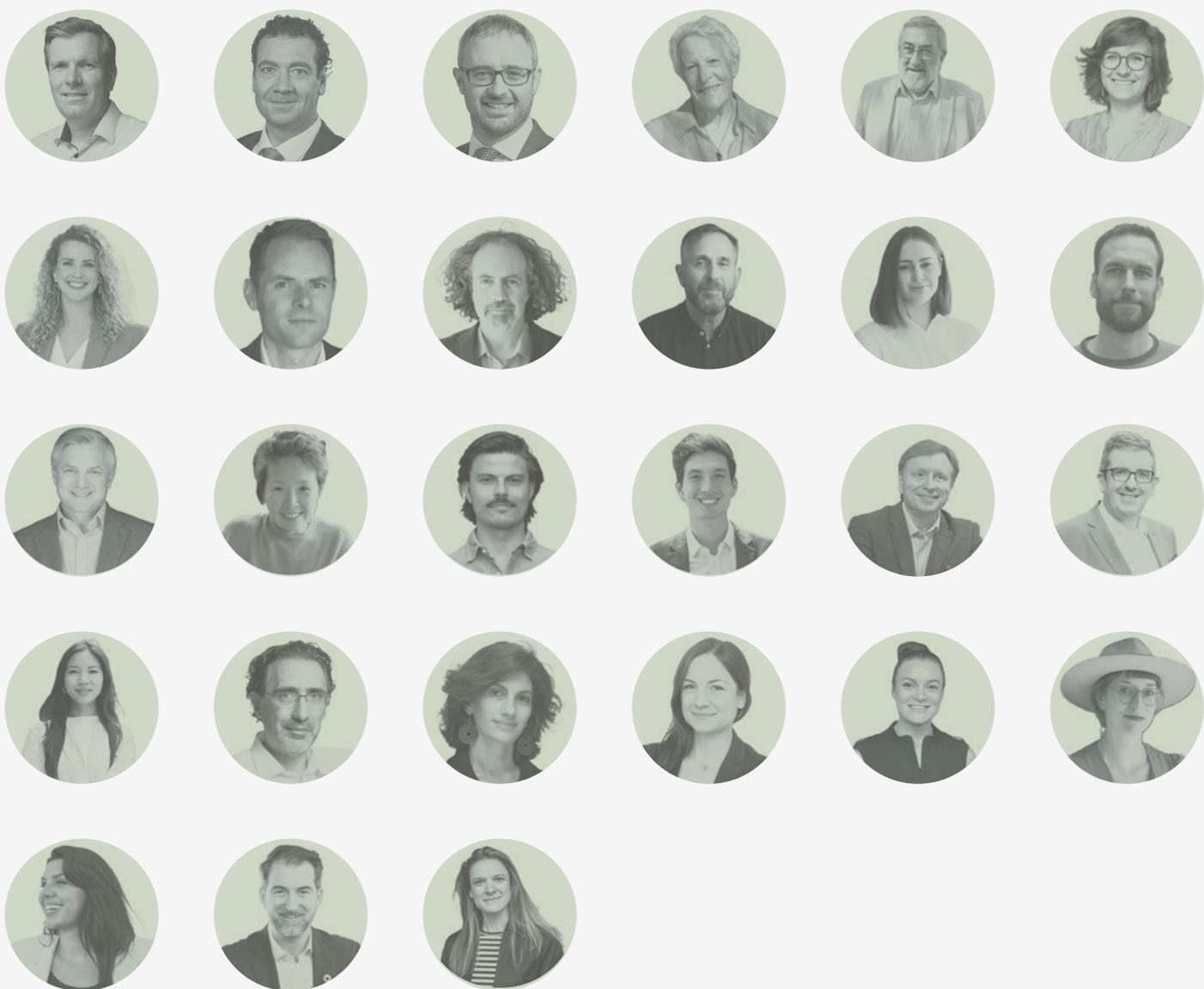


HYB26

Sustainability Edition

The Regenerative Question - What
Hospitality Must Become



The Hotel Yearbook

Foresight and innovation in the global hotel industry



HYB



The Regenerative Question - Who We Choose to Become

Editorial

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At its root, hospitality means something simple: to receive a stranger with generosity, to share what you have—food, shelter, warmth, knowledge—and in doing so, strengthen bonds of trust and reciprocity. It creates mutually rewarding relationships between humans and towards the place; ultimately it fosters conditions for life to flourish, deepens human connection, and leaves all parties enriched.

It is also how hospitality functioned across cultures for millennia (see Kevin D. O’Gorman’s “*The Origins of Hospitality and Tourism*”). The host and guest participated in an exchange that honoured place, community, and the future. Food was shared, stories were exchanged and relationships deepened. The stranger became part of the story of the place.

Somewhere, hospitality became something else. The industry professionalized and capital consolidated. Growth became the organising logic and guests became transactions. Staff became labour costs and places became products to be extracted and monetized. What was once fundamentally regenerative became fundamentally extractive. Regeneration and unlimited growth are contradictory. We now have a reckoning with the 20th-century aberration of the hospitality-as-extraction model that offers a dead-end. It is a fundamental reckoning with what hospitality has become and what it must be to remain legitimate.

This edition of the Hotel Yearbook convenes 25 contributors—operators, designers, researchers, strategists—who agree on one thing: **the hospitality current model is not viable.**

Our industry should enable an infrastructure for restoring ecological health, strengthening cultural continuity, and expanding community agency — rather than optimizing internal performance alone. Hospitality should not be an industry operating *in* places, but an actor operating *for* places by increasing the capacity of ecological, cultural, and community systems to thrive. As **Michail Toanoglou** writes: “*A hotel is not an island. It is embedded in networks of food, water, waste, mobility, labor, energy, regulation, finance, and culture.*” This network is often commoditised for convenience and profit as write **Bumjoo Maclennan** and **Adam Maclennan** asking “*What if food—so ordinary, so underestimated—sits at the centre of today’s most urgent and complex crises: biodiversity loss, climate breakdown, crop failures, inequality, and public health? Because it can do so much harm, what if the reverse is possible?*”

So what must change? **Amanda Ho** articulates it simply: “*Regeneration, however, begins with a different orientation, one rooted in relationship rather than reduction. It requires leaders to shift from asking how a destination can serve guests toward asking how a business can meaningfully serve the destination, thereby aligning commercial success with place-based vitality.*” This is echoed by **Carlos Martin-Rios**: “*It [regeneration] shifts the starting point. Instead of asking how to reduce harm, it asks whether our actions improve the vitality of the living systems on which we depend.*” As **Glenn Mandziuk** posits: “*The path to regeneration is our industry’s greatest opportunity to redefine its role in the world... to become the best for the world.*”

This is echoed by **Yves Carnazzola** who stated: “*Regeneration is not a performance upgrade, but a compass that orients hospitality toward the conditions that allow places, communities, and ecosystems to remain alive.*”

If the “need of moving forward” is shared among the contributions, where they diverge is even more interesting since it is not on *whether* to transform, but rather on *how*. These tensions are not obstacles to overcome but are rather the actual substance of the work ahead.

THE TENSIONS WE MUST HOLD

We have identified 8 tensions throughout the articles featured in this HYB Special Edition. Each tension is summarized (See Table 1) with examples from contributors to the HYB Special Edition.

TABLE 1: EIGHT TENSIONS ON REGENERATIVE HOSPITALITY

Tension	One perspective	Another perspective	Why it matters
Practice	Stop defining, start documenting working examples	Rigor prevents premature certainty	Learning from practice vs. clarity from theory
Transformation	Build incrementally from efficiency upward	Optimize broken systems or replace them?	Are early steps enabling deep change or entrenching extraction?
Harm	Focus forward on restoration	Reckon with extraction history first	Can you regenerate without accountability to what was taken?
Materiality	Design and circularity are foundational	Mindset and governance are primary	Both matter; which comes first?
Verification	Rigorous metrics needed for accountability	Context-specific, relational outcomes resist standardization	Capital needs signals; meaning cannot be reduced to data
Replication	Scale through networked learning and principles	Each place must respond hyper-locally	How do we learn from examples without reproducing extraction?
Credibility	Credibility is about quantitative measurement	Leadership and meaning seeking feed credibility	How do we balance measurement and meaning?
Growth	Quality over quantity; accept limits	Manage growth through restorative logic	Can hospitality growth be regenerative?

THE PRACTICE VS. THEORY PROBLEM

None of the 25 contributors are saying “*regeneration is impossible*”. Many point to working examples. Yet some are more attuned to advanced sustainability practices within an

extractive mindset and growth/profit maximization. So, the conversation keeps returning to definitional questions: What is regeneration? How is it different from sustainability? What framework should guide it?

Nicola Gryczka Kirsch names the trap: *“Only when we go from asking ‘What is regenerative hospitality?’ and begin focusing on ‘How does it look on the ground?’ do we move from theory to experience.”*

So what is the risk here? The risk is paralysis by analysis. There is however a second risk: a premature certainty about ‘regenerative hospitality’ creates greenwashing (or even regenwashing) opportunities for those wishing to seek an alternative to ‘sustainability’. **Harold Goodwin** argues: *“Regenerative has joined sustainable and ecotourism as aspirational language conveying superiority untrammelled by any need to meet any standard. Lacking a broadly agreed definition, regenerative is presently ideal for greenwashing.”*

As **Anna Pollock** writes, *“To regenerate is not synonymous with to improve or “make better”. It describes a core process of life and involves a 100% change in purpose and approach i.e. complete systems change.”*

The path forward is learning *from* practice while remaining rigorous about what we actually know. We argue that we then need to shift from definition to documentation and study working examples to extract principles that work and test them in new contexts.

THE TRANSFORMATION VS. OPTIMIZATION QUESTION

Some contributors outline pragmatic, incremental pathways. **Dominic Paul Dubois** proposes three sequenced steps: maximize resource efficiency, establish internal culture aligned with values, then rethink guest experience. Others see this as part of the problem. **Manuel Maqueda** is direct: *“Regeneration is not a feature to add to an existing portfolio. It is a new operating system”* since *“You can’t optimize your way to regeneration. You can’t add regeneration to a linear system any more than you can ice a cake you haven’t baked yet.”*

So where’s the catch here? Every operator wakes up tomorrow needing to function today while imagining a transformed future – yes a tall order. The question is not optimization or transformation. So the honest assessment is whether efficiency gains in a broken system constitute progress or sophistication of the wrong thing. As **Maribel Esparcia Pérez** writes: *“The perception that an extractive model is more affordable than regenerative systems is due to the externalities caused by asset activity not being accounted for in most EBITA and P&Ls.”*

Can incremental steps be designed to *accelerate* transformation, not preserve the status quo?

THE HARM RECKONING QUESTION

Most contributions frame regeneration as forward-looking: restoring ecosystems, strengthening communities, building reciprocity.

But **O’Shannon Burns** asks a harder question: can regeneration happen in places where tourism has extracted value for decades, displaced communities from ancestral lands, erased local knowledge systems? She argues: *“Regeneration cannot take hold where underlying patterns of extraction continue unchecked.”*

In many celebrated tourism destinations, the relationship between tourism and community is fundamentally unequal. Regeneration that ignores this history may fail as communities will rightly reject it. So regeneration demands reckoning before restoration and community leadership in defining what regeneration means in their place.

THE MATERIALITY QUESTION

Does regeneration happen through mindset shifts, governance changes, and relational work? Or does it require fundamental redesign of buildings, systems, and supply chains?

As **Graeme Labe** writes: *“Regenerative design develops its own logic in each context, shaped by landscape, culture, economic realities, and stewardship capacity. There is no universal template.”*

A mindful manager in a poorly designed space hits limits. But as **Francesco Allaix** reminds us: *“Regenerative processes imply preserving, mending, and embracing imperfections.”*

THE VERIFICATION PARADOX

How do you prove regeneration worked without reducing it to metrics that miss the point?

Glenn Mandziuk is clear: *“ambition without accountability is merely aspiration”* and **Natasha Montesalvo** adds: *“Measurement of outcomes maintains focus and provides fertile ground for refinement and innovative ideas.”* Yet **Anne-Kathrin Zschiegnier** counters: *“There is no single set of metrics that can capture regeneration in all contexts. What success looks like for biodiversity over a 50-year horizon will be very different from what success looks like for community wellbeing or cultural continuity. Numbers matter, but they never tell the whole story.”* Regenerative impact unfolds over decades, through relationships that resist quantification. Knowledge starts with science and with measurement, but not everything that we measure actually matters and some remains happily unmeasured but not unimportant: the taste of soil returning to health, the pride in a community’s face, the slow recovery of a watershed.

The friction here is real and debated in the contributions. What we require as a sector are measurements that serve learning, not control and frameworks that combine quantitative rigor with qualitative insight.

THE REPLICATION PROBLEM

Hospitality embraces standardization overall and particularly since it creates efficiency. But regeneration demands the opposite: deep knowledge of place, decisions rooted in specific ecosystems and communities, operating logic that shifts based on context.

Diane Binder argues for distributed impact: thousands of independent hotels, each deeply embedded in territory, each making decisions rooted in *their* place's regenerative logic. Scale emerges not from replicating a model, but from shifting mindset across properties.

David Leventhal observes, when discussing scaling to new locations, that *"Each of these have their challenges, each look to Playa Viva as a model for "doing it right".*" In regeneration, networks of hotels learning from each other without replicating templates is critical for an acceleration of transformation.

MEASUREMENT AND CREDIBILITY

Across the contributions, a core tension emerges between those who see rigorous longitudinal measurement of regenerative actions as an essential pillar of regenerative credibility and those who believe that excessive quantification risks flattening what is most meaningful.

On one hand, authors such as **Anne-Kathrin Zschiegner** emphasize that *"quantitative data can track trends, scale, and efficiency"*, stating that regeneration requires *"measuring what matters, even when that measurement is difficult"* to distinguish genuine commitment from performative action.

On the other hand, **O'Shannon Burns** reminds us that regeneration *"unfolds in ways that performance frameworks often struggle to capture"* and that signals like *"trust, reciprocity, ecological vitality, community consent"* can be essential yet *"largely invisible to quantitative measurement"*.

This tension matters because regeneration, if reduced to dashboards, risks becoming another technical exercise rather than a lived, relational transformation. Yet without credible measurement, it risks dissolving into rhetoric and regenwashing. Navigating this tension is thus fundamental: the future of regenerative hospitality depends on holding rigor and relationship, data and meaning, together without letting one erase the other.

A growing fault line runs between regeneration as practice and regeneration as brand. When 'regenerative' becomes a marketing identity detached from verified ecological or social outcomes, it risks repeating the inflationary cycle that weakened sustainability discourse. The discipline lies in aligning rhetoric with measurable repair.

THE GROWTH QUESTION

Perhaps the most fundamental tension: can hospitality growth ever be truly regenerative?

Some contributors argue for quality over quantity such as lower density, deeper impact, acceptance of limits. Generally speaking, emphasizing quality over quantity means all travellers have better experiences, and places have better futures.

Others note that tourism will continue growing. The question is whether that growth is guided by restorative logic or remains extractive.

Anna Pollock is direct: *"Net Positive tourism, is a well-intended step in the right direction but obscures the fact that it can never be achieved within the current model that prizes volume growth."*

This is less about tourism than about hospitality's core purpose as discussed at the start of this editorial. It is about an honest conversation about what "enough" looks like and the willingness to redistribute rather than expand.

Regeneration and unlimited growth are contradictory.

IT IS NO LONGER ABOUT TOURISM

Anna Pollock makes a critical distinction: *"It may not be about tourism anymore, but it is most certainly about hosting and hospitality - hospicing the passing of an old form and midwifing the emergence of something new."* **Jonathan Normand** adds: *"It [Regeneration] demands a shift from a mechanistic worldview of inputs and outputs to a living systems perspective."* This reorientation toward living systems is, fundamentally, what Martin Hohn describes as *"an opportunity to rediscover our relationship with life."*

This reframe is essential. Tourism structured around volume and throughput tends toward extraction unless its incentives are redesigned. But hospitality as genuine welcome, reciprocity, care for place is an entirely different proposition. The question is then perhaps not how to make tourism regenerative but how hospitality, in its truest form, can guide how we welcome people to places. As **Yasemin Oruc** writes: *"If regeneration is a way of relating to life, the real question becomes what kind of future does hospitality choose to contribute to?"* As **Mahe Besson** captures it with the logic of acupuncture: *"Like acupuncture, regeneration recognizes that living systems already possess the intelligence and ability to rebalance themselves. In practice, it is about restoring flow, not adding another layer of solutions."*

Service organizations can participate in regeneration as mediators and catalysts—but in most cases they are not regenerative systems themselves. Their legitimacy depends on the outcomes they enable upstream and the flows they redesign downstream.

WHAT COMES NEXT

As editors, we openly admit that we never aimed to achieve consensus on 'regenerative hospitality' with this edition. If anything, this HYB Special Edition demonstrates that practitioners, honest about constraints, can hold genuine tension productively. They agree the current model is not viable. They disagree on pathways.

The regenerative question is not: *What is regeneration?*

It is: *Can hospitality organize itself around reciprocity instead of extraction? Can it be accountable to places and communities, not shareholders alone? Can it resist pressure growth and embrace the discipline of enough?*

The contributors offer no single answer and disagreements demand continued dialogue.

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The regenerative question is not what we do.

It is who we choose to become.

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“Show me only chemical-free,
bed bug-safe hotels.”



What becomes searchable
becomes bookable.

