

Regenerative tourism and integral human development, a new approach to make territories and people flower within the visitor's economy

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Thus we forget that "time is greater than space", that we are always more effective when we generate processes rather than holding on to positions of power. (Pope Francis, 2015).

ABSTRACT

Regenerative tourism - literature and academic articles since 2005 and mainly from 2011 thanks to the essays afterwards published by Pollock - overcomes the traditional paradigm of sustainable tourism linked to the triple social-environmental-economic base by defining, instead, the visitor economy through a different process as living systems that evolve, adapt and progress according to the model of natural ecosystems. One more step forward and becomes clear that this model links human ecology with the notion of the common good which is fundamental to social ethics and the human sense of ecology, i.e. integral human development. Thus the development of the visitor economy is also identified through the principle of the common good and the issue of happiness: the latter is understood as the Aristotelian *eudaimonia*, the practice of virtue that allows our lives to flourish.

The purpose of my theory is to link regenerative tourism to two interconnected dimensions: the regeneration capacity of each ecosystem in its various sectors, and aspects, together with principles of the civil economy. A practice made in class suggested the move is on the right path and more studies are necessary

Keywords

Regenerative tourism, living systems, eudaimonia, flourishing communities, civil economy, integral human development, capabilities, common good, care of creation, transcendent.

INTRODUCTION

The operating systems for the tourism sector is rooted in the traditional industrial model emerged strongly after the Second World War and focused on efficiency, price-led competition and volume growth, as Pollock framed: "What we've actually done is a copy of successful production and consumption model designed around the manufacturing things to another domain. However there is an important difference: in the domain of tourism it's not about goods but intangible time and place-specific services" (2018).

Furthermore, is necessary to remind that the industrialization of travel practices is based on profit generation orientated towards the wants and needs of tourists (Leiper 1979). Conceptions of tourism as an extractive profit-making industry have universalized and reduced tourism roles to suppliers, distributors and consumers (Dwyer, 2018). The industrial operating model of tourism has come into question due to the growing degenerative effects of extractive approaches such as ecological destruction, economic failure and social inequalities (Hall, 2019).

Communities are being undermined. The benefits of development are not shared equitably and the gap between rich and poor is widening. Injustice, poverty, ignorance, and violent conflict are widespread and the cause of great suffering. An unprecedented rise in human population has overburdened ecological and social systems. The foundations of global security are threatened (Earth Charter, 2023).

Trying to answer at the growing problems in destinations and communities in the recent years a growing number of scholars, thinkers and practitioners - in the tourism ecosystems - are, in theory and practice, pioneering a different evolutionary framework called "regenerative tourism". Focus is pointing towards three main questions : *"What's the real purpose of an economy? Are in danger of confusing means with ends? How might we create the conditions for life in all its forms to thrive? Can tourism play a key role in shifting us into a healthier relationship with mother Earth, and if so, how?"* (Pollock, 2019)

My proposal would like to add, to this new field of tourism studies, an additional perspective embedded in the theories of integral human development and civil economy as brought up by the following two examples:

"The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation. [...] Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (Pope Francis, 2015). Moreover "A profound planetary revision of the way we live and of the paradigms that directly or indirectly generate the axiology that inspire it is urgently needed. [...] It is possible to think of a mutually enriching dialogue between economic knowledge, ethical questioning on the general purpose of action and political questioning on the common good (Mazzocchio, Notarstefano 2019). If the vision centered on the principle of self-interest, therefore of the individual, is the social backbone, then the way we are left with is to imagining social life through the mercantile logic of exchange.

The growth in the past two centuries has not led to an integral development and an improvement in the quality of life. Thus if we analyze how travelers behave as "blinded tourists" instead of being reminded that they/us are human beings: we are 'transcending beings' which constantly look forward beyond the border they have drawn, beyond the limits they set, and we need this propensity of transcending today because we are facing a truly life and death challenge. Either we all teach each other and learn from each other, or we will live unhappily ever after, if we stay alive, that is. Curiosity of the other and the impulse to transcend our reciprocal otherness comes handy under those circumstances. But it keeps being used up, diverted, channelled away squandered by the commercialized pseudo-multiculturalism which boils down to the waiter's different skin colour and different spices in the food – in lieu of genuine conversation or a real attempt to get an insight into the other's life and thought." (Frankly, 2003) in other words as Bauman dramatically said "a planet in the throes of a consumerist orgy, aided and abetted by the market's takeover of the human desire for happiness" (2013).

My analysis supports the need of seeing the other with new eyes, to build the regulative principle of a new world of organizing society. In human society the good of everyone can only be achieved with the work of all and the good of everyone cannot be savored if it is not enjoyed by others as well. (Bruni, Smerilli, 2008)

1. TOURISM'S NEED TO EVOLVE TOWARD A MINDSET SHIFT

The starting point is the call (need) to re-imagine economic organization. Among scholars like Rockström (2009), a solid example comes from economist Raworth who advocates for regenerative economic operating systems: “Doughnut Economics [...]: a global economy that creates a thriving balance thanks to its distributive and regenerative design.[...] To create economies that promote human prosperity in a flourishing web of life” (Raworth, 2017). The challenge in tourism, however, is that seven decades of growth have thwarted any appetite to imagine new and alternative economic models in tourism (Cave, Dredge, 2020).

“Regenerative tourism is a transformational approach that aims to fulfill the potential of tourism places to flourish and create net positive effects through increasing the regenerative capacity of human societies and ecosystems. Derived from the ecological worldview, it weaves Indigenous and Western science perspectives and knowledges. Tourism systems are regarded as inseparable from nature and obligated to respect Earth’s principles and laws. In addition, regenerative tourism approaches evolve and vary across places over the long term, thereby harmonizing practices with the regeneration of nested living systems” (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Nygaard, 2023).

A short analysis on how the above definition is connected to the integral human development starts from the classic economic conundrum called the “tragedy of the commons” where the individual pursuit of self-interest does not necessarily result in the common good and in a finite world may result in ruin for all. Hardin (1968) described how individuals while pursuing their own self-interest will ultimately deplete and degrade a shared limited resource. Tourism activities are using so called common pool resources (Briassoulis, 2002): streets, public squares, parks, museums, galleries without user fee for the public space. Not to mention the natural resources.

In fact we are living in a world where distractions dull our consciousness of just how limited and finite our world really is. As a result, “whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenceless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule” (Pope Francis, 2015). Through superficial and distracted lenses we read our lives and economy markets and technology growth without an equal human beings responsible development: “The fragmentation of knowledge proves helpful for concrete applications, and yet it often leads to a loss of appreciation for the whole, for the relationships between things, and for the broader horizon, which then becomes irrelevant. This very fact makes it hard to find adequate ways of solving the more complex problems of today’s world, particularly those regarding the environment and the poor; these problems cannot be dealt with from a single perspective or from a single set of interests” (Pope Francis, 2015).

Capra (1996) already described the world as an integrated system instead of separated parts. He assumed that we need to dive into the word “ecology” through a deeper understanding which recognizes the fundamental interdependence of all phenomena and the fact that as social and human beings all of us affects the cyclical processes of Nature. The strongest reminder in his theory is the conceptual framework elaborated by Bertalanffy (1950) of open systems in a dynamic balance.

It’s undeniable that the Earth is a living and evolving entity, new insights emerge by working with interdependence and complexity, in acknowledging the relationships between things, and in also valuing multiple ways of knowing or experiencing. In living

systems theories, the world is seen as a complex set of interdependent and interconnected elements, which, when acting together, create wholes that are greater than the sum of their parts and where relationships are as important as the 'things' themselves. Working on regeneration is less about fixing or planning systems and more about dancing with them which means cultivating the potentials that enable us to be human beings (Warden 2021).

We need to realize that modern anthropocentrism has paradoxically ended up prizing technical thought over reality, since "the technological mind sees nature as an insensate order, as a cold body of facts, as a mere 'given', as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape; it views the cosmos similarly as a mere 'space' into which objects can be thrown with complete indifference" (Pope Francis, 2015).

The ecological crisis is one small sign of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity, thus it results like an illogical presumption to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships. "Our difficulty in taking up this challenge seriously has much to do with an ethical and cultural decline which has accompanied the deterioration of the environment. An undeniable risk of the postmodern resides in a rampant individualism, and many problems of society are connected with today's self-centred culture of instant gratification. Furthermore, our inability to think seriously about future generations is linked to our inability to broaden the scope of our present interests and to give consideration to those who remain excluded from development. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. Only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment" (Pope Francis 2015).

Reed (2007) has defined some of the essential shifts that will be needed to create a truly regenerative culture framing 'whole-systems thinking' and 'living-systems thinking' as the foundations of the shift in mental model that we need to create a regenerative culture. "Instead of doing less damage to the environment, it is necessary to learn how we can participate with the environment — using the health of ecological systems as a basis for design. [...] The shift from a fragmented worldview to a whole systems mental model is the significant leap our culture must make — framing and understanding living system interrelationships in an integrated way. A place-based approach is one way to achieve this understanding. [...] Our role, as designers and stakeholders is to shift our relationship to one that creates a whole system of mutually beneficial relationships." This evolving systems design has one of the main founder root in Donella Meadows: "Systems can't be controlled, but they can be designed and redesigned. [...] Living successfully in a world of systems requires more of us than our ability to calculate. It requires our full humanity—our rationality, our ability to sort out truth from falsehood, our intuition, our compassion, our vision, and our morality" (2009).

The Regenerative design process engages and focuses on the evolution of the whole of the system of which we are part. It supports continuous learning through feedback, reflection and dialogue, so that all aspects of the system are an integral part of the process of life in that place. Such processes tap into the consciousness and spirit of the people engaged in a place, the only way to sustain sustainability. Wahl (2017) has been defining the best way to learn how to participate appropriately is to pay more attention to systemic relationships and interactions, to aim to support the resilience and health of the whole system, to foster diversity and redundancies at multiple scales, and to facilitate positive emergence through paying attention to the quality of connections and information flows in the system.

Which criteria should be considered in the work of regenerative development have been described by as: Whole, Essence, Potential, Reciprocity, Nested Systems, Nodal and Development of capacities and capabilities (Mang, Haggard, 2016) Fundamentally there is a deep reminder and recognition that we are living systems so far when designing regenerative tourism we need “ the wellbeing of the destination community is to be tourism’s key deliverable. In fact, there’s a growing call for the industry to become “regenerative,” a word that is synonymous with healing. [...] But if tourism is to get different and better outcomes, then there has to be openness to trying different and better strategies and tactics. And it turns out that community wellbeing calls for decidedly different thinking and new approaches” (Holliday, 2021)

1.1 REGENERATIVE PROCESSES LINKED TO *FELICITÀ* (happiness)

Anchored to this vision I focused on a main question: does exist an economic model where tourism systems are able to care and generate a perspective where human beings relates to each other for the common good so to be a part of the whole? Any possible answer means first asking: “What does it mean happiness (*felicità*)?” Zamagni (2019) across all his studies focused his attention to several concepts starting from *felicità*. The etymology is by Indo-European roots: from Latin *felicitus*, which comes from *felix-icis* (fertile, fruitful). The first meaning of *felix* is fertile (referring to *fetus* and *fecundus*). Therefore the word *felice* (be happy) has roots in the context of birth and fertility: you are happy if you are able to nourish and generate. Aristotle explains that in order to be happy holding virtues is not enough; you need to practice your virtues because happiness is a state of mind not an event. This is called *eudaimonia*, Nicomachean Ethics, namely our life when flourishing. Generally speaking, Aristotle considers virtuousness tied to morality and how to live a good life with the resultant outcome to flourish (Kenny 2016).

In modern times we have witnessed a shift following how Bentham (1789) defines happiness linked to benefit and this to pleasure (hedonism). Further goes with Amartya Sen who has been trying to bring back the old Aristotelian viewpoint talking about capabilities (Capability Approach, a moral framework. It proposes that social arrangements should be primarily evaluated according to the extent of freedom people have to promote or achieve functionings they value): so far happiness is a set of capabilities. In other words the potential inside each human being. Nussbaum (1992) thoughts were exactly the same: what makes a life worthy cannot be exhausted in obtaining material objects, however essential, but in the possibility of having effective alternatives that allow people to best deploy their abilities in any situation. Such an approach should guide public policies with the aim of removing the obstacles (not only economic) that limit and constrain the lives of human beings. It is not enough to redistribute resources to guarantee equity and justice, as the subjective conditions of people can be very different and inevitably marked by the specific context.

Zamagni pointed out that “here reside the difference between development and growth which takes up the dimensions of the civil economic tradition of the Italian *Illuminismo* movement. Briefly, the concept of development in the social sciences can be associated with that of progress, which involves an implicit judgment of value. In fact, progress is not a mere change but a change towards the better and therefore postulates an increase in value. The judgment of progress depends on the value you take into consideration. This is why development cannot be reduced to economic growth alone, which is one of its dimensions but not the only one. The other two are socio-relational and spiritual and

the three dimensions are in a multiplicative and non-additive relationship, therefore either all of them work or if one is missing it resets the entire product. Here the difference between total good (sum of individual goods) and common good (product of individual goods)" (2019).

Integral human development is a transformational project that has to do with change for the betterment of people's lives. Development belongs to the order of ends, while growth, which is an accumulative project, belongs to the order of means.

Besides common goods another concept, part of the civil economic model, is central to the evolution of regenerative models and is that of gratuitousness (*gratuità*): gratuitousness doesn't mean a zero price (for free) but an infinite price. "In life there are important things that do not pass through the market because if they did they would come out impoverished and distorted. Such goods, extremely precious because they are very rare, cannot be subjected to a monetary valuation, because they are placed on a another level: for example a friend who listens, an act of genuine love; we need to learn to consider money for relational goods and for other scarce goods (environmental and civil) as a "gift", which does not express the value of a thing, but says a thank you for a relationship" (Bruni, Smerilli 2008).

Gratuità is an inner attitude which leads us to approach every person and living beings knowing that they are not "things" to be used but reality to be respected and loved because they have an intrinsic value that I welcome and respect because I recognize it as good. It is the concept of the ethics of virtues that the important realities of life (beauty, love, truth, happiness, ...) need intrinsic values that we summarize with the word free (Bruni, Smerilli 2008).

1.2 REGENERATIVE TOURISM PRINCIPLES

The main paradigm is from a mechanical approach which collects scarce resources and individuals compete to exploit, to one that sees Planet Earth, and all life on it, as comprising a set of interdependent, self-organizing living systems that flourish and generate abundance (Pollock 2019b).

Regenerative tourism draws from complex adaptive systems thinking and Indigenous worldviews to encapsulate the interconnectedness between people and the environment and their interactions across scale and time. Regenerative tourism aims for flourishing living systems – living systems that are feeling good and functioning effectively. While ecological systems are self-regulating, socio-ecological systems involve humans that make conscious decisions, and therefore we have a role in supporting system flourishing. Thus, regenerative tourism requires a change in paradigm away from tourism being seen as a linear function centered on extracting maximum economic growth from tourists to a recognition that tourism takes place in communities and natural environments. (Hutchinson, 2021).

As Pollock (2019a) warns us "you cannot understand let alone practice regenerative development unless you are fundamentally shifted your patterns of thinking, your ways of seeing, and assumed a deep sense of interdependence with all life on this planet".

So we are back to the core of our unbalanced tourism development methodologies: it is necessary to understand that "inner peace is closely related to care for ecology and for the common good because, lived out authentically, it is reflected in a balanced lifestyle together with a capacity for wonder which takes us to a deeper understanding of life. Many people today sense a profound imbalance which drives them to frenetic activity

and makes them feel busy, in a constant hurry which in turn leads them to ride roughshod over everything around them. This too affects how they treat the environment. An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals” (Pope Francis. 2015).

Cheer (2020) emphasizes the implications in applying human flourishing to tourism is that in present day terms, it extends beyond the Aristotelian view, towards contemporary considerations of human development, well-being and life satisfaction or as Rasmussen (2009) encapsulates, it is “inclusive of knowledge, health, friendship, creative achievement, beauty, and pleasure; and such virtues as integrity, temperance, courage, and justice”. How to reconcile the myriad contexts and establish empirical human flourishing benchmarks remains a constraint to praxis and scholarly development in tourism.

However recently Bellato (2023) proposed 7 principles for regenerative tourism practices: 1) Ecological worldview 2) Living Systems thinking 3) Potential of places and communities 4) Capability of transformation of tourism living systems 5) Healing approach to adopt perspectives, knowledge and practices of indigenous people 6) Create regenerative places and communities 7) Collaborative participation.

The theoretical background resides also on 4 preconditions as described by Pollock (2019a): 1) Humans are a part of nature and we must understand connections, wholeness, relationships 2) Humans must nourish whole selves (bodies, hearts, souls and mind) 3) All life inter-connected and interdependent 4) Regenerative Tourism is based on understanding that the destination is not an industrial line but a living networked system and works with wholes and not parts.

2. A CLEAR OUTCOME FROM A LAB ON REGENERATIVE TOURISM

The "Tourism and Sustainability" Lab at the A.Y. 2022/2023 Master's degree course in Cultural and Event Tourism Management at the Department of Humanities and Cultural Heritage of the University of Udine has been designed to support students in understanding the new tourism ecosystems evolution and questioning the *status quo*, if the case. Starting from the traditional development paradigms of the sector, both theoretical and practical, we tried to gradually redefine the sense of travel and its evolution to another economic vision of life and places. After an analysis of the current state of tourism development as an economic, social, environmental, cultural, civil phenomenon, the theoretical aspects of current regenerative tourism theories were discussed from several perspectives, both conceptual and practical bringing in class worldwide scenarios - from New Zealand to Costa Rica - with the most well-known grafts such as "flourishing destinations", "The Invisible Burden" conceptual framework, "spirit of place", "transformative travel", "balance awareness" alongside the official UN Agencies latest reports (mainly UNWTO, UNESCO, UNEP) about the UN Agenda 2030 developments and state of advancements in the tourism sector. Alongside these theoretical lessons, three distinguished guest speakers, from very different living and working backgrounds, were invited to talk about their professional experiences and sense of the world for a vision of the future: an international corporate expert in food products lifecycle management, travel retail and market building with its continuous growth dynamics through financial and operational KPIs; an Associate Professor of Ethics who discussed the Aristotelian's *eudaimonia* and *ergon*, *logos* and humans, cultivating the potential, the meaning of living together if the common good is the way; the CEO of a DMO in Italy which, a unique case in the country, has been applying the theories of regenerative tourism for over two years with remarkable results: a more cohesive community, awareness about civil values, healed places to live and visit,

happier and more grounded people within the Planet boundaries and spiritual wisdom. The end results of the program were new questions from the students about: the meaning of tourism, why people travel, why they travel so unconscious, why all those induced choices mimicking autonomous ones, the substantial lack of meaning and happiness when traveling, and when services appear, after the classes, looked sterile and just linked to profit based on selfish adherence to personal interest as the pivot of choices running into "the tragedy of the commons".

The policies and programmes addressed in various countries confirmed the efforts, of a few, for a new approach to the sector, the possibility of creating other territories with successful experiences for all living beings and how this does not mean not having economic wealth but rather the latter as one of the means for a thriving community. The students basically looked for which, in a hypothetical balance of processes, is appropriate to activate, what it means to consider (thriving) living systems as elements of the same equation without priority of numbers. The different awareness of this type of visitor's economy phenomenon in flourishing communities and nourishing places values a deeper meaning than the traditionally ones pursued. A collective assumptions shared by all students at the end of the course started from a single question: what does it mean happiness for you?

For the final exam all the 22 students discussed their project' analysis across different continents case studies related - except one - on regenerative tourism systems, through both economic and touristic national strategies of the countries. What emerged was the use of different KPIs than those commonly disseminated to understand the reasons for the strategic plans activated. Very influenced by the best practices of Tourism of Bhutan and Bay of Plenty in New Zealand, the analytical works have become well structured and touching oral presentations also by adopting another vocabulary (set of words, definitions and grammar I made compulsory to pass the exam) to define progress, evolution, the meaning of the visitor's economy, the meaning and role of local communities and indigenous people and the tangible and intangible heritage they care for.

Their commitment to understand and prioritize human being's own dignity, happiness as the main KPI, virtues and capabilities cultivation, place as nested living ecosystems, and the priority of creating community first, was very promising to support the call of regenerative tourism studies for a more engaged global attention both by public and private sectors.

CONCLUSIONS

When we talk about "regenerative tourism", theory and practices, we must include the integral human development concepts which is another understanding of life from consumers to living beings - loved and lovers. Teaching regenerative tourism means contributing to training on life on the Planet for, I believe, a richer human existence.

Helping to think about the values and meaning of life allows important and independent thoughts to flourish instead of being kept still on the "consumption" function in which we are immersed and through which we live our private and professional choices. From these considerations also arises the need for a different vocabulary to define tourism concepts that starts from other perspectives and lead to more comprehensive goals. Words define thoughts thus the integral human development provides structures for a sentient living being who faces economic models with awareness and creation, hence the importance of teaching "another language" related to the visitor's economy which presupposes a different philosophical and value-based approach and other theoretical

architectures.

This process, within the University system, could be effective only in Departments of Humanities, in fact it becomes obsolete and misleading to pursue studies on the phenomenon of tourism in exclusively economic and technical environments.

Some more words: Market crisis brings an implicit definition of sadness, mostly, in the richest western economies: a lack of “heart wisdom” or an attitude of living by virtues to “a sacred time to remember, return, rest, restore, and rejoice” (Pope Francis, 2020) as it is the Jubilee time. A time to restore the original harmony of creation and to heal strained human relationships.

Happiness is a state and not an event. The common good is the whole set of those conditions of social life which allow both groups and individual members to reach their own perfection more fully and more quickly.

A vital and prosperous living systems means the flourishing of each of its parts: living organisms, human life that manages to express its potential, the custody of the spirit of the place *genius loci*, the rebirth of trust and community as agents of transformation for territories toward an harmonious evolution in which the own value of each creature feeds and is fed together with the others.

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