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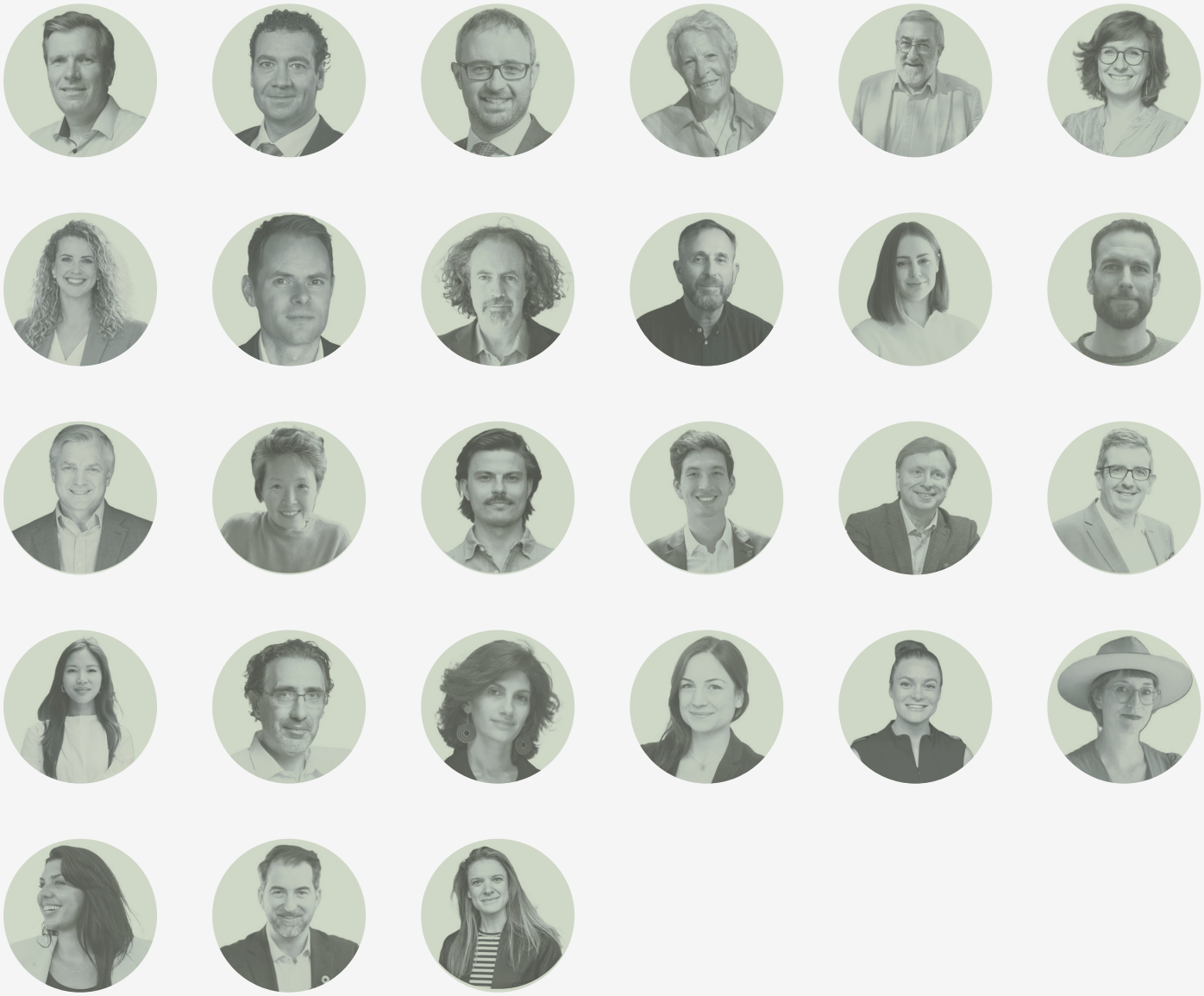
Sustainability Edition

The Regenerative Question - What Hospitality Must Become



The Hotel Yearbook

Foresight and innovation in the global hotel industry

CHAPTER 3: The Reckoning & Regenerative Imperative

CHAPTER 4: The Reckoning & Regenerative Imperative

CHAPTER 5: The Reckoning & Regenerative Imperative

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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 Zschiegner** 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.

The regenerative question is not what we do.

It is who we choose to become.

EDITORS IN CHIEF

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

What becomes searchable becomes bookable.

valpas

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On the peril of wasting a metacrisis

System collapse

Anna Pollock
Founder, Conscious.Travel

anna pollock
Conscious.Travel

Anna Pollock warns that tourism has already "wasted" one historic crisis (Covid-19) and is in danger of wasting a much bigger one: the current metacrisis of ecological collapse, geopolitical instability, and social rupture. She argues that mainstream tourism is still clinging to volume-driven, extractive growth and cosmetic "net positive" claims, while true regeneration requires a 100% shift in purpose – from mass industrial tourism to hospitality that helps hospice the dying system and midwife new, life-aligned ways of travelling, hosting and relating to place.

During the financial crisis of 2008, Barack Obama's policy advisor observed, "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste, because you miss the opportunity to do the things you could not do before." I have been reminded of that while writing this article because, exactly seven years ago (9 February 2019), I suggested that Europe's tourism leadership might need to heed these wise words. I had been invited to speak to the Directors of the European Travel Commission's annual meeting in Krakow. It would be my first attempt at expressing to such a senior audience my concerns about the industry's vulnerability and to share my early understanding of the potential of an emerging concept called "regeneration." While I am a habitual trend-watcher, I have never professed clairvoyance, but I did sense something was profoundly wrong. Fortunately, my host had given me the injunction to "shake things up," so I did as I was told, took a very deep breath, and opened with the following statement:

> *"Global tourism, as currently practiced, is underperforming, highly vulnerable and heading towards breakdown. Its operating model is no longer fit for purpose and needs to be replaced.*

As European tourism had just had another bumper year, with numbers up by 5%, I clearly was not trying to win my audience over with flattery. Nor did I have any clear idea as to what might precipitate the breakdown of an entire sector. But I was aware of the seeming addiction to growth in volume, the consequences of overtourism, and the challenges of living in a VUCA world defined as one of enormous volatility, complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity. Nevertheless, as it happens, I was right about vulnerability – caused then not by too many human visitors but by the undetected arrival of a minuscule bat-borne virus called SARS-CoV-2 that had taken a free ride from a meat market in the backstreets of Wuhan, China. With the onset of the COVID pandemic, Mother Nature was about to teach us a very expensive lesson. A tiny microbe was able to stop not just the juggernaut known as tourism but the global economy in its tracks.

Sadly, in my opinion, that crisis was indeed wasted at an enormous cost to human life and financial security. We humans did not realise that we had been given the chance to understand our true nature. The crisis had positive repercussions, too. The non-human members of the natural world took advantage of the cessation of economic activity and reminded us of the beauty and sounds we had drowned out with our busyness. Nature also showed just how quickly she could recover if given just a little breathing room.

Some tourism professionals spoke sincerely about the need for a "Tourism Reset" and later, in 2019, the first tentative recognition that some form of regeneration would be required began to circulate within the sustainability community. The good news was that support for "sustainable" actions intensified with the offering of sustainability courses, certification programmes, and a focus on measurement. The less good news was that the regenerative message of systemic change was diluted to mean improvement, giving back, making a place better, and being able to generate "net positive" scores on a sustainability balance sheet. The old system was working for tourism, so why change it?

Fast forward to the end of 2025, and tourism was once again striding forth as one engine of the global economy. Trip numbers and spending statistics have exceeded pre-pandemic levels while showing signs of robust annual growth for the rest of the decade and beyond. Rising incomes in much of the developing world are up; a very large and growing middle class, particularly within the developing world, is keen to explore and experience other countries; artificial intelligence is expected to reduce costs, increase efficiency, and improve traveller experience. Curiosity about "regeneration" is increasing – partly as enterprises and destinations see it as providing another point of differentiation. But the concept is still seen as hard to understand and a little too theoretical for many. As a consequence, we are in grave danger of missing the opportunity for deep change as the crises, which we have pushed into our peripheral vision, now demand our full attention.

I confess I am feeling very much as I did in February seven years ago, even though the context is very different. Back then, talk about system change was an uphill battle as "the system" was working for so many. In 2019, no one could have imagined "normal life" could be shut down within weeks without warning. The COVID pandemic was essentially an unknown risk. The same cannot be said of the multiple risks that we face today. They are so numerous and diverse that we have had to lump them under two labels – polycrisis, meaning many, and metacrisis, meaning the many combined and originating from one root cause. If there is another word that characterises the state of human affairs in 2026, then surely it has to be "rupture". With these seven letters alone, Canada's Prime Minister, Mark Carney, confirmed an unwelcome truth – any assumptions underpinning "normality" are cracking open like the ice of the Arctic Sea. According to the World Economic Forum, uncertainty is the defining theme of their global risks outlook: *'Declining trust, diminishing transparency and respect for the rule of law, along with heightened protectionism, are threatening longstanding international relations, trade and investment and increasing the propensity for conflict.'*

While geo-economic and social conditions are the concern of WEF, the UK Government has highlighted nature as the greatest risk to national security. In a report released in January 2026, titled *Global Biodiversity Loss, Ecosystem Collapse and National Security*, the authors state: *'If current rates of biodiversity loss continue, every critical ecosystem is on a pathway to collapse, thereby impairing its ability to provide vital services including clean water, food production, and climate regulation.'*

The report goes on to list nine national security risks and devotes a whole page to the serious challenge not just to the UK's food security, but to the security of the country as a whole.

This profoundly sobering start to this brief essay is for a reason. For the first time in human history, we are knowingly, individually, and collectively having to deal with a system-wide collapse. It is not about patching up a broken system. The living system that is life on this planet is collapsing from the inside. That is what living systems do in order to make room for other living systems that are better equipped to survive and thrive in the changing circumstances. Every human being has done this before when their mother's body signalled it was time for them to leave her womb. Rupture can be the precedent for transformation. In nature, it is a normal stage in the emergence of new life. We can dig in our heels and resist, curl up in a ball and complain, or choose to participate.

But that is enough metaphor; back to tourism. I am writing this essay in this way to invite colleagues to join me and the many fellow travellers already on the journey of discovery associated with the emergence of regeneration as a new way of seeing, being, and behaving that is in service of and in alignment with Life. Readers might think I am ignoring the growing number of "regenerative" consultancies, papers, and toolkits designed to enable destinations and enterprises to enhance their competitive edge by demonstrating how they are improving communities and landscapes. 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.

Should just a few of the projections identified in the two risk reports mentioned above be realised, we can expect tourism to drop off the agenda of many governments and investors. 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., a complete systems change. So-called "mass industrial tourism" (an abstract term for the mechanised movement of bodies between two places) has become a manifestation of a dying extractive system.

The focus now is sustaining life together by investigating how humans can contribute to life's evolution and flourishing and, yes, if you wish, how the movement of people from home to destination and the switching of roles between guest and host can contribute to that endeavour. It may not be about tourism any more, but it is most certainly about hosting and hospitality – hospicing the passing of an old form and midwifing the emergence of something new. The challenge of our time is to respect the sanctity and power of this role and create the conditions for it to contribute to life's flourishing and evolution.

Regenerative Tourism: Needs Protection

Sustainability standards

Harold Goodwin
Founder, ICRT Global; Professor Emeritus, Manchester Metropolitan University & Senior Fellow, Institute of Place Management

Harold Goodwin warns that "regenerative tourism" is rapidly becoming the next vague sustainability label, used in marketing without standards and ripe for greenwashing. He argues that true regenerative tourism is the pinnacle of Responsible Tourism: delivering demonstrable, positive economic, social and environmental impact for residents first, not just better experiences for visitors.

Over the last five years I have been increasingly concerned about the rapidly increasing use of regenerative travel by businesses and destinations seeking to differentiate themselves from their competitors in a crowded marketplace.

Regenerative Tourism is now widely used:

04/10/2025	Google Hits	Google Scholar
Responsible Tourism Examples	92,400,000	1,510,000
Regenerative Tourism Examples	3,290,000	45,100
Regenerative Travel Examples	1,110,000	15,900

"Regenerative" has joined "sustainable" and "ecotourism", both similarly widely used as aspirational language conveying a degree of superiority, untrammelled by any need to meet any standard. Regenerative is ideal for greenwashing in that, for the consumer, it carries real meaning, but lacking a broadly agreed definition it is presently unlikely to result in regulatory action by the UK's Advertising Standards Authority the EU's current misselling consumer protection or the forthcoming Empowering Consumers Directive. "Ecotourism", "regenerative" and "sustainable" are safe greenwashing.

Why does this matter?

It matters because mis-selling and greenwashing matters: they confuse and mislead consumers into making choices which run counter to the objectives of sustainability – our sustainability, and our children's sustainability on our finite planet. I find it particularly unacceptable because greenwashing most affects the choices made by consumers wanting to do the right thing.

It matters to me particularly because we see the word "regenerative" being used by businesses and destinations applying for a Responsible Tourism Award. The awards have been running since 2004; only in the last five have we seen "regenerative" used in applications. The word has meaning and importance for some of the businesses we are recognising in the Awards.

In the Responsible Tourism Awards we have been using "positive impact" for some time to emphasise the impact of the responsibility the business or destination has taken. In my view no business or destination can, whilst remaining profitable and in business. employing local community members and contributing to the local economy, take responsibility for everything on the Responsible Tourism agenda. We advise businesses and destinations to take a careful look at the issues arising in and because of the businesses activities, to consider the concerns of its neighbours, determine what the business or destination can effectively take responsibility for, and report its actions and impact to its neighbours, business partners and consumers.

Regenerative tourism is, in my view, an exemplary example of Responsible Tourism; it is very difficult to achieve, arguably the highest form of Responsible Tourism. Every year in the Responsible Tourism Awards we discover outstanding examples of businesses and destinations where changemakers have stepped up, taken responsibility, and achieved change across the environmental, social and economic pillars of the sustainability agenda.

The Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism in Destinations included the assertion that Responsible Tourism is about *'making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit…'* This has become both a meme and a litmus test. A meme because it is often used but rarely sourced; a litmus test because where the visitor is placed before the resident, the speaker or writer reveals that they have not understood. "Better places" is broadly used in Responsible Tourism to include economic benefits through direct inclusive employment and local sourcing, benefiting lived and built cultural heritage and the environment, including the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity.

In the extensive and growing literature on regenerative tourism there is a plethora of definitions, which I reviewed in establishing the case for a regenerative category in the awards. In the paper on Responsible Tourism and Regenerative Travel I argue that Regenerative Tourism is a form of Responsible Tourism and that Regenerative Tourism is often the pinnacle of the Responsible Tourism Movement.

As no firm definition of regenerative tourism has yet emerged in the industry or in academia, as Hussain & Haley have pointed out *'there is a high risk of 'green washing' and inappropriate adoption of a regenerative model.'* VisitBritain has done just that: in April 2025 it rebranded all of its sustainable tourism work as regenerative, conflating the two and undermining the concept of regenerative.

In the Responsible Tourism Awards in 2026 we are looking for regenerative destinations and businesses of two kinds:

1. Where tourism is making a significant contribution to economic regeneration and to the livelihoods of the local community.
2. Where, drawing on its roots in biology, medicine and agriculture the ambition is transformational: *'regenerative thinking dares us to imagine systems that actively create life, resilience, and beauty — for people, places, and the planet. It's not the end goal. It's a design principle. A mindset.'*

It needs to demonstrate that it delivers. I hope that by doing this we can do our bit to protect the idea of regenerative tourism.

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The Regenerative Question: What Hospitality Must Become

Long-term thinking

Dr. Anne-Kathrin Zschiegner
Executive Director, The Long Run

THE LONG RUN

Dr Anne-Kathrin Zschiegner argues that the real shift hospitality needs is not from "sustainability" to "regeneration" as buzzwords, but from short-term optimisation to long-term contribution to ecosystems, communities, culture, and commerce. Regenerative hospitality is framed as a collective, long-horizon practice that embraces complexity, openly navigates trade-offs, uses standards and technology as tools, and puts responsibility and long-term outcomes at the centre of leadership.

The conversation around regeneration in hospitality often begins with a search for definition. What does it mean? How is it different from sustainability? Has sustainability failed?

From my perspective, this framing risks missing the point.

Regeneration and sustainability are not opposing concepts, nor sequential stages. They are two sides of the same coin, different lenses through which we look at the same fundamental question: *what impact are we creating over time, and is it the impact we actually want?* The real issue our industry faces is not a shortage of terminology, but a shortage of long-term thinking.

Too often, hospitality decisions are made for the here and now. Regenerative thinking, whether we choose to call it that or not, requires a shift in mindset: from short-term optimisation to long-term contribution. It asks businesses to define the future state they want to help create and then work backwards to align strategy, operations, and investment accordingly. Labels matter far less than intent, direction, and commitment.

At its core, regenerative hospitality is about aspiration. It is about being clear on the change we want to drive, ecologically, socially, culturally, and economically, and recognising that this change cannot be achieved in isolation. No hotel regenerates a place alone. Impact happens at the level of communities, ecosystems, and industries, not individual balance sheets. This is why regeneration is inherently collective and why its measurement must be multi-layered.

One of the most persistent challenges is how we measure progress. 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.

Quantitative data can track trends, scale, and efficiency. Qualitative insight reveals depth, lived experience, and real change. For example, it is easy to report how many people have access to a community health programme; it is far harder, but far more meaningful, to understand how lives have changed as a result. These outcomes take time to surface. Regenerative impact is often longitudinal, not immediate, which makes it harder to prove and easier to dismiss. Yet this long time horizon is precisely what distinguishes genuine commitment from performative action.

This same complexity shows up when navigating trade-offs. Sustainability and regeneration are often presented as win-win propositions. In reality, every decision carries tension.

Supporting improved nutrition or education in a community may strengthen long-term resilience, but it may also alter local dynamics or create unintended dependencies. Paying higher wages may empower employees while putting pressure on neighbouring businesses. Conservation priorities may limit short-term revenue in favour of long-term ecosystem health.

Frameworks like the 4Cs (Conservation, Community, Culture, and Commerce) do not eliminate these tensions. They make them visible. Their value lies in helping businesses pause, ask better questions, and understand the ripple effects of their decisions. Regenerative leadership is not about finding perfect solutions; it is about making informed choices, acknowledging trade-offs, and adjusting course as conditions change.

Standards and certifications can play an important role here, but only if they are understood as tools, not endpoints. The most effective frameworks are not prescriptive checklists that reward perfection, but flexible structures that establish a baseline, support strategic planning, and encourage continuous improvement. A meaningful standard combines where a business is today with where it aspires to go tomorrow. It creates space for ambition while remaining grounded in operational reality.

Crucially, regeneration is not limited to small, owner-managed properties. Smaller operations often move faster because they are more agile. Larger organisations face greater complexity, more stakeholders, and slower decision-making, but their potential impact is enormous. Small changes within large systems can create significant ripple effects. The challenge for scale is not feasibility, but mindset. If sustainability and regeneration remain peripheral rather than central to business philosophy, progress will always be incremental. Systemic change requires cultural change at the core.

Technology can support this transition, particularly in conservation and biodiversity management. Today's tools allow businesses to monitor ecosystems, analyse data, and track impact at a scale and speed previously impossible. Far from replacing the human touch, technology can empower teams to work more effectively, deploy resources more strategically, and amplify the impact of human expertise. Used well, it accelerates learning rather than distancing people from place.

So what must regenerative hospitality become?

It must become less concerned with labels and more committed to long-term outcomes. It must embrace complexity rather than simplify it away. It must measure what matters, even when that measurement is difficult. And it must place responsibility, not perfection, at the centre of leadership.

The regenerative question is not whether hospitality can do better. It is whether we are willing to think far enough ahead, act collectively enough, and commit long enough to make that better future real.

Regenerative Hospitality leading the way: From possibility to practice

Future of hospitality

Nicola Gryczka Kirsch
EHL Entrepreneur in Residence and Founder of The Regen Studio

Nicola Gryczka Kirsch argues that regenerative hospitality is no longer an abstract ideal but a lived reality in places like Ibiti Projeto in Brazil, where tourism is designed as infrastructure for land restoration, community vitality, and long-term stewardship. Using the Lausanne Manifesto for Regenerative Hospitality as a compass, it shows how shifting mindsets, systems thinking and co-creation can turn hotels from extractive businesses into catalysts for thriving territories.

For a long time, regenerative hospitality has been part of industry conversations: admired, debated, sometimes misunderstood, and sometimes overmarketed. Often framed as an ideal, it has been positioned as something aspirational. Regeneration is meaningful, but distant; inspiring, but impossible to operationalize. Yet today, a shift is underway.

Across different geographies and contexts, regenerative hospitality principles are already being practiced in ways that restore ecosystems, strengthen communities, and redefine the relationship between guests, places, and those who steward and are endemic to them. This means that regenerative hospitality is no longer a hypothesis. It is real.

And that reality invites us to ask what hospitality could become if we learn from what is already working, rather than trying to invent or define something entirely new.

FROM CONCEPTS TO LIVED PRACTICE

Much of the regenerative debate has focused on definitions. Is regeneration a philosophy or a framework? A mindset or a model? Should (or can) it be measured, certified, scaled?

These questions do matter, but I believe they can also keep us at a distance from what regeneration can look like in practice. Only when we go from asking *"What is regenerative hospitality?"* and begin focusing on *"How does it look on the ground?"* and *"How can we learn from existent models?"*, we move from theory to experience.

When you step into places where regeneration is lived reality, a few patterns become visible. Regeneration is not implemented through a checklist. Instead, it unfolds through time and an ongoing dialogue with communities and place. Hospitality, in these contexts, is not treated as a standalone business, but as part of a broader territorial living system. This role comes with substantial responsibility from conservation to being immersed in local economies, culture, and governance.

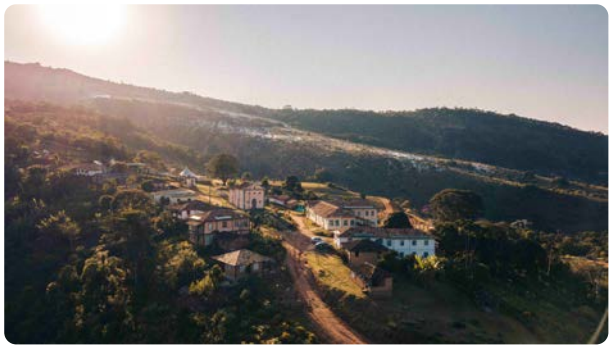
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

A helpful reference point in the field is the Lausanne Manifesto for Regenerative Hospitality, co-created by academics and practitioners at EHL Hospitality Business School in 2025. It lays out a set of principles that help practitioners follow a common line of thought and translate place-based practice into shared understanding.

- **Shifting mindsets**: from extraction to reciprocity, from short-term performance to long-term flourishing
- **Living systems thinking**: recognizing hospitality as embedded within ecological, social, and economic systems locally
- **Place-based and people wisdom**: grounding decisions in the identity, history, and vocation of each place
- **Co-creation through ecosystems of collaboration**: mobilizing communities, entrepreneurs, institutions, and capital as partners

The semantics are not important, but how these principles are *applied*. When they remain abstract, regeneration stays an idealistic aspiration. When they are lived, however, hospitality begins to operate as a catalyst.

REGENERATIVE HOSPITALITY PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE



In Brazil, **Ibiti Projeto** embodies regenerative hospitality in practice.

Ibiti did not start as a hospitality concept. More than forty years ago, it began with a commitment to restore a damaged territory in the Mata Atlatica in Brazil. What was once degraded pastureland has gradually been regenerated through rewilding, protection of water sources, and the return of native ecosystems. Biodiversity came first, followed by water and, ultimately, trust.

Hospitality was the means to the end goal of making long-term land stewardship and community vitality economically viable and engage travellers in a meaningful way.

SEEN THROUGH THE LAUSANNE PRINCIPLES, IBITI OFFERS A CLEAR LINE OF LEARNING:

Shifting mindsets: Success at Ibiti is not measured by occupancy rates or speed of expansion. Decisions are guided by what the land and surrounding communities can sustain, and by what will genuinely improve ecological and social conditions over time. Working in service of regeneration comes with accepting fewer guests, slower growth, and higher upfront investment, and these are not treated as signs of inefficiency.

Living systems thinking: The hospitality at Ibiti is designed to support regeneration rather than to drive growth for its own sake. Revenue generated through hospitality helps sustain regeneration across the territory through food production,

education, culture, entrepreneurship, and responsible land stewardship. Value is regifted to the environment rather than extracted.

Place-based and people wisdom: Everything follows the logic of place. Buildings adapt to the landscape and local traditions, and food follows seasons and local availability. Cultural life grows from local traditions while remaining open to new expression.

The core of the Ibiti experience takes place within the Mogol village, where guests live alongside the local community—not in a staged way, but by sharing everyday life and learning directly from their flow, traditions, and knowledge passed down over generations.

Co-creation through ecosystems of collaboration: Local entrepreneurs become partners through an integrated incubation program, and their role expands beyond suppliers or mere service providers. They operate businesses within the territory through shared principles and reciprocal economic arrangements that ensure value circulates back into the Ibiti system.

Relatedly, guests are not reduced to consumers, and instead become temporary participants in a living, breathing place. The experience is so impactful that many return over time as supporters, collaborators, or long-term allies and investors.

Ibiti epitomizes that hospitality can move beyond being a product to be scaled to becoming invaluable infrastructure for regeneration.

WHY REGENERATION CAN'T JUST BE COPY-PASTED

One of the most common traps is the urge to replicate success by standardizing it.

Traditional scaling logic assumes that what works in one place can be repeated elsewhere through consistent formats. Admittedly, that logic has delivered efficiency, but it has also contributed to ecological pressure and growing resistance from host communities. Regeneration follows a different logic altogether.

You cannot copy a regenerative hospitality model from one territory to another without stripping away **the very qualities that make it regenerative**. Each place carries its own rhythms, social dynamics, and cultural and community meaning. What restores one landscape may harm another.

This is why regeneration is always local.

WHAT HOSPITALITY HAS THE CHANCE TO BECOME

Local does not mean isolated. If regenerative hospitality is already happening, then the opportunity ahead is not about re-invention. While we cannot blindly copy-paste, what *can* travel are the **principles, approaches, stories, and learnings** when they are carefully decoded.

Regenerative hospitality invites the sector to scale a flexible mindset and approaches instead of fixed models.

HOSPITALITY HAS THE CHANCE TO BECOME:

- A learning industry, investing in communities of practice and shared knowledge
- A place-responsive industry, designing from local logic rather than imposing uniform solutions
- A deeply relational industry, prioritizing trust, agency, and long-term partnership
- A systems-aware industry, capable of navigating complexity with humility
- A steward of places, willing to define what "enough" looks like

The regenerative question is no longer abstract. The examples already exist. The next step is identifying and learning from them, adapting them with care, and listening to local communities and place-based knowledge, so hospitality strengthens the places and communities it depends on.

HYB

My journey toward regenerative futures

Mindset and worldview shift

Martin Hohn
Founder, ATMA.life

atma consulting

Martin Hohn reflects on a personal journey from traditional hospitality management toward regeneration, arguing that sustainability has been diluted and cannot succeed as long as infinite economic growth clashes with planetary boundaries. Regeneration is framed not as a technological fix but as a social and mindset shift: a place-based, whole-systems approach that reconnects hospitality with life, community, and ecosystem health.

When I came across the term regeneration six years ago, I loved the idea. As the years went by, it became clear that "regeneration" faced the same fate as "sustainability" — it got diluted and misunderstood.

When the UN released the Brundtland Report in 1987, the definition of the term sustainability was as follows: *'Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'* As of today, we are very far away from that goal.

Now, we jump on the next concept that promises to solve our problems. But we will continue to fail until we realise that infinite economic growth is incompatible with planetary boundaries — boundaries imposed by the natural laws of physics, where we have currently overshot seven out of nine thresholds.

So far, nothing new, you might think. Where does regeneration come into play?

As we all know, the tourism industry is growing strongly. And we are happy about this. So we are stuck in a conundrum: how do we preserve our industry and our businesses without becoming an even more climate-hostile industry?

Unfortunately, I don't have the solution. Or at least not an easy one. Because there are no easy solutions to complex problems. What might save us, though, is a change in mindset — maybe even in our worldview.

And that's where regeneration comes in. Regeneration is much more about social rather than technological innovation. This means behaviour change — and that's what we humans are not so good at. It seems easier to find workarounds for throwaway shampoo bottles than to actually change our consumption patterns. But it is very likely that we will have to do that sooner or later anyway, so why not start now? Carbon credits and other modern forms of indulgence trading won't prevent us from that.

So what is the promise of regeneration?

Simply put, regeneration offers us an opportunity to rediscover our relationship with life. With regeneration, you apply whole-systems thinking — nature, local ecosystems, and communities are key. Basically, it's a very place-based development approach that enables the emergence of resilient socio-economic systems infused with local culture and heritage.

What may sound like utopia is the foundation of a potential-based narrative that is inherent to the way I see regeneration. If we don't dream big, we won't be able to solve the challenges we are currently facing.

What does that mean for your business, you may ask? My personal answer to that is the reason why I quit my managerial career in hospitality ten years ago. I wanted to reconnect to what I felt was the essence of hospitality: slowing down, creating deeper and more authentic connections with customers, offering them transformative experiences and creating meaningful impact for society and nature at the same time.

We often talk about memorable experiences, but what is truly memorable in a world where most hotels look alike, where you get similar products and services anywhere you go?

I believe it's experiences that inspire us and reconnect us to ourselves, nature, and the world around us. What contributes to such experiences are passionate staff, intentional experience design, curated information — because often experiences have an educational aspect — and, last but not least, a strong sense of purpose that drives the concept of a property.

The property and its surroundings are key elements in this. In a regenerative approach, we look beyond the borders of a property and adopt a placemaking lens. In placemaking, one tries to create places that foster a high quality of life, which is also shaped by the neighbourhood.

In placemaking, I work with the three dimensions of infrastructure, utilisation, and organisation. The built infrastructure ideally reduces grey energy and offers a multifunctional setting that enables diversity in its use. Participatory organisation and collaborative governance then ensure cohesion and adoption. Obviously, this has to happen in harmony with the natural ecosystems.

Regeneration is a call for pioneers who want to reinvent the industry. It's also about prototyping new hybrid business models, new ways of working, and creating showcases for resilient hotels that are cornerstones of their destinations.

To embark on a regenerative journey is a beautiful and rewarding, although challenging, endeavour for any business. The choice to do so very much depends on your ambitions as an owner, operator, or manager: how do you want to balance profit and purpose? And, more importantly, what legacy do you want to leave as an individual and as a company?

The Circular Prerequisite: Why Regeneration Without Circularity Is Just Greenwashing

Circular economy

Manuel Maqueda
CEO, Bionomia Institute

Manuel Maqueda argues that "regenerative" hospitality is meaningless – and often pure greenwashing – if it is built on a linear "take–make–waste" model. He outlines a three-step journey from efficiency (doing things right) to circularity (designing out waste and toxicity) to true regeneration (actively restoring ecosystems and communities), warning that you cannot skip the circular step and still claim to heal.

In the high-stakes arena of global hospitality, we are navigating a semantic storm. "Regenerative" has arrived like a hurricane, threatening to displace "sustainable" as the industry's buzzword du jour. We see it everywhere: regenerative tourism, regenerative resorts, regenerative travel.

Alas, even if the people I advise don't want to hear this, regeneration is not a feature to add to an existing portfolio, nor a new "app" to patch a buggy interface.

Regeneration is a new operating system for hospitality. To install it, we must first acknowledge that the industry is running on an obsolete system: the linear "take-make-waste" model. No amount of efficiency can fix a system designed to extract and discard—where toxicity hides in cosmetics, paints, wall coverings, insulating foams, carpets that shed microplastics, and even cooking equipment laden with PFAS. Reaching the destination of regeneration (actively healing living systems and communities) requires a structural transformation through circularity. Without circularity, regeneration is merely poetic aspiration.

This journey involves three steps: escaping the trap of Efficiency, embracing the structural shift of Circularity, and leaping toward the ultimate destination of Regeneration.

THE DESIGN FLAW: WHY INNOVATION FEELS SO SCARY AND EFFICIENCY FEELS SAFE

To understand why our industry struggles to move beyond basic sustainability, we must return to the drawing board. There is an axiom I half-jokingly tell hotel owners to print, frame, and put up on the wall: 80% of environmental and social impacts are determined during the design phase. In other words: pollution, toxicity, bad mojo, emissions, and waste are design flaws.

The journey requires abandoning the comfort of "doing things right" (efficiency) and embracing the challenge of "doing the right things" (effectiveness), which demands ditching the linear mentality of the past. Messy? Yes. Innovative? Required. Courageous? Absolutely. Scary or not, it's the only path I see to a future where hospitality heals rather than just consumes.

1 STEP 1: THE EFFICIENCY TRAP AND LINEAR LOCK-IN

For decades, sustainability has been synonymous with eco-efficiency: we have optimized hotels to use less water, consume less energy, and generate less waste per guest night.

Efficiency asks: How can we reduce the damage we cause? It focuses on being "less bad." Unfortunately, greater efficiency in a linear system often optimizes a model designed around extraction and depletion—one where formaldehyde off-gasses from carpets and microplastics shed from paint.

Out of frustration, I used to say efficiency was the enemy, but I was wrong. Efficiency isn't evil; it's just wildly insufficient. Here's the problem: efficiency lets us move faster, but it doesn't change direction. We're sprinting down the wrong road, getting better at something we shouldn't be doing in the first place.

Efficiency also creates a trap: by investing millions in optimizing linear infrastructure—recycled single-use plastics, biodigesters for biogas—we entrench the very systems we need to dismantle. Worse, efficiency gains often fuel increased consumption. (We economists call this the Rebound Effect, but you don't need jargon to see it: "greener" flights mean more flying.)

Here's the point: we can't optimize our 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. We need to shift from efficiency (doing things right) to effectiveness (doing the right things)

2 STEP 2: CIRCULARITY: HERE'S WHERE IT GETS UNCOMFORTABLE

The only bridge I've found between our extractive past and a regenerative future is circularity. And I am not the only one.

First, circularity is not recycling. Many think it is, even some savvy hotel executives I have encountered. However, recycling is what you do after you've designed something wrong—it's damage control. Circularity is different: it's designing so there's nothing to throw away in the first place. By design, circularity decouples our operations from resource extraction, toxicity, and waste.

Making this shift means abandoning the "cradle-to-grave" flow of materials and adopting a "cradle-to-cradle" mindset. Organic materials return to soil. Technical materials—machinery, plastics, furniture—circulate in closed loops.

But here's what keeps me up at night and makes my hotel stays uneasy: material health. The Crans-Montana fire killed 41 people; prior similar fires killed even more. The investigation is ongoing, but we know the pattern: synthetic furnishings make modern fires faster, hotter, and really toxic. In many cases, 'recycled' building materials—marketed as sustainable—are turning hotels into flammable time bombs. And even when these don't burn, they may slowly offgas nasty chemicals for years.

For a hotel, embracing circularity also means embracing eco-effectiveness: shifting from owning assets to accessing the functions and performance they provide.

Take buying light instead of lightbulbs. In the old model, a hotel buys 5,000 bulbs and the manufacturer profits when they fail. In a circular model, the hotel contracts for "light as a service." The provider owns the fixtures and maintains them — incentivized to make equipment that actually lasts. The hotel gets lighting without capital expense or disposal headaches.

Sounds perfect, right? Actually most owners, CFOs and tax codes hate it. They want assets, not services. Another example of friction.

Now apply this thinking to furniture, appliances, and laundry systems. Everything circulates instead of being replaced every five years, while material health is non-negotiable.

The technology exists: digital product passports, IoT monitoring, closed-loop logistics. But most operators still default to ownership. Purchase, depreciate, dispose. The circular model requires a different mindset: paying for performance rather than acquiring assets, and trusting external providers to maintain quality and control.

That shift—from ownership to stewardship, from assets to access— remains both an opportunity and a barrier.

3 STEP 3: REGENERATION—THE ULTIMATE HACK

Once we have established circular operations —stopping the hemorrhage of waste and extraction, and the encroachment of unhealthy materials— we can pursue regeneration.

A Regenerative Economy, as I define it in my classes and publications, is a Circular Economy designed to restore the biosphere and its capacity to provide ecosystem services, while supporting the health and well-being of human communities. These services underpin everything we do—including the operations of a hotel.

The layering and the distinction is critical: circularity gives us the tools—closed loops and systems that circulate; regeneration gives us the goal—living systems and communities that thrive. Circularity without regenerative intent is just efficient resource management. And regeneration without circularity? That's funding a local ecosystem restoration, while your operations generate toxicity and waste locally and abroad.

The ultimate step is entering a relationship of reciprocity with living systems and communities. In a linear model, the relationship is extractive: we take from the destination—its culture, ecosystems, labor—and package it for guests. In a regenerative model, we ask: how does our presence actively heal what we depend on?

What does this look like operationally? A regenerative hotel manages grounds to recharge aquifers and rebuild soil biology, not just minimize water use. It sources from farms practicing regenerative agriculture, strengthening regional food systems. It employs locals as partners in long-term community resilience, not line items on a balance sheet.

Not offset elsewhere. Not minimize harm. Restore.

THE DANGER OF LINEAR RECIPROCITY

Here's the trap: attempting reciprocity from a linear mindset creates contradictions.

A luxury resort funds coral reef restoration —genuine reciprocity— while continuing to use single-use plastics, toxic cleaning chemicals that leach into groundwater, and extraction-based supply chains. This is "Regenerative Washing." One hand heals; the other harms.

True regeneration requires the integrity of circularity... and here is where most people fail: it is not about doing or thinking new things, but doing and thinking all things differently.

Watch for transition fixes that promise future solutions while permitting business as usual today.Replacing tiny plastic amenities with larger pump bottles that are not refilled, or break after minimal use; or specifying furnishings made from recycled ocean plastics that turn out to be toxic and flammable are examples of ideas that may feel like progress but fall short of creating safe, healthy spaces.

To answer the call of future generations, we must do the hard work of system redesign

CONCLUSION: WHAT COMES NEXT

The hospitality industry is splitting. On one side: "efficient linear" operators, sustainable in name but fragile when supply chains break and resources become volatile. On the other: regenerative operators.

These operators understand that resilience has replaced efficiency as the key performance metric. Circular supply chains and regenerative relationships with local ecosystems provide insulation from global shocks. Regeneration is not a marketing tier above luxury—it is a survival strategy in an age of limits.

This path requires abandoning "doing things right" (efficiency) for "doing the right things" (effectiveness). It is messy, expensive in the short term in ways your CFO will hate, and demands both innovation and courage. But it is the only path I can see that doesn't end in collapse. If you see another, I'm listening.

HYB

The Designer's Responsibility in Regenerative Travel

Hospitality architecture

Graeme Labe
Managing Partner & Chief Design Officer, Luxury Frontiers

Micayla Freeman
Associate & Head of Sustainability, Luxury Frontiers

LUXURY FRONTIERS

Graeme Labe and Micayla Freeman argue that regenerative hospitality demands a fundamental shift in how designers see their role: from minimising impact to actively strengthening the living systems of place. Through examples from South Africa and Mexico, it shows how context-responsive architecture, local materials, and craft-based renewal can tie guest experience to long-term stewardship rather than one-off "sustainable" gestures.

Sustainability has become standard practice in hospitality. Metrics are measured, certifications pursued, and waste minimized at source. Yet a critical question now emerges: are we simply perfecting how to do less harm, or are we fundamentally changing how hospitality relates to the places and communities it depends on?

Regenerative design diverges from sustainability at a philosophical level. Where sustainability manages environmental resources for efficiency, regenerative design recognizes the environment as a series of dynamic, interconnected living systems that can co-evolve with human systems. By this perspective, design becomes an opportunity to contribute to those systems rather than merely minimize disruption. This mindset aligns with circular-economy thinking and other nature-based frameworks, all of which challenge the linear "take, make, waste" model and look to natural systems for cues about renewal and adaptation.

For designers and architects, regeneration is not a certification to pursue or a label to apply. It is a test of coherence, a responsibility to ensure that every design decision makes sense to every stakeholder involved and can be understood, maintained, and carried forward beyond our involvement.

FROM OUTCOMES TO CONTINUITY

Hospitality projects are typically judged at moments of completion: opening day, first accolades, certifications achieved. Regenerative design rejects this endpoint mentality in favour of an "open spiral evolution" mindset. It asks that we look further ahead: what happens in year five? Who maintains this system? How does this architecture adapt as ecosystems and communities evolve?

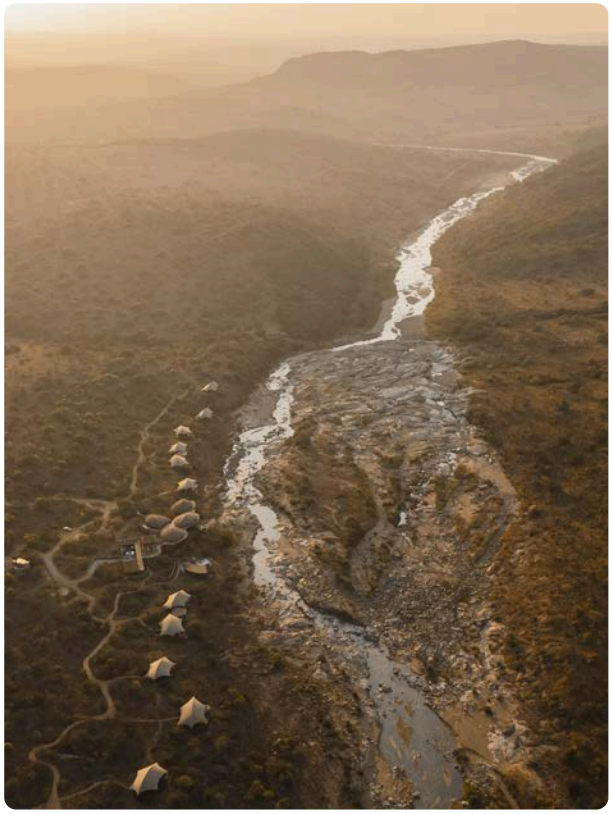
In remote or sensitive settings, this perspective becomes especially important. Designers are often required to balance ecological priorities, community livelihoods, economic targets, and guest experience. Starting with a regenerative outlook helps integrate these considerations rather than treating them as competing demands.

Regenerative work often begins with observation: listening deeply, mapping relationships, and understanding what the landscape and community already know. This helps reveal where existing systems can be supported—whether through environmental care that supports operational logic or community involvement that strengthens stewardship—and where guest experience becomes a vehicle for understanding place rather than consuming it.

Natural systems are constantly in flux. Our work also needs to remain flexible enough to adapt to the changing needs of all stakeholders, human and non-human, as these systems evolve.

DESIGNING FOR LIVING SYSTEMS

At Madwaleni River Lodge within the Babanango Game Reserve, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, regeneration guided decisions from the start. The reserve's long-term commitment to ecological restoration efforts in consolidating previously fragmented agricultural land provided the foundation. Hospitality was introduced not as an isolated intervention, but as one mechanism supporting rewilding, conservation funding, and sustained economic opportunity.



The White Umfolozi River informed the lodge's placement and character. Seasonal change is made visible, not hidden. The river becomes a living indicator of ecological rhythms, connecting guests to the reality of place. Construction strategies followed the same logic: minimizing disturbance, limiting heavy machinery, and prioritizing local labour and site-sourced materials where sensible. These decisions were driven by practicality: what makes sense in this place, now and over time?

The Boma, an outdoor dining experience, represents one of our most tangible expressions of regenerative design in practice. As part of the site's ecological rehabilitation, invasive black wattle is selectively removed and handwoven into the structure using traditional Zulu craft techniques. This seasonal process not only restores clogged waterways but reframes invasive species from an environmental burden into a cultural and material resource.

Rather than a permanent object, the Boma is intentionally designed to weather and eventually fail. Its renewal forms part of a cyclical system where ecological management, craft, and community livelihood remain interconnected. Each harvest generates local employment and sustains traditional skills, embedding cultural practice within environmental stewardship. The result is not a static intervention, but a living framework: a space where guest experience, landscape restoration, and community participation evolve together over time.

CONTEXT-RESPONSIVE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Regenerative design develops its own logic in each context, shaped by landscape, culture, economic realities, and stewardship capacity. There is no universal template.

In tropical environments like Mexico's Pacific coast, rapidly renewable materials and traditional craft approaches naturally support both performance and local industry. At Naviva, a Four Seasons resort, bamboo becomes the primary structural and spatial system, supporting local industries and long-term material cycles. Traditional adobe techniques enhance thermal performance and reduce reliance on mechanical systems, drawing on vernacular wisdom evolved over generations. These decisions sustain skills, support local economies, and reduce future operational dependency.

In arid regions like the Klein Karoo in South Africa, we designed with ancient environmental logic. Thick stone walls, rammed-earth construction, and passive cooling strategies draw from deep understanding of climate and material behaviour.

Comfort emerges through mass, shade, and airflow, with architecture inherently aligned with its environment and simpler to maintain over time.

Across contexts, our questions remain consistent: What knowledge already exists here? What systems are already at work? How can architecture reinforce rather than override them? Regeneration is not about innovation for its own sake, but coherence between design, operation, and landscape.

MEDIATING COMPETING DEMANDS

Regenerative hospitality often operates between two pressures: the desire for ecological and cultural depth, and the need for financial and operational practicality. Neither can stand alone. Lean too far in one direction and projects become unviable; lean too far in the other and they become extractive.

Our responsibility is to actively mediate these forces. We must acknowledge that ecological and social value cannot exist without operational reality, and that financial success is unsustainable if it undermines the systems supporting it.

Recognizing that regenerative systems are sustained by people requires deliberate investment in education, skills transfer, and shared understanding. Materials that weather, systems that demand care, and structures that evolve over time are not signs of failure, but evidence of stewardship and collective ownership. Long-term success depends on cultivating buy-in from those who build, maintain, and inhabit these systems. It is measured not at completion, but over time, through the health of ecosystems, the strength of communities, the adaptability of architecture, and the resilience of operations.

THE DESIGNERS ROLE

Regenerative design asks designers to fundamentally reconsider our role. We are not authors imposing vision, but collaborators participating in existing systems. Our responsibility extends beyond the construction handover to the life of what we create, and to its graceful return to the landscape.

This demands different practices: longer engagement with sites and communities before design begins, collaboration with ecologists and local knowledge holders as equals, designing for adaptation rather than permanence, transparency about maintenance requirements and material lifecycles, and accountability to all stakeholders, not just clients.

Regeneration is not an upgrade to sustainability. It is a shift in mindset. It moves beyond checklists and technical compliance and asks a harder question: does our work strengthen or weaken the systems around it? It pushes the limits of our creativity and tests the reach of our vision. Can we see the web of relationships, the hidden links, the opportunities for renewal? For designers willing to take this on, regeneration is not about doing less harm. It is about contributing to living systems, shaping places that restore, adapt, and give back more than they take.

HYB

Regenerative foodservice: from soil health to menu design

Regenerative foodservice

Carlos Martin-Rios
Associate Professor of Management, EHL Hospitality Business School

EHL

Carlos Martin-Rios reframes foodservice as a powerful lever for regeneration, shifting the focus from "less harm" to actively improving soil health, water cycles, biodiversity, and community resilience. He shows how procurement, menu design, pricing, and kitchen operations can be redesigned around regenerative agriculture and outcome-based measurement, turning restaurants and hotels into stewards of living food systems rather than endpoints of an extractive chain.

REGENERATION CHANGES THE STARTING POINT

Regeneration is not a rebranding of sustainability. It 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. In food systems, this means restoring soil health, strengthening water cycles and supporting biodiversity while reinforcing community resilience. For foodservice, the implications are equally concrete: procurement, menus, pricing and operations must be redesigned so that value creation supports ecological and social renewal rather than contributing to gradual depletion.

FROM ECOLOGICAL THEORY TO AGRICULTURAL PRACTICE

The intellectual roots of regenerative thinking lie in systems ecology, ecological economics and regenerative design. Systems ecology reframed nature as dynamic flows of energy and materials rather than static stocks. Ecological economics highlighted how markets fail to account for soil degradation, water depletion and biodiversity loss, treating them as externalities instead of real costs. Regenerative design translated these insights into practice by asking how systems can be configured so that each use contributes to the integrity of the larger system that sustains it.

Regenerative agriculture provides tangible expression of these ideas. It focuses on measurable outcomes such as increases in soil organic matter, improved water infiltration and recovery of biodiversity. Practices including reduced tillage, cover cropping, agroforestry and managed grazing rebuild soil carbon and strengthen resilience over time. Regenerative agriculture is defined by outcomes. Unlike organic certification, which centers on approved inputs, regeneration asks what has changed in the soil and whether those changes can be verified.

WHY FOODSERVICE MATTERS

Foodservice operators do not manage soil carbon or aquifers directly. Their influence operates through purchasing decisions. Restaurants, hotels and caterers sit at the visible end of the value chain, translating agricultural production into meals and guest experiences. Through this position, they either reinforce extractive models or create demand for restorative ones.

Regenerative foodservice therefore begins with procurement. When purchasing contracts are linked to verified ecological outcomes such as soil carbon gains or biodiversity indicators, incentives for restoration are created upstream.

Outcome-based procurement and true-cost approaches make environmental and social impacts visible within pricing structures (Martin-Rios et al., 2022; 2024). Sustainability is integrated into financial decision-making. A menu built around verified regenerative grains or diversified crops redirects capital toward practices that rebuild landscapes.

CIRCULAR FLOWS IN THE KITCHEN

Regeneration within foodservice also operates through circular flows. Kitchens can redesign nutrient cycles by composting food waste and returning it to partner farms. Whole-crop use and seasonal sourcing reduce embodied carbon. Durable procurement choices and energy recovery systems address material throughput. These actions alter how energy, water and materials move through operations. The restaurant becomes part of a wider ecological and social system rather than an isolated consumption site.

THE LIMITS OF THE LABEL

A farm demonstrates regeneration through measurable biophysical change. A restaurant produces relational value in the form of hospitality and cultural exchange. This difference clarifies that claims of regeneration require reference to ecological outcomes that are enabled or financed. When the term is adopted without measurable links to restoration, its meaning weakens.

Measurement therefore plays a central role. Indicators such as soil carbon, water retention or biodiversity provide accountability. Yet quantitative metrics alone are insufficient. Regeneration also depends on trust, local knowledge and cultural continuity. The task is to design systems in which measurement supports learning and responsibility. When procurement agreements, pricing mechanisms and reporting systems align with ecological thresholds, regeneration gains credibility.

FROM HOSPITALITY TO STEWARDSHIP

The future of regenerative foodservice depends on integration. The focus is the redesign of flows of capital, nutrients, energy and knowledge so that hospitality contributes to ecological repair. Service organizations act as intermediaries. They translate ecological improvement into market signals and shape consumption patterns. Their legitimacy rests on alignment between language and demonstrable repair.

Regeneration reframes hospitality as stewardship. Success extends beyond margin or occupancy to include whether operations strengthen the ecosystems and communities on which they depend. When menus support biodiversity, contracts reward soil health and waste returns as nutrients rather than landfill, foodservice moves toward reciprocity. The work is practical and systemic. It requires redesigning how value is created and circulated.

ADDITIONAL READING

- Martin-Rios, C., et al. (2026). *Reimagining Tourism Futures: Pathways for Transition in Turbulent Times*. Access to white paper.

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Nothing we do is sustainable. Can everything we do be regenerative?

Low-carbon architecture

Francesco Allaix
Architect, project manager, Studio Puisto

Architect Francesco Allaix argues that in a world where six of nine planetary boundaries are already exceeded, sustainability alone is no longer enough – and even leading pioneers like Patagonia admit that "nothing we do is sustainable." Drawing on regenerative principles, Doughnut Economics, and Studio Puisto projects in Lapland and Cyprus, he shows how adaptive reuse, ecosystem restoration, and data-driven design can nudge hospitality away from extractive models toward more regenerative practice, even if perfection remains out of reach.

First came sustainability, and slowly but steadily everyone jumped on the bandwagon. Now that this word has become a blanket of good intentions covering every project and product, we move on to the next one: regeneration. But are we merely changing words, paying lip service to these vague concepts or are we grasping with the true paradigm shift they entail?

A meta-study from Royal Swedish Academy of Science can help us to find some common treads in over 300 cross-disciplinary publications on regeneration and establish some shared tenets. The analysis identifies a few core principles of the regenerative paradigm. The one cited the most in the articles (86%) underscores the need for "inner world" changes, meaning complementing external solutions with inner transformation, for example changes in worldviews and business goals, frameworks and measurements. The second most common one calls for systems approaches, recognizing the need to break silos and adopt holistic ways of thinking. In third place comes the need to move beyond growth-oriented systems to promote long-term human and ecological wellbeing. The fourth most mentioned principle (63%) identifies as crucial prioritizing local knowledge, local communities and their well-being above the interests of external actors and short-term economic gains.

Are we willing and able to commit to the above tenets to call our projects and businesses regenerative?

It is not an easy question to answer with a resounding yes. Nevertheless, yes is the only answer we should have.

Scientists warn us that six of nine planetary boundaries are already broken, meaning that Earth is now well outside of its safe operating space. Our safe operating space has not been analyzed only by scientists but also by economists, like Kate Raworth. In her seminal book Doughnut economy, she describes a framework within which businesses, governments, and people must act.

The framework has a social foundation under which we shall not go otherwise social rights are infringed, and an ecological ceiling which we shall not break otherwise we are overshooting planetary resources. We must operate only between those two limits.

The global picture is not one of swift ecological adaptation, nevertheless many companies have walked the talk for long. One of the best examples is Patagonia, the clothing company. Patagonia has always had environmental and social impact at the core of their business, but it made big strides recently. The company gives 98% of its yearly dividends to a foundation established to fight the environmental crisis and protect biodiversity. "Earth is now our only shareholder" is how Yvon Chouinard, Patagonia's founder, describes the move.

And yet the company admits in the last annual report that "nothing we do is sustainable". Quite a dire and discouraging statement. But at a closer look what Patagonia is acknowledging is how difficult it is to truly implement a paradigm shift.

When we look at our business - designing hospitality projects around the world - I cannot but see the difficulties and contradictions that we stumble through. Can we claim that our office is doing regenerative projects? The honest answer is: it is complicated. Nothing we do is perfectly regenerative, but every project challenges the business-as-usual model.

We have been working on the reuse of existing buildings, for example, transforming an old summer retreat in Lapland into a boutique hotel. The existing structures were preserved as much as possible significantly reducing the upfront carbon budget. Old wooden walls were strengthened rather than replaced, interior design incorporated and reused second-hand furniture, local carpenters helped to seamlessly integrate new and old elements. The guest experience is to provide an island of tranquility surrounded by nature. The most sustainable building is the one that is taken care of the longest, generation after generation. Regenerative processes imply preserving, mending, and embracing imperfections. It is a slow process that requires learning anew while it stretches time and memories.

Regeneration means also improving existing conditions, in a landscape or community. We designed a resort in Cyprus in a lush valley.

The dominant tree in the area is pine and when left to grow unchecked it can impact on the competition and coexistence in the ecosystem. Therefore, the starting point was planting different species of trees, bushes, and flowers to trigger ecological restoration and improve soil quality. Landscape design and architecture design work hand in hand to regenerate the valley, regenerate the local community collaborating with the neighboring villages and providing new jobs, and regenerate guest's body and mind. The project did improve the valley's ecosystem, but we are not blind to the fact that tons of -biogenic and non- materials have to be transported and installed on site to build the resort.

Lastly, we are developing and integrating in our workflow both parametric and AI models that help us analyze the data. Therefore, decisions can be made on numbers rather than assumptions to choose the best options to reduce our buildings' impact on the landscape by analyzing water, wind, and sun paths; to reduce the amount of material we use; to evaluate and reuse what is already available on site; to communicate complex issues to clients and stakeholders.

Reusing and adapting existing buildings, improving and integrating landscape with architecture, optimizing design by using new tools, are three key aspects we focus on. It is not enough yet, but we think it is important to put progress over perfection, regenerating hospitality one project at time.

Food and Beverage, a drain on resources or a regenerative lever?

Food systems

Adam Maclennan
Senior Managing Director, Head of UK & Ireland, PKF hospitality group

Bumjoo Maclennan
Documentary Filmmaker, Food Activist & Former Hospitality Investor, Delicious Revolutions Media

PKF hospitality

Adam and Bumjoo Maclennan propose that food & beverage is not a low-margin nuisance but the beating heart – and biggest lever – of regenerative hospitality. By shifting sourcing toward regenerative agriculture, empowering chefs as tastemakers, and designing menus that prioritise soil health, biodiversity, and zero waste, hotels can turn every meal into a catalyst for healthier ecosystems, communities, and guests.

Food and beverage.

What comes to mind?

Food and beverage (F&B) are a conundrum for many hoteliers, adding complexity to the operation and difficult to make money from. However, F&B is fundamental to hospitality. Regenerative hospitality is not possible without regenerative food systems, and the hospitality industry has a substantial role to play!

In an increasingly institutionalised hospitality industry – driven by expectations of high profit margin, yield optimisation, and shareholder value – F&B is often looked at as a necessary evil. A department with low margins which many hotel concepts try to streamline, outsource or remove altogether.

And yet, food is synonymous with hospitality. When we want to be hospitable, we share food and drink: we invite others over for a cup of tea, a glass of wine, or a meal. Around dining tables, we build lasting relationships, exchange ideas and even debate our differences.

The hospitality industry, however, appears comfortable commoditising food in favour of convenience and profit.

What if that's the mistake?

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? And what if hospitality industry has the power–and responsibility–to lead the change in shaping new narratives about food?

Agriculture alone accounts for roughly 25% of greenhouse gas emissions, occupies 50% of the world's habitable land, and consumes 70% of global fresh water. Yet, up to 40% of all food produced is wasted which equates to an estimated 10% of global emissions.

Our health is at risk. Poor diets and lifestyle-related illnesses (non-communicable diseases) account for nearly three-quarters of all deaths annually. Two billion people worldwide are overweight and, in the US, half of all adults and one third of teenagers have Type 2 diabetes or are prediabetic.

Climate breakdown, driven by biodiversity loss and rising greenhouse gas, is accelerating desertification, fuelling famine-driven migration, and increasing the risk of conflict.

These pressures exacerbate polarisations and populist movements. Repeated crop failures were a key trigger of the Syrian migration crisis – forcing people from ancestral lands in search of food, destabilising regions and fuelling war, a connection powerfully illustrated in the documentary series, *Years of Living Dangerously*. It is expected that climate-disaster-driven migrations will increase.

Industrial agriculture's heavy reliance on chemical inputs is depleting topsoil, causing erosion, eliminating biodiversity above and below the ground, polluting water systems, and increasing the likelihood of crop failures–further destabilising global food production. Farmers face financial hardships driving rising suicide rates in agricultural communities. Meanwhile, the food and hospitality industries remain notorious for their reliance on forced labour.

The question, then is no longer whether food systems sit at the root of these– and many other–deeply interconnected global crises, but whether the hospitality industry is ready to participate and even lead the change within our global food systems.

Today's food culture has handed enormous power of influence to those who can cook–from recipe developers, home cook influencers, to master celebrity chefs. Media platforms are saturated with cooking shows, food travel programs, and cooking competitions. We seek out highly rated restaurants, new openings in search of extraordinary experiences. We trust chefs' opinions on ingredients and flavour. One can easily find, sometimes unsolicited advice on what to eat–what to avoid–for longevity, weight loss, brain function and everything in between.

Chefs and cooks have the power to inspire new ways of eating – and reinvigorate traditional ways of eating based on local biodiversity and seasonality. We don't have to eat blueberries and string beans all year round. Chefs can show us how to transform overlooked or unfamiliar ingredients into something delicious by showcasing them in their restaurants, cookbooks or online cooking classes.

If chefs begin to champion food grown in healthy soil in thriving ecological environments, and share how good it tastes, they can help drive demand for these foods and encourage their wider production.

Chef Dan Barber uses the example of sea bass in his book, *the Third Plate, the field notes on the future of food*. It was not a historically rare or inherently luxurious fish but acquired its reputation as a premium fish because chefs embraced it–promoting its mild flavour and versatility–on their menus. It became so popular that wild sea bass are now endangered, exemplifying the ecological consequences of food choices popularised by *chefs*.

Changing how we source, produce and consume food can trigger a powerful chain reaction of benefits. Farming is inherently risky: the results of today's decisions may only become visible months later and often years later. For farmers to take such risks, they need confidence that their efforts will pay off.

When farmers know that there is a market for their produce that could also promote healthy soil, they will grow more of it. Restoring degraded soil with organic matter fosters biodiversity, creating healthier ecosystems both below and above the ground. This leads to higher-quality crops and livestock that are more resistant to pests and diseases, cleaner water systems, and reduced reliance on fossil-fuel-based agrochemicals. Healthy soil sequesters more carbon too, which is a bonus.

That is all fine, you might say, but can it be profitable and is it scalable? Hotel brands with aspirations of delivering regenerative hospitality can provide the support that promotes systemic changes to the food industry. In countries such as Austria, there is financial support for local producers of healthy, organic regenerative agriculture, making it possible for these farmers to earn a decent living selling their produce at affordable prices to be enjoyed more widely.

Regenerative hospitality and food and beverage need bold leaders who believe that long-term shareholder value and profit is only possible if we can play our part in support farming practices that improve soil health and biodiversity. This might involve a commitment to allocate a slightly higher budget for ingredients grown locally in the regenerative way, and a laser focus on waste reduction as well as creative menu optimisation and innovation. Working with F&B teams and suppliers to seek out options that are local, delicious, grown regeneratively, and prepared sustainably, while developing recipes that will delight guests is the essence of what makes hospitality fun!

The hospitality industry has always led the way in creating something special, a memorable experience. We are trendsetters, shaping people's lifestyles. We anticipate our guests' need before they realise they have them. So why can't we do the same for food–delivering meals that are not only delicious, but that also generate powerful cascading effects for society and the planet?

HYB

The Forgotten Poison: Detoxing the Guest Room is Hospitality's #1 Regenerative Act

Prevention-based pest control

Martim Gois
CEO and Co-Founder, Valpas

Martim Gois argues that hospitality has a "fourth pillar" of sustainability it has mostly ignored: pesticide use, especially neonicotinoids applied in guest rooms to control bed bugs. As regulators, certifiers, and major buyers begin to recognise the massive biodiversity and health impacts of these chemicals, the industry is shifting from reactive, chemical-heavy pest control to prevention-based, pesticide-free systems, positioning pesticide elimination as a concrete, non-negotiable step toward truly regenerative hospitality.

There is a room at the centre of the global hospitality industry. It has a bed, a minibar, blackout curtains, and — invisible to the guest, unrecorded in any sustainability report, and missing from virtually every green certification on the market — a recurring application of neonicotinoid pesticides to manage bed bugs.

For years, that room has simply not been part of the conversation. That is now changing.

> *Carbon is the headline. Pesticides are the headline the industry is finally ready to write.*

Hospitality has built strong frameworks around three sustainability pillars: energy, water, and waste. Each has dashboards, benchmarks, and improving trajectories. But a fourth pillar — pesticide use — has remained unmeasured and largely unacknowledged, due in no small part to decades of heavy lobbying by pesticide manufacturers. That silence is ending as the evidence of environmental and human harm has grown impossible to ignore.

In 2026, that changes. The frameworks have shifted. The market has moved. And the path to follow the leaders, rather than catch up, is open.

THE FOURTH PILLAR

Energy, water, waste. Walk into any property pursuing EU Ecolabel, GSTC certification, or a regional star rating, and you will find targets and benchmarks for each. You will almost certainly not find a single line of data on pesticide application.

Yet pesticides — specifically the neonicotinoid-based insecticides that dominate indoor pest management for bed bugs — represent a category of environmental impact that reaches beyond what appears on any carbon dashboard. Not in terms of emissions. In terms of something arguably more fundamental: biodiversity.

Carbon governs the atmosphere. Biodiversity governs everything else.

> *Insects are not a footnote to life on Earth. They are the chapter everything else is written in.*

Seventy-five percent of all animal species are insects. They maintain soil health, recycle nutrients, pollinate the crops that feed eight billion people, and regulate the very pest populations we spray chemicals to control.

Over the past 27 years, insect populations have declined by more than 75 percent — with some species falling by one to two percent every single year.

At the centre of this collapse: neonicotinoids. To bees alone, they are approximately 7,000 times more toxic than DDT — a compound banned in the 1970s for being too dangerous. They are water-soluble, leaching into soil and waterways. They are airborne, drifting through ventilation systems and open windows into urban greenery, affecting both indoor and outdoor air quality. They persist for years, accumulating rather than dissipating. By some estimates, only five percent of an applied neonicotinoid remains in its target. The other 95 percent goes somewhere else — into the insect world that sustains ours.

> *We are at the beginning of a major extinction-level event — the first ever for insects on the planet. While they may survive, we may not. We need them more than they do.*
>
> *'Floyd Shockley, Smithsonian Institution*

HOSPITALITY'S STRUCTURAL ROLE

Hospitality is, according to current evidence, the heaviest indoor user of neonicotinoid pesticides in the built environment. The reason is structural: bed bugs are uniquely suited to the hotel model. They travel in luggage, colonise rooms, and spread outward — to guest homes, to other hotels, across destinations. Reactive treatment after an infestation is detected has been the default. And it creates a feedback loop of chemical discharge with every new outbreak.

The environmental cost of this loop has been real. Beyond biodiversity, pesticide misapplication in confined hotel spaces has caused serious health incidents — including fatalities — in the past decade, raising questions about the adequacy of current oversight that regulators have not ignored.

The good news is that the industry never set out to cause this harm. It operated within the frameworks available. Those frameworks are now being rewritten.

A DECISIVE SHIFT: REGULATORS, ALLIANCES, AND THE MARKET

The past two years have seen a convergence of institutional recognition that would have been unimaginable five years ago. Each body has moved in its own language — but the direction is unanimous.

The European Commission's forthcoming EU Ecolabel revision for tourist accommodations is looking to, for the first time, formally distinguish between reactive in-room biocide treatments and prevention-based systems that can demonstrate verified absence of use. Indoor biocidal products are explicitly identified as hazardous substances with documented health and environmental impacts, and hotels may be required to disclose treatment logs or provide verified evidence of prevention. The standard is taking shape. The question is who is ready for it.

The UAE's Department of Tourism has already updated its hotel rating criteria: prevention-based pest management with verified monitoring records now scores above reactive chemical treatment. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council has recognised this gap and is already reshaping its criteria around it. Travalyst is developing new standards to recognise and highlight hotels that have verifiably detoxified their guest rooms and maintain pesticide-free operations. The World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance has included indoor chemical avoidance in its sector pathway frameworks.

Tens of thousands of hotel rooms are already operating with zero pesticides. That number is rising fast. What began as a compliance conversation has become a competitive one.

> *The standard is taking shape. The market has moved. The question is who is ready.*

The transmission into bookings is already underway. Corporate RFPs from major travel buyers are including environmental health criteria for the first time. OTA algorithms are surfacing verified sustainability data as ranking signals. AI-powered travel assistants — increasingly making booking decisions on behalf of users — are trained on precisely the structured, verifiable data that certifications now require. A hotel without a pesticide management framework is a hotel an AI agent cannot confidently recommend to a traveller with environmental values. That is the architecture of the booking market being built today.

FROM ROOFTOP GESTURES TO VERIFIED STANDARDS

The industry's instinct toward biodiversity has been genuine. Rooftop beehives have appeared on hotels across Europe and North America, bringing local honey to breakfast tables and a clear message: we want to coexist with nature. That instinct deserves credit — and a more powerful next step.

The uncomfortable truth is that placing beehives on the roof while spraying pesticides in the rooms below sends two opposite messages at once. Wild, local pollinators — the bees, flies, and beetles that have always lived in the area — are far more important to local ecosystems than any managed hive, and they cannot be protected by a rooftop gesture. The real move is to stop harming them in the first place.

This is where prevention-based standards change the equation entirely. Valpas certifies hotels in real time as bed bug-safe, backed by seamless guest room technology that prevents bed bugs within hours of their arrival in luggage — before infestations form, and without any chemical treatment. This eliminates the reactive pesticide cycle at source, while generating verified safety evidence recognised across demand platforms from ChatGPT to certificators like EU Ecolabel, GSTC, and emerging star-rating schemes. The rooftop bee farm is a symbol. Zero pesticide use, verified in real time, is the standard.

WHAT REGENERATIVE HOSPITALITY ACTUALLY REQUIRES

Regenerative hospitality has many definitions. But in a hotel context, one of its clearest practical expressions is this: the decision that this building will not discharge neonicotinoids into the environment.

Energy efficiency reduces harm at the margin. Pesticide elimination removes a category of active harm entirely. One is incrementalism. The other is regeneration.

> *Regeneration is not about doing less damage. It is about removing a source of damage that should never have been there.*

In the late 1960s, the connection between DDT and ecological collapse was contested. A decade later, it was banned worldwide. The operations that moved ahead of regulation were not penalised. They were prepared — and positioned.

The evidence on neonicotinoids is no longer contested. The regulatory trajectory is visible. The booking infrastructure is being rebuilt around verified environmental data. And the industry has, for the first time, the frameworks, the technology, and the market signal to act.

The guest room is the hotel's smallest unit and its largest environmental statement. Detox it. The pollinators, the planet, and today's travellers are waiting.

HYB

Leapfrogging Regeneration

Community & environment

Dominic Paul Dubois
Director of Sustainability, Six Senses Crans-Montana

SIX SENSES

Dominic Paul Dubois argues that truly regenerative hospitality is a journey, not a label you can jump to because the word is fashionable. Using a luxury alpine resort as an example, it outlines three non-negotiable "inner development" stages, showing how each step must be in place before a property can credibly claim to benefit its community and environment more than it harms them.

Disclaimer: The following is my personal human-centric perspective on Regenerative Hospitality in the luxury hospitality industry.

It is assumed the reader understands the incremental evolution from CSR, Sustainability, ESG to Regenerative Hospitality which we speak of today.

It's always tough to answer journalists when asked if we practice 'Regenerative Hospitality'. To say with confidence that the community is better off in all aspects thanks to our existence is a tall order. That said, it is clear Regeneration is what we work towards, so let's break down the steps: What are the prerequisites of regeneration? What are the check-boxes? What can't we leapfrog?

Distilled to its core, regeneration as anything beyond breakeven of your impact P&L. To 'sequester' more impact than what we emit, nuanced, of course by the challenge of quantifying Environmental and Social impact.

I posit the following: For a property to be labelled 'Regenerative' is the equivalent of reaching enlightenment, and as such, there are inner development steps which cannot be skipped.

1 MAXIMISING RESOURCE EFFICIENCY

First and foremost, we must focus on reducing and optimising the resources which feed our building and operations: electricity, water, gas, biomass, plastics, paper, foods, chemicals, etc. These physical resources enable our resort and its operations to function.

These are reduced through means we are already familiar with, pertaining to energy efficiency practices within the building envelope, HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning), MEP (Mechanical, Engineering, Plumbing), and how we handle daily operations.

At my current property, heating accounts for 2/3rd of our scope 1 & 2 energy consumption. The building is heated with wood pellet biomass, a waste stream from the local agroforestry industry, purchased down the valley. The ash produced is used for compost, and magnetic ESP filters ensures clean air leaving the building. Residual heat creating through kitchen, spa & engineering operations are reinjected into the heating system. So, the carbon-neutral primary ingredient is cheap local waste, costing 25 cents on the dollar compared to a fossil fuel system, the industrial byproducts are handled with care, and the waste heat recuperation results in massive cost savings. This system ticks both Environmental and Financial boxes. Remember, the success of technical solutions depends on geographical and climate factors.

Don't forget the upwards management of suppliers: improved packaging, take-back programs, the *where* and the *when* of the products. This addresses the scope 3 impact you have least control over.

This step is the easiest to justify, as the ROI is intelligible to all stakeholders.

2 SETTING INTERNAL CULTURE

Once the tangibles have been addressed, we turn to the intangibles: Our Culture.

Many working in hospitality today are sceptical, blasé from years of greenwashed marketing strategies and low impact solutions. To show our teams that they are part of a larger movement which genuinely cares is a gargantuan undertaking. The only way to do so is to take them along for the ride and have them actively participate. Bring them on a clean-up event led by the GM, have them harvest honey from the on-site beehives, show them energy reduction data & waste metrics and let them propose actions, have them lead initiatives and ensure leadership follows-up, and above all, celebrate their success.

Once won over, the team become the causes greatest cheerleader, as they are celebrating change they themselves created. They, not us, are on the frontlines, communicating directly with the guests. Have them experience diverse impactful initiatives such that they have stories to tell. Prepare the car but let them drive.

Work with HR to instil values through engaging methods such as excursions, trainings, workshops, anything that requires active participation. Remember to use the canteen, as it's the great equaliser, where GMs sit with stewards. Food waste campaigns are particularly powerful, as they are relatable. Don't underestimate the leverage of being a preferred employer in retaining talent, today's generation looks for purpose.

Your business cannot emanate sustainability if it isn't practiced internally. Should leadership take shortcuts: uses plastic bottles, waste food at the canteen... a profound disconnect will immediately be perceived by the teams, and the **cost of doing poorly outweighs the cost of not doing**. People don't believe what they are told, instead what they experience. This alignment begins at the back-of-house.

3 RETHINKING GUEST EXPERIENCE

Once the structure is optimised, and the walls inhabited, we look to our guests. There are basic prerequisites within the guest journey: No single-use plastics front-of-house, refillable products in bathrooms, menus indicating provenance, etc. Think 'compliance'.

But let's dig deeper in the proactive delivery of 'Sustainability' as an experience. At Six Senses we have the Earth Lab, a semi-science lab, semi-kitchen, where sustainability is lived through upcycling activities, getting guests' hands dirty and letting them enjoy a phone-free moment with their loved ones. Every workshop has a green twist: Candles with used kitchen oil, seed bombs using homemade compost and endemic seeds, and postcards using shredded office paper.

Last summer we faced a dilemma with the landscaping team. We didn't have the budget to take on another full-time position, but we needed extra hands (or hooves). The solution was instead to adopt 5 sheep from a local farmer (henceforth known as: Feta, Haloumi, Pecorino, Ricotta, & Mozzarella), who roamed around the resort. An addition to the environmental benefit of a fossil fuel-free lawnmower was the joy of the guests, who came to the Swiss Alps for the Heidi experience, which could now be enjoyed directly from their balconies, bells and musk included. We even launched the 'Finding Feta' experience, where guests were invited to feed, interact with, and understand the role ruminants play in sequestering nutrients. Feta and Co. proved to be an Environmental, Financial, and Experiential triple win.

We partner with a multitude of third-party suppliers who curate guest experiences: cheesemaking with farmers, woodwork with carpenters, fly-fishing led by the fishermen who own rights to the nearby lakes... all featuring enhanced sustainability touchpoints. Cheesemaking begins with milking of the cow yourself, ending with a fondue on the slopes. Woodwork starts with a stroll in the forest where species you will work with are pointed out. And fly-fishing ends with us preparing the freshly gutted rainbow trout in a dignified way, worthy of the life it led. Hakuna Matata. Full circle.

On their own, the environmental impact of these experiences is negligible. Yet they embody the tenets of sustainability without being overtly educational. They are *salt-of the-earth* reconnection experiences, transporting families back to a simpler time. These moments are indescribably enriching, and a catalyst for rethinking the definition of luxury.

I was telling a student about such reconnection experiences. She snickered and remarked *'Isn't it funny how guests will pay to milk a cow, when it once used to be a chore for our grandparents?'* She hit the nail on the head.

It´s a win-win. The establishment is rewarded by bridging luxury & nature, parents cherish a shared memory as a family unit, and children are nudged to reconsider their definition of 'value'.

ALL OR NOTHING

You see, we can't leapfrog to transformative guest experience without first addressing resource optimisation and internal culture, because the misalignment will stand out like a sore thumb and the experience will be delivered inauthentically. The same applies to bringing Regeneration to a community whilst leapfrogging these incremental steps.

In the wagon of Regenerative Hospitality, your teams, guests, communities, and integrity must all be along for the ride.

From Harm Reduction to Healing: Why True Hospitality Must Become Regenerative

Sustainability leadership

Glenn Mandziuk
President & CEO, World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance

World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance

Glenn Mandziuk argues that hospitality must evolve from "doing less harm" to actively regenerating the ecosystems and communities it depends on. Building on the World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance's Pathway to Net Positive Hospitality and shared data platforms like Vera-FY, he calls for accountable, place-based leadership and cross-industry collaboration that leaves destinations measurably better than we found them.

For over three decades, my career has taken me from the front desks of local hotels to the boardrooms of global brands and the policy tables of regional alliances. This journey has given me a profound appreciation for our industry's recent sustainability revolution. We have moved measurement from the margins to the core, embracing science-based targets and rigorous ESG reporting under the watchful eyes of regulators, investors, and guests. This progress, driven by the understanding that 83% of travellers now see sustainable travel as essential, is real and commendable.

Yet, from this vantage point, I also sense a collective unease. Despite better data and sharper targets, the systems we depend on—our climate, biodiversity, and local communities—remain under profound strain. We have become adept at measuring our footprint, but we must now ask a more courageous question: Is reducing harm *enough*?

This is not a rejection of sustainability but a call to deepen its promise. It is the foundational thinking behind our Alliance's **Pathway to Net Positive Hospitality**, a framework that guides hotels from simple actions to meaningful, restorative impact. The next chapter must be regenerative.

REGENERATION: THE AMBITION TO LEAVE PLACES BETTER THAN WE FOUND THEM

Regeneration moves beyond the vital but limited goal of "doing less harm." It asks how our industry can actively heal and restore. It shifts the paradigm from efficiency to renewal

- **A sustainable hotel** reduces its water consumption.
- **A regenerative hotel** improves the health of the local watershed it shares with its community.
- **A sustainable hotel** sources food locally.
- **A regenerative hotel** invests in regenerative agriculture that rebuilds soil fertility and supports farmer resilience.

This is not theoretical. We see it in destination-level collaborations that protect biodiversity while creating more profound guest experiences, and in properties co-designed with communities to ensure cultural heritage is honoured and economic benefits circulate locally. These are practical, scalable models of a new relationship between hospitality and place.

THE NON-NEGOTIABLE ROLE OF ACCOUNTABLE LEADERSHIP

However, ambition without accountability is merely aspiration. If our sustainability journey has taught us one indispensable lesson, it is that trust is built on transparency and measurable progress. Regeneration cannot become a vague buzzword; it must be rooted in the same rigour.

This means building on universal sustainable metrics, such as those launched by the Alliance through the newly established **Vera-FY Data Management Platform**—our industry's crucial common data collection and distribution point—with more nuanced, place-based indicators. We must learn to value qualitative stories of community resilience alongside quantitative data on carbon reduction. This demands a new kind of leadership: one that owns outcomes publicly, empowers teams with real authority, and creates cultures where accountability is a shared commitment, not a top-down pressure.

THE CALL TO COLLECTIVE ACTION

Ultimately, no single hotel or brand can regenerate an ecosystem or revitalise a community on its own. This journey demands unprecedented collaboration across value chains, with local stakeholders, and even with competitors, for the health of a shared destination. It requires long-term thinking in a world often driven by short-term returns.

As leaders, we are the stewards of this transition. We must be the ones to model integrity, demonstrate that people and profit are mutually reinforcing, and make decisions that prioritise legacy over quarterly gains. The World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance is committed to providing the tools, knowledge, and collective platform to make this transition practical.

The path to regeneration is our industry's greatest opportunity to redefine its role in the world. It is a commitment to move beyond being the best in the world, to becoming the best for the world. I invite every leader, every brand, and every stakeholder to join us in this essential work. Let us build not just better hotels, but a more resilient and flourishing future for all.

HYB

Reimagining Hospitality Through Regeneration and Place Vitality

Place vitality

Michail Toanoglou
PMP Professor & Academic Director MSc Hospitality Management, ESSEC Business Schooll

ESSEC
BUSINESS SCHOOL

Professor Michail Toanoglou argues that hospitality must move beyond "low-impact" sustainability toward regenerative hospitality that actively strengthens the vitality of places. He lays out a new value architecture and six executive priorities for hotel leaders to embed systems thinking and place-based reciprocity into strategy.

Hospitality is entering a post-sustainability era. Not because sustainability has failed, but because it is no longer sufficient for the scale of ecological disruption, social strain, and destination fragility now shaping our sector. A low-impact model can reduce harm; it cannot, on its own, restore ecosystems, revitalize cultural landscapes, and rebalance who benefits from tourism growth.

That is why regenerative hospitality matters now. It reframes the strategic question from "How do we operate more efficiently?" to "How do we improve the vitality of the socio-ecological systems that make hospitality possible?" This is not a rhetorical refinement. It is a redesign of business purpose, operating logic, and performance architecture.

Over the coming decade, tourism growth will continue in volume and value. If this growth is not guided by restorative logic, pressure will intensify on water systems, biodiversity, cultural heritage, housing, local labor markets, and social cohesion. In many destinations, we already see the symptoms: erosion of resident trust, seasonality stress, commodification of culture, and rising adaptation costs linked to climate volatility. Regeneration is therefore not a premium narrative. It is a strategic response to systemic risk and systemic opportunity.

FROM RESPONSIBILITY TO REGENERATION

The evolution from CSR to sustainability, then circularity, and now regeneration, marks a deeper transformation than terminology suggests.

- **CSR** emphasized responsibility and reputation.
- **Sustainability** emphasized footprint reduction, efficiency, and compliance.
- **Circularity** emphasized resource loops, reuse, and material productivity.
- **Regeneration** emphasizes restoration, revitalization, reciprocity, and long-term system health.

Each phase added value. But each phase also exposed limits. Sustainability, for example, often optimized internal operations while leaving external system dynamics insufficiently addressed: destination leakage, unequal value distribution, ecological decline beyond property boundaries, and weak community agency in tourism governance. Regeneration challenges this narrowness by asking whether hospitality contributes to the renewal of place-based life systems.

In practical terms, this means moving from a compliance logic to a contribution logic.

SYSTEMS THINKING AS A STRATEGIC CAPABILITY

A hotel is not an island. It is embedded in networks of food, water, waste, mobility, labor, energy, regulation, finance, and culture. These networks shape both guest experience quality and destination resilience. They also shape risk. Climate events, biodiversity degradation, social contestation, infrastructure pressure, and geopolitical volatility do not stay outside the business model; they increasingly define it.

For this reason, regeneration cannot be delivered through isolated "green initiatives" or disconnected departmental projects. It requires systems thinking at executive level: understanding interdependencies, feedback loops, thresholds, and unintended consequences. It also requires moving from property-level optimization to destination-level stewardship, where hospitality actors co-design outcomes with public authorities, SMEs, civil society, and local communities.

In this sense, regenerative hospitality is less about adding one more ESG layer and more about integrating strategy across scales: property, destination, region, and planetary boundaries.

THE NEW VALUE ARCHITECTURE

Traditional hospitality metrics remain important—ADR, RevPAR, GOP, occupancy, productivity. But they are incomplete proxies for long-term competitiveness if the destination is becoming ecologically unstable or socially contested. Regenerative leadership requires a multi-capital model of value creation and value retention.

A robust architecture can be structured around five pillars:

1. **Ecological Restoration and Climate Resilience:** Move beyond "less bad" toward measurable renewal: habitat restoration, water replenishment, soil and landscape regeneration, biodiversity health, and adaptation readiness.
2. **Cultural and Heritage Revitalization:** Protecting heritage is not enough. Regeneration requires living continuity: intergenerational transmission, support for local cultural practitioners, language visibility, and craft-linked livelihoods that remain economically viable.
3. **Equitable Local Prosperity:** Growth without local retention undermines legitimacy. The central question becomes: how much value remains in destination ecosystems through local sourcing, fair contracting, SME participation, quality employment, and entrepreneurship pathways?
4. **Community Agency and Governance:** Regenerative outcomes are stronger when local stakeholders are co-authors, not consultees. Participatory governance, transparency, and benefit-sharing mechanisms reduce conflict risk and increase policy coherence.
5. **Transformative Guest Value:** The future experience economy will reward depth over novelty. Guests increasingly seek meaning, place connection, and contribution. Regenerative design turns visitors from passive consumers into active participants in place-based renewal.

This architecture does not reject financial discipline. It strengthens it by aligning financial performance with the long-run health of the assets hospitality actually depends on: nature, culture, trust, and social license.

AUTHENTICITY AS RELATIONAL INTEGRITY

Authenticity is often treated as aesthetic packaging. In regenerative hospitality, authenticity is relational integrity between people, nature, culture, memory, and future. It is not staged identity; it is co-created continuity.

This has direct design implications:

- Community-led interpretation instead of imported storytelling.
- Seasonal, place-based gastronomy linked to local producers and biodiversity.
- Heritage-linked experiences that support restoration funds and local livelihoods.
- Learning-centered itineraries that foster ecological literacy and cultural respect.
- Collaborative formats where residents and visitors participate in shared stewardship.

When authenticity is co-created, the guest experience becomes more distinctive while the destination becomes more resilient. This is both an ethical gain and a competitive gain.

BUSINESS MODEL INNOVATION FOR THE NEXT 3–5 YEARS

Regenerative hospitality will likely evolve through three concurrent pathways.

First, incremental adapters will integrate selective regenerative modules—procurement changes, restoration pilots, local hiring targets—while keeping conventional performance systems dominant.

Second, hybrid integrators will combine financial KPIs with ecological, sociocultural, and equity indicators, supported by cross-functional governance and destination partnerships.

Third, system pioneers will redesign full operating models around restoration and revitalization outcomes, including investment criteria, incentive structures, supplier ecosystems, and narrative strategy.

All three pathways will coexist. The strategic differentiator will be execution quality: the ability to translate regenerative ambition into measurable, credible, place-specific outcomes.

Capital markets and owners will also play a defining role. As climate and social risks become more visible in asset performance, resilience investment will increasingly move from optional ESG expenditure to core competitiveness infrastructure. In this context, the most future-ready operators will be those that can articulate clear cause-effect pathways between regenerative action and risk-adjusted value creation.

A second differentiator will be governance quality. Regenerative portfolios need stronger data credibility, outcome verification, and adaptive learning cycles. The organizations that create transparent links between investment, operations, and place-level impact will secure higher trust with communities, regulators, guests, and long-term capital.

SIX EXECUTIVE PRIORITIES

To operationalize regeneration now, leaders can focus on six priorities:

1. **Build Destination Baselines:** Establish shared baselines for ecosystem condition, water stress, cultural vitality, leakage patterns, workforce conditions, and climate vulnerability.
2. **Rewire Procurement for Local Multipliers:** Use procurement as a development lever: local supplier onboarding, capability-building, fair payment terms, and transparent sourcing thresholds.
3. **Embed Regenerative KPIs in Management Systems:** Add restoration and revitalization indicators to executive dashboards, incentives, and board reporting—not as peripheral CSR metrics, but as strategic performance metrics.
4. **Institutionalize Co-Governance:** Create recurring governance forums with public actors, community representatives, SMEs, and scientific advisors to align decisions and reduce fragmentation.
5. **Develop Regenerative Talent:** Train teams in systems literacy, place interpretation, community engagement, and climate adaptation competencies. Regeneration is a capability agenda, not only a project agenda.
6. **Redesign Guest Journeys for Reciprocity:** Curate experiences that invite contribution: restoration participation, heritage revitalization activities, local enterprise engagement, and reflective learning pathways.

Execution matters more than slogans. Regeneration becomes credible only when these priorities are structured, budgeted, measured, and communicated transparently. Equally important, leaders should define clear thresholds for trade-offs: where growth should slow, where visitation should be redistributed, and where restoration periods require temporary limits. Regeneration without boundary governance remains aspirational.

Implementation discipline is equally critical at portfolio level. Operators need cross-property learning systems, common definitions for restoration outcomes, and periodic external assurance that reported progress reflects real ecological and social change. Without this rigor, regeneration risks becoming a narrative premium without operational substance. With it, regeneration can become a source of strategic resilience, destination legitimacy, and brand trust.

Hospitality has always been about welcoming people. The next chapter is bigger: welcoming the future of places. Regeneration invites the sector to become a force that restores landscapes, revitalizes heritage, and renews trust between visitors and host communities.

If sustainability taught us to reduce harm, regeneration challenges us to create conditions for life to flourish. The real legacy of hospitality will be measured not only by what guests remember, but by what destinations become.

HYB

What Is This Place Asking of Us?

Sustainability vs regeneration

Amanda Ho
Co-Founder & CEO, Regenerative Travel

REGENERATIVE Travel

Amanda Ho argues that sustainability, while valuable, is no longer enough for a hospitality industry facing climate instability, biodiversity loss, and social inequity. Regeneration is proposed as a deeper, place-based paradigm that asks a fundamental question: "What is this place asking of us?" Instead of treating hotels as isolated assets, it frames them as actors within living systems of community, culture, and ecology, illustrated through examples like Fogo Island Inn, Basata Eco-Lodge, and African Bush Camps.

The hospitality industry finds itself at a defining moment, one in which the pressures of climate instability, biodiversity loss, cultural homogenization, and widening social inequities are no longer distant projections but present realities that directly shape the landscapes, communities, and destinations upon which tourism depends.

For more than two decades, sustainability has served as the guiding framework through which hospitality leaders have attempted to respond to these pressures, resulting in important operational improvements such as reduced energy consumption, water conservation systems, elimination of single-use plastics, carbon measurement initiatives, and increasingly sophisticated ESG reporting standards. These efforts represent meaningful progress and signal an industry that is capable of adaptation. Yet despite these advancements, the larger trajectory of environmental and social degradation has not fundamentally shifted, prompting a deeper and more uncomfortable reflection: is incremental sustainability sufficient in an era that demands systemic change?

Regeneration invites us to consider that it may not be. While sustainability often seeks to minimize harm and maintain balance within existing systems, regeneration challenges us to restore, renew, and actively strengthen the ecological and social systems in which hospitality businesses operate. It calls for a transition from doing "less bad" toward creating measurable positive impact, and at the center of this shift lies a deceptively simple but profoundly transformative inquiry:

WHAT IS THIS PLACE ASKING OF US?

This question moves us beyond standardized certifications and universal checklists and directs our attention instead toward context, relationship, and responsibility. Every hotel, lodge, resort, and tourism enterprise exists within a living web of relationships that includes watersheds, food systems, labor markets, local histories, cultural identities, and governance structures. A property is never an isolated economic unit; it is embedded within a dynamic and interdependent system whose health ultimately determines the long-term viability of the business itself.

Traditional sustainability metrics frequently prioritize efficiency by asking how energy use can be reduced, how waste can be diverted, or how emissions can be offset. 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 reframing strategic foresight in a world where destinations under strain from overtourism, resource depletion, housing pressures, and ecological degradation are becoming increasingly fragile. Hospitality brands that fail to account for these realities risk reputational erosion, operational instability, and long-term financial vulnerability. By contrast, those that intentionally align their operations with local regeneration build resilience, deepen community trust, and position themselves as long-term partners in the wellbeing of the places they inhabit.

Across the globe, a growing number of pioneers demonstrate that regeneration is not theoretical but operationally achievable when leadership is willing to think beyond conventional models of growth.

On Fogo Island in Canada, for example, Zita Cobb designed Fogo Island Inn not merely as a luxury property but as part of a broader economic and cultural strategy intended to revitalize the island's community. The inn reinvests profits locally, supports traditional boatbuilding and crafts, and integrates architecture that reflects vernacular heritage rather than imposing external aesthetics. In this model, the hotel functions as an anchor institution for place-based renewal rather than as a stand-alone commercial entity.

In Egypt, Sherif and Maria El-Ghamrawy established Basata Eco-Lodge decades before sustainability entered mainstream hospitality discourse, grounding their approach in simplicity, ecological sensitivity, and respectful integration with the surrounding Bedouin community. Their long-term presence illustrates how regenerative principles often emerge from humility and attentiveness to local context rather than from global branding strategies.

In Botswana, African Bush Camps has demonstrated how conservation, community ownership, and hospitality can reinforce one another by investing in locally owned lodges, education initiatives, and wildlife protection programs that ensure economic benefit and ecological stewardship advance together.

These examples, spanning continents and cultural contexts, underscore that regeneration is not a singular formula but a mindset that reshapes ownership structures, supply chains, hiring practices, guest engagement, and governance frameworks. They also demonstrate that regeneration can strengthen brand equity and guest loyalty precisely because it delivers authenticity and meaning, qualities increasingly sought by travelers who wish their journeys to contribute positively rather than extractively.

While much of the current industry dialogue focuses on achieving net zero emissions, an essential and urgent goal, regeneration encourages leaders to widen their perspective beyond carbon accounting alone. Carbon reduction is necessary, but it represents only one dimension of systemic health. A regenerative lens asks whether a property can contribute to biodiversity corridors, restore degraded soil, revive traditional crafts, support youth employment, or protect marine ecosystems, recognizing that environmental, cultural, and economic vitality are deeply intertwined.

Crucially, regeneration is inherently place-specific. The needs of a water-stressed Mediterranean island differ profoundly from those of a rainforest lodge in Costa Rica, a desert retreat in Namibia, or an urban heritage hotel in Southeast Asia. This reality requires leaders to engage in listening processes with communities, scientists, local governments, and Indigenous knowledge holders before determining strategy. Regeneration begins not with solutions but with understanding.

Because tourism intersects with transportation, agriculture, housing markets, infrastructure development, and governance systems, regenerative strategies must extend beyond property boundaries. They demand cross-sector collaboration and long-term commitments that transcend annual budget cycles. For executives accustomed to linear planning models, this systems-oriented approach may initially feel complex, yet complexity reflects the reality of the ecosystems and communities upon which hospitality depends. Ignoring that complexity does not reduce risk; it amplifies it.

Embedding regeneration into governance therefore becomes essential. This involves integrating place-based impact into board-level strategy, aligning performance indicators with long-term community and ecological outcomes, incentivizing leadership for enduring value creation rather than short-term extraction, and cultivating partnerships that expand influence beyond traditional hospitality silos.

Such integration also calls for a new leadership posture characterized by humility, curiosity, and the courage to question inherited assumptions about growth. Regenerative leadership acknowledges that scale without stewardship erodes the very foundations upon which hospitality is built, and it reframes profitability not as an isolated objective but as an outcome of alignment between business success and ecosystem health.

As regeneration gains visibility within industry discourse, there is, however, a growing risk that the term becomes diluted through superficial adoption. When regeneration is reduced to marketing language without structural change, it not only fails to deliver meaningful outcomes but also undermines trust among increasingly informed travelers and stakeholders. Authentic regeneration requires measurable commitments, transparent reporting, and a willingness to confront trade-offs honestly.

Ultimately, the regenerative question invites the hospitality industry into a more mature phase of evolution, one that recognizes tourism not merely as an economic driver but as a powerful force capable of shaping landscapes, livelihoods, and cultural narratives for generations. The question is not whether change is coming; it is whether the industry will lead that change intentionally.

If we are willing to ask what each place truly needs, and to align our operations accordingly, hospitality can become a force for healing rather than harm, resilience rather than depletion, and partnership rather than extraction.

The future of hospitality will not be defined solely by luxury standards, occupancy rates, or brand expansion strategies. It will be defined by whether we have the courage to embed regeneration at the heart of how we design, govern, and measure success, and whether we are prepared to listen when a place tells us what it is asking for.

HYB

What Hospitality Might Become

Post-sustainability

Yves Carnazzola
CEO, AxessImpact

AxessImpact

Yves Carnazzola argues that the real shift facing hospitality is not from sustainability to regeneration as competing trends, but from seeing hospitality as an industry managing impacts to seeing it as a participant in living systems. Regeneration is framed as a reorientation of purpose: from efficiency and control to coherence, shared responsibility, and place vitality, supported by new governance, financing, and accountability structures.

SUSTAINABILITY IS NOT THE ISSUE

Over the past two decades, hospitality has taken sustainability seriously. Real progress is visible. Environmental impacts are measured, energy use is tracked, emissions are calculated, supply chains are audited, and accountability is embedded in operations. Sustainability is no longer a goal; it is an expectation.

Sustainability emerged as a response to the excesses of mass tourism, where growth long ignored ecological limits, community well-being, and long-term resilience. It gave the industry a shared language for responsibility, along with practical tools to make impacts visible and align business practices with environmental and social concerns.

REGENERATION AS REORIENTATION, NOT REPLACEMENT

Despite this progress, an unease persists across the sector. The regenerative question did not arise because sustainability was ignored, but because something still feels incomplete. The gap is not one of intention. Many hospitality leaders, designers, operators, and teams care deeply about the places they work in and the futures they help shape. The tension lies in the growing mismatch between what sustainability enables hospitality to manage and what hospitality, as a lived and relational practice, actually shapes.

This unease points to a deeper question about what hospitality is understood to be, not just how it performs. Regeneration is increasingly described not as a refinement of sustainability, but as a shift in purpose toward creating conditions for life, continuity, and shared futures, rather than simply sustaining existing systems.

FROM CONTROL TO COHERENCE

This tension becomes visible at the edges of measurement and control. Sustainability has trained hospitality to focus on efficiency, reduction, and verification. It asks how impacts can be minimized, processes optimized, and performance measured. These questions are necessary, but not sufficient. They struggle to account for coherence, continuity, and relationship, or whether destinations become more resilient, communities gain agency, and ecosystems recover beyond reporting cycles.

What matters is not only what happens, but how patterns of interaction build and carry forward.

HOSPITALITY AS A LIVING SYSTEM

Regeneration should enter the conversation not as a new label or higher standard, but as a different question altogether. It asks whether hospitality should continue to see itself as an industry that manages impacts, or as a participant in living systems. In this view, hospitality is embedded in places that evolve over time, shaping relationships, meanings, and long-term trajectories, not only material flows.

A mechanistic approach treats hospitality as a system to be controlled and optimized against fixed targets. A living-systems perspective starts from interdependence and feedback, where care emerges through balance, diversity, and adaptation rather than predefined outcomes. This difference cannot be resolved through better metrics alone. It invites hospitality to reconsider how responsibility is shared, how value is recognized, and how decisions are coordinated among interdependent actors.

Seen this way, regeneration is not a performance upgrade, but a compass that orients hospitality toward the conditions that allow places, communities, and ecosystems to remain alive.

THE GOVERNANCE GAP

Regeneration should not be a niche tourism product or specialized market segment. It is a broader way of rethinking how tourism is developed and governed. It relies on meaningful community involvement, shared capacity building, and inclusive decision-making, with visitors recognized as participants whose choices shape outcomes. Where sustainability works within existing structures to reduce harm, regeneration asks whether those structures support long-term aliveness.

In practice, this redistributes roles and responsibility across stakeholders. Communities, corporates, investors, public institutions, visitors, and ecosystems all play a part, with no single actor able to govern the system alone. This shift is visible where tourism is shaped from within communities. When tourism functions as a web of relationships rather than isolated activities, regenerative outcomes emerge more naturally. Yet not because they fail, but because governance and investment structures seldom support continuity.

This governance gap is mirrored by a structural financing gap. Regeneration unfolds across ecosystems, value chains, and communities, yet capital remains organized around isolated projects and single balance sheets. Activities that generate long-term ecological and social value, such as landscape restoration, community capacity-building, or cultural stewardship, are essential to hospitality resilience, yet remain underfunded because they do not fit conventional investment logics.

Addressing this mismatch requires a systemic and ecosystemic investing approach, where outcomes rather than outputs become the organizing principle. In this model, philanthropic, public, and private capital play complementary roles across a nonlinear value chain of impact. Financing becomes inseparable from poly-governance, with accountability distributed across the system rather than confined to individual balance sheets.

THE ACCOUNTABILITY PARADOX

At the heart of this challenge lies an accountability paradox. Regeneration is often assumed to resist measurement, as if holistic change and accountability were in conflict. In practice, regenerative hospitality requires more accountability, not less, but of a different kind. Instead of being externalized and transactional, accountability must be shared and sustained. Existing sustainability systems are effective at verifying compliance, yet struggle to support collective responsibility across actors, places, and time horizons.

Relational accountability means remaining answerable to shared consequences as conditions evolve, not only at moments of audit. Individual actors may optimize their own performance while systemic outcomes remain unaddressed. Regenerative hospitality therefore depends on evaluation approaches that combine measurement with learning and adaptation, supporting coordination rather than control.

This shift also changes how value is understood. Sustainability focuses on reducing harm. Regeneration focuses on the quality of relationships that allow value to circulate and endure. In living systems, value is maintained through diversity, reciprocity, and coherence. Hospitality moves from managing impacts to participating in vitality.

HUMAN–AI PARTNERSHIP

Such participation cannot be sustained by intention alone. It requires infrastructures that make contribution visible, responsibility shared, and outcomes legible without losing context or meaning. Outcome- and results-based financing across ecosystems depends on shared visibility, reference frames, and continuous learning across stakeholders. This is where digital commons become critical, not as platforms of extraction or control, but as shared governance infrastructure.

When paired with human–AI partnerships designed to support memory, coordination, and learning rather than prescription, digital systems help actors navigate complexity without flattening it. They retain place-based knowledge, qualitative insight, and historical context alongside quantitative signals, allowing responsibility to remain local while alignment across actors and time horizons becomes possible. Used this way, human–AI systems strengthen relational intelligence by helping practitioners see interdependencies, learn as conditions change, and remain accountable within shared living systems.

The regenerative question, then, is not whether hospitality should abandon sustainability, nor whether regeneration is the next trend. It is whether the sector is willing to reflect on the operating logics through which it acts. Sustainability taught hospitality how to manage impacts; regeneration asks what responsibility hospitality accepts for the worlds it helps shape.

FROM PRINCIPLES TO PRACTICE

For practitioners, the regenerative shift is less a question of intent than of infrastructure. Moving beyond impact management requires operating systems able to hold context, relationships, and shared responsibility, rather than treating impact as disconnected indicators.

This calls for place-aware environments where quantitative signals and qualitative insight coexist, linking short-term actions to longer-term outcomes and systemic effects.

Digital solutions matter here not as tools for optimization or control, but as enablers of agency. When human judgment is paired with AI that supports memory, coordination, and learning, decision-making can remain local while coherence across actors and time scales becomes possible. Such systems help practitioners stay attentive to changing conditions and remain accountable without reducing complexity to abstraction.

Embedding human–AI agency at the core of hospitality systems allows regeneration to move from aspiration into daily practice, not by replacing sustainability metrics, but by situating them within living contexts where responsibility, learning, and stewardship endure.

WHAT HOSPITALITY MIGHT BECOME

What hospitality might become is not a perfected industry, but a relational practice capable of holding complexity, responsibility, and care together. Its future will be shaped less by the sophistication of tools than by the coherence of the social, ecological, and institutional systems in which they are used.

Seen this way, regeneration extends beyond destinations themselves. By engaging hosts, practitioners, and visitors within living systems rooted in place and reciprocity, hospitality can influence how people experience responsibility beyond the duration of a stay. It does not seek to persuade, but to create conditions in which stewardship is lived.

Regeneration, then, is not a destination to reach or a model to complete. It is an ongoing commitment to remain attentive, responsive, and accountable to life as it unfolds through places, relationships, and the worlds hospitality helps shape.

HYB

When Hospitality shapes places, not just stays

Community stewardship

Diane Binder
Founder & CEO, Regenopolis

REGENOPOLIS

Regenerative hospitality reframes hotels from standalone assets into locally embedded infrastructures that strengthen ecosystems, communities, and destination resilience. Diane Binder argues that the real shift is from "doing less harm" to actively serving place – with independent and franchised hotels acting as catalysts for land restoration, cultural vitality, and shared prosperity, supported by new governance, measurement, and blended finance models.

For years, sustainability has been the hospitality industry's preferred language of responsibility. Reduce energy use; offset emissions; certify operations; report progress. And yet, wherever we look, the tensions are intensifying.

Destinations are grappling with climate shocks, water stress and biodiversity loss. Residents are pushing back against tourism that extracts more than it gives. Natural ecosystems are under mounting pressure. Infrastructure is strained. Workforces are fragile, seasonal, and increasingly hard to retain. In many places, the social license for tourism is wearing thin.

Regeneration matters because these are no longer marginal risks. They are structural. And hospitality sits at their intersection: at its best, hospitality can help restore degraded environments, revitalize local economies and foster meaningful relationships between guest and host communities. At its worst, it can accelerate the extraction and overuse of resources, erode local cultures and leave little economic benefit behind.

The regenerative question, then, is not whether hotels should "do better." It is whether hospitality can redefine its role: from an industry operating in places to an actor contributing to the resilience of places.

This question matters even more when we consider who actually shapes hospitality worldwide. Around half of global hotel room capacity, and the vast majority of hotel properties, is operated by small and medium-sized independent hotels ; roughly 60% of branded hotels globally operate under franchise models. In other words, hospitality is largely delivered by actors with a strong local footprint and often significant operational autonomy.

WHY LOCALLY EMBEDDED HOTELS CAN SHIFT DESTINATIONS

Hotels that are deeply rooted in their territories, whether independent, franchised or branded, occupy a unique position in destination ecosystems. They hire locally, source locally, influence land use and infrastructure needs, shape narratives of place, mediate relationships with residents, farmers, artisans, and municipalities. Their governance is closer to the ground, and their decisions are faster.

An independent hotel does not need thousands of rooms to influence food systems, water use, waste practices, cultural preservation, or land stewardship. It needs clarity about its role within a living system, and the courage to align operations accordingly. Regeneration does not require scale, but rather intention and coherence.

If hospitality is to become a lever for territorial resilience, it will not be through a handful of iconic flagships alone. It will be through thousands of independent hotels quietly reshaping how they relate to nature, community, and value creation.

WHAT REGENERATIVE HOSPITALITY IS, AND IS NOT

Regenerative hospitality is often misunderstood. It is not a greener version of business-as-usual. It is not an ESG upgrade. It is not a label, a certification, or a checklist.

At its core, regenerative hospitality treats the hotel not as a standalone asset, but as an enabling infrastructure within a living system.

This means a shift in perspective :

- From optimizing internal efficiency to strengthening external resilience
- From minimizing harm to actively contributing to ecosystem vitality
- From guest-centricity alone to stewardship of place

In a regenerative approach, hospitality becomes a catalyst: a space where people reconnect with nature, where cultural heritage is lived rather than displayed, where food, energy, water, and waste practices reinforce ecological cycles rather than break them.

Regenerative hospitality is an investment in the resilience of a territory: it considers hospitality as of service to the place. Through its practices, it enhances the resilience of assets, preserve destination attractiveness, mitigate physical climate risks as well as supply chain disruption risks; regenerative hospitality also delivers non-financial value such as social license to operate, ethical leadership, skills development and boost the entrepreneurial ecosystem of the destination.

What regenerative hospitality is not is equally important. It is not about copying a model. It is not about scaling a format. It is not about extracting value under a different narrative.

It is about designing hospitality as adjacent to public good, even when privately operated.

THE TENSION POINTS HOTELS CAN NO LONGER AVOID

Moving toward regeneration is a journey that requires shifting mindsets and paradigms, and exposing tensions. As outlined in the "Regenerative Moonshot" white paper launched by Regenopolis and Igarapé Institute alongside the World Economic Forum in Davos, four tension points emerge.

Financing is the first. Regeneration unfolds over long-time horizons vs. short-term profitability and cash-flow constraints. Hotels face daily trade-offs: occupancy growth vs. capacity within social and ecological boundaries, short-term returns vs. long-term restoration.

Governance follows closely. Many regenerative projects begin with strong founder vision, but resilience requires structures that protect purpose beyond individuals. The tension between control and stewardship becomes unavoidable.

Awareness and education present another challenge. Regenerative values are often experienced viscerally, through place, rhythm, and relationships, yet they must be transmitted consistently to staff, guests, partners, and investors without collapsing into slogans or compliance.

Measurement remains one of the most difficult frontiers. Traditional hospitality metrics capture financial performance and guest satisfaction, but regeneration also concerns biodiversity recovery, cultural vitality, social cohesion, and human transformation. Measuring everything risks reducing meaning; measuring too little risks losing credibility. And if we consider hospitality as part of a nested system, then how do we measure the ripple effect over land restoration, guest transformation, renewed dignity and well-being?

Across these operational challenges sit deeper paradoxes :

- Scale versus sufficiency
- Experience versus extraction
- Measurement versus meaning
- Governance versus control
- Capital velocity versus ecological time
- Well-being versus growth

Regenerative hospitality does not eliminate these tensions but has to work through them.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

In practice, regenerative hospitality takes many forms. No two territories are the same.

In Brazil, the Ibiti Project illustrates what long-horizon territorial stewardship can look like when hospitality is embedded within a broader regenerative ecosystem. There, hospitality revenue supports land restoration, local entrepreneurship, cultural programming, and education. The hotel is not the project; it is one function within it.

In southern Morocco, the work developed through 700'000 heures Impact around Tizkmoudine shows a different pathway. Micro-hospitality operates as a catalytic lever in a fragile rural context, helping revive an abandoned village, restore oasis-based agroecology, support women-led cooperatives, and preserve cultural memory. Scale is deliberately limited; impact is not, if supported the right way for long-lasting effects and replication.

These examples are not blueprints. They illustrate logics: hospitality as accelerator and catalyst, not extractive engine; guests as participants, not consumers; revenue as enabler, not endpoint.

What matters is not their form, but what they reveal: place is the teacher.

(c) 700,000 heures Impact, Tizkmoudine, Morocco

HOW HOTELS CAN MOVE THROUGH THE TENSIONS

Emerging practice points toward three converging pathways.

First, impact models must follow the regenerative journey, not only KPIs. Measurement should track pressures and progress across nested systems - ecological, social, economic - without pretending everything can be reduced to a dashboard.

Second, governance must evolve toward stewardship. Purpose needs legal, financial, and cultural protection. Freedom to experiment works only when boundaries are clear and trusted.

Third, financing must diversify. Regenerative hospitality cannot rely on a single balance sheet. Blended capital, combining hospitality revenues with philanthropy, public finance, impact investment, and emerging nature-based mechanisms, is essential.

AN OPEN INVITATION

Regenerative hospitality is not a destination. It is a way of organizing relationships over time.

What the sector needs now is not a perfect model, but shared direction and connections.

If enough hotels, across ownership models, geographies, and cultures, anchor their decisions in place, align around common principles, and share learning openly, something larger can emerge: a constellation of regenerative territories, connected by practice rather than standardization.

Hotels should ask a simple question: what does this place need to thrive, and how can hospitality help?

Hospitality will not solve the crises of our time. But it can become something better than it is today. As an industry that touches land, food, culture, labour and imagination at once, it is a powerful lever for transformation and a force for planetary regeneration. This makes them powerful coordination nodes, often more agile that public institutions and more grounded than global platforms.

HYB

Values over value: adding to place rather than extracting from it

Tourism growth paradox

David Leventhal
Founder and CEO, Playa Viva

Interviewed by **Willy Legrand**
Professor, IU International University of Applied Sciences Germany

PLAYA VIVA

David Leventhal challenges tourism's "growth is always good" mindset, arguing that low-density, values-driven, regenerative hospitality can deliver both better guest experiences and stronger profitability. He explains how Playa Viva optimises resources, rebuilds degraded landscapes, involves local communities, and experiments with inclusive pricing models, while also tackling tough questions on aviation emissions, greenwashing, and how to scale without becoming extractive.

David Leventhal is the founder of Playa Viva, a regenerative hospitality project on Mexico's Pacific coast that has evolved from 5 rooms in 2008 to 20 rooms today, with expansion plans to Cabo San Lucas and the Dominican Republic. He is also a founder of RegenerativeTravel.com, a platform for connecting travelers with independent hotels that are rooted in community to enable people, nature, and culture to thrive. I wanted to probe whether regenerative practice can truly transform tourism's growth logic—or whether it risks becoming another form of laundering for an extractive industry.

***Editor**: Playa Viva exists within Mexico's tourism economy, which is, as most other economies, fundamentally organized around growth, extraction, and commodification of place. You've chosen to work within that system rather than outside it. Are you planning to have Playa Viva scaled to influence the broader industry and is there a point of paradox, also in the 'regenerative system' where success paradoxically intensify tourism pressure on the very ecosystems and communities you're trying to protect? In other words, at what point does regenerative practice become a sophisticated laundering mechanism for tourism's fundamental logic?*

David: Great question. Let's deconstruct it and then construct our response.

Quality vs Quantity – When considering growth and extraction as a model for tourism vs a model closer to what we have done at Playa Viva", while you state in your question that we have "chosen to work within that system", it begs the question, do we have a choice? The system exists as is, the real question is, "how can we be part of fixing that system?" Or, in regenerative terms, how are we part of "harmonizing" with the current system while being a part of the transformation to a new system?

Five points I would like to make:

1. Quality vs. quantity is at the core of many tourism debates now. Tourism has evolved from the diversion of the wealthy who could afford to travel, or the itinerant traveler who chose it as a way of life. Travel was also for business, to trade goods that were only available from faraway places. Business travel has evolved as the nature of work has transformed, but leisure travel is still about going to that distant place to "experience" the place. Mass tourism has likewise transformed the place. Travelers arrive in huge buses or cruise ships, have that "been there, seen that" moment, snap the photo, and move on to the next location. But are they really experiencing the place? The people? The food? The culture? The way of living? The landscape?

As you walk out to the beach under the dark sky at Playa Viva, you see more stars than you have seen in a long time, then notice the fireflies flirting in the trees, and finally, as you approach the water, bioluminescence dancing on the shore for you. That is what I mean by truly experiencing a place.

2. Quantity vs. quality also brings up the argument of exclusivity. If you make travel about quality, then those who pay more, the wealthy, are the only ones who can have that experience. That is a false argument put forward by those who want mass tourism to fill buses, bigger boats, and larger hotels.

First, many experiences, like camping, are affordable to all. Second, limiting access to a place can be done in a way that is inclusive of all people, regardless of their status, wealth, accessibility, etc. Finally, often what makes the experience special is that you are not surrounded by a mob. Everyone who has been to the Fontana di Trevi in Rome knows the "cost" of that picture of "just you" in front of the fountain.

3. False Dichotomy (False assumption that growth is always good, or "Values vs. Value") – Take Butler's Model of the Tourism Area Cycle of Evolution, as published in *Mexico Daily News* recently: "One aspect of the model that has become more relevant over time," Butler has written since his theory was first published, "is the relationship implied between level of use and quality of experience."

This means that the more people that come to a destination, the more likely they are to degrade the quality of the natural attractions that spurred tourism in the first place. So, while the "exclusivity paradox" might seem like a choice between limiting visitors (and thus raising prices, cutting costs, or accepting lower margins), the paradox is really that an increase in visitors may result in a *decrease* in profits.

Also, pricing is not a linear, either/or option; that is, it is not simply "I raise my prices by 50% (or cut my costs by 50%) to overcome a 50% drop in visitors in order to maintain margins." Another way to look at this, arithmetically, is that if we drop the prices for some and raise the prices for others, we can increase profits *and* the quality of the experience.

The old paradigm is that everyone sitting around the bar at the ultra-luxury hotel wants to be investment bankers talking to CEOs. The new regenerative luxury is more like wealthy VCs wanting to sit around the table with entrepreneurs of modest means who have great ideas, alongside seasoned team members, to build success for the future.

So think of pricing as a bell curve with a few who are very wealthy, many who can afford it, and some who cannot and are subsidized.

The discussion around the bar is now more about *values* than *value* - how do we add value to the place rather than how do we extract value from the place; and guests have a better travel experience as a result. Playa Viva is thriving with this model of a wide variety of price points, low density, and high-quality experiences that result in a high return rate for customers and thus higher profitability.

4. As Anthony Bourdain so eloquently stated, “Travel is not reward for working, it is education for living.”

By equating travel as a reward, an end in itself, we forget the real value of travel, as it was when humans first migrated to faraway places for trade as well as that sense of discovery and immersion in a people and place. Regenerative travel brings us back to that core value of travel. Emphasising quality over quantity, all travelers have a better experience; more importantly, the place has a better experience.

5. During COVID, places that were over-touristed were able to take a “breather” and realize how much better the quality of life was for residents. Those who extracted the value of overtourism were the only real losers in such a “quality-focused” tourism scenario. This became evident after calls and meetings between Regenerative Travel and the Hawai‘i Tourism Authority.

Editor: *Let us talk about scale. You have grown over the years and have plans to expand further. At what point does scaling a regenerative model contradict the principles of place-based, low-impact tourism? Is not geographic expansion just distributing the same extractive logic across more territories? Is there an inherent paradox?*

David: As for scaling Playa Viva, we are definitely looking at how to best scale so that Playa Viva can continue to be a model for regenerative hospitality. Scale in our current location is about growing to meet demand, fill capacity, balance absorption, ensure reliable employability, consider the availability of water, and address so many other factors. Playa Viva started with only 5 rooms in 2008; as of 2025 we have 20 rooms, with plans to build more.

We are also scaling to other locations. Through a partnership called *Regenerative Collection*, we are working with values-aligned landowners near Cabo San Lucas (within one hour from the airport) who want a legacy project similar to Playa Viva, but specific to their place.

We are also scaling by working internationally, beyond Mexico. We are currently working on an 800-hectare master-planned regenerative tourism development near Miches in the Dominican Republic. Each of these projects has its challenges; each looks to Playa Viva as a model for “doing it right” — that is, you can do well while doing good.

Paradox? What paradox? This part of the question assumes that scale, quantity, is required for success and impact on the industry.

The real paradox is that sustainability and regeneration are good for business. Sustainability, at its core, is about saving water, saving energy, and managing supply chains and waste streams more efficiently which, from a P&L perspective, delivers higher margins. Regeneration is more about looking at the balance sheet and thinking about long-term investment and return on investment.

Simple examples are hotels I have seen that were not designed with the impacts of nature (water and sun principally) in mind, and the result is higher operating costs. Additionally, the cost of climate change is hitting bottom lines through higher insurance costs, higher costs of repairs after extreme weather, etc. Regeneration is a long-term investment. We look at it similarly to regenerative agriculture. We invest in creating fertile soil.

Rather than spend money on pesticides that kill the microorganisms necessary for healthy soil so we can have short-term gains in yields but be left with inert (dead) dirt, we invest in healthy soil that has all the nutrients and microorganisms to generate healthy food for all of us. This is the investment of regeneration — in food, in travel, in whatever — and that is the real paradox.

Editor*: There are some hard-to-abate issues in tourism — aviation emissions being the most obvious. Many of your guests fly internationally to reach Playa Viva. How do you reconcile the climate impact of air travel with regenerative principles?*

David: Paradoxically, many of our guests fly to get here, and flying has a carbon footprint. But to say that flying alone cancels out everything good that happens when tourism is done right is wrong. As the American Southernism goes, “Don’t throw out the baby with the bathwater."

In the book *Drawdown* by Paul Hawken, it analyses the biggest climate levers such as refrigerants, plant-based diets, and educating girls as top points of change. Travel does not show up until number 76. Let us stop the flight shaming and focus on the issues that address the top 75 items first. Suggesting that this single factor negates the substantial positive outcomes of responsible tourism is a gross oversimplification. Our goal is not to discourage people from experiencing the world, but to ensure that when they do travel, their trips actively finance critical initiatives in the destinations they visit.

Editor: *I will be direct: at what point does regenerative practice become sophisticated laundering for tourism's fundamental logic? Consumer-facing sustainability claims are notoriously prone to greenwashing. What prevents "regenerative" from becoming just another marketing term that is functionally meaningless?*

David: Sophisticated laundering – what does that even mean? I would suppose this is the greenwashing, sustain-washing, and thus laundering via regen-washing. While the saying goes, "Let the buyer beware," I am a believer that you can fool people one time, but in the long term consumers will see through any "laundering." Given a consumer market that is reliant on guest reviews, laundering will only backfire on those who are not true to their brand messaging.

Similarly, hotel companies, large and small, realize that the next generation of talent is looking to work for causes, not companies — and if the company *is* a cause, then all the better. As hospitality companies, we are in the service business and rely on having teams made of the best and the brightest. Hospitality companies see that the trend is towards regenerative and values-aligned hospitality. Beyond losing brand value by laundering, they lose out on their key to the future: the next generation.

I agree that there will always be a place for a generic box-hotel experience, but hotels are going back to their roots of travel, immersion in the luxury of nature and place and people.

Editor: *Development inherently transforms landscapes. "Sealing of soil" is one of tourism's structural problems, when new hotels are built and take away soil biodiversity. How does Playa Viva's physical expansion avoid this?*

David: When I first started down the path of regenerative development for Playa Viva with Bill Reed and Regenesis Group, I too started with the assumption that building means destroying. Bill said something that still resonates with me today: "In 99% of cases, where we build, we, as humans, have degraded that place, and if we understand how that place was degraded, then we can understand our role in bringing back the abundance that was once there."

This is the process of *History of Place*, and through that process we define a solution that is not "sealing soil" but rather unsealing soil, bringing back water and life to that soil, and developing in a way that nourishes life and abundance in that place. Real "greenfields" very rarely exist. Playa Viva, while a natural landscape, was once dense low coastal forest, thriving with life, but humans degraded it via slash-and-burn agriculture and cattle ranching. We have regenerated that low coastal forest while building a thriving hotel that is also regenerating the local community and watershed. Thus we are proving that you do not have to "seal the soil" but rather "heal the soil."

Editor: *Thank you, David. You have made a compelling case for regeneration as good business and for working within the system to transform it.*

HYB

Where Will You Place Your First Needle?

Destination regeneration

Mahé Besson
Project manager, 7Generations

7Generations

Using Camiguin Island in the Philippines as a living laboratory, Mahe Besson explores regenerative tourism through the metaphor of acupuncture: small, precise interventions that unlock a destination's own capacity to heal. Rather than rebuilding systems from scratch, she argues for carefully chosen "acupuncture points" such as teaching resorts, youth ocean programs, and co-created (un)Summits that let local ecosystems and communities regain their flow.

Last September I joined a small team with a big dream: transforming Camiguin Island in the Philippines into a living model of regenerative tourism. So far, our journey has been filled with more questions than answers. What does regeneration mean in the tourism context? How do we practice it? What does it take for an entire destination to become regenerative?

These questions alone can feel overwhelming. Add to that existing patterns, entrenched power structures, and economic pressures, and meaningful system-wide change can seem impossibly distant. On Camiguin Island, home to just 100,000 people, these challenges are strikingly present. In our conversations with local hospitality providers, we keep bumping into the same primary concern: making ends meet. We believe many change makers in the tourism industry worldwide face similar tensions.

So how do we start making regenerative tourism a reality?

As we asked this question to regenerative development experts and practitioners, one image surfaced repeatedly: acupuncture. At first, it seemed surprising. But the more we reflected, the clearer the parallel became. Acupuncture offers a powerful analogy for both understanding and practicing regenerative tourism.

Consider how acupuncture works. In traditional Chinese medicine, health arises from balanced Qi, the vital life force flowing through the body. When this flow is disturbed, the acupuncturist does not perform surgery or prescribe medication. Instead, they insert thin needles at carefully chosen points, stimulating the body's innate capacity to heal itself. 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.

The holistic perspective is crucial. An acupuncturist views the body as an interconnected whole and always starts a session by asking questions. Lots of questions. Some seemingly unrelated to the presenting symptom. This is because they know that disparate cues may point to a common underlying imbalance. And so, treating a headache might involve needling a point on the foot.

Similarly, regenerative tourism requires developing a deep, nuanced understanding of the living system that makes up the destination. At 7Generations, we believe this means listening to all voices—human and non-human alike. The wise grandmother, the dream-filled teenager, and the ocean are all part of the system's wholeness. Making decisions without integrating these diverse perspectives inevitably creates blockages in the life force of a place.

But here's what makes the acupuncture analogy truly liberating: a few well-placed needles are enough to activate healing capacities. In other words, small, precise interventions catalyze systemic transformation. This, transposed in the tourism context, frees us from the paralyzing belief that we must rebuild everything from scratch.

Most tourism destinations have decades, even centuries, of history. The fantasy of starting with a blank slate is not just unrealistic; it misses the point entirely. Regeneration isn't about demolition and reconstruction. It's about designing thoughtfully crafted and precisely targeted actions that will create conditions and impulses for the whole system to shift and transform.

This invites us to start now, to learn by doing. Whether you're building a new hospitality venture or transforming an existing organization, you don't need to wait for perfect conditions or complete consensus. All you need is to identify your first acupuncture point, that one strategic intervention that can help catalyze broader transformation.

On Camiguin, we're already experimenting with several such points. The Malambo Ocean Lodge is becoming a teaching resort, offering vocational training in regenerative tourism to local youth. Our Guardians for the Blue initiative invites children and communities to grow their relationship with the ocean and become its guardians. And this November, we're hosting a Regenerative Tourism (un)Summit. This participant-driven gathering will bring together practitioners from Camiguin, the Philippines, and beyond to share knowledge and forge connections.

Are these three initiatives perfect? No. Are they enough to transform the entire island? Not yet. But each represents a carefully chosen point that gives impulses for transformation. Each creates space for local wisdom and dreams to emerge and for regenerative practices to take root and grow organically. The acupuncture approach keeps reminding us of something vital: we're not here to fix the system. The place itself—its ecosystems, its community, its culture—holds the healing power. Our role is to remove blockages and to create conditions where life can flourish.

The transformation of tourism toward regeneration won't happen overnight. It will happen needle by needle, point by point, as more of us learn to read the landscape, identify where life wants to flow, and create the conditions for that flow to restore itself.

So we ask you: Where will you place your first needle?

Green sprouts of hope in the regeneration question

Measurement & impact

Natasha Montesalvo
Director of Research and Policy and Principal Consultant – Destinations, Strategy and Insights, EarthCheck

Starting from her own skepticism, Dr Natasha Montesalvo explores where regenerative tourism is already moving from rhetoric to reality, highlighting destinations and hotels that build regeneration into governance, design, and operations from day one. Through examples like Red Sea Global, Capella Ubud, Maroma and TTNQ's Reforest partnership, she shows that measurable positive impact on ecosystems and communities is possible – but only when strong policy, thoughtful design, and long-term performance tracking replace vague "do good" intentions.

To be honest, when I first started exploring regenerative tourism, I was a non-believer. How, in a system that traditionally champions visitor numbers and growth over all else, can we promote outcomes that leave the world better than we found it?

EarthCheck's White Paper defines regenerative tourism as a step beyond sustainability - *a process where the tourism sector stakeholders, collectively, exert care and guardianship (through decision-making and practices) for the improvement and enhancement of natural, human and human-made [built] elements when moving to, visiting, living or operating in a destination. In so doing, it would allow the above elements to exceed their current survivability conditions.*

Again, this raises the question, if we are yet to master sustainable action – do no harm – how is it that we can lead to a position of more good?

Despite the scepticism, there are pockets of hope where tourism acts as a force for good, and regenerative outcomes are evident.

GOVERNANCE

Where we are seeing meaningful regenerative outcomes, vision and ambition are rooted in the structures and systems that govern the destination. For example, Red Sea Global, Saudi Arabia, has embedded regenerative principles across all facets of planning, development and operation. From coral restoration and mangrove planting to youth empowerment and low-impact resorts, the mandate was set from the outset and guided every decision and action since. The outcomes: a social impact of more than 120,000 jobs, a 40% Saudi workforce target, significant protected conservation areas, and more than 1 million mangroves planted to restore coastal ecosystems. Here, regeneration matters and impact is measured.

At a business level, for those starting a new enterprise, it can mean embedding regenerative processes from design, ensuring no biodiversity loss, and utilising passive design strategies, including the purposeful use of building orientation and layout to promote natural ventilation, shading, and insulation. A great example is Capella Ubud, Indonesia. During this project build, the surrounding forest was untouched; no trees cut down, and landscape unaltered. An array of organic Indigenous vegetables, spices, and herbs were planted and utilised by chefs. Green and food waste is turned into compost to replenish garden soil and reduce the property's ecological footprint. The camp was decorated with refurbished vintage and antique furniture and art, telling stories of tradesmen and artists from the 1800s.

It's not just new builds that can embed these principles; the redevelopment of Maroma, A Belmond Hotel, is a beautiful example. Situated in Mexico's Riviera Maya, the team worked with local artisans to honour heritage. Through the redevelopment process the property's original design and architecture, including its white stucco buildings which are aligned with Sacred Geometry of Mayan masonry, were preserved and revitalised. The design is made more sustainable by incorporating energy-efficient fixtures and appliances. All materials used internally are eco-friendly and high quality. These projects, new and old, demonstrate a commitment to regeneration can lead to powerful outcomes.

YOU CAN'T MANAGE WHAT YOU DON'T MEASURE

Where regeneration is a step beyond sustainability it is important to understand performance to shape outcomes that leave businesses and destinations better off. We need more than thoughts and prayers. Measurement of outcomes maintains focus and provides fertile ground for refinement and innovative ideas.

Ultimately, regeneration is a long-term process, measurement is not a set-and-forget and we will not understand the true regenerative nature of action for several years. Without measurement over time, regenerative claims risk becoming greenwash. A sustainable foundation, combined with intentional efforts to reverse damage and build positive capacity, is essential if regenerative tourism is to deliver its promise.

We see this in practice with Tourism Tropical North Queensland's (TTNQ) partnership with Reforest. The primary focus is to use tourism to protect the endangered Mabi Forest, to restore habitat for threatened species. TTNQ encourages events and members to use the Reforest program to incorporate regenerative actions into their experiences. They host annual planting days for industry to get hands-on experience and see the impact on the ground. To date, the partnership has seen 18 TTNQ members plant over 5,600 trees.

WHAT'S NEXT

So, what does the future of regeneration look like? Ideally, it is part of a system that promotes positive impact across communities, economies, and environments above traditional growth and demand led approaches. Regeneration can flourish where business practices, and destination policies and plans champion measured, managed approaches to tourism that prioritise the needs of locals, embrace tourism as a force for good, and where visitors contribute positively to the aspirations of place, leaving them measurably better than we found them.

What Regeneration Asks of Hospitality

Conservation and communities

O'Shannon Burns
Founder, Aurora Collective and Program Director, Cornell University

O'Shannon Burns argues that regeneration in hospitality is not a new label for sustainability or a framework to "roll out," but an emergent, place-based practice grounded in relationships between people, land, culture, and more-than-human life. Drawing on global regenerative futures research, the article outlines four key orientations and challenges hospitality leaders to move from aspirational impact language toward honest accountability and structural change.

Across hospitality and tourism, the language of regeneration is spreading quickly. Hotels, destinations, and travel brands are exploring what it might mean to move beyond sustainability—seeking ways to restore ecosystems, deepen community benefit, and create travel experiences that give back more than they take.

Academic research, including work by Loretta Bellato and Anna Pollock, has cautioned against reducing regenerative tourism to a framework, certification, or performance model, instead emphasizing it as an emergent, place-based process grounded in living systems. In parallel, practitioner communities are experimenting with how regenerative thinking might be integrated into tourism models in context rather than standardized.

Yet regeneration is being interpreted in sharply different ways. Some regard it as little more than sustainability reframed in new language, while others seek to translate it into familiar industry tools including metrics, standards, and certification systems designed to demonstrate progress. Both responses attempt to make regeneration legible within existing sustainability paradigms, even as they risk narrowing its meaning.

This persistence of simplified interpretations raises a more fundamental question for hospitality: if regeneration is not simply sustainability renamed, nor a program to implement, what does regeneration actually ask of the sector?

In 2024, I joined nine multidisciplinary researchers in a global inquiry into regenerative futures commissioned by Unearthodox. Rather than defining regeneration, we gathered lived experiences, tensions, and place-based practices that reveal it as relational, more-than-human, and deeply contextual. From this work, four orienting ideas emerged that illuminate how hospitality leaders might more authentically engage with regeneration.

REGENERATION IS NOT SOMETHING TO BE DESIGNED INTO HOSPITALITY SYSTEMS, IT IS SOMETHING THAT MAY OR MAY NOT BE ALLOWED TO EMERGE

In the regenerative futures work, we deliberately avoided defining regeneration through academic or business models, and instead oriented inquiry toward communities, lifeways, and everyday practices where regenerative principles are already being lived. From this perspective, regeneration is not something hospitality can engineer or install. It emerges when relationships between people, place, culture, and more-than-human life are healthy, reciprocal, and allowed to unfold over time.

Hospitality's role, then, is not to "do" regeneration, but to understand whether its practices are supporting or undermining the conditions that allow regeneration to exist. In Peru's Parque de la Papa, regenerative practice began not with the design of visitor experiences but with long-term investment in biocultural governance, Indigenous knowledge, and collective community process. Only from this foundation did distinctive hospitality offerings emerge, including a culinary experience rooted in traditional foodways and women's entrepreneurship. These experiences are designed to support Indigenous knowledge systems, community leadership models, and food systems, demonstrating how tourism and hospitality can grow out of living culture rather than attempt to manufacture it.

REGENERATION CANNOT BE LED BY A SINGLE WORLDVIEW, NOR BY A SMALL GROUP OF DESIGNATED LEADERS

The concept of the pluriverse, rooted in decolonial and Indigenous scholarship, challenges the assumption that knowledge must converge into one coherent model, often shaped by Western institutions. Across the research, regeneration consistently appeared not as a single pathway or model, but as many coexisting practices shaped by place, culture, history, and more-than-human relationships.

Hospitality operates in daily proximity to communities and living systems that are themselves experts in survival, adaptation, and care. A pluriversal approach shifts attention and authority toward those closest to place—listening not for universal solutions, but for locally grounded knowledge and community visions of regenerative futures that hospitality may be called to support.

As those in hospitality seek to be regenerative practitioners, it is important to value this place-based knowledge and intentionally widen the circle of voices shaping regenerative tourism and hospitality, especially those whose knowledge comes from lived experience, community stewardship, and non-Western worldviews.

REGENERATION IS PRACTICED

Regeneration does not primarily reveal itself through outcomes, frameworks, or stated commitments. It is practiced. Across the research, regenerative capacity showed up in everyday lifeways and rituals—how people move through place, set limits, share responsibility, and sustain relationships over time. These practices are quiet, relational, and deeply place-based, and they lose meaning when abstracted into models or scaled as "best practice."

At the same time, the research surfaced a real tension. Regeneration unfolds in ways that performance frameworks often struggle to capture. In my own experience, data and analysis can be powerful tools for seeing more clearly by helping us understand patterns, relationships and the real impact of decisions over time. It can support learning and accountability, but it cannot substitute for relationship or fully capture whether or not regenerative capacity is strengthening.

For hospitality, this lens reframes the role of metrics. The question is not whether to measure, but what measurement is in service of. Regenerative practice asks hotels and destinations to treat metrics as feedback while attending equally to relational, cultural, and ecological signals that remain largely invisible to quantitative measurement. These subtler signals—trust, reciprocity, ecological vitality, community consent—are essential to regenerative practice.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Mauriora Systems Framework (MSF) offers a concrete expression of pluriversality within tourism and hospitality governance. Developed in the 1990s by Māori planning scholar Hirini Mutunga to evaluate social, cultural, spiritual, and environmental impacts, the framework centers concepts such as kaitiaki (guardianship), taonga (valued relationships and resources), tikanga (right practice), and mauri (life force) as the basis for decision-making. Applied to tourism planning, the MSF shifts the sector beyond consultation or cultural inclusion toward integrating Māori worldview into the fundamental systems that guide development, management, and long-term strategy. In doing so, it demonstrates how regenerative hospitality requires holding multiple knowledge systems in relationship rather than collapsing them into a single universal logic.

CONFRONTING PERSISTENT HARMFUL ACTIONS

In many efforts to advance regeneration, attention naturally centers on restoration, renewal, and positive impact. But when the underlying harms shaping relationships between tourism, land, and communities remain unexplored, the conditions required for regeneration cannot emerge. The regenerative futures research took this inquiry around “persistent harmful actions” as a deliberate mandate, engaging directly with the structural, historical, and normalized forms of harm that continue to shape relationships between land, communities, and economic systems. This process was demanding and uncomfortable, requiring us to slow down, question assumptions, and remain with uncertainty rather than rush toward solutions. Yet it also revealed that confronting persistent harm may be among the most consequential aspects of regenerative practice, because regeneration cannot take hold where underlying patterns of extraction continue unchecked.

For hospitality, this lens shifts the conversation from aspiration to accountability asking not only how positive impact might be created, but how the sector must reckon with its own history and present-day role in harm. Tourism has, in many contexts, been intertwined with the displacement of communities in the creation of protected areas, the erosion of coastal ecosystems for large-scale development, and the commodification of local cultures and livelihoods. Regenerative practice therefore requires more than improvement or mitigation, but instead for the explicit recognition of these histories and a willingness to transform or relinquish the arrangements that continue to reproduce them.

Although many safari operators and hospitality companies emphasize their investments in conservation across the African continent, the industry’s dominant narratives often render local communities invisible, or minimize their knowledge, stewardship, and historical relationship to land. Many reporters have noted how tourism companies focused solely or primarily on pristine nature exclude living cultures and contemporary realities, narrowing what is recognized as worthy of protection or care—an argument explored powerfully by Lebawit Lily Girma. At the same time, research by my Unearthodox co-author Wangũi wa Kamonji documented how conservation models have removed Indigenous and pastoralist communities from ancestral lands while positioning tourism as a primary beneficiary of those landscapes. Together, these examples reveal a pattern of persistent harms—including displacement from ancestral lands, the erasure or marginalization of local knowledge and culture, and the concentration of power and benefit outside the communities most connected to place—in which tourism has played a material role. Supporting regenerative tourism therefore requires openly acknowledging these realities and committing to programs and practices that not only prevent further harm but work to repair relationships and transform the systems through which damage has occurred.

For hospitality leaders, this is both a challenge and an opening: a call to listen more closely to place, confront harm more directly, and allow new forms of practice to emerge over time. Regeneration asks less for new strategies than for a deeper honesty about the relationships that sustain hospitality itself and whether the sector is willing to transform the relationships on which it depends.

A Mindset Shift for Resilience and Prosperity in Hospitality

Nature-based solutions

Maribel Esparcia Pérez
COO, Honest Operations

Maribel Esparcia Pérez argues that hospitality asset management must move beyond extractive, short-term models toward regenerative, resilient systems that account for climate risk, ecosystem health, and community wellbeing. Using examples like Casa Leonardo and Coron Natural Farms, she shows how regenerative practices can protect asset value, strengthen local resilience, and align with emerging financial and regulatory frameworks.

The future of hospitality is shaped by critical challenges, including geopolitical tensions, climate change, economic fluctuations, digitalization, and the evolving needs and preferences of travelers. In this context, asset management and ownership have two pathways: either a reactive approach to respond to evolving regulations, disruptions, and supply chain shocks, or a proactive approach where businesses and communities collaborate to build resilience and wellbeing. The industry is challenged by the urgency to adapt to a rapidly changing landscape. In the years to come, hotels will experience technology implementation at scale, generational behavioural changes, and diverse guest expectations.

The evolution from the early days, when the hospitality industry began to consciously realize the externalities caused by the hotel activity and the corporate social responsibility movement, has now expanded into a comprehensive structure, especially in multinational companies, franchises, and multi-destination brands. Furthermore, more business schools and academia have incorporated sustainability as a critical subject in tourism and hotel management degrees and master's studies. These advancements and the infrastructure created around (certification bodies, international associations, and activism) allowed progress; however, systems and industry dynamics have not changed at the pace needed. The hospitality sector depends on an extractive model and systems that are causing irreversible damage to destinations and ecosystems. Accelerating change is required to rethink systems and adopt change management approaches focused on regeneration. An example of a lodging leading by example is Casa Leonardo where the team created *Gratitude Pallars* to maximise impact prevention measures (avoid and minimise) over corrective measures (restoration and offset), balancing development priorities with the conscious use of natural resources. They created micro-reserves managed under the guise of private nature reserves with biodiversity and heritage conservation projects. Another example presented recently by Susana Santos de Cardenas: *'In the tourism hotspot of Coron, Palawan, Coron Natural Farms (CNF) demonstrates that regenerative resilience is the ultimate safety net against global disruption. Regarding sovereignty and food security, the CNF established a circular food security net that sustained the community even when global imports stalled.'*

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. Regeneration is not merely about creating life, but also about preserving it in communities and ecosystems around the assets. It should not be forgotten that human and planetary health are inseparable, and this not only sharpens our sense of urgency, but a mindset shift and understanding allow hospitality leaders to change the agenda on how we operate, invest, and develop hotels.

For instance, if transactions of assets in coastal areas are analysed, is the real value of a property like it is assumed to be once we factor in physical, reputational, and transitional climate-related risks? If we use IPCC projections, a potential climate-related discount can be applied due to water-related physical risks to the asset and the operations (such as sea level rise (SLR)). It can represent millions in hidden costs. An example of imminent risk in the European hotels market is that assets in 68 regions are projected to experience high or extremely high water stress, containing 2.19 million hotel rooms (36.1% of EU capacity). Exposure is highly concentrated in Mediterranean countries. Often, obtaining place-based data is critical for the hotel industry to understand and measure local impacts and challenges. Only context-based data helps us to build the agenda. The European Central Bank has now embedded climate and nature-related risks into core financial risk frameworks, confirming that, for instance, water-related risks are among the most material for the euro-area economy and strengthening climate risk data for credit entities.

At the asset level, crisis-proof operational resilience is fundamental. The risks present a threat to living systems, local communities, and economies. A lack of contingency plans can leave an asset non-insurable. Only the costs of extreme weather events are estimated to be 143 billion per year attributable to climatic change. How do we replenish and rebuild ecosystems with our hotel operations? How do we ensure asset proof and resilience to extreme weather events, pandemics and other social and economic risks in the coming years? From the last World Economic Forum Risk Report, extreme weather leading short-term concerns, biodiversity loss, and critical change to earth systems dominate the upcoming years.

One of the main challenges is to scale best practices. Current standards and reporting frameworks often have a tick box exercise that lacks local understanding and accountability for all the risks and peculiarities of the place (such as indigenous voices or local traditions). Assets whose value increases over time will be those that demonstrate resilience and proactivity in creating life within communities, protecting local culture and tradition, as well as ensuring business continuity and climate resilience. Hospitality relies on the restoration of ecosystems for security and long-term tourism in destinations. Data is clear, creating resilience through nature-based solutions is the way forward, and risks are measurable. The cost of inaction has already been paid in asset valuations, changes in weather patterns, economic disruption, supply chain shocks, and the slow erosion of guests' and the workforce's trust. Trends such as longevity and the importance of wellness also focus on creating life and helping to create human experiences that are transformed for the better. GlobeScan's recent research on healthy and sustainable living has found that health is now the strongest driver of sustainable behavior change. Regarding workforce best practice, the sector has to ensure talent stability and access to dignified living conditions, such as fair employment and affordable housing for staff and overall building social legitimacy through cooperation with local communities and developing strong climate adaptation so the hotel and its surrounding territory become more resilient to inevitable changes and impacts.

Evolving holistic frameworks such as Edmans's framework (Grow the Pie book) for *"radical responsibility"* introduce critical elements such as purpose as a value driver, instead of viewing social initiatives as a cost, Edmans highlights their potential to drive value, integration with strategy, responsibility is woven into a company's core strategy and operations, aiming stakeholder welfare, improve guest' lives, provide employees with a healthy and enriching workplace, preserve ecosystem services, and lastly, use an evidence-based approach, especially when measuring asset performance considering local context and data. Therefore, the hotel business ecosystem stakeholders are encouraged to create partnerships to work together, locally and globally, to drive innovation and expand the collective mindset to enable wellbeing and prosperity for all.

HYB

The Regenerative Compass: A Moral Guide for Hospitality Leaders

Conscious leadership

Jonathan Normand
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B Lab Switzerland

Jonathan Normand frames regeneration as the only viable path for hospitality in a world of ecological overshoot and collapsing trust, arguing that sustainability alone is no longer enough. It introduces the 7C Leadership Compass as a practical, deeply human guide for leaders who want to align business success with the long-term wellbeing of people, places, and the planet, and positions Moral Ambition plus cross-industry coalitions as the engine of real, regenerative change.

The hospitality industry stands at a crossroads. For years, we have spoken of sustainability, implementing measurable goals and accountability frameworks that have undoubtedly moved the needle. Yet, a growing sense of "sustainability fatigue" permeates our industry, a feeling that our incremental improvements are no longer sufficient. The truth is harder to face: we are in ecological overshoot, relying on declining net energy, with planetary boundaries already breached. The extractive paradigm that has defined our civilisation is self-terminating. In this moment, sustainability will not save us. Regeneration is the only viable path.

This is not a prophecy of doom. Rather, it is a perceptual upgrade, a clear-eyed recognition that business-as-usual is incompatible with the living systems we depend upon. The question is no longer if we must transform, but how we, as leaders, authentically embed regeneration into the heart of our organisations. This transformation is particularly urgent in a world grappling with **insularity**, where trust is in peril and optimism for future generations has collapsed, as highlighted by the 2026 Edelman Trust Barometer [1].

FROM MECHANISTIC TO LIVING SYSTEMS

Regeneration, at its core, is about understanding the logic of life itself, creating the conditions for ecosystems, both natural and social, to thrive. It demands a shift from a mechanistic worldview of inputs and outputs to a living systems perspective, where our businesses are seen as integral parts of a larger, interconnected whole. This is not merely an evolution of sustainability; it is a fundamental paradigm shift. And each paradigm shift involves a quiet death of the self shaped by the old worldview. It requires us to move beyond the transactional and embrace the transformational.

This shift is mirrored in the broader evolution of work itself. We are moving away from a singular focus on shareholder value toward a more holistic, stakeholder-conscious model. The new generation of talent seeks purpose-driven work, and customers are increasingly drawn to brands that align with their values. Conscious leadership is no longer a soft skill, it is a strategic imperative, especially when addressing the erosion of institutional trust and the widening mass-class divide [1].

THE ANSWER LIES WITHIN: MORAL AMBITION AND THE POWER PARADOX

The journey to regenerative leadership begins not with a checklist of external actions, but with the inner work of the leader. Modern neuroscience reveals that leadership effectiveness is deeply tied to self-awareness. As leaders gain power, their brains can actually rewire, leading to a decrease in empathy and a reduced ability to process feedback.

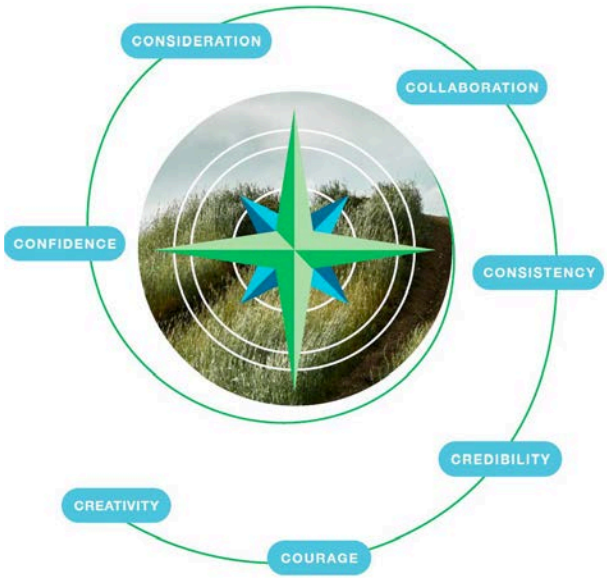
This "power paradox" is a significant barrier to the very qualities regenerative leadership demands: humility, empathy, and a deep sense of connection. In an era of insularity, where individuals retreat into familiar circles, leaders must actively counteract this paradox to become **Lead Trust Brokers** [1].

To counteract this, leaders must cultivate what I call Moral Ambition, the unwavering commitment to align personal and organisational success with the well-being of all stakeholders. This is not about moral perfection, but about conscious and continuous striving. It requires building new neural pathways, training our brains for empathy, psychological safety, and long-term thinking.

The science here is compelling. When leaders create environments of high trust, they trigger the release of oxytocin, the neurochemical of connection. Research shows that high-trust organisations report 74% less stress, 50% higher productivity, and 76% more engagement than low-trust counterparts. In hospitality, where service excellence depends on discretionary effort, this is not a soft metric, it is the foundation of competitive advantage. Oxytocin fosters collaboration and innovation precisely because it reduces fear and enables risk-taking. Regenerative leadership, then, is not merely an ethical stance; it is neurologically optimal. Furthermore, with "My Employer" now recognised as the most trusted institution (78% trust among employees), leaders have an unprecedented opportunity to bridge divides and rebuild trust [1].

THE 7C LEADERSHIP COMPASS

To guide leaders on this journey, I have developed the 7C Leadership Compass for Moral Ambition. This is not a rigid map, but a dynamic compass that helps leaders navigate complexity with integrity and purpose. It is a spiral model of continuous growth, where each "C" builds upon the last, guiding leaders from extractive models toward a regenerative future, and offering a pathway to counter the prevailing insularity and rebuild optimism.



CONFIDENCE
Confidence is the foundation, inner confidence rooted in self-awareness and purpose that allows a leader to be vulnerable, to trust their team, and to create psychological safety. This is where transformation begins: the willingness to let go of the old worldview and confidently lead through periods of societal uncertainty and collapsed optimism.

CONSIDERATION
Consideration follows as the practice of deep empathy, the ability to understand and value the diverse perspectives of all stakeholders: employees, guests, local communities, and the environment. This is crucial for bridging the widening mass-class divide and fostering genuine engagement across different groups [1].

COLLABORATION
Collaboration is the art of mobilising collective intelligence, recognising that regenerative solutions are rarely born in silos. It is about fostering a culture where diverse voices can co-create solutions that benefit all stakeholders, directly combating the retreat into insular circles.

CONSISTENCY
Consistency is the reliable application of values, walking the talk, ensuring regenerative principles are reflected in every decision. When employees see their leaders living the values, trust deepens and commitment strengthens, reinforcing the employer's role as a trusted entity.

CREDIBILITY
From this emerges Credibility, the earned trust that underpins true influence, granting leaders the legitimacy to drive bold change. It is the natural outcome of the first four Cs, essential for leaders to be effective **Lead Trust Brokers**.

COURAGE
Courage is the willingness to challenge the status quo, to make long-term decisions that may not show immediate financial returns. This might mean investing in regenerative practices that do not show immediate financial returns, demonstrating a commitment that transcends short-term economic anxiety.

CREATIVITY
And courage unlocks Creativity, the engine of innovation that allows leaders and their teams to imagine and build new, regenerative models of hospitality, offering fresh perspectives and solutions in a world resistant to change.

THE COMPASS IN ACTION

What does this compass look like in practice? Consider the hospitality and tourism coalition now forming to accelerate regenerative hospitality across the industry in 2026. Such an initiative embodies each C in action, serving as a powerful counter-narrative to insularity and a beacon of renewed optimism.

It begins with Confidence: the willingness of leading institutions to publicly stake their reputation on a paradigm that challenges business-as-usual.

Consideration follows, the coalition's design process requires deep listening to diverse stakeholders: hoteliers, local communities, academics, and ecosystem partners, actively working to bridge the mass-class divide. Collaboration is the engine: no single institution can drive systemic change; the coalition model itself is the message, fostering collective intelligence over individual silos.

Consistency will be tested as members align their internal practices with the principles they advocate. From this foundation, Credibility emerges, the earned authority to challenge an industry and act as a **Lead Trust Broker**. With credibility comes Courage: the willingness to set ambitious targets that may not show immediate returns, addressing economic anxieties with long-term vision. And from courage flows Creativity, the space to prototype new models, from regenerative supply chains to place-based guest experiences that give more than they take, inspiring hope and innovation.

This is not a theoretical exercise. It is regenerative leadership unfolding in real time. Imagine a hotel manager who, guided by Consideration, spends time with local farmers to co-create a truly farm-to-table experience that regenerates the local soil and economy. Picture a leadership team that, through Collaboration, empowers its employees to design and implement waste-reduction initiatives. This is the face of regenerative leadership in action, actively rebuilding trust and fostering a sense of collective purpose.

COALITION AS SPARK, MORAL AMBITION AS GEAR

The journey to regeneration is not easy. It requires us to unlearn old habits and embrace a new way of being and leading. But the architecture of transformation is becoming clear.

Coalition is the spark. No leader, no matter how visionary, can regenerate an industry alone. The complexity of the systems we seek to heal demands collective action: networks of committed actors willing to share knowledge, hold each other accountable, and amplify what works. The B Corp movement is already answering that call. Initiatives like Travel by B Corp in the UK, B Tourism in Florida, and the emerging Hospitality Coalition are lighting that spark. They are proof that stakeholder-governed businesses don't just meet standards; they build the field, creating a blueprint for the entire industry.

Moral Ambition is the gear. Sparks fade without sustained energy. Moral Ambition is the internal mechanism that keeps leaders moving when the initial enthusiasm wanes, when the quarterly pressures mount, when the easy path beckons. It is the gear that transforms inspiration into consistent action, turning the flywheel of regeneration day after day, decision after decision, empowering leaders to be the **Lead Trust Brokers** our insular world desperately needs.

The future is already unfolding. March is Global B Corp Month, a moment that illuminates what is possible. While B Corps are at the vanguard, the coalition for a regenerative hospitality industry is not an exclusive club. The question is not if you will join, but if you will lead.

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HYB

Luxury Hospitality as a Regenerative Way of Life

Luxury hospitality

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HOTELSCHOOL THE HAGUE

Yasemin Oruc argues that luxury hospitality is uniquely positioned to lead a shift from "doing less harm" to regenerative, net-positive impact, treating hospitality as a living system embedded in people and place. This article explores how regenerative hospitality turns experiences into co-created, transformative journeys that support personal well-being while restoring ecosystems and communities. Luxury hotels, with their resources and cultural influence, can act as pioneers and prototypes for this regenerative way of life.

A MOMENT OF PRESENCE

In a world of constant stimulation and 'doing', hospitality rarely pauses. Perhaps this is the moment to return to the present, to simply 'be' – the only moment in which hospitality actually happens. For a long time, such mindful reflections came mainly from spiritual thinkers and philosophers. Today, they increasingly show up in strategic sessions, design sprints, and development conversations.

Strategies built solely on control, logic and analysis no longer feel fitting. What is emerging instead is a growing awareness that progress requires balance – between head and heart, logic and creativity, performance and care. This is where the art of hospitality takes center stage.

FROM SURVIVAL TO LEGACY

The hospitality industry is at a significant crossroads, where we increasingly observe a readiness to shift. We are beginning to realise that all we are currently trying to do to preserve our planet may no longer be enough.

Decades of research into sustainability have provided valuable insights and created a strong foundation to depart from. In essence, sustainability is much about 'doing less bad' by minimising harm to the environment and aiming for net-zero as an outcome.

This is where regenerative hospitality comes in: the focus is on increasing impact through a net-positive mindset, where 'doing more good' is the starting point. The goal is to restore ecosystems, strengthen communities and create net-positive outcomes. Regeneration becomes more than just an upgrade – it can turn into a viable business model.

HOSPITALITY AS A LIVING SYSTEM

Hospitality is much more than 'just' an industry; it operates as something deeply connected and relational. Every hospitality organisation is shaped by the people we work with, who visit us, who live around us, and the place we are embedded in.

Unlike many other industries, hospitality is rooted in local communities, guest groups, supply chains, partner networks and ecosystems. Here, loyalty shifts from being a transaction to becoming stewardship. It moves beyond the individual guest and recognises responsibility toward the people and places that carry the impact long after a guest's stay has ended.

This uniquely positions hospitality to embrace a regenerative mindshift, as it relies on the integration of human and natural systems.

FROM LIVING SYSTEM TO LIVING EXPERIENCE

When hospitality is understood as a living system, regeneration is no longer an abstract ambition. It becomes something that is lived and felt through the entire experience.

Experiences become more than moments of enjoyment; they become invitations to transformation – for the self, for others and for the place one temporarily stays in. Regenerative hospitality creates the conditions for such experiences by shifting the focus from staged delivery to co-creation, and from exclusive to inclusive.

Rather than positioning guests as passive recipients and hosts as static servers, regenerative experiences invite everyone to take part and immerse themselves in local flows. This collective sense of purpose and belonging is not only created through branding; it is felt through connection – with hosts who are visible, communities that endure and environments that last.

Focusing on the health of ecosystems from both a place and people perspective also aligns with a more transformative understanding of well-being. Health is becoming wealth, not just through additions to a wellness menu, but by integrating well-being throughout the entire journey.

The combination of personal well-being with the health of the environment offers opportunities to curate experiences that leave guests, employees and communities better than they were found. Regenerative hospitality is not a general recipe for transformation; it creates the context in which transformation can occur.

LUXURY THAT RESTORES

One segment offering a great opportunity to bring regeneration to life is luxury. The settings of luxury properties allow – generally due to more time and resources available – to truly set the stage. Their cultural influence, visibility and the empowerment of employees to personalise experiences by understanding guests' real 'jobs to be done' create unique leverage.

Luxury has long been understood as a symbol of material ownership and conspicuous identity. Current developments signal a clear paradigm shift toward experience-driven engagement through personal, co-created moments that generate emotional resonance, meaning and lasting impact beyond the stay itself. This form of luxury offers experiences that can transform and restore.

Luxury hospitality often sets the tone for what follows. Due to its space, resources and impact, it has the valuable ability to act as a regenerative inspirator, where new practices can be prototyped, adapted and shared as inspiration for the wider hospitality ecosystem and beyond.

ON A FINAL NOTE

If regeneration is a way of relating to life, the real question becomes: what kind of future does hospitality choose to contribute to?

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

What becomes searchable becomes bookable.

valpas