

IMPLEMENTING REGENERATIVE DEVELOPMENT IN VISITOR ECONOMIES TO BENEFIT PEOPLE AND PLACES

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Despite sustainable tourism being advocated as a way of contributing to conservation and positive social outcomes in host communities, empirical measures suggest that tourism continues to be as unsustainable as ever. The COVID-19 pandemic paralysed tourism, and scholars argue it has shown the vulnerabilities within tourism. Across the world, communities are beginning to stand up against tourism, recognising that its impacts are excessively influencing their perceived quality of life in a negative way. As a result, tourism researchers and practitioners are calling for the transformation of visitor economies post-pandemic. In that sense, regenerative tourism has emerged as a proposed way to lead that transformation. Regenerative tourism is considered a transformational approach that aims to increase the regenerative capacity of human societies and ecosystems so they may contribute to the flourishing of destinations and the creation of net positive benefits within them. Yet, regenerative tourism is quite nascent, and there are major gaps in understanding how it is constrained, enabled, or implemented in visitor economies, particularly in regional tourism areas. This study addresses these gaps by exploring the systemic changes needed to embed regenerative tourism in a destination so tourism can give back more than it takes from people and places.

The study employs a mixed method and case study approach, using Noosa Shire, Queensland, Australia, as a case study. The research has been designed to bridge the gap between theory and practice and is based on an industry partnership with the Noosa Council to inform their Destination Management Plan and the Shire's 10-year tourism strategy. Systems thinking has been used as the foundation for the analysis undertaken. The research was conducted across three distinct phases encompassing four scoping reviews and four empirical studies. The scoping reviews were conducted to understand the intersection of regenerative tourism, other regenerative approaches, and sustainable tourism. One empirical study, which was based on the scoping reviews, explored the role that our inner world plays in driving regeneration. Three empirical studies were conducted in the context of Noosa Shire to understand the case study destination holistically and infer implications for regenerative tourism development. Secondary data, field observations, semi-structured interviews, stakeholder conversations, and a comprehensive survey instrument informed this stage of the research. Overall, the analysis undertaken aims to 1) compare traditional tourism policies with regenerative tourism policies, 2) identify the barriers and drivers for regenerative tourism within a social-ecological tourism system, 3) propose ways in which regenerative principles can be embedded into community engagement processes and Destination Management Plans, and 4) propose leverage points for regenerative tourism and holistic systems change within visitor economies.

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