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Host Communities: The Foundation of Regenerative Tourism

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Host Communities: The Foundation of Regenerative Tourism

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Abstract: Tourism is a human structure and cannot be equated to natural systems such as farming. While regenerative farming focuses on the health of the natural system starting with the soil, tourism is a human system and must focus on regenerating the human system. This paper argues that the foundation of tourism is the host community. If the host community is vibrant and healthy, dynamic and resilient, and has appropriate political systems to manage tourism, tourism will have the social license and will thrive. Tourism can then have upwardly cascading feedback mechanisms where the host community can restore the natural environment, institutional and political systems, social structures such as schools, and physical infrastructure such as roads, and the community can be empowered and strengthened.

Keywords: host communities, human systems, location capital, regenerative tourism.

Introduction

Regenerative tourism has been widely accepted in New Zealand as the new paradigm of tourism management, it is commonly used in Destination Management Plans (DMP) as well as by government agencies undertaking tourism policy and planning (Fusté-Forné & Hussain, 2022; Hussain & Fusté-Forné, 2021; MBIE, 2019, 2021, 2023b; Sustainability and Resilience Institute, 2023). Regenerative tourism signifies a shift from the status quo economies, towards a holistic model that mimics nature (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, & Nygaard, 2022; Cave & Dredge, 2020; Hussain, 2021, 2023; Hussain & Fusté-Forné, 2021; Hussain & Haley, 2022).

Natural sciences and ecological terms have been borrowed liberally and are drawn into economic theory and language, such as the

term ‘ecosystem’ now used broadly in business organisational structure. A human structure, however, is not as dynamic or complex as an ecological system (ecosystem) with feedback loops in interconnected systems where any shift in the management of a part will affect the whole and often in ways unforeseen (Hussain & Haley, 2022). Regeneration has thus also been borrowed from ecology without a full understanding of how to integrate humankind into the paradigm of nature, largely keeping the environment and nature as a separate area of management to be impacted upon or restored by initiatives, often in the paradigm of ‘external to self’.

Regenerative farming uses an ecological approach to system change, understanding that it is the soil that underpins a system shift. Restoring soil microbiome (soil ecology) restores the natural systems

creating plant health and an upward cascade effect transpires that shifts the whole balance of the farm system, including that of social and economic change (Colley, Olsen, Birkved, & Hauschild, 2020; Kenne & Kloot, 2019; LaCanne & Lundgren, 2018; Toensmeier, 2016).

This paper argues the importance of place and host communities is first and foremost for a regenerative tourism step change, drawing on the six capitals, social, human, natural, physical, institutional, and financial, and placing these in an interconnected and holistic system where they are considered within ‘location capital’ (place) (Hussain, 2019; Hussain & Fusté-Forné, 2023). Once we narrow down our policy and planning to specific locations we begin to be constrained and simultaneously released by the adage to ‘think global, act local’. Restoring and regenerating host communities through the vehicle of tourism can have a cascade of effects where good outcomes flow from being location-specific.

What good management looks like for one place may be detrimental to a location just down the road, just as is true in ecology, it must be location-specific, ecosystem-specific management. As one farmer uses one technique to restore the soil microbiome, just down the road on a different soil profile with different mineral loads another farmer must use a different technique. In regenerative tourism, no host community is like another, connection to place and stories vary, but if we can be location-specific and regenerate host communities a cascade of effects can flow. This discussion document aims to show that its host community is our baseline for tourism, the soil upon which we operate tourism ventures, termed the meta-capital ‘Location Capital’ (Hussain, 2019).

Current Tourism Mindset

Tourism has been seen as an extractive industry, and conversely with the potential to contribute towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of lifting communities out of poverty (Fehling, Nelson, & Venkatapuram, 2013; Pradhan, Costa, Rybski, Lucht, & Kropp, 2017). The tourism industry has lent towards mass tourism models where financial gain is the only goal of tourism businesses, leaving institutions such as central and local government to control the negative externalities (Rasoolimanesh, Ramakrishna, Hall, Esfandiar, & Seyfi, 2023; Scheyvens & Hughes, 2021; Scheyvens & Momsen, 2020) of financial extraction. Extractive businesses which are often offshore owned send financial returns offshore, without reinvestment to infrastructure and social contributions to the local economy (Sigam & Garcia, 2012; Yeung & Liu, 2008).

Regenerative tourism offers us a new model which is aspirational (Bellato et al., 2022; Cave & Dredge, 2020; Fusté-Forné & Hussain, 2022; Hussain, 2021; Hussain & Fusté-Forné, 2021; MBIE, 2021), but there is no clear agreement on what is trying to be regenerated. The term regeneration has been borrowed from ecology and in turn regenerative farming (Hussain, 2023; Hussain & Haley, 2022). Ecological regeneration is the regeneration of an ecosystem to renew and recover from damage. Regeneration of an ecosystem creates a cascade of benefits across the entire ecosystem, often starting with the regeneration of forest habitat. Regenerative farming is the restoration of the soil ecosystem, again creating a cascade of benefits across the entire farm system, including the social and financial. In both systems, the restoration of the foundation of the system creates positive feedback mechanisms for the whole system.

The Draft Tourism Environmental Action Plan Principle 1 states that ‘caring for our whenua (land) is the priority, everything else must be measured against this’ (MBIE, 2023a). Actions to achieve this include decarbonisation, biodiversity management, environmental outcomes, technology uptake and regeneration. There is no explicit mention of host communities, even though the host communities will need to undertake these actions. If the host community remains divided in acceptance of tourism, under-resourced and disempowered in tourism management, these actions cannot be achieved. In effect, this treats tourism as separate from the system in which it operates, which is a human system.

Ecological regeneration and to an extent regenerative farming are naturally occurring systems, or the management of natural systems. Conversely, tourism is not a natural system, but a human system. The misunderstanding of what regeneration is and how it can be applied to tourism may mean that we enter into a new era of tourism green-washing (Hussain & Haley, 2022). With regenerative tourism, it is not clear what is the foundation, the soil, that should be restored. The foundation is the ‘sweet spot’ from which positive outcomes flow, with multiplying outcomes for minimal inputs.

Regenerative Tourism – The Need

For regenerative tourism to be successful it must restore the host community as the foundation of tourism. Regenerating the host community enables the community to be more vibrant and resilient, engage in tourism management, create robust infrastructure, have strong social systems, and restore the natural environment. This feedback from the host community and location capital (place) as social licence welcomes and encourages travellers to stay longer, spend more, travel slower, connect with local culture and customs and give

back to the community, schools, and nature conservation projects.

The Six Capitals Constrained within Location Capital of Place

Regenerative tourism is a move away from extractive economic capital creation, towards a values system (Bellato et al., 2022; Cave & Dredge, 2020; Dredge, 2022; Hussain, 2021; Hussain & Haley, 2022; Sustainability and Resilience Institute, 2023). The development of all capitals creates and values businesses that feedback into the location meta-capital (place) and build social licence to operate, a resilient natural environment, the infrastructure that is needed for both the host and visitor communities and high-value experiences that are transformative both for host and visitor, with meaningful exchanges of authentic place-based tourism products.

When location capital is valued as a whole and the six capitals are given equal value within the constraint of place (location capital) this reduces the skewed effects of overemphasis on any one capital such as economic capital as shown in Figure 1 and Table 1 below. It also creates an environment in which the capitals are constrained into a circular economy, reinforcing and promoting all six capitals into a resilient system. The six capitals are human capital, natural capital, social capital, financial capital, physical capital and institutional capital. Hussain (2019) argues that within tourism these capitals are constrained by the place in which they occur and terms this new model Location Capital (Hussain & Fusté-Forné, 2023).

The Six Capitals and the Holistic Capital: Location Capital

When we talk about the restoration of location capital, this includes automatically the six capitals, social, human, natural, physical, institutional and financial (DFID, 1999; Hussain, 2019). To restore a tourism

destination (place) is to restore the host community (social and human capitals), the environment within which tourism operates (natural capital), benefiting the physical capital of infrastructure upon which tourism and the host community rely, and strengthens institutional capital through

participatory democracy, while still returning financial capital to the host community and businesses who supply tourism goods and services.

Figure 1. Regenerative Tourism of Place: Capitals (human, natural, social, financial, physical, and institutional) all occur within the meta capital of location of place (own source).

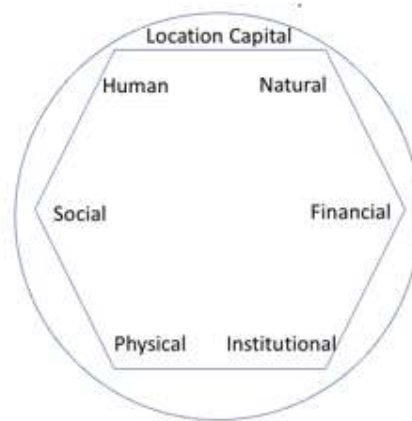


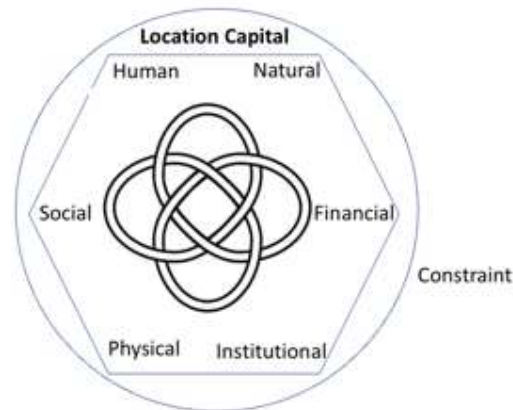
Table 1. Diagram and table showing the six capitals, constrained within their location capital and descriptive examples of each of the six capitals (own source).

Capital	Descriptive (examples)
Human Capital	Education, knowledge, nutrition, mental and physical health
Social Capital	Employment, networking, relationships, lifestyle, culture, language
Natural Capital	Land, water, forest, wildlife, air, nature
Physical Capital	Infrastructure facilities, toilets, recreational, hospitals, roads, transport networks
Financial Capital	Financial resources, investment and return
Institutional Capital	Participation in decision-making, effective governance

The prerogative of government and Regional Tourism Organisations (RTO) to collaboratively build Destination Management Plans with the community of place (residents, visitors and business operators) creates the operative model under which the community wishes to function. This model directs businesses to

have social licence to operate, and towards operations that give back, and enhance the local environment and community in a collaborative model. Businesses that operate like this can enhance the communities' social functions such as schools, sports and community clubs.

Figure 2 Regenerative Tourism of Place: Capitals (human, natural, social, financial, physical, and institutional) all occur within the meta capital of the location of the place (own source).



This diagram demonstrates the resilience that can be created within a meta-capital location if that location understands its uniqueness and its constraints and works to build an interconnected regenerative system that enhances the place (location) for the benefit of all capitals, host and visitor communities.

Destination Management Plans: An example of an intervention towards a regenerative future

A shift to a holistic mindset means tourism within destinations (location capital) with destination management plans (DMP) (institutional) works to capture the unique values of the destination, restore the community (social and human) in line with the aspirations of the host community, manage infrastructure (physical) and restore the natural environment (natural). DMP can ensure that host communities, RTOs, business operators, accommodation and hospitality service providers are in alignment and all contribute to the regeneration of place towards a common goal.

If we focus tourism management on the social and human capital, this will create positive feedback mechanisms to support and restore the natural, financial, physical and institutional capital. If however, we focus our management of tourism upon the

natural capital (natural environment) this will not create positive feedback to all other capitals, as it is not the natural capital that is the foundation of tourism, but the human and social capitals and tourism does not exist within the natural environment without human-built structures (roads, accommodation, institutions, host community).

Positive feedback refers to a chain of relationships which enhances the response of a system to the initial change. In a native forest when you regenerate the forest, the habitat for animal species increases, as does the food sources, the land is stabilised and water retention increases. These are considered positive feedback from the original change in management, and forest restoration. Similarly in farming, restoration of the soil increases its carbon sequestration, microbiome (insect life and fungi), and ability to hold and store water, resulting in lower costs of external inputs of chemicals and fertilisers, higher profitability, social and human resilience and better systems of managing physical capital.

What is needed for regenerative tourism management is an understanding of positive feedback mechanisms and identifying the system foundation to be restored (the sweet spot), in tourism. This cannot be the natural environment as tourism is a human system,

even though tourism is reliant upon natural capital as it is in all six capitals. Restoring the natural environment in tourism does not have automatic positive feedback upon institutional, physical, human, social or financial capital. Restoring the host community, however (social and human capital) creates positive feedback into host community management of tourism.

An example of this in action is the Banks Peninsula Destination Management Plan (ChristchurchNZ, 2023a, 2023b). The host community was not happy with the draft DMP and rejected it (ChristchurchNZ, 2023a). While it was a regenerative plan it did not engage and prioritise the host community. After further engagement and community submissions, a more robust process resulted in a plan the community could take ownership of (institutional capital) and feel empowered by (social).

Future Tourism Mindset – Transformative Tourism from Connection to Place

Regenerative tourism can restore a place (location/destination) if the host community is placed at the very centre of all tourism management decision-making. The host community can be guided to communicate what makes a location unique, the values the community wants to strengthen through tourism, the environmental and social investments that are needed and see the Millennium Development Goals be achieved. Regenerating the host community's positive feedback mechanisms of holistically managed tourism reinforces positive benefits to the community. For example, the community is empowered to the institutional management of tourism, targets marketing to desired visitors, receives increased financial value from tourism, has better high-value interactions with tourists, shares host community stories and love of place and engages visitors to give back, reinforcing positive

environmental and social outcomes that have the positive feedback mechanism of making the host destination a better place to live, experience nature and raise a family.

This clear communication from a host community can be used to create positive tourism interpretation to enhance environmental and cultural stewardship (Walker & Moscardo, 2014) and transformative tourist experiences, linking back to the values of the host community. These place-based community values can lead to a greater global understanding and perspective that is taken home by the tourists. The think global act local adage can have its greatest impact when applied to tourism interpretation, where tourists are bringing their world view and experiences and understanding interpretation through this lens, allowing tourists to reflect on their place in the world through the interpretation of the place they are visiting. Many people gather information and beliefs through experiences outside of formal education and the only structured education activity many people are likely to take part in is tourism interpretation (Walker & Moscardo, 2014). Tourism can lead to the transformation of both the tourist through their experiences and the host community through the achievement of the development goals. However, tourism has failed to step through from extractive capitalistic systems to the transformative power that it was believed to be. This could be due to the failure to view tourism management through all six capitals rather than solely financial capital, and by applying the constraint of location-specific management practices.

The Importance of Place in Tourism

After a worldwide pandemic, we can ask the question of why people visit places in a new way when virtual tourism flourished, but as international borders reopen people return to travelling physically. We can ask the second question. What cannot be

transmuted through a screen? The senses, the smells, tastes, touch, sight, noise, light. The full physical sense of being in place is not transferable in any other way but to visit.

This is the mauri of a place, its life force, and it is perceptible when we visit a place that does not have a strong mauri, if it has rubbish, or visible impacts of high visitor numbers, such as damage to the environment, or division within the host community. When we visit a place with strong mauri it is discernable. As natural places, these are the world 'must-sees' of the world.

But so often a tourist moves through a place that they visit without having fully felt connected to the mauri of that place, travelling without understanding the environment in which they wish to connect, the stories of that place, its history, uniqueness, and culture. All of which are more transient and ephemeral values. Each person's connection to a place is different, due to the differences in their experiences, their openness to learning, and the speed of their travel. Most people are not aware that a sense of connection to place is what they are seeking when they travel, instead, they are fueled by the desire to experience what is marketed to them, the photo points, the selfies, the must-see and must-do experiences.

How, when you are travelling, do you stand in a place and 'know where you are'? This indigenous term of *tūrangawaewae* (*turanga*: dig *waewae*: toes, literal translation dig toes), asks us to know where we stand, to connect deeply to place, to connect to the earth upon which we stand (the earth upon which we live and depend upon for our existence). By understanding where and how we connect to the earth, we start to understand who we are, and where we belong, and move more sensitively and sustainably.

By regenerating host communities, and fulfilling our obligations to the capitals upon which our communities and livelihoods rely (social, human, natural, physical, infrastructure, financial) we are regenerating the place in which we live and operate. The regeneration of a place, through tourism, can allow the mauri of a place to be restored. But this regeneration of place can also be a deep connection to place, for the traveller moving through, but more importantly for the host community which holds that space.

Ultimately this is what we are seeking when we travel, to experience it as a local would, to understand the place and host community and to build a connection to it so that our travel 'experience' has emotional, mental and spiritual meaning. Connection to place through interpretation and values-based tourism experiences that are designed in such a way as to centre the visitor in the landscape, with the intention of transformational experiences that are not of the linear mechanistic worldview. This connection to place is to understand where you are as a visitor and to understand the place from the perspective of a local who is connected deeply, physically, to that place. This connection to place creates an understanding of what makes it special, offers an interpretation of the specific environmental, social, and cultural issues and allows the visitor to see new local perspectives that can inform a global perspective.

Thus, true *manaakitanga* or hospitality with storytelling and interpretation allows the visitor to connect, and understand *tūrangawaewae*, the host community connection and with this knowledge arises respect and the wish to protect and restore – *kaitiakitanga*. "In the end, we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand; and we will understand only what we are taught" (Dioum, 1968).

Conclusion

New Zealand tourism management organisations have set the objective for regenerative tourism, without a clear definition of what is to be regenerated through tourism. Regeneration is a term that has been borrowed from ecology and in turn from regenerative farming. In ecology, it is the habitat that regenerates to strengthen the ecosystem. This creates cascading feedback mechanisms that benefit the whole system. In farming, it is the soil microbiome that is regenerated. By restoring soil pasture with minimal external inputs (reduced fertiliser and chemical costs), animal health is improved and financial returns and resilience are improved.

Tourism is a human system, not a natural one, thus it is the social structure that should be the focus of regeneration. The foundation of tourism is the host community. If the host community is strong the social licence for tourism allows for positive tourism experiences and feedback mechanisms that improve the six capitals. Tourism management must focus on location-specific management, as location capital, to regenerate the six capitals (human, natural, social, financial, physical, and institutional) and create a resilient tourism system.

Tourists wish to visit places that are vibrant and have a strong and healthy mauri (lifeforce), to connect to locations and their natural and human values. When a location is restored as a unique destination with a focus on community resilience it will drive positive feedback mechanisms of host community engagement in management, infrastructure development, natural environment restoration, community resilience and financial strength. If a host community is not the centre of tourism management, it cannot be seen as regenerative tourism. “What’s the most important thing in the world? He tangata, he tangata, he tangata. It is the people, it is the

people, it is the people” (Haley, 2021). Regenerative tourism must focus on the very centre of the system, as a human system, this is the people and host communities.

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Author profile



Marie Haley is the founder and guide of The Seventh Generation. She was born and raised on Banks Peninsula, a seventh-generation direct decedent of Akaroa’s first French settler. She grew up on the family farm following her Grandfather's footsteps and his Grandfather before. From the age of six, she knew that she would devote her life to the conservation of native species and protect the incredible beauty of New Zealand. In her work as a wildlife ranger and Wildside coordinator, this dream has become a reality. With The Seventh Generation, she wants to share her passion and knowledge with other people to provide a deeper understanding and local connection to her special place's history and nature.