

# A REGENERATIVE APPROACH TO TOURISM IN CANADA

An offering of why and how tourism can more fully support people, place and prosperity—with case stories, principles, and indicators of progress.



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# FOREWORD BY DESTINATION CANADA

Change is unending and so is the evolution of Canada's tourism sector. As the world emerges from the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have an opportunity to reflect on what it will take to cultivate the conditions for a more resilient and thriving sector in the future—one that is capable of continually regenerating people, place, and our collective prosperity over time. Our challenges looking forward are profoundly complex. To succeed will take a more integrated systems approach where value is created together with other people, other organizations, and the natural ecologies that sustain us all, rather than extracting value from them as expendable resources. This will require letting go of existing ways of thinking and doing. In this way, Canada's tourism sector has an opportunity to be the change the world aspires to see happen. Tourism—viewed from the perspective of hosts welcoming guests into their communities—has potential to be a catalytic force in the transformation of Canada's economy and social fabric, helping to put the country onto a more sustainable, inclusive and prosperous trajectory by:

- **Reconnecting people with each other**—nurturing mutual benefit across geographies, industries, cultures;
- **Reconnecting people with nature**—reawakening us to our interdependence within a larger living system, adding value without extraction; and
- **Elevating the role of communities of all sizes**—discovering their inherent potential, weaving purpose, place, people, and profit together again.

Many in the tourism sector were coming to this realization prior to the pandemic, and were already beginning to chart a new, more regenerative path. To build on that important groundwork and cultivate the conditions for a wider transformation of the sector to emerge, we're going to need support from experienced guides and from each other. This endeavour will require courage and commitment. But everything is at stake. With this as the scope of our intentions, this guide to action offers an invitation to embark together on this journey, knowing that it will require adaptation by each of us, at every level of the hosting economy ecosystem.

Marsha Walden  
**President and Chief Executive Officer/  
Présidente-directrice Générale  
Destination Canada**



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We at Destination Canada acknowledge the Indigenous Peoples of all the lands that we play, work and live on. From coast to coast to coast, we acknowledge the territories of the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations peoples who are the original and enduring hosts of these lands, calling this place home since time immemorial.

We do this to reaffirm our commitment to and responsibility for improving relationships between nations, including growing our own understanding of local Indigenous peoples and their cultures. As storytellers and representatives of Canada's tourism sector, we recognize our position of influence and the importance of recognizing and reflecting the many voices and places of these lands.

In particular, we honour the regenerative thinking and stewardship among Indigenous cultures of this and other lands. Regenerative ways of being are inherently more holistic, more integrated, more reverent towards all life. In these ways, they draw on the wisdom at the heart of many Indigenous worldviews.

The pages of this document carry our humility, hope and desire that this work may contribute to reconciliation as our views and actions become ever more aligned.





# INTRODUCTION





Around the world, and here in Canada, there have been growing calls for tourism that prioritizes communities and the environment, in what is often referred to as a “regenerative” approach. These calls are coming from all corners: from communities, from travellers and from the tourism sector itself, with Destination Canada offering an important rallying cry in its recent public strategy documents<sup>1</sup> and with its support for this report.

To move forward effectively, it will be essential to understand:

- Why the calls for a new approach?
- What it means to be regenerative
- How we practice regeneration in the context of tourism

Drawing on decades of experience with regeneration across a range of sectors, as well as on global research and emerging insights from the field, this document provides a broad perspective and a basic practice framework for regeneration. Importantly, it also offers inspiring real-life stories to illustrate the pathways and potential of such an approach. And it concludes with a glossary of terms for reference.

In short, this document will show that a regenerative approach to tourism involves three elements:

1. Connecting people and their place in deep, purposeful, and meaningful relationship;
2. Putting that shared purpose into action by developing hosting experiences and infrastructure that are enlivened by local story, learning and care;
3. Working in a manner that grows capacity for

flourishing and resilience among people, businesses, communities, and ecologies.

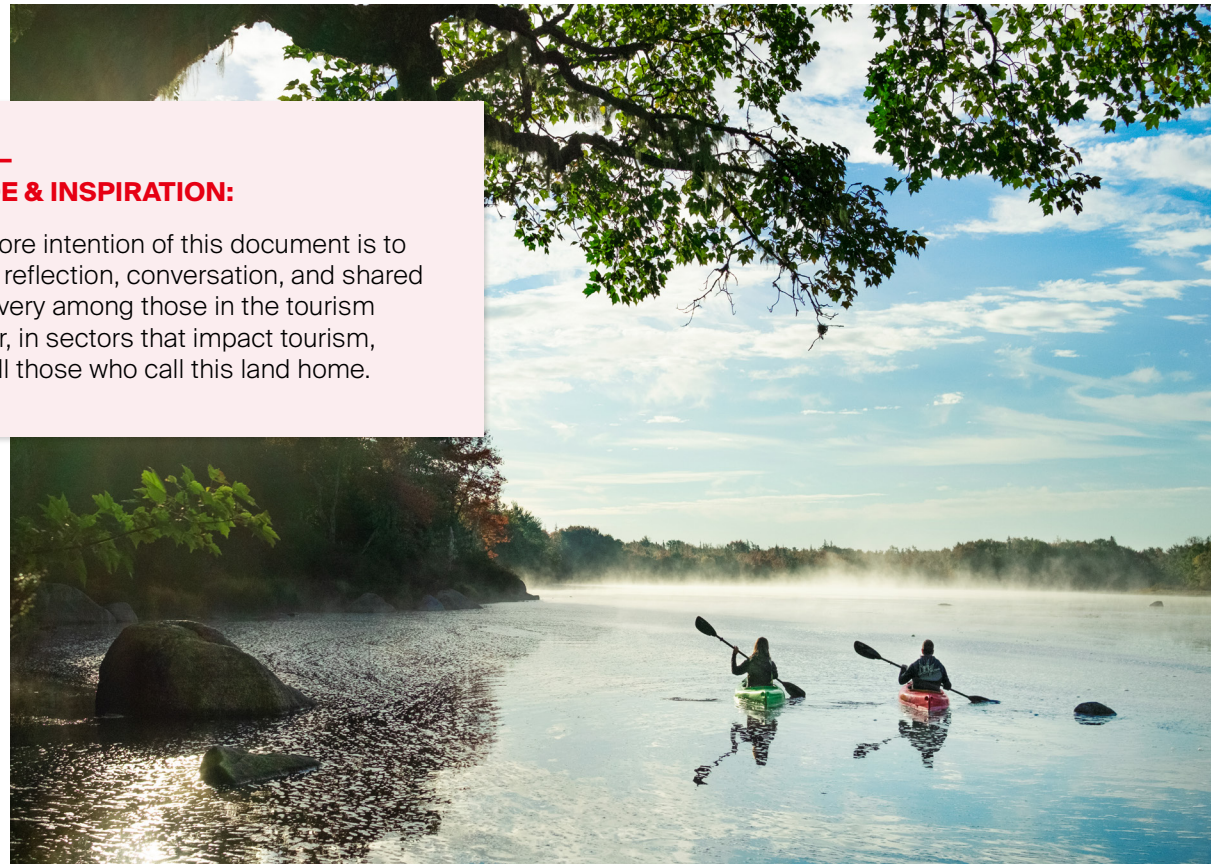
As the stories throughout the document will demonstrate, these new ways of working are a means of regenerating—or enlivening and healing—communities, enterprises, ecosystems, and the human spirit. On that foundation, it offers an invitation to embark together in our own places, with appropriate and enabling support at national and regional scales.

For many, this will require new relationships, new skills, new thinking, new language, and even a renewed perspective on life. As daunting as that may sound, it seems to be exactly what these times call for. As anthropologist Margaret Mead observed: “For the human species to evolve, the conversation must deepen.”

1. See Canada’s Tourism Renaissance: Our Strategy for Recovery and Tourism’s Big Shift: Key Trends Shaping the Future of Canada’s Tourism Industry

### WHY— GUIDE & INSPIRATION:

The core intention of this document is to spark reflection, conversation, and shared discovery among those in the tourism sector, in sectors that impact tourism, and all those who call this land home.





# WHY A NEW APPROACH?





## Tourism's Need for a New Approach

At the broadest scale, we face a maelstrom of civilizational challenges:

- an economy still reeling from the pandemic;
- systemic racism and structural inequities;
- a divided and threatening global geo-political context;
- growing social division at community levels;
- and most of all, climate and ecological crises.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, if we're honest—if we really take in what the science is telling us—then we need every industry, every sector to turn to the world, and earnestly say: “These are our skills and resources; how can we help?”

Against that stark backdrop, there is growing awareness that, for all the vast good it does, the underlying model of tourism itself is in need of transformation.<sup>3</sup> It is becoming clearer that the sector can no longer measure its success by volume and revenue alone, with net impacts on local people and place largely unintentional and overlooked. More and more communities are rejecting uncontrolled tourism development. The rising sentiment is that current approaches are too often extractive and *degenerative*, reducing quality of life for residents, damaging ecosystem health, and diminishing local culture and community in the interest of efficiency and scale.

Likewise, there are reasons to look for alternative approaches at the operator level. Persistent challenges include worker shortages, changing consumer interests, disaggregated marketing

channels, ever expanding digital technologies, intense competition for customers and investment dollars, deteriorating local climate patterns, and vulnerability to disruption and perpetual change. Too often, these difficulties make consistent profitability and even viability an elusive target for tourism enterprises.

Finally, guests themselves are looking for something more. Research overwhelmingly points to the growing demand for experiences that are deeply meaningful and environmentally responsible, enriching both the guest and the host community.<sup>4</sup>

### THOUGHT STARTER:

How can tourism be an enabler or catalyst of the larger shift that is needed?

2. The IPCC report 2022 warns, “The scientific evidence is unequivocal: climate change is a threat to human well-being and the health of the planet. Any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a liveable future.” UN Sustainable Development Goals; Canadian Green Building Council LEED Green Building Rating System; International Living Future Institute - Living Building Challenge; SITES Rating System - Sustainable Sites.

3. For example, see “Regenerative Tourism: The Natural Maturation of Sustainability” by Anna Pollock or “Regenerative Tourism: A Conceptual Framework Leveraging Theory and Practice” by Loretta Bellato, Niki Frantzeskaki and Christian A. Nygaard.

4. Ibid

## A Limited Worldview: A Story of Separation and Fragmentation

The root of these many problems stems in large part from the worldview that underpins our current approaches. Though this may seem abstract and far-removed from what is most pressing and practical, the often-hidden perspectives of our worldview filter what we can see and, therefore, do. They dictate what seems reasonable and even possible. They shape our goals and, therefore, the outcomes of our activities. If getting to the “root cause” of our challenges is essential, then an exploration of society’s dominant worldview is the necessary starting point, as is an understanding of emerging alternatives.

In effect, this is what must be acknowledged if we hope to move forward: for the past several centuries and even now, most of Western society has been guided by a worldview that tells us that we are separate from nature and that we exist to compete and consume. It tells us that everything in the world operates like a machine.

This guiding narrative assures us that the “whole” is nothing more than the sum of its parts, therefore everything can be broken down into its component pieces in order to be understood and controlled. It declares that productivity and profitability are the only things that matter, and that scale and efficiency are the only reasonable ways to achieve those ends. Everything is just that simple, according to the paradigm most of us have been raised with.

The influence of this story is evident across every aspect of society. And the tourism sector is no exception, from the terminology of “product” and “consumer” to the focus on volume and the trend towards the generic in the name of efficiency and scale.

This isn't to say that the prevailing worldview and its approaches are all wrong. But collectively, we're discovering that this story has clear limitations. And those limitations are keeping us stuck with a mounting collection of degenerative outcomes.

### Dominant Worldview



World as machine



Separation & fragmentation



World as simple & linear



Command, control & prediction



Generic solutions



Self-interest & transaction

# OTTERCREEK WOODWORKS: ARTISAN TO FOREST STORYTELLER

## (RURAL AND SMALL TOWN)

David Schonberger is an artisan woodworker, selling handcrafted charcuterie boards and furniture. Until 2018, his business, Ottercreek Woodworks in Tillsonburg, Ontario, had no apparent connection to tourism. Tired of lonely days in his workshop, he yearned for a deeper, more personal connection with customers and community. And he longed to share his love of the local forest ecosystem.

With the help of tourism experience coach Celes Davar of Earth Rhythms in Nova Scotia, David created “From Tree to Table: A Build-Your-Own-Board Experience.” In it, David invites people to discover a story of tradition, appreciation, and regeneration of place.

As guests arrive for the experience, they gather around an open fire with a cast iron skillet cooking local artisan bacon and sausage, while David describes the significance of the Canadian Carolinian ecozone. “If guests are going to use a piece of wood from this place, they should get to know where that wood came from,” David explains. Then they head into the forest, where they touch and smell the soil, discovering the ancient mycelium network. “It really allows us to settle down, get grounded in the forest and get a sense of where we are,” David continues. “And we can take that appreciation and peacefulness inside us, turn that into creativity and walk into the woodshop inspired by the things we see in the forest.” To make their charcuterie boards, guests choose from lumber that has been harvested within a 40-50 kilometre radius of the woodshop.

They use various power tools, but also some vintage tools, including David’s grandfather’s hand tools. “The message is: I trust you enough to work with my most personal tools.” For lunch, the group gathers around a 16-foot white pine table that David made specifically for the experience. There, they share conversation and what he calls “the bounty of the county”—artisan charcuterie, cheese, pickled items and delicacies, “full of the stories of this region.” In all, the day is a dance of emotion and surprise. In the morning, people arrive as strangers and by the end of the day they leave as friends of each other, of the shop, and of the region. Guests become woven into the story of place.

For David, the experience has enabled him to see himself as a storyteller and a facilitator. Each From Tree to Table experience is unique, as he learns from his guests and as they learn from him. He also became a more purposeful business owner, seeking positive outcomes for people and planet. He now collaborates with other businesses in his community. And he has an even deeper connection to the forest than before.

The experience has also been transformational for Ottercreek Woodworks. Its offerings have diversified, creating a new income stream that now represents 20% of revenue. The company has won major awards and been featured in major publications, enabling the business to emerge as a leader in its field.

From Tree to Table has also been transformational for the region. Through a partnership with

Carolinian Canada Coalition, each ticket funds regeneration of 8 square metres of fragile Carolinian ecozone.

“Moving towards a regenerative approach is the future,” says David, “and I think people are going to be looking for that when choosing where to go.”

### Outcomes:

- Diversified product range. New income stream representing 20% of revenue.
- Awarded 2019 Ontario Culinary Experience of the Year, 2018 Ontario’s Southwest Innovative Experience of the Year and 2021 Ontario’s Southwest Sustainability Trailblazer of the Year.
- Carolinian Canada Partner contributing to regenerating local fragile forest ecosystems with every board: over 800 trees planted, and 5,000 square metres regenerated.



# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE REGENERATIVE?



## A Living Systems Worldview: A Story of Integration and Wholeness

Fortunately, an alternative paradigm is gradually emerging—and in many ways re-emerging. It recognizes the world not as a machine but as a living ecology, with humans playing an integral part. And it is from this worldview that the concept of regeneration arises. After all, only something that is alive is capable of regenerating. Our bodies regenerate themselves. Ecosystems regenerate themselves. A marriage needs to be continuously renewed and regenerated. This is perhaps the core function of any living system, including organizations, communities and economies. Indeed, regeneration may be considered a synonym for continuously renewed vitality and self-healing.

With life at the centre of the plot, this alternative paradigm points to the inherent interdependence and complexity of the living world. Everything exists in relationship to everything else. Instead of focusing exclusively on separate parts, this worldview encourages us to engage with whole systems. More than engineers, we see ourselves as gardeners or stewards of the living systems we are part of, including our organizations and communities. Without denying competition, efficiency and scale, we are also invited to recognize the effectiveness of cooperation and local adaptation and responsiveness.

Within this new narrative, the concept of emergence is particularly important. Rather than seeking to tightly predict and control all things as if they are so many mechanistic gears and knobs, this worldview invites us to pay attention and respond to the constant changes that are emerging all around us. Such evolution can be slow and incremental, but it can also be sudden and entirely unforeseen, emerging out of changes that happened previously. As John Lennon summed it up:

“Life is what happens while you’re busy making other plans.” As we move beyond thinking of life as static and unchanging, we more easily step into a stance of relationship, participation, cultivation and learning.

In fact, this guiding story is not entirely new. Core to the shift from a mechanistic to a living systems narrative is a broadening appreciation for Indigenous worldviews, which have been grounded in such perspectives since time immemorial.

In all, the worldview at the heart of regeneration invites us to see ourselves as more fully enmeshed in a living, evolving world. From this vantage point, the purpose of our every activity is to participate in enlivening and healing the ecosystems and human relationships on which community, economy and our collective wellbeing depend.

### A Shift in Worldview

#### Mechanistic



World as machine



Separation & fragmentation



World as simple & linear



Command, control & prediction



Generic solutions



Self-interest & transaction



#### Living Systems



World as living ecology



Integration & wholeness



World as complex & non-linear



Creating enabling conditions & working with emergence

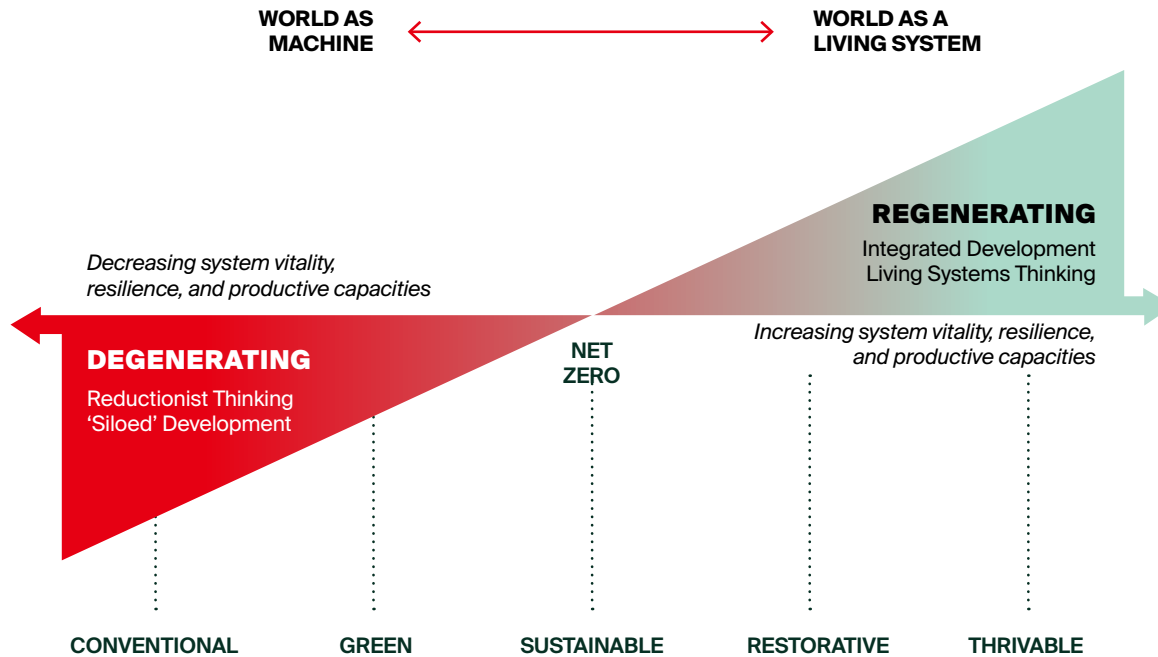


Local responses



Mutuality & reciprocity

## SPECTRUM OF WORLDVIEWS & STRATEGIES



This graphic helps us understand that we do still need to 'reduce the damage' we are causing. Any reduction of negative impact will give life an easier foothold to flourish. It's just not the full scope of what is needed. We must also embrace the practice of regeneration.

This **Trajectory of Ecological Design** illustrates the transition from a mechanistic to a living systems worldview. This transition can be plotted as a spectrum of strategies. The predominant, conventional approaches [depicted on the left] do the most harm, with a "degenerative" effect, in which ecosystems and communities become ever less viable. With "green" approaches, we seek to reduce harm through actions like reducing pollution. This is a good thing, but we are still polluting.

At the centre of the diagram, sustainable approaches, as generally practiced, are about making operations more efficient. Theoretically, a goal of sustainability is to get us to zero damage. Unfortunately, zero damage is not possible.

For that reason, it is essential that we also engage in healing the damage we have caused. This puts us on the restoration and thriving side of things, i.e., regeneration, at the far right of the spectrum. How much restoration is enough? How do we keep regenerating our relationship with the living systems we're part of? That all depends on you and the place you live. The objective is a healthy diversity of species and relationships. As life changes and evolves, these relationships need to be consciously regenerated.

## The Regenerative Movement

With this understanding of shifting worldviews, we see that calls for new approaches to tourism are part of a larger regenerative movement arising over the past several decades in sectors as wide ranging as agriculture, business, architecture, fashion, urban planning, and more.

Among these, regenerative agriculture provides a helpful example, in which *what is being regenerated* is the vitality of the living soil and of the land's broader ecosystems. This approach to farming recognizes that the *potential* for vitality exists within the soil as a complex living ecosystem; the farmer's role is to support, respond to—and participate in — that unique local potential. With regenerating soil, both farm and farmer flourish. The result of such a holistic, co-evolutionary approach is a wide range of possible benefits, including:

- better nutritional value of food
- lower costs
- higher profits
- natural control of pests
- reduced soil erosion
- less vulnerability to droughts and floods
- restored biodiversity
- a drawing down of carbon from the atmosphere (a natural climate solution).

In other words, the outcome over time is a more resilient, abundant ecosystem, at every level, including economically.



## A Regenerative Approach to Tourism

In the context of *tourism*, what is to be regenerated is the vitality of our places: of local people, businesses, community, and the complex ecologies that sustain them all. What is being regenerated is life's ability to thrive within those contexts. Just as in soil, the *potential for vitality* exists in any community and in any place. The work of regeneration is to come together to discover and cultivate that potential through mutual care for people and place. The ongoing practice of regeneration is to tend the “soil” of the human and more-than-human community together so that new levels of health and new possibilities continually arise.

Whether you're a tourism operator, a hotel manager, a restaurant owner or a resident, you have a role *in the community and in the surrounding ecosystem* through the things you already do. Your every product, service, or contribution—and the process of developing new creative offerings—serve as an opportunity to deepen relationships, generate new understanding, and learn how to care and contribute in novel and enriching ways.

Importantly, regeneration is a function of whole, healthy systems and communities. That means:

- Regeneration is not solely about the behaviour of the individual guest. It is not the traveller's responsibility to enliven and revitalize our communities.
- And it is not only about the offerings of a particular operator. No one is regenerative alone or in a single action or program feature.

Instead, regenerative approaches are our opportunity to create the community that will nourish us, and it is this that will attract and nourish guests. As Indigenous author and botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer writes: “All flourishing is mutual.”

### Building on Existing Strategies

Such an approach does not replace or reject existing business strategies nor the pursuit of profits. There will always be a need for marketing, for example, though it may be reframed as an invitation, and it may be recast at a new level of authenticity.

There will always be a need for the essential functions of destination management, though they may be integrated into the broader concept of stewardship, and the responsibility for it may extend to everyone in the community. It will always be vital for businesses to be prosperous, though their connection and contribution to the wealth and wellbeing of the communities in which they operate will be more intentional and interwoven.

Likewise, this is not a call to move on from community-based, sustainable or eco-tourism. Each of these contains some aspect of the care for people and place that is at the heart of regenerative approaches, and so each will continue to be needed. The question is: how complete can we be? How effective can we be at generating net benefit for people and place? Regenerative approaches introduce a necessarily holistic lens, along with the principles and practices of collectively stewarding what is most alive within our communities. Anything less is likely to deliver a fragmented approach that falls short of the community's potential to thrive.

### Outcomes

As in agriculture, the outcomes of such a collective and care-centred approach to the tourism ecosystem are widespread and varied. For example, we find that:

- Every host community has the potential for a sense of unique character and cohesion, which then nourishes residents, entices and enriches guests, and attracts supportive resources.
- People everywhere are capable of growing a culture of warm hospitality towards their neighbours and towards those who visit, even across difference, even across conflict.
- Hospitality and care can be extended to the land itself, as people find meaning in working together to serve and regenerate surrounding ecosystems and as they come to feel held and hosted by their place.
- From this “fertile ground,” new, creative projects continuously emerge. Like plants in regenerated soil, individual enterprises prosper. And diverse offerings are integrated, so that benefits are multiplied.
- In all, communities discover that more becomes possible together, in a continuous unfolding of learning, healing, vitality, and potential.
- In these ways, the tourism sector delivers not only gross revenue but “net benefit” to communities, as they come to define that term for themselves. And it generates wellbeing for hosts and guests alike.
- On this foundation, communities develop the resilience to withstand future disruptions. And every *place* becomes a *home*—for residents and, temporarily, for guests.

# ORILLIA'S STORY OF PLACE

## (RURAL AND SMALL CITY)

Adapted from text by Michael Jones,  
as it appeared in *The Age of Thrivability*

For the past several years, I have served as co-chair of two community roundtables in Orillia, Ontario, a rural farming and—at one time—successful industrial centre 90 minutes north of Toronto. Our task on the roundtables has been to address Orillia's downtown revitalization, economic development, cultural and event planning, infrastructure design, and more. Through public conversations, individual initiatives and the support of city staff, our focus has been on what makes our community unique and how to redefine our role as citizens.

upheavals of war and industrial progress, Leacock animated the longing for places that preserved our common humanity.

It was this insight that inspired the roundtables to imagine how the story of place as told in Leacock's *Mariposa* can serve as a touchstone to which many community initiatives could be understood. In re-imagining our own stories in this way, we took up the call to be anthropologists, uncovering the untold tales, forgotten artefacts, and hidden meanings so that they may serve as the foundations of the community story.

Our quest also led us to explore the region's other, more ancient narrative—the Indigenous story of Mnjikaning, which means “gathering together.” For millennia, many gathered here from all directions for conversation and for the hospitality of the people who made their home in that place. They were the “keepers of the fish fence,” or the weirs, which are still located in The Narrows.

This land also marked the meeting place of the limestone plain and the warm, shallow pickerel lakes to the south and the deep granite and cold trout lakes of the pre-Cambrian shield to the north. The people of Mnjikaning lived in this “land in the middle,” where they were required to be masters of two distinct ecologies.

Leacock's mythical *Mariposa* and the Indigenous story of Mnjikaning offered our community an evocative narrative as a place of meeting, a destination for global conversations, and an opportunity for visitors to develop their creative

potential through participation in experiences that are unique to the place itself. Underlying all of this, our vision has been to create an ethic and culture of local hospitality.

This vision led us to imagine our new public library as a meeting space and the physical heart of the community—a ‘commons’ where many with diverse interests can meet and talk. It also led us to designate a part of our downtown as an ‘arts district,’ including music and arts festivals.

Our belief is that the future will belong to those communities that are attuned to story, empathy, artistry, dialogue, originality, and shared meaning, dimensions that express their unique character



In this work, we have been accompanied—in spirit, at least—by Canadian humourist, Stephen Leacock, who, a century earlier, had gathered his observations of the townspeople of Orillia and transported them into the much-loved imaginary community of *Mariposa* within his book, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*. In the midst of the great



and strengths.



# HOW DO WE PRACTICE REGENERATION?





**At its core, regeneration involves bringing people together around what they care about (and *could* care about) in their place, and then putting that care into action.**

What follows here is a basic practice framework—a small number of principles that effectively energize a regenerative process at any scale, whether in a neighbourhood or across a whole city and watershed. These principles offer ‘guides to action’ and help us choose how to advance our shared purpose and put our values into practice. Expect that engaging with these principles of regenerative practice will be challenging at first and then increasingly enriching. And although it is a non-linear and iterative learning process, there is something of a natural starting point and progression. Ultimately, though, any point you begin is meaningful. The important thing is to start.





## Principle #1: Understand and work at the scale of place

The starting point is **learning to see, understand, and work at the scale of your whole place.**

This is the home you share with neighbours, with innumerable other species, and with the local geology, hydrology, economy, culture, and more. Place is the largest manageable living system, a scale at which we can all understand and see the impact we are having.

Understanding our places in this way helps us comprehend and work with complexity. In particular, it helps us see that whole systems are nested within one another: an individual exists within a business, within a neighbourhood, within a landscape, within a city, a watershed and a region. All these larger and smaller systems interact, and ideally each adds value and benefit to the others. To support a system's ability to thrive and continually regenerate, it is essential to understand the benefit each of these nested systems adds to the others. Then, instead of focusing on isolated and fragmented issues—inevitably ending up with new problems and unanticipated consequences—regeneration asks us to see the larger context, with all of its inter-relationships, i.e. to work holistically.

So, how do you define 'the whole' of your place?

- Step back, lift your gaze and take in the broader landscape—beyond yourself, your enterprise or project—to observe the larger context and relationships that may be at play.
- Ask: “how big is ‘here?’” Most everyone in a community or place knows the difference between ‘here’ and ‘there.’ This is a question that can help guide our thinking about the interconnections and integration of the multiple stakeholders and aspects of our home.
- Identify naturally occurring boundaries (e.g., neighbourhood, city, watershed) within which diverse ‘participants’ and ‘activities’ exist, understanding that there will be flows into and out of the whole, as well as circulation within it.

**Result of living out this principle:**

**You will have collectively defined the broad contours of this place. It need not be perfect; you can always revisit.**



## Principle #2: Think about your place as a living ecosystem with unique potential

The next step is to **co-discover the potential for vitality that is possible in your place, based on its unique nature as a living ecosystem.**

Here, the work is to sense, serve and manifest the vision of your place's fullest, most healthy, alive, and evolving state. In other words, it is to align stakeholders around the common purpose of what is possible and profoundly meaningful here.

The work of this stage is to convene people to identify **the singular “essence” or story** of your place, in all its complexity as a whole and dynamic living system. After all, no two places are the same. How and why, for example, is Vancouver different from Charlevoix? How we support and regenerate this uniqueness is what will shape the quality of life for inhabitants. And it is what will attract visitors who yearn to be hosted by people who understand the value of what and who they are. As we come to understand and reinforce the authentic nature of local people, communities, and ecosystems, we tap into the specific genius of the place rather than diminishing it with one-size-fits-all, generic solutions and programs.

The concept of “**potential**” is significant here. It has to do with what doesn't yet exist *but could*. As an approach, cultivating potential is

very different from solving problems. When organized around problems, our actions are narrowly dictated by decisions made in the past, rather like trying to steer a boat by looking backwards at its wake. Outcomes of such an approach tend to be incremental, improving only slightly on what already exists. In contrast, regenerative approaches always start from the inherent potential of living entities, anchored in their unique essence. Just as each child has unique potential that we support and seek to enable as responsible parents, the same is true of the potential of our towns and places. And this is a major source of the hopefulness and inspiration associated with a regenerative approach; this is how essence expresses itself into the future. Then, as we work towards the health of the whole system in this way, problems tend to get absorbed and disappear within more meaningful, forward-looking actions.

So, how do you understand the unique story and potential of your place? You look for the patterns of life that keep repeating themselves, making your place who it is, shaping inhabitants and being shaped by them. In fact, this is the same way we learn about people: we look for the recurring patterns that indicate their temperament and passions. Based on the way the whole system

(the place) has responded to various situations in the past, we can be guided by larger trends and time frames, while remaining alert to what may emerge.

Following are a few of the ways to see these patterns:

- Reach out to those with knowledge of the history of this place, including elders and Indigenous people; record their stories.
- Ask people: What do you love about this place? What are the stories that represent ‘who’ this place is to those who live here? Where do you take visitors, and why? Listen to oral histories.
- As tourism visionary Anna Pollock advises: “Ask yourself, what is it about this place that makes you come alive? What would help you flourish? What would enable this place to flourish?”
- Read about the social, cultural, and economic history. Look for patterns in land use, farming, transportation, and business practice.
- Research the natural history of this place over time, its geological, ecological, cultural, economic, and other aspects; dig into the data; draw on GIS and cluster mapping

tools in addition to information from the archives. Review maps and aerial photos to see shifts in patterns over time.

Through these kinds of considerations and conversations, you will start to see that there is care and energy in your place. People see, experience, and grow in understanding the way life uniquely ‘works’ here, perhaps even ‘falling in love’ with their place. Feeling this sense of relationship—finding that it is a place you care about and where you feel cared for—is what makes a place become a home.

**Result of living out this principle:**  
**You will have a succinct story of place rooted in its unique geographic and cultural context and encapsulating its essence or intrinsic nature. Just as important, you will have an emerging network of community members conversant in the potential of this place and its narrative, evolutionary arc.**



### Principle #3: Cultivate a field of relationships to support the ongoing evolution of this place

In an ever-deepening awareness of the story and potential of place, the work of this phase is to begin to align and nurture a **network of people and businesses interested in working together in support of their place. Their ongoing task is** a shared tending of community interaction and the continual learning it generates. The opportunity is to invite people out of their silos so that they can cross-fertilize thinking and actions in service of the health of their whole community, economy, and ecosystem. In this way, we develop an architecture for collaborating, which builds the capacity for vitality and healing among guests, hosts, community, and ecosystem.

These initiatives ultimately **generate a field of excitement, energy, and relationships** that will attract others to the effort and expand opportunities for collaboration and effective progress. We become a community of practice, entrepreneurship, and learning. This becomes the source of creative agency. Just as a good party is an attractor, **a field of mutual caring can energize and expand into a community.** It only takes a few people, consistently engaged around a common, potential-filled purpose, to begin to shift even reluctant

members of the community to contribute.

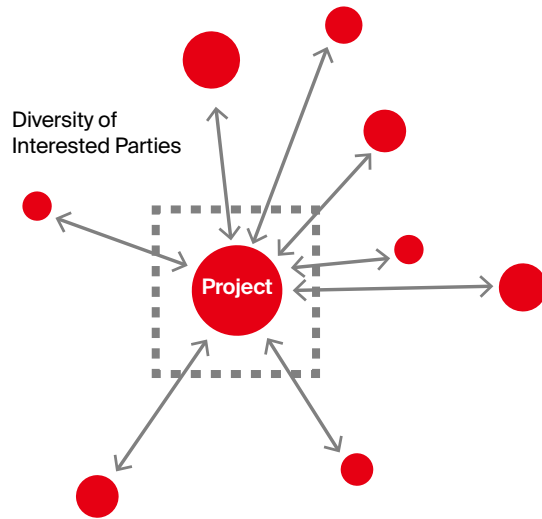
In the process, we come to see ourselves less as separate entities interacting transactionally around a single project (see diagram on the following page) and more as an ecosystem, as a network of mycelium, in the mutual tending of our place.

Traditional or transactional exchanges are oriented towards extracting as much value as possible from an exchange. Reciprocity, on the other hand, is based on the idea of mutual benefit, where our exchanges are intended to grow the vitality and productivity of a whole system. Trees in a forest are linked together in symbiotic relationships with fungi, soil bacteria, and other trees. The resulting webs of mutual support make such trees healthy and long-lived. They work together to benefit the whole, rather than competing to extract the most value for themselves. The community network we develop in this spirit is then the foundation for the ways we practice hosting guests, offering integrated experiences of the unique essence and hospitality of this place.



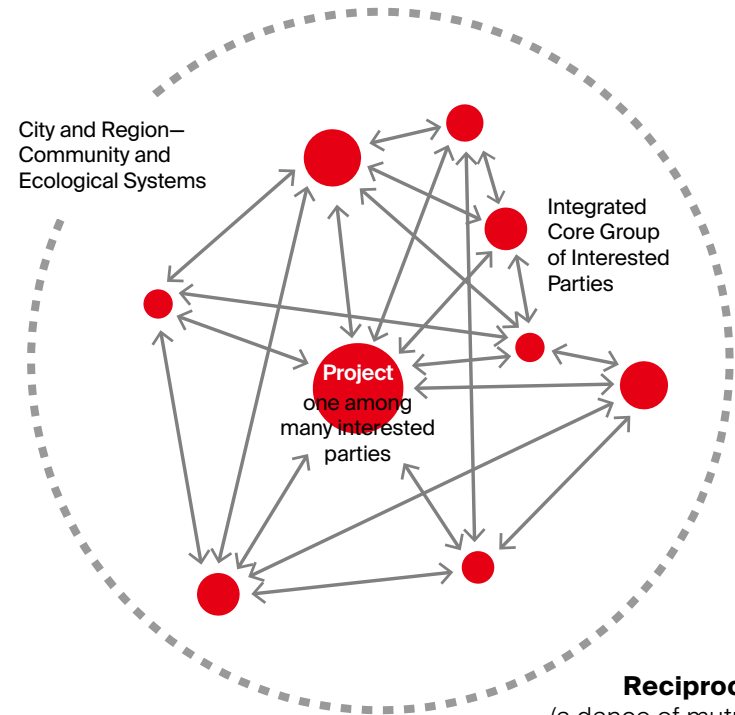


OLD 'RELATIONSHIP'



**Transactional**  
(Rewards / Cost-benefits)

NEW RELATIONSHIP



**Reciprocal**  
(a dance of mutual benefit and greater potential)

The starting point is to ask:

- Who is sensing a calling to care for this place?
- Who is already connected?
- Who is already taking initiative?
- Who are the interested parties?

People with this kind of energy and shared interest in their place can be brought together to begin the work (eventually forming a governing structure as described in Principle #5), even where their initial points of view may be divergent.

**Result of living out this principle:**

**You will be part of a newly emerging field of relationships and cooperation, bringing together a curious group of interested parties and businesses to see how they might collaborate in supporting the potential health of their community, their economy, their place.**

## Principle #4: Invite the gifts and focused contributions of individuals

Building on the previous phases, the work here is to **invite and begin to integrate the motivating gifts and service-focused passions of a wider array of people, community groups and enterprises.**

Just as we acknowledge the unique essence and potential of our places, people respond with focus and enthusiasm when their own “essence” and potential are encouraged. It then becomes easier to invite them to express and integrate their motivating passions in service of the community.

And as we explore and discover the potential of a community and gather in relationship around shared purpose, it also becomes easier to align a variety of people and initiatives. Previously, we may have struggled to navigate conflicting interests. Tuning in to the story of our common home and the unique potential for vitality and hospitality here can help us move beyond stalemate or compromise to “harmonizing” around what is truly meaningful.

In these ways, the work of this phase directly informs individual tourism offerings that are aligned

with the potential for vitality within your place. What can emerge are transformational experiences in which the hosts, the guests, and the ecosystem of place will all be enriched through the encounter.

How do we do this?

- Invite people to consider what motivates them at a core level? What gives them joy? What would they do, how would they serve, if income were not the driver of their work?
- Invite a conversation with friends and business colleagues to help one another see what

you each might not observe about yourselves.

- Like David Schaumberger of Ottercreek Woodworks, explore opportunities that might allow a network of complementary skills and passions to add value as a mutually supporting system of relationships.

In these ways, regenerative approaches create a process and a practice ground of personal development, which is integral to the healthy evolution of any place. You imagine what you can uniquely contribute to the regenerative

capacity of your place. And you grow through offering your gifts and through the practice of hosting. In other words, the initiative develops people’s gifts and contributions in ways that nourish people and place, so that the process of development becomes fully reciprocal.

**Result of living out this principle:**  
**You will surface individual gifts and passions in alignment with the potential of your place. Collective commitment to the potential of your place will grow, and resourcing of initiatives aligned with it will come more naturally.**





## Principle #5: Practice stewardship within an ongoing field of co-creation

In setting our intention to enable regeneration, we take on a new role of adaptive, responsive **stewardship**. Such a practice calls for a process, rhythm and infrastructure for continuing to learn, share and grow together.

One concise definition of stewardship is ‘care for the whole.’ In other words, it is the ongoing, collective practice of tending the whole living system of place, in all its layers and all its complexity. A living system is too complex to control and contains more potential than we can know. But we can sense, participate, experiment, and evolve together with the system. To apply an agricultural metaphor, we can tend the soil even as we grow the plants and harvest the fruit.

Such a practice of ongoing care and tending may be understood as a continuously unfolding inquiry, asking: “What conditions are needed in this moment, within these circumstances, to support the ability to thrive as fully as possible?” It is a continual assessment and adjustment based on emerging insights, evolving conditions and shifting context. And it is a purposeful set of responsive actions.

For tourism entities such as DMOs (Destination Management Organizations), this represents an

expansion from “managing the tourist destination” to “cultivating the hosting community.” It brings the need for an evolution in culture and relationships, calling for a shift in the nature of the organization and the nature of leadership and governance. And it takes conscious practice to avoid falling back into the usual command-and-control operations and to engage an ongoing, emergent process so that relationships can become powerfully co-creative.

To this end, the next step is to gather **a Stewarding Circle, which is an integrated group of people serving the whole**. The ultimate deliverable of a regenerative development project is to leave the place, the community, and the ecosystem with a core group of people who have the capability to continue evolving this developmental process into the future. Such a Stewarding Circle may be a newly formed group, or an expanded existing one, representing the various domains, subsystems or interest areas that form a place (e.g., energy, water, habitat, agriculture, mobility, social, cultural, governance, and so on). The purpose of this team is to “hold the whole,” bringing together or informing others who are working in the subsystems so that they can work together in mutual support of the unique nature of that particular place.



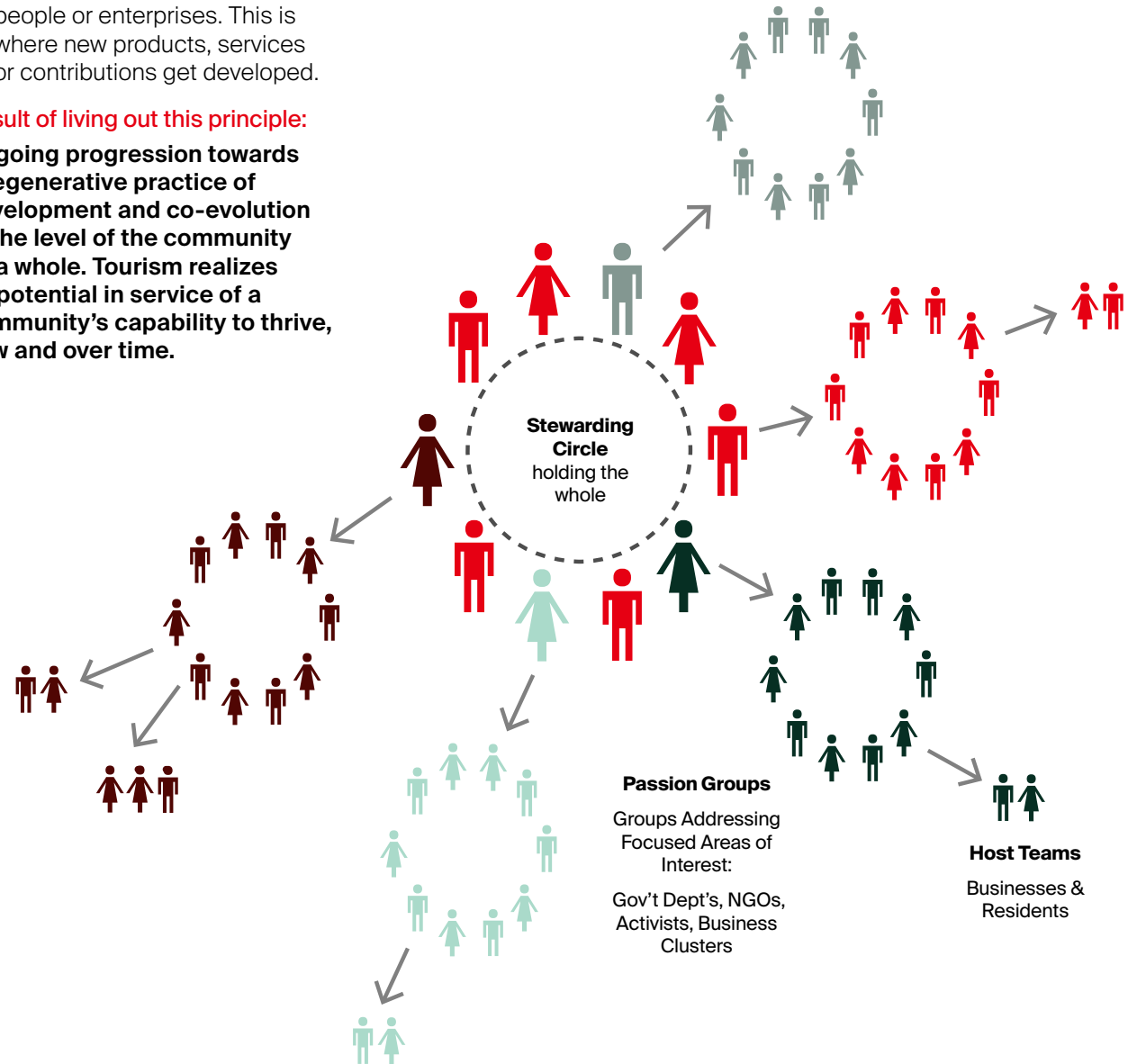
The diagram on the right portrays one way of structuring such a Stewarding Circle and the various levels of community engagement and contribution.

- **A Stewarding Circle** is formed of a diversity of community members who understand and consider the needs and health of the whole system (the place), including focused interest areas. The power of this group cross-fertilizing new ideas and opportunities eventually produces a richness and effectiveness of effort that is not possible if the entities remain isolated.
- **Passion Groups** are fields of focus and interest; these might be activist groups, business associations, and government departments. Passions, or interest areas, might include climate change, habitat health, mobility, culinary tourism, agritourism, workforce development, social justice, and so on. These groups include and are represented by someone engaged in the Stewarding Circle.

- **Host Teams** are the individual people or enterprises. This is where new products, services or contributions get developed.

**Result of living out this principle:**

**Ongoing progression towards a regenerative practice of development and co-evolution at the level of the community as a whole. Tourism realizes its potential in service of a community's capability to thrive, now and over time.**





## PLAYA VIVA (VILLAGE AND RURAL)

In 2006, David Leventhal and Sandra Kahn established the eco resort Playa Viva on 200 acres of abandoned palm plantation on the Pacific coast of Mexico. The land was adjacent to Juluchuca, Guerrero, a declining village of 500 people: overall, not the optimum location for an intimate, luxury destination. In addition, notwithstanding its pristine beaches, the remaining forest and estuary were in a compromised state and the 'hill' that was intended for the development of the casitas turned out to be an Aztec pyramid. However, with the help of experienced naturalists, the design team saw

the potential for this ecosystem to be revitalized, re-establishing the cultural foundation to evolve more diverse and health-giving ecological interrelationships.

The restoration aspect of the work was within the original aspiration of the founders. What emerged turned out to add even greater potency to this vision: in the course of attempting to understand the needs of the land, the design team sought out the Indigenous understanding from the elders in the village. Their perspective, knowledge, and warmth so engaged David that the concept for the resort was transformed in an afternoon.

Instead of building a resort that 'extracted' needed resources from the village, such as staff, food, and so on, the concept was flipped. The resort IS the village, and the quality of life it supports—both ecologically and socially—is integral to the viability and economic success of the resort.

As a result of this awareness, Playa Viva has become a collaborator in the community, and its presence has truly been of benefit to the surrounding ecosystem and its inhabitants. By engaging with community groups through educational projects geared towards sustainability, and by primarily hiring local people, Playa Viva has been a positive driver for the community on several fronts. For example, Playa Viva has led organic farming workshops as well as waste reduction programs for local community members, participated in school programming and teaching, and developed a local salt co-op to ensure the salt harvesters receive contracts at a fair price. Lastly, through the process of understanding the essence of Juluchuca, the project was able

to uncover a rich and amazing history that had largely been forgotten in the area. Through public education regarding this history, Playa Viva has enabled members of the community to feel, rightfully, that they have a say in how their community should evolve in the future. AND if they choose, the guests can experience this healthy dynamic and many leave their visit with a profound respect and experience beyond the conventional resort amenities.

Along the way, seemingly conflicting issues needed to be harmonized:



- The turtle sanctuary was turned into a truly safe area by engaging the former poachers as wardens for the protection of the turtles.
- The casitas proposed on the barrier dune system became a source of stability. Building



## PLAYA VIVA (VILLAGE AND RURAL) – CONT'D

with hardened foundations on dunes is a destructive action; this forced the team to use housing as a way to stabilize the dunes. The solution was to use the existing palm trees and plant others, too. The casitas were turned into 1- to 2-metre-high tree houses with the roots serving to anchor the sand.

### Outcomes:

The result of this way of working was the development of an entrepreneurial local economy that draws from unique local talents and resources to:

- Create jobs.
- Solve community health and nutrition problems.
- Provide consistent and on-going education about new farming techniques for healthier soil and food.
- Build local skills and assets.
- Engage the community in active stewardship for a long-term effort to regenerate native biodiversity needed to maintain the system's resilience in an area vulnerable to hurricanes.
- Guests are educated and have chosen to be involved in these efforts-some invest in local business.
- The resort has been continuously profitable even while opening at the height of the Financial Crisis
- The Teenagers are staying and the young adults are moving back to town.





# HOW WILL WE KNOW WE ARE MAKING PROGRESS?





As we move into the practice of stewardship, the automatic question many people ask is: how will we measure our progress?

The first step is to be clear about where we are headed. What is needed in each place for an ongoing, thriving way of life? What intermediate steps are needed to take us there? What outputs, outcomes, and impact (or effect) will our actions have over time?

These questions require real consideration; the outcomes we aim for in the hosting economy are currently in flux. For example, Destination Canada's new aspirations and outcomes for wealth and wellbeing (described in the diagram on the right) offer a powerful signal of shifting priorities and intentions, expanding from the famous "heads in beds" to more meaningful results for the whole system.

Every community, enterprise and initiative will have to identify their own desired outputs, outcomes, and impact, along with quantitative and qualitative indicators to assess them. Ideally, they will do this for economic, social and ecological factors at multiple geographic scales and multiple time frames. As much as this is a significant number of variables to take into account, there are plenty of resources, certifications and frameworks that offer guidance and support.<sup>5</sup>

## WEALTH & WELLBEING OUTCOMES

- 1** Tourism businesses prosper, are deeply embedded in and generate wealth for communities;
- 2** Tourism jobs are coveted and inclusive of diverse people and geographies;
- 3** Local cultures thrive, are rooted in community and welcome the world;
- 4** Tourism operates in harmony with ecological abundance and rebalancing of the carbon cycle;
- 5** Infrastructure supports the development of tourism;
- 6** Guests are transformed by rich experiences that distinguish Canada in the world.



As we consider the question of metrics, it is interesting to note that the root of the word “accounting” is the same as the French word “raconter”—to tell a story, to give an account. It is less about counting and more about creating a narrative in support of greater understanding. And quantitative measures only tell part of the story, often not the most important part. The more complete version of “how will we measure our progress?”, then, is “how will we know we are growing more vitality and “thrivability” at multiple levels of our place as a whole and dynamic living system?” This is the question every local Stewarding Circle, community initiative and enterprise will have to discern.

Here is a simple example of what that might entail. For CLC Canada, a Montréal-based language school that hosts students from around the world, founder AJ Javier noted some of the ways he assesses the level of thrivability in his organization:

- What is the level of attractiveness? (“Thriving organizations have magnetism,” he says.) Are we attracting nice, conscientious people?
- Do visiting students feel more fully alive? Do they feel belonging? Do they come early? Do they stay late? Do they come to the optional events? Do they feel a sense of contribution within the community?
- Is it absolutely evident that we value the team? Do staff feel listened to? Are they autonomous? Do teachers laugh together? Do they talk socially? If the staff are thriving, the students feel that.

These are some of the indicators that let him know the conditions are in place for life to thrive at every level—for visiting students, for staff, for the school itself, for the community. Not coincidentally, he senses a strong connection between this set of indicators and the school’s profitability.

But importantly, if he tried to measure these indicators quantitatively, it would negate their effect and possibly even do harm. Imagine, for example, if he tried to closely monitor the number of times teachers laugh together, charting and posting the results each week. What is needed, instead, is an ongoing, collective rhythm and process of re-engaging, reflecting and re-evaluating, of observing, assessing, and adapting. In other words, asking: how well are we living out our story, and what are we learning in the process?

In monitoring both quantitative and qualitative aspects of our place in these ways, we also need to pay attention to relationships between smaller and larger systems. Nothing exists without its supporting context; value and resources are continually exchanged for life to carry on. This is why we need to consider the effect of our actions in larger and smaller domains and over many years. For example, a restaurant might want to achieve a green building rating such as a LEED certification; yet a building and its services do not work in isolation. We may also need to consider questions such as: where does the food come from, might it be grown locally, might we support local farmers, do local banks offer support to start-up farmers, who can help with soil and associated regenerative farming techniques, how is the food sent to the restaurant, and so on. You don’t need to address every connection, yet being aware of these connections will help knit a stronger

and more resilient economy, community, and ecosystem.

**To be clear, classic quantitative metrics of economic and business performance remain important; however, regenerative stewardship involves ongoing monitoring of an even richer set of indicators, both quantitative and qualitative, sensitive to the dynamics of the system as a whole.**

In all, we see that a regenerative strategy is one of continual practice, learning and becoming. It calls for us to look for changes in behaviour in people and ecosystems. To notice progress markers, as well as early indicators that we’re off course. To observe trends and track the pace of change. To draw on multiple perspectives. To embrace surprise, intuition and complexity. To identify together what would bring the most vitality, possibility and new capability—and to commit to a collective journey to those ends. On that basis, we can appropriately adapt the ways we are enriching the health and diversity of our home places and ourselves, so that the story of our place grows ever more coherent.

For example, on the following page is a simple scoresheet designed by architect Malcolm Wells, followed by assessments of two sample systems. Note that this kind of scoresheet helps us assess improvement (or not) over time, indicating progress towards a healthy ecological system.

**Did you know?**

The word “accounting” is the same as the French word “raconter”—to tell a story, to give an account. It is less about counting and more about creating a narrative in support of greater understanding.”

**EVALUATING PROGRESS towards Regenerating Thriving Places**

Subject for evaluation

	towards degenerative				towards regenerative			
	- 100 always	- 75 usually	- 50 sometimes	- 25 seldom	+ 25 seldom	+ 50 sometimes	+ 75 usually	+ 100 always
pollutes pure air								creates pure air
emits carbon								sequesters carbon
pollutes pure water								creates pure water
wastes rainwater								stores rainwater
produces no food								produces its own food
destroys rich soil								creates rich soil
wastes solar energy								uses solar energy
stores no solar energy								stores solar energy
consumes energy disproportionately								consumes energy equitably
imports all its energy								exports energy
destroys silence								creates' silence
dumps its waste unused								consumes its own wastes
needs cleaning and repair								maintains itself
disregards nature's cycles								synchronizes with nature's cycles
destroys wildlife habitat								provides wildlife habitat
destroys human habitat								provides human habitat
intensifies local weather								moderates local weather
is ugly								is beautiful
discourages community interaction								encourages community interaction
is socially and ecologically exclusive								is socially and ecologically inclusive
is a bad neighbor								is a good neighbor

negative score  
- 2100 possible

positive score  
+ 2100 possible

final score

© Malcolm Wells  
with modifications  
SBSE @ Quebec City



# LAS SALINAS, VIÑA DEL MAR, CHILE

## (CITY AND REGION)

Viña del Mar (Vineyard by the Sea) has long been a major tourist destination for the region and for South America as a whole. The city had been one of the early examples of the Garden City movement of the late 1800s and had a long history of intelligent and sustainable growth. However, over the last few decades, tourism had grown too rapidly, becoming a force that was undermining the community with crowds and businesses catering to mostly seasonal needs. Community amenities were vanishing—parks

community. Their vision: to clean up and restore a 19-hectare former oil tank farm to create a new campus of residential high-rises. This fenced-in eyesore of a brownfield site was currently blocking access to a nearby beach, and the developers believed that turning it around would make a valuable contribution to the community.

However, the community wasn't interested in the developer's vision. There were no fewer than 25 separate community interest groups that were actively opposed to the project. These groups universally referred to Las Salinas as "the enemy." To counteract the opposition, the only approach the developer knew how to employ was that of a public relations war: to placate, counter, or reduce the influence of the various groups that opposed their efforts.

A regenerative development team was hired. They looked instead to find common ground and to identify what the core aspirations were between all the stakeholders, including the developer. The activist groups were met with individually and each conversation opened with a pledge that the purpose of their involvement in the project was to focus on its impact on the health of the city as a whole, living organism. With this foundation, they engaged in an exploration and identification of how that health had been compromised over the years.

This exploration and conversations spoke directly to the community's yearning by developing a Story of Place—painting a vivid picture of the

potential for the Viña del Mar that could be. By reflecting on the place's long history as a thriving and sustainable contributor to the region, the Story of Place articulated key patterns of health and resilience that, if restored, would enable the regeneration of the city. By using the place's own history as the basis for identifying these patterns, they enabled this understanding to move strongly into the hands of community members.

The result of this process was an ongoing and consistent series of very productive meetings with an initial group of interested stakeholders. These meetings, held every six weeks over the period of a year, allowed the activist groups to exchange ideas and thinking that had never occurred while



were languishing, and young people were moving away, unable to find meaningful work, affordable housing, and quality of life. The city was in decline.

The patriarch of one of the largest corporations in Chile wanted to create a legacy project—Las Salinas—as a way of giving back to their



# LAS SALINAS, VIÑA DEL MAR, CHILE

## (CITY AND REGION) – CONT'D

they were working in silos of fragmented interests; new and purposeful relationships were born.

At the end of the first phase of involvement, community groups that had been opposed to the project had become collaborators, with some groups seeing themselves as partners in its long-term vision. But a second result of the process was that it spun off related efforts and breathed new life into existing projects that were outside the boundaries of the development, with community groups leading the way. The field of momentum within the community was so inspiring that one businessman remarked: “I don’t know how you’ve done it—this is the first time this city has been able to dream in 30 years.”

Multiple projects related to community uplift were started by various interests in the city and region. The Chamber of Commerce pledged millions of dollars to restore the large estuary in the city; farmers and restaurant owners began to collaborate; mobility issues began to be addressed as a whole city (not just relating to the development itself); youth leadership groups built on this energy to increase visibility and relationship to the schools. These efforts and more contributed to the long-term viability of the project and increased investment return. The next phase will further engage the community and implement metrics to measure outputs and outcomes.



### Outcomes:

- Reduced approval time and cost.
- Support of the community and a reduction in years of legal battles and fees.
- Community support and federal approval for the brownfield remediation process—accomplished by engaging the academic community in evaluating and offering a process developed by trusted locals.
- The collaboration and unity of interest groups to harmonize formerly fragmented issues and problems.
- Identification of leverage points to bring back a dynamic, healthy and vibrant city such as water, mobility, ecological system connectivity and enhancement, re-gardening of the city, new business vitality, and neighbourhood connectivity.
- Inspiration for how the master plan can influence and catalyze the social and ecological systems in the community, and how the community can inspire the master plan.



**WHERE DO WE  
GO FROM HERE?**





## What's next? A perspective from Canada's national tourism organization

Recall that the intention for this 'Guide to Action' is to spark reflection, conversation, and shared discovery among those in the tourism sector, sectors associated with tourism (consciously or otherwise) and all those who call this land home. So, please, consider this as an invitation to join in a movement and emerging field of practice—one that involves regenerative approaches to stewarding Canada's hosting economy, inspired by the principles outlined in this document.

Many of you are well on your way to cultivating your own place-specific regenerative practice within your communities. Others are at a different

point in their journey. For our part, we are stepping forward in a spirit of humility and learning, in particular where regeneration begins to touch on reconciliation.

With this in mind, and at this point in our own evolution as a national tourism organization, please think of Destination Canada's role primarily as a "field catalyst." Much of our work will be behind the scenes, oriented towards filling gaps and facilitating connection and alignment among communities of practice. We look forward to many conversations and evolving partnerships as we seek to catalyze a more integrated and

mutualistic country-wide ecosystem of destination development and stewardship at various scales. We do so with the knowledge that a regenerative approach to destination development is geography-specific and, therefore, intensely local or regional in practice. Our desire is to cultivate the potential for an accelerated evolution of this practice across Canada's hosting economy by encouraging greater structure and cohesion within and between national, regional and local levels. To those ends, what follows are some of the ways we are seeking to make a contribution at this time.

### 1. Thought Leadership

With this paper as an initial contribution to the field, our goal is to offer readers an informed perspective on regeneration, through:

- An articulation of why regenerative, why now, and why tourism;
- A synthesis of knowledge on how to practice regeneration locally, by capturing the essence of what pioneers in this field are already doing and by sharing it broadly; and
- Shared language to enable effective conversations, recognizing that embracing a living systems worldview is new to most and it requires new terminology and metaphors.

### 2. Convening People

Since at its core, regeneration involves bringing people together around what they care about (and could care about) in their place and then putting that care into action, Destination Canada will support the convening and facilitation of regional dialogues. We are inviting participation both from those directly involved in the tourism sector locally or regionally, and others whose role in community development has potential for synergy in cultivating a broader field of practice in regenerative development and stewardship through the lens of tourism. For example, this includes urban planners, community organizers, and impact investors.

We also see potential in convening nationally as a natural culmination of these regional dialogues, to share learnings across regions and ensure we pay appropriate attention to the relationships between smaller and larger domains of the ecosystem. This would also be an opportunity to celebrate a growing affinity for regenerative approaches to tourism and inspire putting this care into action.



### 3. Enabling Networks

In parallel with preparation of this guide, Destination Canada has been developing a new website that we envision as a collaborative learning hub where sources of insight, including this guide, and other information will be curated to become more accessible to a wider range of people. We intend for this to include inspiring real-life stories that illustrate the pathways and potential of regenerative approaches to development.

### 4. Capacity Development

Destination Canada will highlight and support the use of experienced teachers and facilitators in the principles of regenerative practice who are available in Canada now. This is truly one of those aspects of life where we learn by doing; capacity will develop most profoundly when we immerse ourselves in shared discovery of the potential of our place as a living ecology. We will also invite planning and development, as well as other communities of interest to become acquainted with and embrace regenerative principles in the evolution of their own practices.

### 5. Sense Making

How will we know we are growing more vitality and “thrivability” at multiple levels of our place as a whole and dynamic living system? Since this is the question that every local stewarding circle, community initiative and enterprise must discern, collectively we will require a richer set of indicators (qualitative and quantitative) along with new sense-making tools.

Destination Canada is working with Statistics Canada and others on the development of a “national data collective” that will be accessible to both expert and non-expert users. It will integrate information from official government statistics and other less traditional sources. The information will be organized so that it is meaningful within a regenerative context, relevant to local communities and adaptable by them to suit their local needs.

### 6. Cultivating Investment

We have learned that as collective commitment to the potential of our places grows through the application of these principles, resourcing of initiatives will tend to come more naturally. This is true both for resources which emerge from within your own communities, as well as for external investments. To enable more of the latter, Destination Canada will seek to cultivate a community of tourism-aware investors whose missions are aligned with regenerative principles and practices.



## LET'S GET STARTED!

Holistic thinking and collective action still require individual effort, but it's worth it! Expect it to be messy and, at times, uncomfortable. As with the principles themselves, building momentum across a country with the geographic, cultural and economic complexities of Canada will not be linear. Leadership within a regenerative

ecosystem is always distributed. It requires people and organizations to come forward and seize the initiative at every scale. Create your own energy, inviting others from your community and region to live the principles with you. From it will emerge a field of practice that will grow over time and across spaces.



# CONCLUSION





The rise of regenerative approaches offers a new lens on the role of the tourism sector in society.

This lens offers the perspective that we in tourism have a special opportunity and perhaps even responsibility. Who else, if not hospitality, is in a position to be a force for vitality and healing in community? What other sector or profession is better equipped to tap into the unique story that connects people to their place and brings them together across difference, so that local cultures thrive and guests feel welcome and enriched? Who else is capable of hosting authentic encounters that reconnect people with their full humanity? Of creating experiences that open people's minds and hearts to what really matters? Of tuning in to what is most true at a local level, and also across the land?

As a sector, we can collaboratively partner with those in community leadership and development, as well as with business owners, artists, farmers, teachers, and others.

Indeed, those of us dedicated to the work of hosting in – and being hosted by – place may also have a role to play in healing the relationships

between settler and Indigenous communities. The work of truth and reconciliation is not only about atoning for past and present harms to people. It is also about past and present harms to the land, and therefore to ourselves. There can be no reconciliation with Indigenous peoples if there is not also reconciliation with place. And there can be no reconciliation with place without reconciling with life-centred worldviews that are core to Indigenous cultures. This is work that must be carried out with care and intention, perhaps as the deepest work of regeneration.

In all, the essence of a regenerative approach to tourism is putting care into action, asking:

- What is the care this place needs?
- What patterns of care are needed within this community?
- What is the care each of us needs—from each other, from this community, from the land?
- What is the care we would love to extend to guests, and what care do we wish they would extend in return?

The work of regeneration is fundamentally an ongoing collective practice of creativity and collaborative caring, learning and integrating diverse interests and perspectives, rooted in community and in place.

What is being regenerated—made more vital, more viable, more possible, more resilient—is the capacity for our communities and ecologies to adapt and thrive—economically, socially, culturally, and environmentally.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

*The two of us are grateful for this opportunity to share our combined perspectives on regenerative approaches to tourism in Canada and beyond. The views shared here are drawn from our own thinking and experiences, as well as from a broader field of pioneers and cherished colleagues. Both of us have also been profoundly influenced by Indigenous worldviews and practices. Of course, any errors and omissions are fully our own.*

*To be regenerative is to be dedicated to listening and learning together with people and place. With this in mind, the core intention of this document is to spark reflection, conversation and shared discovery among those in the tourism sector and among those who call this land home. May this be a helpful guide and inspiration.*

**Bill Reed** is an internationally recognized planning consultant, design process facilitator, teacher, and author in sustainability and regeneration. He is a principal of Regenesys, Inc.—a regenerative development, living systems integrator, and education organization at the leading edge of regenerative practice. An author of many technical articles and contributor to multiple books including co-authorship of the seminal work, *Integrative Design Guide to Green Building*, he is a founding Board Director of the US Green Building Council and one of the co-founders of the LEED Green Building Rating System. In addition to being considered one of the leading thinkers in this field, Bill has also consulted on hundreds of green design commissions—buildings and city master plans. He is also a keynote speaker at major building and design events, as well as a guest lecturer at universities throughout North America, Europe, and Oceania.

**Michelle Holliday** is a globally recognized thought leader on regenerative approaches to work and community. As a consultant, facilitator, researcher, and writer, her work centres around “thrivability” — a set of perspectives and practices based on a view of organizations and communities as dynamic living systems. On this basis, she supports pioneering, purpose-driven clients across a wide range of sectors, including tourism and agriculture, to enable the transition to more regenerative systems and structures. To these ends, Michelle brings people of diverse perspectives together to uncover shared aspirations, tap into their collective intelligence, and allow innovative responses to emerge. Michelle's research, perspectives and practical experience are brought together in the highly acclaimed book, *The Age of Thrivability: Vital Perspectives and Practices for a Better World*. She frequently delivers keynotes globally, including two popular TEDx talks. And she has written close to 100 articles on themes of thriving and regeneration. After living in 19 cities, including Moscow, London, Paris, New York, and a small tourist town in Scotland, she has called Montréal home for nearly two decades.



# APPENDIX A

## VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, SEA ISLAND, BRITISH COLUMBIA A PLACE IN EVOLUTION

### Intro

**Vancouver International Airport (YVR) exists to serve the surrounding community and the economy that supports it.** Like other airports, its core function is to provide ground services that enable inbound and outbound movement by air of people and goods regionally, nationally, and internationally. More interesting though is the way they do this, and more. **It begins with the belief that their business is completely interconnected within a larger ecosystem—human and more than human—rooted in Sea Island on the Fraser River Delta of British Columbia.** Which happens also to situate them on traditional unceded territory of the Musqueam people and inside the boundaries of Greater Vancouver.

### Backstory

When the local airport authority became responsible for running the facility in 1992, the arrangement was operationalized through a 99-year lease of the land and infrastructure from the federal government. A for-profit non-share capital corporation business model was chosen, one that invests all profits back into the airport. The faraway lease-expiry date of 2072 combined with this **purpose-oriented and community-centric organizational model has enabled a culture of stewardship and holistic thinking** to emerge. In the words of Tamara Vrooman, the President and CEO, YVR's "...focus is always on how to sustain a future," and her organization regularly asks, "...what does our community need from us, [at this time]?"

Looking back, the early days under this arrangement were a heady time for the country. Canadians were inspired by the success of Vancouver Expo '86 as well as the opportunities stemming from Canada's deepening integration into a rapidly liberalizing world economy. Canada was looking to the Vancouver Airport both as an economic gateway between our country, the Asia-Pacific and the broader North American economy, as well as a welcoming place for immigrants and guests from Asia-Pacific to be greeted upon their arrival in Canada.

As the saying goes, with opportunity comes responsibility. Thirty years on, YVR has indeed earned its reputation as an internationally competitive mover of people and facilitator of commerce, including for tourism. As we will see, its success has grown in no small part out of a willingness to **1) work at the scale of place, 2) embrace the complexity** inherent in this unique ecosystem (itself intertwined with larger domains around it), and **3) cultivate a field of mutually reinforcing relationships** between people and businesses whose energies are continually drawn towards the greater potential of this place.

### 1. Relationship with the Musqueam Nation

Essential to putting this belief into action is the **transparent and inclusive collaboration practised between leaders of YVR and the Musqueam people**, having evolved their relationship into one of trust and mutualism. In 2017, building on their history of working well together, YVR and the Musqueam people formalized a 30 year Musqueam Indian Band - YVR Airport Sustainability & Friendship Agreement. This long-term partnership recognizes that **YVR has a responsibility to work with the Musqueam to achieve a sustainable and mutually beneficial future for this community.** The agreement embeds principles of stewardship and representation, making explicit a host of intended benefits including funding scholarships, diverse employment opportunities, revenue sharing with the Musqueam, identification and protection of archeological resources, as well as support for ongoing airport operations and long-term development of YVR. <https://www.yvr.ca/en/about-yvr/musqueam/overview>

Put succinctly by Vrooman, YVR "...integrates this perspective into everything we do...[in part] because transparency and inclusiveness improves the quality of decisions." This is reflected in an organizational culture in which every new employee's onboarding involves time spent with the Musqueam who reinforce with them the **values of respect, pride, inclusiveness, honour and shared responsibility.**

## 2. Relationship with the natural ecology

In terms of humanity's broader relationship with our natural ecology, air travel generally sits at the degenerative end of the spectrum of impacts. While the YVR leadership team readily acknowledges this reality, they do not accept it as a future state. Instead, they are taking steps to **reduce the harm locally on and around Sea Island** resulting from their own operations, as well as to **cultivate an inclusive culture of innovation oriented towards rebalancing aviation's relationship overall with the ecology** on which we all depend for our survival.

On Sea Island, YVR's environmental management practices **combine modern biological sciences with traditional Musqueam knowledge** of the Fraser River Delta to rehabilitate shoreline biodiversity and other factors important to the health of the habitat, most notably for salmon. This began with recognizing the interdependence between the vitality of the river delta, the salmon, the Musqueam and the airport. Learning to see and work with the local ecology as an integrated system presented these partners with the opportunity to discover how stewardship of the airport and associated lands could be altered to recreate ecological conditions conducive to more robust salmon populations. In 2016, YVR became the first airport in North America **certified as salmon-safe**, and earlier in 2022 they were recertified as such. <https://www.yvr.ca/en/media/news-releases/2022/recertified-salmon-safe>

More broadly, in response to civilization's grand challenge of coming to terms with our impact on the climate, YVR has developed a **Roadmap to Net-Zero emissions by 2030** resulting from its local airport operations. When asked about the motivation for setting a comparatively ambitious timeline, Vrooman was all business. The longer they wait, the bigger the gap they'll have to close. And she expects that being an early mover will position YVR to attract more public and private capital, more partnerships with climate innovators, more opportunities to demonstrate to other airports that it's both possible and profitable – potentially even generating future revenue streams from the resulting innovations as they did before by being the first to deploy airport check-in kiosks. Simply put, aligning corporate intentions with collective wellbeing is good strategy for profit sustainability. <https://www.yvr.ca/en/about-yvr/environment/carbon-reduction>

To broaden this movement, YVR is investing in Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) infrastructure through its involvement in **BioPortYVR**, an initiative designed to enable air carriers flying out of Vancouver to make the switch to low emissions renewable fuels that are compatible with existing fleets of aircraft. This infrastructure, when viewed together with the **Innovation Hub @YVR** (hosted by the airport), is an invitation for other organizations to bring their unique mix of talents so that **diverse groups can 'learn together' and partner to harmonize**, on the one hand, the benefits of physically connecting people and places with, on the other hand, the potential of zero emissions flight.

## 3. Relationship with employees, businesses, and diverse communities

This philosophy of respect for people and place manifests in numerous other ways. One of the most important is how the airport seeks to co-create value with (rather than extract value from) the people it employs, outside organizations operating within the regional ecosystem, the land on which they sit, and even the digital sphere.

### Living Wage Employer

Several years ago, YVR made the transition to become a certified **Living Wage Employer** (their own employees and soon-to-be direct contractors, some 2,200 workers in total) and they are encouraging all other employers operating within the airport ecosystem to embrace this practice. Again, it's not just the right thing to do, it's good for business too. Looking at the employment landscape holistically, higher entry level wages foster a tighter bond between employers and employees thereby encouraging a mutual commitment to employee development and, relatedly, reducing 'churn' so as to enhance the vigour of the airport ecosystem overall. It also allows YVR and its partners in this ecosystem to better attract prospective new employees. For example, early in 2022, when YVR advertised 80 vacancies for guest experience positions, it received over 600 applications. Not only did they fill every vacancy at an important moment in the tourism sector's recovery, but the resulting new hires also netted them some 32 different language capabilities.





## Iskwew Air

High quality connectivity between urban, rural, and Indigenous communities is important for the socio-cultural, economic and even the ecological health of the wider region. **Iskwew Air** is a new entrant into this space; they are **an Indigenous, woman-owned airline** flying out of Sea Island. This carrier received the blessing of the Musqueam to operate on their traditional unceded territory and then began chartered operations in 2019. In 2021, Iskwew Air marked its inaugural commercial flight from YVR, offering daily scheduled service between Vancouver and Qualicum Beach on Vancouver Island. September 2022, Iskwew Air and YVR entered into a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen their working relationship based on a shared vision for the potential of aviation. Said Teara Fraser, Founder of Iskwew Air, “We look forward to continuing to connect people with each other and the land alongside our friends at YVR. We know, together we can transform the aviation industry into one that is based on reciprocity, relationships and sustainability. This is the future taking flight.” One opportunity is to enable more remote parts of region to tap into the potential of authentic local tourism experiences which help their communities thrive. <https://www.iskwew.ca>

## Land use planning

During COVID-19, YVR **updated its land-use plan** on Sea Island for the first time in 30 years, putting an indefinite pause on previously zoned development of a third runway. Instead, they are inviting others to join them in exploring opportunities for industrial, commercial, logistics and/or conceivably residential uses. When asked about how they intend to proceed, Vrooman’s response was, “Slowly, in synch with Musqueam agreement and principles.” She emphasised that success, “**rests on a foundation of partnership with Musqueam; [and] rests on our commitment to decarbonizing.**” For example, might these lands play a role in fostering a more robust marketing and logistics ecosystem for regenerative farmers, fishers and food producers who already have a foothold in the region?

## Digital twinning of the airport

Another recent initiative with long-term potential rests on having taken time during the pandemic slowdown to digitally map the entire outside and inside of the airport. This **digital twin of YVR** and surrounding lands opens the way for a more inclusive and collaborative approach to learning and innovation than in the past, for example through real-time modeling of aircraft movements outside as well as human and air flow patterns inside. It creates potential for improving efficiency, reducing emissions, and mitigating airborne disease transmission. Potentially even new revenue streams for creators of Indigenous art installations too large to take on the road; think digital re-creations of large works of art that can be auctioned in the form of Non-Fungible Tokens!

Vancouver International Airport’s **pattern of development** is indicative of an organization that is **evolving towards a regenerative practice**, even though this is not the language they would use. The airport’s relationship with the local Musqueam people, with Sea Island and the Fraser River Delta is increasingly mutualistic. This is synergistic with cultivating opportunity for greater connection and mutual benefit between urban, rural and Indigenous communities of the region. And between the region and the wider world.

### Some Indicators of Progress

- Approximately 100 Musqueam employed with the Airport Authority on Sea Island in diverse roles
- Ongoing habitat restoration – Salmon-Safe Certified
- Living Wage Employer
- Carbon reduction leadership -- Roadmap to net-zero emissions by 2030
- Hosting an Indigenous, woman-owned airline
- Land-use development based on Musqueam principles and commitment to zero emissions

# GLOSSARY

## Community

The people with common interests living in a particular area. (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/>)

All living entities (people, animals, plants, microbes, etc.) can be seen as having common interests in that they support each other.

## Ecology

The totality or pattern of relations between organisms and their environment. (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/>)

## Ecosystem

The complex community of organisms and its environment functioning as an ecological unit. (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/>)

## Harmonization

In general, nature 'harmonizes' and adapts, it doesn't compromise. In the larger context, the systems of life collaborate, they do not win or lose. The oak tree does not negotiate the exchange of nutrients with the nearby hickory tree. Trees in a forest are linked together in symbiotic relationships with fungi, soil bacteria, and other trees. The resulting webs of mutual support make such trees healthy and long-lived. They work together to benefit the whole, rather than competing to extract the most value for themselves.

## Hospitality

The act of assuring one's guests feel welcomed, cared for, and valued.

Louis, chevalier de Jaucourt describes hospitality in the Encyclopédie as the virtue of a great soul that cares for the whole universe through the ties of humanity. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hospitality>)

## Hosting

In the sense of what is required for the long-term flourishing of a destination, hosting is more than guest-focused. It means to bring the whole community together in a way that contributes to the visitor economy; working together to lift up a new vision that delivers a much more compassionate, caring and connective experience to both host and visitor, and lifts up the potential for all life to flourish in place. In other words, "regeneration." (<https://reallyregenerative.org/regenerative-tourism/>)

## Living System

Self-organizing life forms and entities that interact with their environment. These systems are maintained by flows of information, energy, and matter.

Instead of examining phenomena by attempting to break things down into components, a general living systems theory explores phenomena in terms of dynamic patterns of relationships of organisms with their environment. (Wikipedia, Living System, August 2022)

## More-than-Human Community

The totality of living species that make up the community of life: animals, plants, fungi, and single cell entities. Human life, as we know it, would not exist without the collaborative creative relationships within this community.

## Nested Systems

Wholes and whole living systems are contained within one another. Each whole adds and receives value (energy, information, shelter, resources) from the others.

Example: a person, a family, a neighbourhood, a city, and a watershed are nested systems within each other and provide mutual support. Being conscious of the exchanges in value between these helps a community adapt to changes in these systems.

## Outputs, Outcomes, Impacts

Outputs: tangible, immediate practices, products and services that result from the activities that are undertaken.

Outcomes: changes or effects on individuals or the environment that follow from the delivery of practices, products and services.

Impact (or Effect): changes or effects on society and/or environment that follow from outcomes that have been achieved. Impacts rarely can be anticipated. Because of this, it is necessary to build in a near continual process of paying attention.

## Place

The unique, multi-layered network of living systems within a geographic region that results from the complex interactions over time of (a) the natural ecology (climate, mineral and other deposits, soil, vegetation, water and wildlife, etc.) and (b) culture (distinctive customs, expressions of values, economic activities, forms of association, ideas for education, traditions, etc.).



The regenerative paradigm asserts that development can and should contribute to the capacity of all of the natural, cultural, and economic systems that it affects in a place, (to grow and evolve their health and ongoing viability. (Mang and Reed, *Designing from Place: A Regenerative Framework and Methodology*, Routledge, Building Research & Information, December 2011)

### Potential

Inherent ability or capacity for growth, development or coming into being. (Dictionary.com)

In contrast to problem-solving, which rarely works without experiencing unanticipated consequences, working with the potential for health in people and place is much more effective at producing positive results and aligning disparate perspectives because we are focused on what we want to see emerge.

### Restoration (in the context of life):

We cannot restore any living system to its 'original condition.' Living systems constantly change. What is really occurring when we 'restore' a living system is to bring it back to a condition supporting evolutionary health; the 'condition' is the capability for an ecological subsystem (a wetland, a woodland, a riparian corridor, etc.) to self-organize and evolve. Because no ecological system is independent of its surroundings, long-term restoration is not possible without humans being conscious of their impact, i.e., the need to pay attention to evolution and regenerate the relationship in the face of continual change.

### Regeneration:

The continual process of rebirth; the ongoing process of evolution: the cycle of birth, life, death, rebirth. E.g., if we unintentionally break connections in our personal relationships, we must then regenerate them; regeneration is also needed to heal our relationship with the ecological systems we live within.

Regenerative development builds the capability of the people to engage in a continuous and healthy relationship with the place where they live. There is continuous learning and feedback so that all aspects of the system (natural, cultural, and economic) are an integral part of the process of life in that place—co-evolution.

### Stewardship

Care for a whole system, in all its complexity and potential.

The careful and responsible management of a thing or system entrusted to one's care, e.g., the stewardship of natural resources.

The concept of 'management' can be misleading. At its most basic level, stewardship is acting upon the understanding that leadership is a temporary role which is outlasted by the lifespan of an organization, community, or ecosystem. A leader is performing the act of stewardship whenever they are actively preparing for an entity's or system's future vitality.

<https://nytimesineducation.com/spotlight/what-is-stewardship-and-should-all-great-leaders-practice-it/>

### Story of Place

Instead of only asking 'what' this place is, this process is discovering 'who' this place is; its subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle patterns that give it its identity over time.

Regenerating the health of each place requires working with the patterns of life that support its thriving as a whole socio-ecological system. Discovering these patterns, its essence, or unique nature, is begun by the Story of Place process. This is not simply a narrative. Just as we would not describe our children or a friend through their history only; we identify the patterns of their life—the expressions of life and how they live it that define their uniqueness.

### Sustainability

A societal goal that broadly aims for humans to safely co-exist on planet Earth over a long time.

Sustainability goals have generally been seen in terms of increasing efficiency and minimizing the damage to ecosystems. This is in contrast to regeneration, which relates to how we engage with life and improve the self-organizing dynamics of the living systems that support clean air, water, earth, food, and more.

A sustainable condition is impossible without a continual process of regenerating our relationship within living systems.

### Thrive/Flourish

To express unique potential, to generate new possibilities, to regenerate continuously, to integrate death and renewal, to be ever more at home and in harmony with context. (Michelle Holliday)

Whole (a Living Whole)

An entity that is singular, alive/vital, and evolving. (Carol Sanford)

### Whole Living System

Something constituting a complex unity: a coherent system or organization that is greater than the sum of its parts, working together as one, i.e., a person, a city, a watershed.

E.g., If we were given all the 'parts' of a human being and mixed these parts and organs together in a bowl, do we get a live human being? Living entities are more than the sum of their parts—there is a spirit and essence to them that defines the real nature of this whole entity.

# REFERENCES

Below is a necessarily incomplete collection of resources to satisfy an interest in learning more. Many of these resources will lead to others, as the community of regenerative thinkers and practitioners is generally wonderfully connected and generous.

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[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358966495\\_Regenerative\\_tourism\\_a\\_conceptual\\_framework\\_leveraging\\_theory\\_and\\_practice](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358966495_Regenerative_tourism_a_conceptual_framework_leveraging_theory_and_practice)

**Loretta Bellato:** “Is ‘regenerative tourism’ just a rebranding of ‘sustainable tourism’?”  
<https://goodtourismblog.com/2021/05/is-regenerative-tourism-just-a-rebranding-of-sustainable-tourism/>

**Anna Pollock:** “Introducing Regenerative Tourism”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3hgfxWLOf8>

**Anna Pollock:** “The Conscious Travel Manifesto”  
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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tME2zkFi8gY>

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**The Tourism CoLab,** including current work in Flinders Island

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- “Tourism, Hosting and the Practice of Community Wellbeing”
- “Travel to Tomorrow: An Emerging Vision for the Tourism Industry”

**The Really Regenerative Centre’s**  
article on Regenerative Tourism

**JoAnna Haugen:** Rooted Storytelling, “Storytelling at the intersection of sustainable travel, environmental conservation, and community-based advocacy efforts.”

**Suzanne Simard, UBC:** “Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest”

**Suzanne Simard:** How trees talk to each other - TED  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/suzanne\\_simard\\_how\\_trees\\_talk\\_to\\_each\\_other](https://www.ted.com/talks/suzanne_simard_how_trees_talk_to_each_other)

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[https://www.amazon.com/Regenerative-Development-Design-Framework-Sustainability/dp/1118972864/ref=sr\\_1\\_1](https://www.amazon.com/Regenerative-Development-Design-Framework-Sustainability/dp/1118972864/ref=sr_1_1)



