The rise of regenerative hospitality

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Abstract

Purpose – *The concept of "regenerative business" is thriving in current business literature. The present study seeks to contribute to the current academic debate by investigating the nature and scope of regenerative hospitality, here seen as a steppingstone of regenerative tourism.*

Design/methodology/approach – *Exploratory in nature and with the goal of understating the nature and scope of regenerative hospitality, nineteen semi-structured interviews with academics, consultants and self-proclaimed regenerative hoteliers were conducted.*

Findings – *Results provide a regenerative hospitality framework to move from the current sustainability paradigm towards local and systemic regenerative approaches in hospitality by applying place and people intelligence.*

Originality/value – *This research contributes to the current academic debate about the future of travel, particularly focussing on the future of hospitality in relation to the multidisciplinary field of regenerative economy. Particularly, the paper has been designed to contribute to the current discussion in the* Journal of Tourism Futures *about the transformation and regenerative future of tourism.*

Keywords *Regenerative hospitality, Regeneration, Place intelligence, People intelligence, Net-positive impact*

Paper type *Research paper*

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1. Introduction

The year 2017 was the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) year of sustainable tourism; yet, the UN-led sustainable development agenda seems relatively questionable when addressing the actual contribution of tourism and hospitality to local socioeconomic development (Inversini and Rega, 2020). In fact, despite UN sustainable development efforts to mitigate damage, it has been recognized that "doing less harm" is often considered inadequate (Chassagne and Everingham, 2019).

This is the starting point of regenerative tourism and hospitality: it is a sustainable development paradigm that positions tourism and hospitality activities as interventions that develop the capacities of places, communities and their guests (Ateljevic and Sheldon, 2022). Global initiatives in the field emphasize the transformation of relationships with and between self, other humans and non-humans to improve social and environmental systems' capacity (Araneda, 2017). The regenerative development paradigm in tourism and hospitality promotes innovations by embedding tourism practices within local communities and ecological processes that elevate human and non-human well-being (Bellato and Cheer, 2021). Although literature about regenerative tourism is growing, focussing mostly on systemic (Bellato *et al.*, 2022a, b) and destination angles (e.g. Fusté-Forné and Hussain, 2022), there is still a lack of consideration for the role of hospitality businesses within the regenerative movement.

In fact, promoting a systemic approach means having an understanding of regenerative hospitality businesses being embedded within the overall destination ecosystem and contributing to enhancing, and thriving through, the health of social-ecological systems in a co-evolutionary process (Hahn and Tampe, 2021, p. 465). This builds upon the scale that represents three levels of regenerative strategies, namely restore–preserve–enhance, recently developed by Hahn and Tampe (2021).

Therefore, defining and discussing the role of regenerative hospitality establishments means giving a strategic role to the main actors and cornerstone of the destination ecosystem, encouraging a shift from the "net-zero-impact" concept towards a "net-positive-impact" (Polman and Winston, 2021). This represents as the existence of a hospitality establishment being a prerequisite to generate a contribution towards (1) the ecological system and (2) the social system around it.

Our study moves from these premises: it is nested in the systemic regenerative movement but looks at the key actors of the system (i.e. hotels) with the purpose of generating an initial understanding of the key components of regenerative hospitality businesses, thus contributing to the ever-increasing literature on the topic. In the next sessions, the study will discuss relevant literature concerning regenerative economy and regenerative tourism towards generating an understanding of the underpinning concepts of regenerative hospitality. A group of academics, consultants and hoteliers, who are already engaging with some sort of regenerative hospitality, have been interviewed. Results shed lights on the nature and scope of regenerative hospitality, contributing to the theoretical and practical discussion of the topic.

2. Literature review

2.1 Sustainability struggle

The concept of corporate sustainability has risen to prominence in the last few years (Awaysheh et al., 2020). Indeed, it has been implemented as the solution for businesses tackling the challenges of modern society and to create a more sustainable world (Montiel and Delgado-Ceballos, 2014). Corporate sustainability deals with the relationship between business and the wider society (Bansal and Song, 2017) and proposes an alternative business approach "to traditional, short-term, profit-oriented approaches to managing the firm by holistically balancing economic, environmental, and social issues in the present generation and for future ones" (Lozano et al., 2015, p. 430).

However, as claimed by Hahn and Figge (2011), conventional corporate sustainably remains rooted in a bounded notion of instrumentality that still focusses too much on profitability in terms of financial outcomes. Undoubtedly, the theories of firms (Seth and Thomas, 1994) most widely used in the context of corporate sustainability, such as the Stockholder Theory (Argandoña, 1998), the Aggregate Theory (Avi-Yonah, 2005), the Contractual Theory (Boatright, 1996), the Resource-Based View (Conner and Prahalad, 1996) and the Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 2010; Freeman et al., 2004), are not meant to address efficiently the four sustainability dimensions immediately (i.e. human, social, economic and environmental - Lozano et al., 2015). As expressed by Ferraro et al. (2015), traditional management approaches seem to be falling short when applied to the sustainability domain. Thus, even though sustainability has generated some progress in the relationship with businesses and the wider society, it has failed to deliver its expected results (Rug, 2022) as it did not succeed in providing a radical shift in values and mindset (Ateljevic and Sheldon, 2022).

Over the years, more holistic management practices have been developed, such as the Sustainability-Oriented Theory of the Firm (Lozano et al., 2015), so that environmental and social organizational outcomes would be considered equally as important as financial outcomes (Hahn and Figge, 2011) and truly interdependent (Newton, 2002). Indeed, to meet its objectives, corporate sustainability should integrate more the visions of natural sciences (Whiteman et al., 2013), by, for example, taking into account planetary boundaries (Rockström et al., 2009). Moreover, it has been shown that small companies usually "work the talk" when it comes to sustainability actions, while large companies usually communicate symbolically about their actions but often do not actually implement sustainability in their core structure (Wickert et al., 2016).

2.1.1 Fatigue towards sustainability in the tourism and hospitality industry. Many scholars in the tourism and hospitality industry have denounced the actual inappropriateness of the current sustainable paradigm to tackle the challenges of our society, especially as tourism authorities still

promote tourism growth without taking into account "the ecological and social limits of living on a finite planet" (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018, p. 157). Becken (2019) shared the same concern, adding that there are other reasons preventing the tourism industry from reducing its environmental impact; these are, the institutionalization of interests, the nature of policy-making, the inadequacy of incremental improvements, the focus on technological efficiency instead of (behavioural) conservation and the global distribution of tourism. Moreover, sustainable tourism still prioritizes top-down, standardized and compartmentalized interventions (Bellato *et al*., 2022b). However, the idiosyncrasies of the tourism industry have the potential to help society to work towards the realization of the SDGs (i.e. Sustainable Development Goals - UNWTO, 2023). For example, Cores (2014) found that tourism can be an important factor in poverty reduction under certain conditions. In light of the Covid-19 crisis, calls for rethinking how sustainability is applied in the tourism and hospitality industry have arisen (Cheer, 2020; Dwyer, 2018) to develop a more sustainable, inclusive and caring model for all stakeholders, which takes into consideration the environmental and ecological capacities of the destination (Simón *et al*., 2004).

2.2 The regenerative approach

In response to the fatigue towards corporate sustainability, a different systemic approach has been rising to prominence in recent years, which is the regenerative approach (Ateljevic, 2020; Dredge, 2022; Hahn and Tampe, 2021). This approach stems from an ecological and living systems worldview where the goal is to promote the conditions for all life to renew and restore (Hahn and Tampe, 2021; Mang and Reed, 2012; Reed, 2007). Moreover, it aims at moving from the traditional "doing less bad" sustainable approach to a "doing more good" regenerative approach (Hahn and Tampe, 2021).

This regenerative approach has been applied, especially by practitioners, in fields including agriculture, architecture, landscape and urban design (Newton *et al*., 2020; Reed, 2007; Roth and Zheng, 2021; Zari, 2009). Regenerative agriculture, which focusses on the conservation and restoration of soils, provides a good exemplification of this concept. Regenerative practices in this field focus on restoring the productivity and function of the ecosystem in contrast with conventional agriculture, which exploits soils, depletes nutrients and reduces soil quality (Du Plessis and Cole, 2011). Coleman *et al*. (2018) and Mang and Reed (2012) discussed the regenerative approach in the context of the built environment and underlined the interplay between the human and environmental systems, which can result in positive outcomes for both those systems.

2.2.1 Theories underpinning the regenerative approach. The regenerative approach moves from a focus on the local level, including environmental and socioeconomical systems (Ateljevic, 2020; Dredge, 2022; Hahn and Tampe, 2021), towards making a net-positive impact (Polman and Winston, 2021). It is strongly underpinned by indigenous knowledge; that is, by deep and meaningful connections with nature and people rooted within the place (Major and Clarke, 2022) and it fosters processes of local bottom-up ownership and decolonization (Bellato *et al*., 2023). Although the overall approach rose to prominence in recent years, these concepts have been studied previously by other scholars and applied in other theories (e.g. Freudenburg *et al*., 1995; Gabel and Others, 1985).

The term "regenerative economy" was first used by Gabel and Others (1985) to describe an approach aimed at focussing on economic growth at a local level by finding resources locally available as an alternative to ones imported. More recently, Walls and Paquin (2015) reviewed the organizational perspectives offered by the industrial symbiosis approach, which consists of sharing resources, such as excess materials or energy from one company with another company, to reduce overall environmental impacts economically (Chertow and Ehrenfeld, 2012). In the Doughnut Economy approach, Raworth (2017) explains that humans should not live under a certain level of safety and well-being or they would experience deprivation; similarly, they should not live above a certain level that would be too damaging for the planet as it would not respect its physical boundaries.

Whiteman and Cooper (2000) define the concept of ecological embeddedness to express the level to which "a manager is rooted in the land; that is, the extent to which the manager is on the land and learns from the land in an experiential way" (p. 1267) and stresses that managers should adopt a more native approach based on the knowledge of indigenous people to implement a better sustainable approach. In a similar vein, Muñoz and Cohen (2017) introduced the notion of entrepreneurial synchronicity to describe the necessity to synchronize the venture rhythm with ecological cycles. In addition to this, Williams *et al.* (2017, 2021) summarized past studies that underline the importance of using system thinking to understand the feedback loops of ecosystems to build better resilience. Especially, despite economic, social and ecological systems being nonlinear interdependent elements (Holling, 2001), their relationship has been too often considered only as dualistic (Freudenburg *et al.*, 1995).

2.2.2 Regenerative approach in detail. While the regenerative business approach is not the direct result of those past approaches, it reunites most of their characteristics (Benne and Mang, 2015; Fullerton, 2015; Hahn and Tampe, 2021; Kambo *et al.*, 2016). The regenerative approach can therefore be conceptualized as going beyond commercial logic to implement a system approach to derive business strategies from the logic of social–ecological systems, allowing businesses to enhance and thrive through the health of social–ecological systems in a co-evolutionary process (Hahn and Tampe, 2021). The core concept at the basis of the regenerative approach is to be place-based, meaning that firms need to understand their stakeholders and how their living systems are embedded (Reed, 2007). Thus, this could help them to deal more effectively with such thorny issues as social justice, global climate change, alternative energy and economic inequality (Guthey *et al.*, 2014). In other words, it develops a system approach in which human beings should replace themselves as being part of nature and aim at continuously feeding and being fed by the living systems within which they take place (Mang and Reed, 2012). Thus, it takes into consideration the interplay between human and environment systems to have positive outcomes on those systems (Coleman *et al.*, 2018).

In a regenerative approach, the human beings or, in the case of a business, the entrepreneur/manager (Lupton and Samy, 2022) should develop an intimate, recursive and informative relationship with the ecosystem. This is for nature to become a partner and, therefore, enable the creation of the regenerative venture (Vlasov, 2021). Caldera *et al.* (2022) explored how SMEs (i.e. Small and medium-sized enterprises) can transition to the principles of the living system, regenerative business approach using the stewardship theory (Davis *et al.*, 1997). Based on two case studies, they define the regenerative approach as "slow, stop and then reverse their negative environmental impacts, then progressively and positively influence their surrounding socio-ecological systems" (p. 13). Last but not least, the necessity of a shift of mind to implement regenerative approaches has been recognized to abandon the current mechanistic vision to focus on an ecological worldview and to incorporate the living systems principles in a holistic way (Benne and Mang, 2015; Dredge, 2022).

2.3 Regenerative approach in the tourism industry

The tourism industry is at the forefront of this regenerative business transition (Ateljevic and Sheldon, 2022). In fact, tourism is an industry with high global reach and local trans-sectorial impact (Ryan, 2002; Wahl, 2019), which can be one of the catalysts of regenerative transformation; however, despite decades discussing pathways to sustainable tourism, authorities are still promoting a pathway to growth not aligned with sustainability principles (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018). The tourism industry could become more resilient and regenerative (Tomassini and Cavagnaro, 2022) by envisaging the co-existence of diverse economic practices, such as capitalist, alternative capitalist and non-capitalist (Cave and Dredge, 2020) because *capitalocentric* challenges limit the development of regenerative practices (Mathisen *et al.*, 2022). Sheller (2021) describes regenerative tourism as embracing "alternative non-capitalist forms of ownership, non-monetary exchange, and beneficial community-based development" (p. 2).

Thus, the regenerative approach in the tourism industry is a distinct approach derived from the ecological worldview and regenerative paradigm (Araneda, 2017; Howard *et al*., 2008; Pollock, 2019a). This approach shares some concepts with some sustainable tourism approaches that can enhance regeneration, such as the ones from creative tourism (Duxbury *et al.*, 2020), community capacity building (Aref *et al*., 2010), responsible tourism (Camilleri, 2016), transformational tourism (Bhalla and Chowdhary, 2022), social–ecological system (Wu and Tsai, 2016) and circular economy (Tomassini and Cavagnaro, 2022). Indeed, both types of approach promote the well-being of future generations (Bellato *et al*., 2022b). Yet they differ because the regenerative tourism approach challenges the growth paradigm and looks for creating net positive social–ecological systems effects, while sustainable approaches only minimize social–ecological damage.

Bellato *et al*. (2022b) have created frameworks describing the regenerative approach in the tourism industry. Their frameworks include dimensions, such as a regeneration mindset and systems capabilities and effect (Bellato *et al*., 2022b), as well as the role that shareholders can play in the regenerative approach to contribute to the healthy evolution of the social–ecological system (Bellato *et al*., 2022a). Pollock (2019a) exemplifies regenerative tourism as being "a fresh understanding that the visitor economy, in general, and the destination, in particular, is not an industrial production line but a living, networked system embedded in a natural system called Nature and subject to Nature's operating rules and principles". Part of the process requires "exploring what it means to be fully human by applying our whole selves (bodies, hearts, souls and mind) to whatever task we face" (Pollock, 2019b). It is an additive approach and it allows mutual benefits as there is an interconnected and reciprocal relationship between people and place (Matunga *et al*., 2020). Following on those frameworks and definitions, it is clear that regenerative tourism should be built on indigenous peoples' continuous living cultures and their evolving perspectives, knowledge systems, Western science and practice (Matunga *et al*., 2020).

Finally, an important output of the regenerative approach is that "regenerative tourism allows people to immerse themselves in nature, which generates healing effects for both humans and the planet" (Bhalla and Chowdhary, 2022, p. 389) and results in the well-being of all the stakeholders.

2.4 Regenerative approach in the hospitality industry

After a thorough search of relevant literature, it seems that the term "regenerative hospitality" has never been used to describe how hotels can adapt their business model to become more regenerative. Indeed, most of the theory on the regenerative approach in the tourism industry has been built on examples from tourism activities (e.g. Bhalla and Chowdhary, 2022; Boluk and Panse, 2022; Wu and Tsai, 2016) and theorized under the appellation of regenerative tourism. Some scholars did focus on hotels but still did not express their findings under the appellation of regenerative hospitality (e.g. Bellato *et al*., 2022a; Benne and Mang, 2015).

Slawinski *et al*. (2021) conducted a six-year inductive study of a regenerative organization (including a hotel, Fogo Island Inn) and developed an empirically grounded model of managing paradoxes of place for regeneration that stipulates that effectively managing place-based tensions, paradoxically, is the condition to enable regeneration. In their study, they define place based on different studies (Cresswell, 2014; Gieryn, 2000; Guthey and Whiteman, 2009; Thomas and Cross, 2007; Walck, 2004) as "a multidimensional concept, including geographic location, locale, and sense of place" (p. 596).

Their findings give insights into how a hotel can have positive local impacts when focussing on its interactions with the place it is embedded. However, further research needs to be conducted to create a regenerative hospitality model that can be generalized for hotels that are aiming to become regenerative.

This research tries to bridge this gap, generating a better understanding of the regenerative hospitality concept; hospitality establishments are here seen as the cornerstone of change (Greenwood, 1976) in the destination; that is to say, the business building block of the destination system that could trigger a net-positive impact on the wider destination.

3. Methodology

Moving from the perspective outlined above, regenerative hospitality is here investigated as the missing and, perhaps, most important piece in the overall regenerative tourism discourse (Ateljevic and Sheldon, 2022); however, hospitality is at the core of local tourism development and has a global reach as well as a local impact (Whal, 2019).

This research aims to generate a better understanding of this cornerstone of tourism destination considering regenerative businesses. Therefore, the main objectives of this research are to generate a better understanding on:

1. The nature of regenerative hospitality

2. The scope of regenerative hospitality

In order to do so, qualitative exploratory research has been designed involving 19 senior travel professionals from 15 different countries, who have been contacted and interviewed (Table 1). The semi-structured interviews consisted of 10 guiding questions that were created based on current literature (e.g. Bellato *et al.*, 2022a, b); interviewees were chosen using different criteria:

1. Academics (n = 5) were chosen based on their publication and research interest. Each one of the selected academics published at least one paper about regenerative businesses.

2. Consultants (n = 6) were chosen based on their consultancy activity in relation to regenerative travel. Only consultants whose linkedin.com profile mentioned "regenerative travel" (or similar) were chosen.

3. Hoteliers (n = 8) were chosen from a pool of self-proclaimed regenerative hoteliers; mostly from regenerative establishments certified by "regenerativetravel.com".

The interviews ranged from 19 to 72 min in length and were conducted in English. These were then transcribed and analysed with a mixture of deductive coding (i.e. driven from the literature) and inductive coding (i.e. themes developed based on data (Boyatzis, 1998) using the Nvivo software. Data were primary coded by one of the authors. In a second step, all the coded data have been reviewed and discussed with all of the authors to foster inter-coder reliability and to reach agreement regarding the codes assigned.

Table 1	List of participants	
Code	Category	Place
A1	Academic	Switzerland
A2	Academic	Portugal
A3	Academic	United Kingdom
A4	Academic	Germany
A5	Academic	Australia
C1	Consultant	United States
C2	Consultant	France
C3	Consultant	Switzerland
C4	Consultant	United Kingdom
C5	Consultant	United Kingdom
C6	Consultant	United States
H1	Hotelier	Nepal
H2	Hotelier	Jamaica
H3	Hotelier	South Africa
H4	Hotelier	Bali
H5	Hotelier	Panama
H6	Hotelier	Canada
H7	Hotelier	Punta Cana
H8	Hotelier	Bhutan

Source(s): Table compiled by authors

4. Findings

Findings of the interviews supported the generation of a better understanding of regenerative hospitality. Particularly, informants contributed in shedding light on the two main objectives of the research.

4.1 The nature of regenerative hospitality

4.1.1 The need of a regenerative approach. Almost all informants started to point out the intrinsic characteristics of the travel sector, which is inherently unsustainable, as informant [A3] maintains: "[...] until we recognize that the basics of the system are unsustainable and acknowledge that, and we've been trying to sustain a flawed system [...], then again, we're going to go round in circles [...]." Moreover, [C6] supports this idea: "[...] we've been talking about sustainability now for 40 years and we're less sustainable today than we were before." The travel field, along with hospitality, should go beyond sustainability and seen in the reductionist, as pictured by informant [C2]: *"doing less damage, but still continuing what we are doing."* However, as explained by [A4], "sustainability [...] it is very much within the economic model we have" but "the application of sustainability has been very difficult with lots of gaps [...]; it hasn't worked right, the implementation of sustainability acquired right has been a failure." Therefore, regenerative hospitality should move from sustainability, to restoration, to regeneration *"focusing on net positive effects rather than just preservation and maintaining status quo or doing less harm,"* according to informant [A5]. In fact, informant [C5] maintains: *"it's got to be not just minimizing negative impacts, but preferably maximizing positives."* This would then result in an approach where "the focus isn't on tourism and what it can gain, the focus is on tourism being a tool for the development of places and communities," as [A5] maintains. This approach, following [H2], focusses on having *"active responsibility towards the environment, the community, the staff and, ultimately, the guests."*

4.1.2 Regenerative means mind shift. Interviewees agreed a mind shift is required to move towards regenerative hospitality because this is not just a business strategy but, as [A5] specifies: *"ontologically it's a different worldview, it's a different way of thinking"* and a mind shift. Regenerative hospitality challenges the *"linear approach where humans are separate entities from the nature [...], able to control and exploit it. [A5]."* For [A3], regeneration is not a cherry-picking exercise but rather a *"shift of thinking [which should result] in a fundamental change in the system"* where *"we see ourselves [...] living in symbiosis with nature [A4]."* This, following [H3], *"[...] has to go through everything you do, your personal life, the thing you do in the business"* and, in a way, "everything we do [at the hotel] basically drives how good we are being to the environment," maintains [H4].

4.1.3 From profit to purpose. Adopting a regenerative mindset translates into "a series of principles that help the business identify how they can produce value and that value should not just be money for investors, which is how many businesses are running today" [C1]. In fact, as [C3] maintains, "I don't think you can regenerate [...] if the main driver of our actions is the desire for profit"; interviewees agreed on the fact that regenerative hospitality is a long-term commitment which, in most cases, "will take longer to be profitable" [H6]. However, [H1] maintains: "Regeneration [...], in a highly commercial sense, can probably mean either more profit, or longer profit." Most of the hotel owners stated that profit is not the main driving force of their business; as [H3] explains, "we care very little about the profit [...], it is our home [...]. Yes, we need to pay salaries but profit is not the driving force." Therefore, these regenerative properties are shifting from profit to purpose: "if purpose is your main driver, then profit is less important" [C3].

4.1.4 Shifting metrics on a moving target. This shift and intertwining with the local community is also reflected in the metrics used to measure the impact of regenerative properties, which shift from pure quantitative indexes to community-based impact. According to [C1], *"[...] the accountability of your peers [...], always wanting to really be more regenerative,"* in fact, for [H5]: "a regenerative business cares about what it's doing to the world, what it's doing to the community, all of the

different touch points, all of the different people, all of nature, water, all of those things that went into it to go forward, and so that's just one measurement." Maybe, following [A4], "regeneration does not need metrics" or, maybe, different qualitative metrics to measure success are needed. As [C2] affirms, "[Regenerative hotel should be] measuring success and qualitative metrics on top of quantitative metrics and traditional metrics [. . .], with metrics that are more holistic." However, for [H5], it is important "to monitor ourselves with metrics and because we're looking at different things, I think it makes a difference in the way we do business. So, we knew, for instance, that we had excessive amounts of waste from our fruit and vegetables and some other things; until we started measuring it, it wasn't something that people cared about; so, if you don't measure something, it's not easy to say that you could do better."

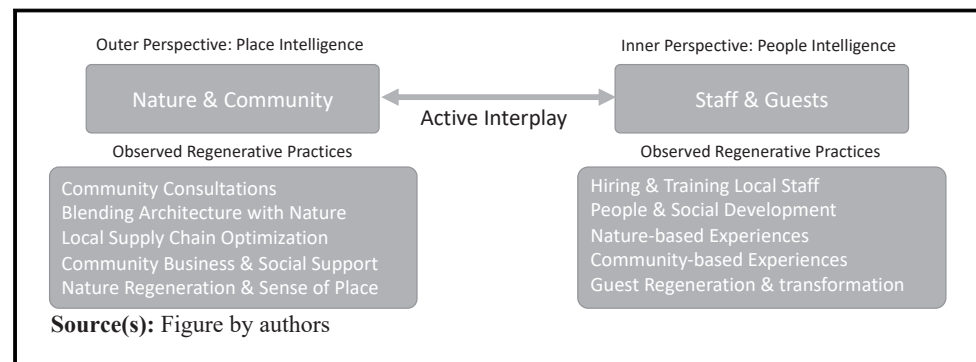## 4.2 The scope of regenerative hospitality

4.2.1 Local and systemic. Results also highlight the scope of regenerative hospitality that focusses on a local yet systemic approach. In fact, on the one hand, the concept of honouring the sense of place is very strong; according to [C6], "honouring how things were done many thousands of years ago in terms of how they like to do the architecture and design" and "resisting that standardization and that reduction, the reductionism, that has happened to us all, even with hospitality, food systems" [A5]. However, [C3] states: "[There is a] systemic perspective, everybody's part of the ecosystem, so everybody has a role to play and everything is interconnected [. . .], you also have a certain responsibility in the whole cycle and you can influence it." In a nutshell, as [C2] maintains, "the regenerative [hospitality]approach is about building awareness on these organizations as living systems" and "they'll benefit [. . .] the development of that community, but not in a way that's unsustainable, in a way that involves the community itself."

4.2.2 An inner–outer approach to development. Hoteliers have an active "responsibility to the guests, responsibility to the team, responsibility to the environment, and responsibility to the community. This kind of became our sort of mission statement or mantra, these four cornerstones of building the hotel and really, that original mission has really guided a lot of the decisions we've made over the last sort of 30 years there," according to [H2]. The involvement of the community is very strong for [C2]: "Basically a regenerative approach is an inner and outer approach to development, so it ends at developing the capacities in people so that we can best evolve in harmony with our environment and with each other."

This inner–outer approach to development can be used to better understand the peculiarity of regenerative hospitality which, following [C5] "involves quite a sort of creative and innovative brains to think how can we do this differently."

Figure 1 proposes a synthesis of this approach. In the outer perspective it is possible to classify all the discourses related to the natural ecosystems and social ecosystem; that is to say, all the

Figure 1 Regenerative hospitality: The inner/outer perspective

Outer Perspective: Place Intelligence

Inner Perspective: People Intelligence

Nature & Community ⟷ Active Interplay ⟷ Staff & Guests

Observed Regenerative Practices

Observed Regenerative Practices

Community Consultations
Blending Architecture with Nature
Local Supply Chain Optimization
Community Business & Social Support
Nature Regeneration & Sense of Place

Hiring & Training Local Staff
People & Social Development
Nature-based Experiences
Community-based Experiences
Guest Regeneration & transformation

Source(s): Figure by authors

regenerative discourses related to place honouring [C6]. Regenerative hospitality therefore needs to develop "Place Intelligence." Meanwhile, the inner perspective relates to staff (often part of the community and therefore connecting to the outer sphere), suppliers who provide the hotels with goods and services to operate and guests who benefit from the regeneration and, eventually, transformation as well. Consequently, "People Intelligence" is also a cornerstone of a regenerative approach.

4.2.3 Place intelligence and people intelligence. This inner/outer perspective and observed regenerative practices allowed better categorization of outer perspective; that is to say, "place intelligence" is the systemic relationship with nature and the community and the inner perspective; that is to say, people intelligence is the transformative relationship between staff and guests.

Place intelligence: almost all interviewees agreed and mentioned the importance of having a net positive impact on the social and natural ecosystems; blending the accommodation within the natural environment was essential for [A5], who explained: "they designed that hotel with the village in mind, so there was a local village and they saw the hotel as part of the village because they were of that village; then they related to that land, to that community differently. They weren't a separate hotel group that were just plonking themselves on that land and setting up having benefits for community." This does not happen by chance, there is the clear need to perform community consultation and to understand the natural landscape in detail, as [A3] maintains: "So, you go out and talk to the residents and find out what they think." This is echoed by [H3], who stated: "I think one aspect of regeneration is, a huge part of it, is actually how we can protect the places when we get people to travel to but also protect the communities, protect the heritage of the places where people travelled." Therefore, both the natural ecosystem and the social ecosystem are part of place intelligence, allowing hospitality entrepreneurs to melt with nature and the community.

People intelligence: almost all the interviewees agreed that regeneration should start from their staff, who are often part of the community. This is because, according to [H5], "taking care of the place means to take care of the people associated with it [. . .], it's about being a permanent member of the community and so stewardship is very important; we try and really live into our values, and we have stewardship." Most hospitality organizations participating in the interviews make a point of hiring locals [H5] and to an entry level [H2], thereby offering the possibility of growing with the company. Running a regenerative hospitality establishment also supports employee retention. According to [H7], "employees stick [. . .] if they believe in the mission of the company and they believe that the company has kind of a greater goal than just making money, that they're trying to improve the world." However, employees are also the human connector with guests, as per [H8]: "the quality of the services [and interaction with guests] is much better because the team is also so involved in it. So, I think there's a win-win in all aspects." Guests are regarded as a regenerative force for the place, as [H3] states: "I believe that we cannot regenerate environment if we don't regenerate as human beings [. . .]; it's such an important part, as well as the regeneration for human minds and regeneration for human body." Therefore, authentic customer experience [C4], which is enabled by staff belonging from the community [H8], may result in transformational experiences [H3], with travellers being also agents of change for the community. Regarding the implication of suppliers in People Intelligence, [H3] describes the relationship as follows: "we try to buy as much as possible locally, right? So, we, you know, established relationships with farmers that live around, right, and the community is very tight here. So, you know, there is you get SMS, oh, we have sweet potatoes, and sweet potatoes, right? So, it, you know, also forces us to be much more flexible and creative in how we work with food, right? Because, if suddenly somebody says, 'oh, we can give you 10 kilos of sweet potatoes, and two kilos of mangoes, right?' So, yes. Okay, so that's gonna be on the menu, right?" Moreover, working with suppliers in a regenerative way often has a broader impact than just sourcing locally and ends up with activities developing the whole community. Indeed, as explained by [H2], "In the hydroponic farm, we've actually done a partnership where we're going to own the equipment and everything, but he's going to operate the farm and sell to us at a sort of a discounted rate but sells all of the rest of the vegetables at his profit to people outside. So, it's about trying to work out how to leverage the local skills."

5. Discussion and conclusions

This research triangulates three different viewpoints from academics, consultants and hoteliers, leading to a preliminary understanding of the nature and scope of regenerative hospitality. All the interviewees shared a passion towards regenerative hospitality and actively contributed to generate an understanding of it. In general terms, hoteliers gave a more operation-based perspective, consultants gave a more strategic and tactical vision of the phenomenon, while academics gave a more holistic view in the light of theory. Consequently, all these standpoints contributed to the richness of the research, highlighting the multifaceted nature of the issue under investigation.

Additionally, for the first time in current literature, the role of the hospitality establishment as a cornerstone of the regenerative process within a destination is discussed. The interactions between the different social and natural ecosystems, along with the inner relationships created within the hospitality business, are necessary conditions for regenerative hospitality to unfold.

Regenerative hospitality has a local scope as the results of this approach should be visible in the community and in the local natural ecosystem; it has also a systemic approach because each and every player in the ecosystem is interconnected due to the central position of the hotel in ecosystems; therefore, each actor of the ecosystem could play a role in regeneration of the place. This embeddedness of the hotel business at the very local level in a systematic way also complements the visions of Bellato *et al*. (2022a) and Hahn and Tampe (2021).

However, in order for the hospitality organization to be perceived as central in this process, the first condition is that hotel owners must have a shift of mindset to look beyond the traditional sustainability approach of companies in a capitalistic world; this finding echoes past studies (Bellato *et al*., 2022a; Benne and Mang, 2015; Dredge, 2022). Regenerative entrepreneurs need to work for purpose rather than for profit. Nonetheless, most of the independent hotel owners participating in the study clearly defined regeneration as a business orientation where the "purpose" is at the centre of concern but where "profit" plays a crucial role for the subsistence of the actual business. However, profit optimization is not the first concern.

Additionally, this study brings deeper insights into the role and definition of "place." So far, place has been described by Slawinski *et al*. (2021) as a specific geographic location, its ecosystem, inhabitants, their history and their ways of being. Echoing this perspective, regenerative hospitality organizations are embedded in a place formed by a natural and social ecosystem to which they clearly belong. They nourish the relationship with this place and their impact is relational (i.e. in relation to the place they belong). In this way, the community and the natural ecosystem actively blend into the hospitality organization and the hospitality organization actively blends into community and the natural ecosystems. This also feeds the actual inner circle that is the actual hotel: where staff, who belong to the community, take active part in the experience design for guests, leading to people regeneration and possible transformation. Moreover, guests' touristic activities can also participate in the regeneration of the place. This relationship and active interplay between the inner and outer perspective results in high engagement, which sparks outer and inner creativity, leading, for example, to the creation of new businesses required in the community, optimization of the local supply chain, natural regeneration initiatives, transformational experiences and so on.

Figure 2, explains this new way of describing this interactive relationship between place and the hotels to trigger the regenerative process. In fact, hospitality establishments are at the core of this regenerative interaction.

The proposed framework in Figure 2 describes the interactions of the hospitality regenerative business with the local ecosystems. It is the first attempt to describe how hospitality organizations can understand and implement a regenerative orientation; thus, it contributes to the current discussion about regenerative tourism (Ateljevic and Sheldon, 2022), highlighting the crucial role of hotels within the destination ecosystem. Hotels are here seen as the cornerstone of regeneration and the propellers of regenerative culture within the destination.

Figure 2 Regenerative hospitality framework

Source(s): Figure by authors
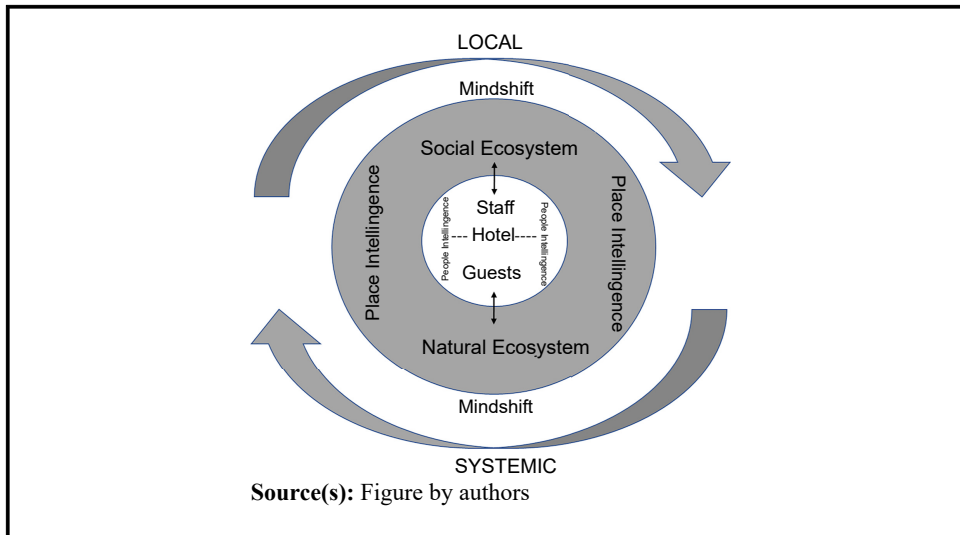
Lastly, it is worth mentioning that most hoteliers taking part in the study manage relatively small businesses with a clear possibility of re-orienting the culture and/or innovating towards regenerative hospitality. Given the fragmentation and multifaceted nature of the hospitality industry, further work is required to establish the viability of the concept and the model for other (bigger) hospitality businesses.

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