconnectedness, place integration, localized impact, well-being, co-creation, and dynamism – as potential drivers of regenerative hospitality.

For some hotels, a regenerative practice could mean developing an ecological restoration program: replanting mangroves, supporting biodiversity, or rewilding land. For others, it could mean social regeneration: creating spaces where local artists can perform, providing training for local groups, or hosting innovation hubs that connect residents. In both cases, the aim is not just to offset harm but to create tangible new value.

PEOPLE AND PLACE INTELLIGENCE AT THE CORE

Sustainability efforts often focus on environmental concerns and sometimes tend to overlook broader systemic issues such as social inequality, economic structures, and cultural dynamics. Sustainability claims are often prone to greenwashing. The scale of today's global crises, such as climate change, systemic injustice, and geopolitical instability, demands more than localized, incremental solutions – it calls for a coordinated, systemic and structural transformation.

Responding to this need, EHL Hospitality Business School, together with the Swiss university HES-SO Valais, has developed the *Regenerative Hospitality Canva: A Transformative Playbook* to help hoteliers move from net-zero to net-positive and create lasting value for both communities and guests. Developed with key industry partners, the playbook provides hotel managers with a clear methodology to identify net-positive contributions and turn them into concrete actions.

The playbook draws on the two core concepts of regenerative hospitality: the **regenerative mindshift**, which cultivates leaders' awareness of their ecological and social responsibilities, and the **ecosystem approach**, which integrates natural environments and human relationships to drive transformation.

Key elements of this model include **place intelligence**, which addresses the social and natural ecosystems of a location, and **people intelligence**, which focuses on transformative host-guest interactions. This holistic approach is applicable to hospitality businesses of all sizes and types, showing that regeneration is not just an ideal but a financially viable, strategically designed and purpose-driven business model that can lead to long-term, positive impacts.

*"Regenerative hospitality embodies a broader responsibility towards the reality and ecosystems, which is both **place-based** and **people-centered**,"* explains Dr. Inversini, who spearheaded the research and has written a book about the subject, *Regenerative Hospitality, Strategies for Transformative Hospitality Leaders,* edited by Edgar Elgar Publishing.

WHY REGENERATION MATTERS FOR HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is uniquely positioned to lead this shift because of its dependence on both **people** and **place**. Unlike other industries, hotels and resorts cannot "outsource" their environment: a beachfront property is inseparable from the health of its coastline; a mountain lodge from the surrounding ecosystem; a city hotel from its neighborhood's social fabric.

Regeneration can offer operational resilience, prompting hotels to reconsider supply chains, community relations, and environmental dependencies. These shifts can reduce risk, differentiate brands, and open new sources of value that go beyond cost control.

Many concrete examples of regenerative practices in hospitality and tourism have already emerged. For example, the eco-luxury resort Playa Viva in Mexico restores coastal ecosystems and invests in local health and education, the Fogo Island Inn in Canada blends ecological stewardship with guest engagement, and the Brazilian Ibiti Projeto, which was a keynote speaker on regenerative economies at the 2025 EHL Open Innovation Summit, has transformed degraded areas into a 6,000-hectare biodiversity refuge and reintroduced native species into the ecosystem.

In Switzerland, the *Regenerative Hospitality Canva: A Transformative Playbook* has been tested with key industry players including Geneva Marriott Hotel, Hilton Geneva, Six Senses Crans Montana, and Hôtel des Horlogers, each adapting regenerative practices to their unique local contexts and testing out the practicality and adaptability of the approach.

For us, regenerative hospitality goes beyond sustainability. It is about actively creating a positive impact on our environment, our community, and our guests' well-being. At Geneva Marriott Hotel, this means rethinking hospitality in a way that restores, nurtures, and regenerates the ecosystem we are part of, while ensuring a meaningful and responsible guest experience.

Pierre-Henri Perrin, *General Manager of Geneva Marriott Hotel*

The hotel has implemented several initiatives, including local sourcing and partnerships with regional producers to support surrounding communities and short supply chains, waste reduction programs, and collaborations with impactful locals who share the same vision for a more responsible future. *"We believe regenerative hospitality will become a defining pillar of the hospitality industry,"* adds Perrin. *"Guests will increasingly expect hotels not only to minimize harm but to actively regenerate local ecosystems and communities. In the future, this will translate into deeper collaborations with local producers, more transparent measurement of impact, and the integration of wellness, culture, and nature into the essence of the guest journey."*

Other pioneers include the Six Senses in Crans Montana, where wellness and regenerative design have been at the core of the brand since its establishment in 1995. *"Regenerative hospitality is an ambitious journey, not a destination,"* says **Dominic Paul Dubois**, Sustainability Director of Six Senses Crans Montana.

Long committed to sustainable practices and eco-responsible standards, the Hôtel des Horlogers in the Vallée de Joux has also embraced regeneration as part of its identity.

"Regeneration is embedded in our hotel's DNA. Just like the watchmakers in the region, we do more than we say. The process is complete and holistic. It forces you to think about aspects that otherwise would not have been considered," says **André Cheminade**, General Manager at Hôtel des Horlogers.

To further its understanding of the subject, EHL is currently leading a research project in rural Lebanon, together with the Nature Conservation Centre of the American University of Beirut, to better comprehend the role of regenerative hospitality and the use of digital technologies to support natural and social systems regeneration.

THE PATH FORWARD

While regenerative hospitality is still in its early stages, some hoteliers remain cautious. The lack of standardized metrics makes measurement difficult. Several industry and standard-setting bodies – including the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), UNESCO's Travel Pledge, World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance or the Forbes Travel Guide – are now developing clearer frameworks and best practices to ensure sustainability claims become more verifiable. While there are not yet strictly defined metrics for regeneration, many experts agree that real impact is measured at the level of community ecosystems, for example through community well-being, nature restoration, or local culture preservation.

As Professor Dr. Inversini says, *"Regeneration is not a recipe – it is a process of listening, trying, failing, and learning. Regenerative professionals do not intend to introduce new regenerative metrics or propose specific measurements or scales. There are no checklists to adhere to; there are no standards whatsoever. Rather, the impact of regeneration is visible by the hotel staff and their guests, because regeneration is systemic yet local, and its ripple effect can be seen in the restoration, enhancement and co-evolution of the local ecosystems."*

Another challenge is the contextual nature of regeneration, which means that no two approaches look the same. What works for a city business hotel may not translate to a mountain lodge. Yet these very challenges open space for innovation. By moving beyond top-down prescriptions and instead engaging with local needs, regenerative hospitality can avoid the pitfalls of one-size-fits-all approaches.

Vivian Wei Zhou, EHL International Advisory Board (IAB) Member and Vice President of the tourism and hospitality company Jin Jiang International in Shanghai, believes in the potential of regenerative economics and its importance for the future of humanity. *"I believe the approach of regenerative economics goes beyond sustainability, as it reminds us how we should cherish the Earth and all the resources it gives us. However, it's important to make it applicable to profit-oriented businesses and to take a collaborative approach,"* she adds. *"It requires coordination from all the stakeholders as it is a joint effort, taking into account the technological dimension, the business dimension, as well as policies and cross border compliance."*

It is also important to emphasize that regenerative hospitality should not be viewed as a new sustainability standard or a substitute for sustainable practices. Rather, it should be approached as an additional way to align more closely with nature, community and humanity as a whole. *"Regenerative hospitality should not be considered a replacement for sustainability, but a paradigm shift,"* explains Dr. Inversini.

At its heart, regenerative hospitality is about people and place – about creating thriving communities, resilient ecosystems, and experiences that enrich both guests and hosts. By aligning business success with ecological and social regeneration, the hospitality industry can create a multi-dimensional, long-term, positive impact.