

2023

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### Recommended Citation

Hussain, Asif (2023) "Human Relationship with Nature, Indigenous Ways of Living and Regenerative Tourism Framework," *Journal of Sustainability and Resilience*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/jsr/vol3/iss1/4>

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Publisher's Note: Journal of Sustainability and Resilience (JSR) (ISSN:2744-3620) is published bi-annually by the Sustainability and Resilience Institute (SRI) of New Zealand. The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of SRI. SRI remains neutral about jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

# Human Relationship with Nature, Indigenous Ways of Living and Regenerative Tourism Framework

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Received: 06/01/2023

Revised: 08/01/2023

Accepted: 11/01/2023

Published: 01/02/2023

**Abstract:** In the post Covid-19 era, human civilisation appears to undergo a significant shift in social-ecological consciousness and an emerging concept of ‘regenerative tourism’ is getting popular. The concept acknowledges the strong linkages between humans and nature and together special conditions are created for life to renew and restore itself. While indigenous people have always been aware of their actions and their impacts on the socio-ecological environments, the scientific community has started to acknowledge indigenous knowledge and ways of living, and integrated intelligence. The key aspect of the indigenous lifestyle is the linkages with physical and social environments where humans acknowledge their limitations and always worked with nature, not against nature. This paper highlights the indicators of regenerative tourism from both supply (host/destination) and demand (guest/tourist) perspectives. Given the active participation of Māori in policy making, this paper argues that New Zealand is in a unique position to develop and transform its tourism products and provide conditions for the tourism industry to rejuvenate for a better future. This paper presents a Regenerative Tourism Framework to guide the journey towards regenerative tourism by putting destinations and people at the heart of policymaking.

**Keywords:** Indigenous Studies, New Zealand, Paradigm Change, Regenerative Tourism Indicators, Relationship with Nature, Social-ecological Consciousness.

## Introduction

In the post Covid-19 era, human civilisation appears to undergo a significant shift in social-ecological consciousness. The first project which explored multidisciplinary researchers and scientists to collaborate on the evolution of societal development was the ‘Resilience Project’ (Gunderson et al., 2002). The project was the outcome of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Program (IGBP) (1957-58) to understand human impact on Earth’s systems such as the Global Change and Territorial

Ecosystems and Land Use Land Cover Change (LUCC) (Hussain & Haley, 2022; Mooney et al., 2013; Turner et al., 1993). The result of the ‘Resilience Project’ was the concept of ‘panarchy’ which is “the hierarchical structure in which systems of nature, and humans, as well as combined human-nature systems and social-ecological systems, are interlinked in never-ending adaptive cycles of growth, accumulation, restructuring and renewal” (Holling, 2001, p. 392). It is these adaptive cycles which are resulting in the shift in our social-ecological consciousness in a post-Covid-19 era. This shift is seen as a

paradigmatic shift similar to the European Dark ages and the times of Enlightenment in response to the current pandemic, climate change ecosystem disruption, economic imbalances and food security (Dredge, 2022; Forum for the Future, 2020). It was these global concerns which captured the term ‘regeneration’ which brings well-being an emotional and intuitive meaning attached to it as is felt deeply at community levels despite the technical or scientific understanding of the term (Dredge, 2022), which is explored below.

### **Indigenous ways of living**

The regenerative mindset is not a new phenomenon but rather an ancient and traditional way of living (Nelson et al., 2018) and provides conditions for life to renew and restore itself (Holling, 2001; Hussain & Haley, 2022; Mang et al., 2012; Nelson et al., 2018; Reed, 2007). It is argued that the paradigm shift requires conscious co-creation of the future by investing in human development (Dredge, 2022). The key aspect of the relationship between nature and human is that they are not separate from each other but rather connected and one complement the other. Historically this symbiotic relationship has been seen in the indigenous way of living (Nelson et al., 2018) where consumption provides a feeling of groundedness “when a product is connected to their physical(place), social(people) and historic(past) environment” (Eichinger et al., 2022, p. 1). In return, product consumption increases consumers' happiness, involvement, beauty, consciousness and rootedness (Eichinger et al., 2022; Hussain & Fusté-Forné, 2022).

By acknowledging the indigenous ways of living and indigenous knowledge, modern science is acknowledging the holistic livelihood systems of indigenous people. Indigenous people have always been aware

of the contextual understanding of their relationship with nature where both acknowledge their boundaries and limitations. Indigenous sources of integrated intelligence (Blake, 2018) are the critical aspect which made them resilient and grounded (Eichinger et al., 2022) and they lived for thousands of years in isolation and extreme weather and climatic conditions (Hussain, 2019).

### **Regenerative Tourism Mindset**

Regenerative tourism supports the long-term renewal of social-ecological systems by ensuring that the tourism industry reinvests in a destination where a tourism product is produced and consumed (Hussain, 2021; Hussain et al., 2021a; Hussain & Haley, 2022). Globalisation and digitization have made our lives “increasingly virtual, fast-paced, and mobile, leaving many consumers feeling like trees with weak roots, at risk of being torn from the earth” (Eichinger et al., 2022, p. 1). However, the complex interlinkages of various segments of the tourism industry requires regulations to meet the demand of modern traveller who has less time to engage consciously in a particular destination to have mindful experiences.

Covid-19, climate change, ecosystem disruption, and economic inequalities have raised human conscious levels (Associate for Psychological Science, 2020; Dredge, 2022; Forum for the Future, 2020). Over the years, the tourist-conscious level rose when individual travellers wanted to improve personal growth based on the self-actualisation of human needs noted by Maslow (McLeod, 2007) or diversity of motives (Pearce et al., 2013). Part of the reason why regenerative tourism is getting traction and because it offers conditions for the industry to be reborn and renew itself (Hussain & Haley, 2022). Where tourists, tourist-generating regions and destinations are interconnected and the physical, social,

and historic environments provide means to the production and consumption of a tourism product. It is these connections and linkages with the physical, social and environments that have created a niche market in the form of regenerative tourism where a tourist is willing to consume a unique product with groundedness, independence, connectedness, and autonomy.

According to Kegan (1998), this high level of consciousness can be achieved at the five levels of human development, of which the ‘fifth order of consciousness (The Self-Transforming Mind)’ offers self-transformation and appreciate dynamic relationships with others and nature. Kegan (1998) estimates that to be 1% of the population (1% of 8 billion as of January 2023). This paper argues that while 1% of the population may demand a holistic tourism experience the remaining 99% has the potential and need the motivation to engage in a self-transformational activity. In this regard this paper analyses ‘Conscious Travel Paradigm: between Destinations/Hosts and Travellers/Guests’ model (Hussain, 2021), ‘Regenerative tourism model: Adaptive cycle of the tourism system and indicators of regenerative tourism’ (Hussain & Haley, 2022), ‘features of authentic tourism experiences’ (Hussain & Fusté-Forné, 2022) and Livelihood Framework for Transport Infrastructure Development and Tourism Hussain (2019) from both supply (host/destination) and demand (guest/tourist) side. While the global 1% of the population is conscious enough to make rational decisions, policymakers need to think, plan and market tourism products (Ateljevic, 2020) in ways that entice visitors to engage consciously to have a collective positive impact on our socio-ecological impacts.

From the supply side, a destination must create conditions to continuously renew the tourism system, if required, transcend into new forms to flourish in ever-changing conditions for economic stability, minimum impact on the environment and produce pure and genuine tourism products. From the demand side, tourists make conscious and mindful decisions when travelling and are aware of the impact of their travel and are motivated to make a difference and do things differently. Both supply and demand sides must ensure originality, and symbolism and offer engaging activity so that a tourist sees the positive impact they have on the community. The goal here is “nourish local places, their environments and communities so that they could flourish...and returning the energy and resources that are taken away...and invest back more than it takes” (Dredge, 2022, p. 271) so that a destination (popular) takes a breath, rejuvenate and (re)generate rather than getting exhausted of resource extraction over and over. This attitude will force policymakers to put destinations and people at the heart of policymaking.

Haley (2021) explores indigenous concepts from Māori and American Indian philosophies that offer ‘long-term resilience and human-centred decision making’. For decades human civilisation hoped that scientific tools such as ‘sustainable development goals’ would solve our problem, but these tolls have failed us. The current pandemic has made us realise that to move forward we need to look backwards – to our roots, our ancient ways of living – the indigenous philosophies and knowledge. Bateson (2022) argues that people need people, people need to connect, collaborate and nourish together so that communities would own and build their unique place and future.

Table 1. Indicators of regenerative tourism from both supply and demand side and overarching characteristics.

Capitals*	Supply Side Indicators	Characteristics	Demand Side Indicators	Capitals*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Human (H)</li> <li>✓ Social (S)</li> <li>✓ Natural (N)</li> <li>✓ Physical (P)</li> <li>✓ Financial (F)</li> <li>✓ Institutional (I)</li> </ul> (Hussain, 2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Creating conditions to continuously renew tourism systems</li> <li>✓ Transcend new forms of tourism</li> <li>✓ Flourish in ever-changing conditions</li> <li>✓ Economic stability</li> <li>✓ Minimum impact on the environment</li> <li>✓ Produce pure and genuine tourism product (Hussain &amp; Fusté-Forné, 2022; Hussain &amp; Haley, 2022)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Originality** (beautiful, natural, genuine and location)</li> <li>✓ Symbolic*** (ethical rooted, honest, and conscious)</li> <li>✓ Activity**** (human, simple and involved) (Hussain &amp; Fusté-Forné, 2022)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Conscious and mindful when travelling</li> <li>✓ Awareness: Making an informed decision and knowing about the impacts of travel</li> <li>✓ Motivated to make a difference and do things differently (at the individual and societal level) (Hussain &amp; Fusté-Forné, 2022; Hussain &amp; Haley, 2022)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Human (H)</li> <li>✓ Social (S)</li> <li>✓ Natural (N)</li> <li>✓ Physical (P)</li> <li>✓ Financial (F)</li> <li>✓ Institutional (I)</li> </ul> (Hussain, 2019)

\*Human (H) i. Awareness, Access to education ii. Knowledge, skills, and labour iii. Nutrition and health status. Social (S) iv. Networking, relationships and trust v. Lifestyle and culture: Dress, Language and music, Natural (N) vi. Land and Water vii. Forest, wildlife, and minerals, Physical (P) viii. Basic infrastructure facilities and access to market ix. Tools, machinery and technology, Financial (F) x. Financial resources: i.e. money, assets and remittances, Institutional (I) xi. Participation in decision and policymaking xii. Benefit-sharing of the tourism market (Hussain, 2019).

\*\*Beautiful (Tourism product needs to be beautiful and look appealing to the visitor), Natural (The tourism product should be purely natural and must not be tainted or manufactured), Genuine (Tourism products and the experience need to be genuine and give the tourist a sense of place), Location (An authentic experience is unique and belongs to a particular area that cannot be experienced elsewhere).

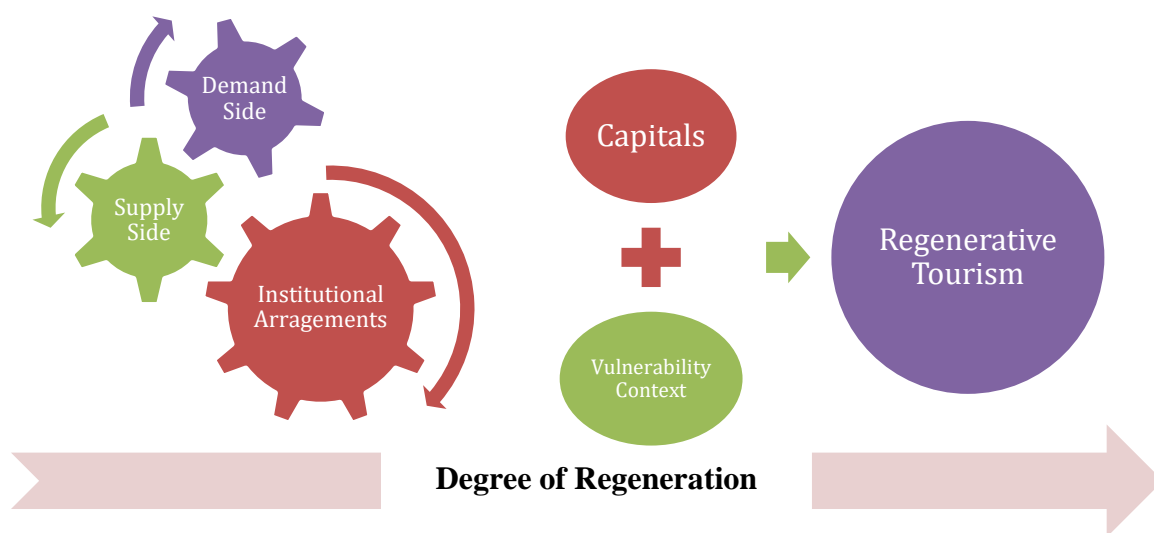
\*\*\*Ethical (Experience should be found in ethical consumption, sustainability and the principles of the community), Rooted (A sense of place is rooted in a particular destination and the tourism product being offered relies on it), Honest (Deliver an honest product and must not promise what cannot be delivered), Consciousness (An experience that improves conscious level where traveller seeks interpersonal gains in the form of psychological rewards and enjoys a positive experience).

\*\*\*\* Human (The experience is people-centred, and tourists want to connect with local people), Simple (The experience must be simple, and the visitor should be able to see the benefit without any complications), Involvement (Where tourists interact and engage actively in the tourism experience delivery processes, build long-lasting relationships, and pay multiple visits).

While the concept of regenerative tourism is getting popularity globally (Ateljevic et al., 2022; Day et al., 2021; Fusté-Forné et al., 2022; Hussain et al., 2021b; Owen, 2007a, 2007b) New Zealand is in a unique position with indigenous Māori participating actively in decision-making processes and has the potential to set an example at global levels. Supply and demand side indicators are presented above. Every indicator must ensure the presence of certain characteristics which can be explained with the help of the Likert scale (1-10) to explain the degree to which a tourism product (both supply and demand side) is regenerative as explained by Hussain and Haley (2022). These characteristics (originality, symbolism and

activity) (Hussain & Fusté-Forné, 2022) are vital to a Regenerative Tourism Framework which defines the degree to which a tourism product or a service is termed as regenerative or non-regenerative. In this regard institutional arrangements, both horizontal and vertical (Quain, 2018) play a critical role (Hussain, 2019) in the processes of tourism (re)generation as shown in Figure 1 below. For this research vertical organisations constitute government and non-governmental organisations, whereas horizontal organisations constitutes community organisations, prominent community leaders, household or tribe representative and tourism enterprises or regional tourism operatives.

Figure 1. Regenerative Tourism Framework.



Own source.

Institutional arrangements are the first to respond to changing tourism trends and shocks and are the driving forces to implement change from both supply and demand perspectives. The response towards a change would depend on the available capital which constitutes Human (H), Social (S), Natural (N), Physical (P), Financial (F) and Institutional (I) capital. Access to resources will be determined by

vulnerability context in response to internal (lack of means to cope) and external (shocks, stress, risks and trends) shocks (Hussain, 2019). Indicators set in Table 1 above will be measured against the degree to which a product or service is regenerative with '0' being the lowest degree and '10' being the highest ranging from far below – moderately below – slightly below – met expectations – slightly above – moderately

above –far above. It is vital to note that because of the complex nature of the tourism industry (partially industrialised as opposed to a traditional industry) and the possibility that a tourism product or service ‘may exhibit partial characteristics of regenerative’ (Hussain & Haley, 2022, p. 8) various characteristics and indicators are measured in the form of Likert scale.

## Conclusion

Covid-19 has provided all the conditions for the rejuvenation of indigenous knowledge, and it is time for us to adapt and grow for a better future. If communities do not take charge now, then policies will be imposed from the outside and there is the fear we may re-enter into ‘back to normal’ scenario set by Hussain (2021) where tourism policies will only focus on increasing visitors number and destinations will be overflooded with mass tourism, negative social impacts, economic instability and host-guest conflicts. Scientific criteria such as sustainable development goals have failed to solve the challenges we face in today’s world (Dredge, 2022; Fehling et al., 2013). This is because of the complex and dynamic challenges rooted in social-ecological consciousness and our attitude towards collaboration in co-creating our common future (Dredge, 2022; Hussain, 2021; Hussain et al., 2021a; Meadows, 1999; Reed, 2007). While indigenous wisdom has finally been acknowledged by the scientific community, I argue that indigenous knowledge must be taken in its holistic sense rather than adapting an element that answers the current topic under discussion, akin to tourism, and leaving the rest aside. Indigenous knowledge is the way of living where livelihood decisions are dynamic and constitute never-ending adaptive cycles of growth, accumulation, restructuring and renewal of resources. Indigenous wisdom is the process of knowing about things,

events, and engagement in a particular context at a particular time and acting as the advocate of the physical, social, and historic environments.

## A personal note

Despite being an indigenous person, I never felt the desire to exercise my indigenous knowledge. However, after an unfortunate traumatic March 15 incident in Christchurch, New Zealand, I have rediscovered the spirit of being an indigenous person. During my treatment, I explored a journey I never thought I would have taken otherwise. I fought against, with and within and the journey led me to a path of exploration, understanding and guiding the purpose of life and commitment to supporting individuals, businesses, and communities by providing them with the essential tools to thrive.

The foundation of the Sustainability and Resilience Institute New Zealand (SRINZ) was one of the outcomes of this journey. The fundamental purpose of SRINZ is to make communities and businesses sustainable and resilient, in the face of evolving global trends and shocks such as Covid-19. I have learned and I believe that indigenous communities and their ancestors’ farsightedness, planning, and binding understanding of a shared future laid the foundation of the concept of sustainability and resilience. These founding principles of collaboration, joint planning, and collective resilience were made possible by identifying strengths and diverse skills, which enabled communities to move forward in a time of crisis for collective well-being. Whether it is climate change, environmental degradation, social inequality, resource depletion or food security, human history is full of lessons. We need to look back to move forward and succeed in a time of extreme uncertainty.

In the case of New Zealand indigenous philosophies such as Manaakitanga (hospitality, respect, kindness, generosity and care to others), Kaitiakitanga (guardianship and protection), tiaki (caring for and protecting people, place and planet, for our future), pōtikitanga (our curious, ingenious and adventurous spirit), and whanaungatanga (creating a sense of connection, family and belonging) are some of indigenous Māori concepts which can guide us towards a sustainable and resilient tourism future.

New concepts like regenerative tourism arise in response to the negative impacts of tourism on destinations and communities. The regenerative tourism approach aims to travel with the minimum adverse impact of tourism on the environment and local communities, but also to actively improve and regenerate these areas. This approach is based on the principle of conscious travel and leaving a positive impact on the environment and local communities by supporting and preserving local cultures and economies, and fostering relationships between tourists, locals, and the environment. The fundamental principle of regenerative tourism is community input into tourism planning and decision-making, such as destination management planning, to ensure a resilient and sustainable tourism industry, host community and the environment.

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### Author profile



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