

FLOURISHING BEYOND SUSTAINABILITY

The promise of a Regenerative Tourism

Presentation to ETC Workshop in Krakow, February 6th, 2019

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Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. It's an honour to be contributing to another workshop organised by the European Travel Commission and sharing the stage with so many tourism professionals who care about the future of our industry.

I've just 20 minutes to share what I have been spending the past 7 years thinking about, and as I have been tasked to "shake things up," I won't waste time with platitudes but instead start with a personal conviction:

Global tourism, as currently practiced, is underperforming, highly vulnerable and heading towards breakdown. Its operating model is no longer fit for purpose and needs to be replaced.

After my talk, you will hear from a number of sustainability experts so may I be clear -- my opening statement is in no way meant to undermine their advice and counsel. On the contrary, I urge you to take heed and learn hard and fast. Sustainable practices that reduce our material impact, our footprint, are ESSENTIAL, not optional, but and it is a big BUT, they are not enough. Sometimes, they even delude us into thinking that we can continue Business As Usual (BAU). We cannot. Sustainable practices address symptoms and enable us to do less harm. In so doing they buy us a little time and also – more dangerously – defer the moment when we have to get down to the work of systemic change. The time for that kind of work is now.

Normally I would start a presentation such as this by telling you why we need to embark on deep, transformative change. But I have learned that focussing on problems and what is wrong, always affects the mood and saps the energy of an audience at the outset of a program like this.

As I'd rather use my time now to inspire you to action I am going to focus what I believe we **need** to do which is far more than simply doing less of what we have done in the past! I've created /attached another short document that expands on the WHY for you in case you still doubt or want support persuading colleagues!

So what are "**we**" being called to do differently and who, in this case, are we? Whom am I addressing today? As a collective of national tourism organisations in Europe, that represents both public and private sector member-constituents, I'd like to think I am addressing the collective tourism leadership on this continent.

1. LEAD as well as manage

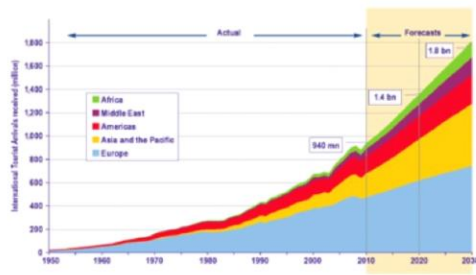
Leaders:

- Create clear visions that inspire
- Engagement, passion and commitment
- Facilitate Collective Reflection that taps into
- Collective Intelligence

That being the case, the first thing **you** must do, is to step up to **LEAD** and not be content to just manage. I say that in response to the title of this event – *Managing Sustainable Tourism Growth in Europe*. To me, managing means addressing symptoms and crafting tactics to fix problems. It doesn't involve questioning the *status quo* or digging into root causes. That's what leaders do and any of us can perform that role.

Consequently, one of the first steps is **to step up**. The role of LEADER is to set a vision, name the goal or destination and, thereby, inspire others to get engaged, want to contribute and to follow. In the turbulent times in which we live today, a leader is also required to facilitate collective reflection as a precursor to tapping into some collective intelligence. The best way to do that is to pose open-ended questions and convene conversations. That's exactly what's happening in Flanders and hopefully elsewhere right now ¹

2. Re-define success from volume to greater NET BENEFIT



In that context, the second imperative is to dare to challenge prevailing assumptions such as our definition of success. The notion of Perpetual Growth is not a sacred truth so it's not taboo to question it. It's amazing to me just how many articles have been written on both climate change and over tourism where volume growth was never mentioned let alone questioned.

But that's changing and changing fast thanks, in part, to two pioneering myth busters – Susanne Becken, Professor from Griffith University in Australia and closer to home Dr Paul Peeters and team who headed up the TRAN report and sensibly recommended that the issue of volume growth be debated.

Two other Myth Busters

Waking up – tourism, climate change and the SDGs

Dr. Susanne Becken, Professor, Griffith University

Research for TRAN Committee - Overtourism: impact and possible policy responses

Dr Peeters, Stefan Gosling et al

In the current model, success is equated with more – more visitors, more spending, more arrivals, runways, cruise docks, referrals etc. Virtually every NTO/DMO states in their strategic plan the objective of attracting more visitors next year than this year. But DMOs, destinations or the contributors to that growth in traffic

Every destination seeks to grow the # of visitors



(many of whom reside in the origin markets) are not held accountable for the net benefit generated by that activity. Each year, fairly accurate statistics are produced showing the growth in numbers, but few destinations have any real sense of the full nature of the costs, where the income goes, and who ends up paying the direct and indirect costs associated with servicing the traffic.

¹ See links at end of this paper.

The arguments we use to justify our insistence on constant expansion are that more visitors and their spending contribute to jobs, taxes and the Gross Domestic Product. But it is now recognized that GDP is simply a measure of total economic activity – good and bad – and a very poor indicator of increased well-being throughout a society. What began on the very fringe of economics in the 1990s has since moved to the mainstream as witnessed by the debates in Davos last month.

This focus on attracting more visitors (i.e. growing numbers) from what is now a global market has had at least two unintended consequences.

Because....

A VUCA world on the edge of “Phase Change” demands:

- Increased Productivity** – improve yields and net benefits
- Resilience** – community coherence and surplus
- Adaptability** – creativity, agility, innovative capacity

8

First, in what’s called a VUCA world of enormous volatility uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, it’s not enough to grow bigger. What’s **needed** more than income growth is greater productivity; strengthened resilience to bounce back from shocks; and far greater adaptability since the future won’t resemble the past and our practices shouldn’t do too.

Second, the members of the organisations responsible for developing their tourism and hospitality industries tend to look outward to the markets and to nurturing relationships with those entities that cultivate market interest – in other words, media and their agencies, tour operators, retailers and often investors – most located in the source countries. In many situations, the needs and rights of visitors take priority over the needs and rights of residents. Over tourism is partially an expression of this imbalance of power between guest, host and resident. All too often, being the marketeers we are, we’ve approached resident engagement as a promotional challenge focusing our efforts on telling residents why tourism is good for them but neither actively listening to their issues, experiences and aspirations nor engaging them , as in involving them in decision making regarding their future.

The bulk of the work undertaken by a DMO can be described as Marketing & Sales management. Few are responsible for what, in strictly commercial terms, would be called Asset Management.

In traditional business, the latter function which involves “making best use of an organisation’s assets in order to maximize shareholder value and to provide the best possible returns to other stakeholders in the

3. Give equal weight to ASSET Management

“Asset Management involves making the best use of an organization’s assets in order to maximize shareholder value and to provide the best possible returns to other stakeholders in the organization”

Imagine: the destination to be a company and its shareholders the residents....

organisation” is rarely undertaken. Now imagine this, supposing your destination were a company and you were its Asset Manager – how might you do your job? Take a city like Krakow, for example, with cultural assets dating back thousands of years and the environment, a life support system that dates back 3.8 billion years – what would be an appropriate return on that asset? Would it make sense to sell it off at discount prices year after year –

because that's exactly what the tourism industry has been doing. Would it make sense to diminish the capital stock and defer replenishment?

Deeper than shifting roles, commercial enterprises are increasingly being asked to consider the very purpose of their existence. This meta shift is now happening all around us in the business world and is the most forceful of all the changes likely to affect the way we do tourism.

Donella Meadows, one of the prescient authors of *Limits to Growth* published back in 1972, and a most articulate proponent of systems thinking, said the most effective lever for changing a system is to change its purpose.

4. Change our PURPOSE from

The sole purpose of a business is to make money for its shareholders...

(Any business executives who pursued a goal other than making money were), unwitting puppets of the intellectual forces that have been undermining the basis of a free society these past decades.

Milton Friedman, 1970s

In 1968, and around the same time that the Cub of Rome commissioned *Limits to Growth*, Milton Friedman was laying the groundwork for neoliberal values of untrammelled growth and the active pursuit of self-interest that underpinned the economic expansion of the 1980s and 1990s prior to the crash of 2008. Throughout the majority of my business career, his statement – as depicted on this slide - was the mantra ringing in my ears.

Not surprisingly, it was the Global Financial Crash that did more than any other factor to accelerate the shift in values a decade ago, such that Paul Polman can make this comment now

“If you want to be a successful company in the future, you have to go beyond CSR and make a contribution”

4. Change our PURPOSE to

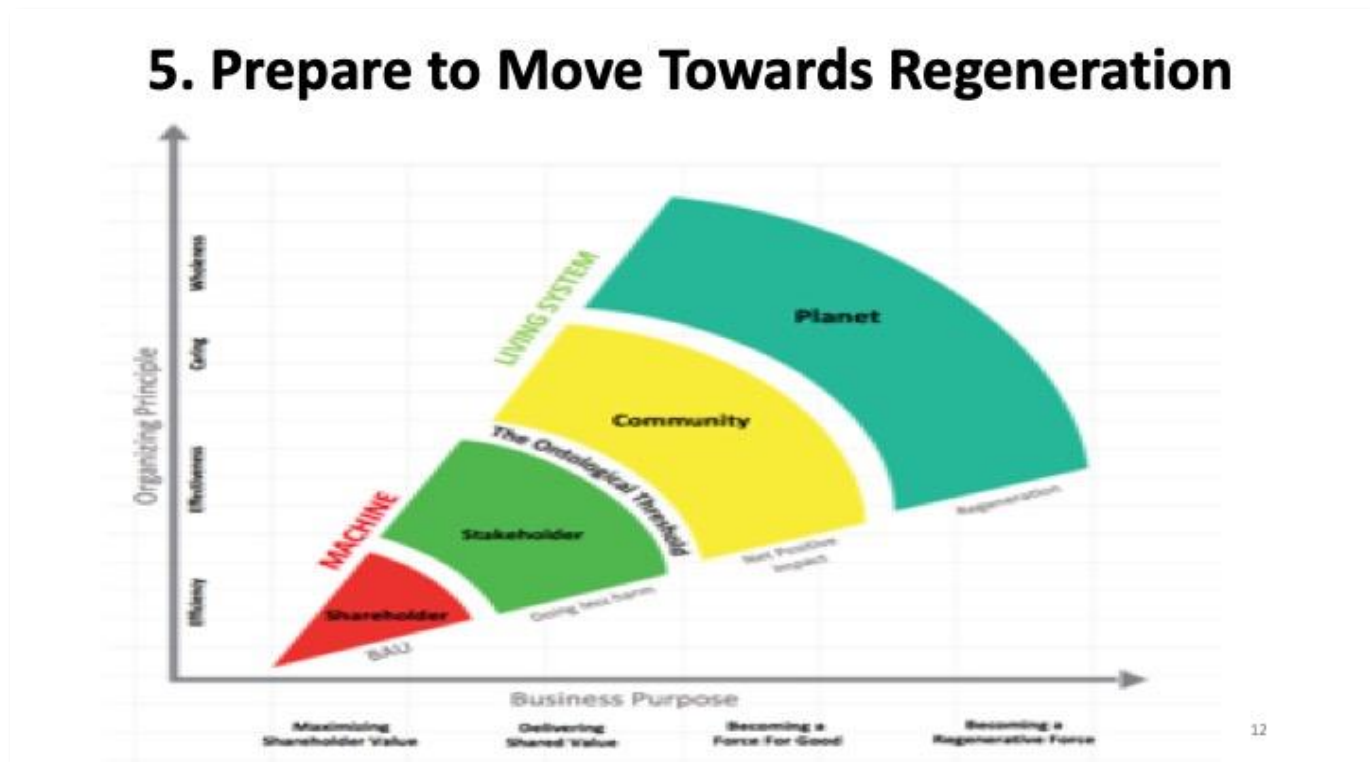
“If you want to be a successful company in the future, you have to go beyond CSR and make a contribution” Paul Polman

Business as usual will not work. Sectors need to understand the role they can play in removing obstacles to social progress and work together to create healthier societies. Deloitte

So it's a start of a new year – where is the business world heading? The graph on the next page illustrates the direction of a journey towards a different future that I believe the tourism community must join in numbers and quickly IF it is to secure its social licence to operate. The bottom axis shows how the purpose of business is being re-defined from a narrow sense of responsibility for generating returns exclusively to shareholders (often regardless of cost) to a much broader need to return benefits to all stakeholders and, as Polman indicated, become “a force for good.” Other examples of this shift in thinking can be seen in the Conscious Capitalism movement and the growth of B Corps that include social impact measures.

On the left axis are organising principles that change as purpose changes. During most of the post war economic expansion, business was all about efficiency and scale – producing more with and for less. As the negative environmental and social side effects became impossible to ignore, emphasis shifted to the notion of effectiveness, minimizing or mitigating damage and improving social impact by delivering shared value to

a broader range of stakeholders. To make a true contribution to society requires what Einstein described as a widening of our circle of compassion (i.e., from serving only self, to serving family, then tribe, and then the broader community in which we live and work). Then the organisational principle shifts to caring



But to make this shift, a threshold of understanding has to be crossed. Academics describe this as “the ontological threshold” which actually means **changing the way we perceive the world and make sense of it**. In other words, the individual has to experience a shift in perception, paradigm and worldview from seeing the world as comprising solely dead, inert matter that can be manipulated as a machine to a living system with consciousness and intelligence at its core and capable of evolving and self-generating. At this stage, it becomes natural to think of a much broader community of stakeholders and to focus on ensuring enterprises deliver **net positive impacts** to the places and society in which they operate.

This afternoon, I wish to draw your attention to the fourth wedge – the destination of this journey – and to a new word that you will see with increasing frequency and that is Regeneration – a concept that introduces infinitely more potency, meaning, hope than sustainability. It is far more than another buzzword or trend.

You cannot understand let alone practice regenerative development unless you have fundamentally shifted your patterns of thinking, your ways of seeing, and assumed a deep sense of interdependence with all life on this planet. This means heeding the words of Einstein who identified the need for mindset change, arguing that it is futile to try to solve problems with the same pattern of thinking or consciousness that caused them – hence Step 6.

The concept of Regeneration is shaped by a mindset that appreciates our integral connection to nature and depends on a number of premises of which the four most important are:

i. **That we humans are a part of nature and NOT apart from it.** We will thrive only so long as we support and serve the thriving of life as a whole and the ecological systems of which are a part. All regenerative development starts by asking how are my actions conducive to life's flourishing? To flourish is to be healthy,

6. Change Your Mindset, Your Worldview

We are part of Nature
NOT
apart from it!

How do we generate conditions for all life to flourish?



the intention and practice of aligning organizations with how life thrives

to express vitality and also to be creative, adaptable, resilient and capable of self-control and self-mastery. In other words, we are being asked to think more like gardeners (especially of the permacultural kind) and less like miners.

Tourism is not one big, complex assembly line of separate parts connected mechanically and we

are neither units of production or consumption but living, breathing human beings with enormous potential and drive to become more, to learn and to grow in nature and quality.

6. Change Your Mindset, Worldview

EGO



SURVIVE

ECO




THRIVE

ii. **We humans are NOT superior to other life forms** nor do we have a right or need to exploit, conquer or subdue nature but we have, as humans, a responsibility to work with nature to enable its primary purpose and function which is sustaining and evolving all life. A growing number of biologists are beginning to agree with Lynn Margulis who said "Life is matter that chooses."

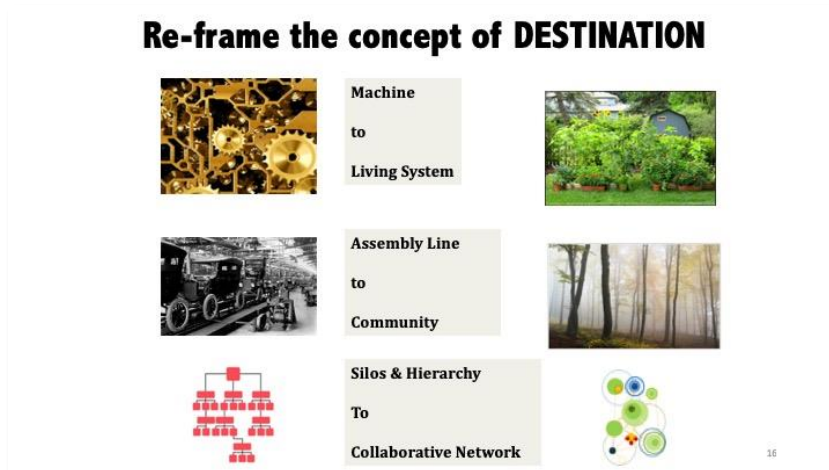
iii. **All life inter-connected and inter-dependent.** It comprises multiple sets of nested living systems that obey nature's principles. We are NOT separate individuals only responsible for ourselves and having to struggle and compete in a harsh world of scarcity. Nature offers abundance and plenty especially when each part gives before taking. **Each part, each person is unique and has a unique set of gifts to share and role to play.** Each of us matter and are always making a contribution to the health of the whole.

6. Change Your Mindset, Worldview

All life is inter-connected and interdependent
We are not separate
Every person has a unique role to play



Regenerative Tourism is based on 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.



Once we understand that to be our reality, once we emulate the proven patterns of being and doing in nature, abundant opportunities to create meaningful value for all participants opens up. It is in this context that the concept of FLOURISHING or THRIVING makes most sense as it describes the success of a living system in terms that are not merely financial but encompass all that is involved in being alive and healthy and using all one’s faculties and gifts – be they mental, physical, emotional or spiritual.

For the past few years I have been studying Regenerative principles and observing how this relatively young concept is being taken up in such many and diverse fields as agriculture, economics, finance, business, education and health. Tourism is ready and ripe for its application – we are a people intensive phenomenon that connects people and, in many cases, seeks to make them whole as in healthier. That’s



why the root of many words associated with tourism such as hospitality and recreation are actually about healing or making whole what was broken. If done properly, tourism can become a vital regenerative force in communities enabling all participants (guest, hosts, employees, business owner-managers, resident) to flourish – not just in a material, financial sense but also emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually.

Regenerative tourism is not about stopping marketing or even about de-growth; it’s simply about agreeing to apply a more mature, robust, creative understanding of what growth means in nature and that is to “de-velop” as in “de-veil,” or reveal the potential inherent in every living thing and allow it to become more – as in more complex, more beautiful, more adaptable, more resilient and more capable of living life to the full.

The most exciting aspect of Regeneration is its pursuit of aliveness and possibility. In commercial terms this will be expressed in a greater engagement and passion experienced by both guest and host; a commitment to stewarding the natural resources on which tourism depends; a closer match between what the community wants to share and what the visitor values; and greater involvement from across the community which leads to greater creativity, collaboration and resilience.



If this excites you and I hope it does, here are some books on the subject of flourishing or thriving – a powerful concept that is derived from both human psychology and ecology and draws heavily on what students of both biology, biomimicry, organisational development, developmental psychology are now revealing.

So, if that’s the big aspirational picture, then the next practical steps towards it is to start by focusing our attention on the health of our destination communities as they are now. Real change will occur at the grassroots, one community at a time as each community discovers who they are, who they want to become and how they want to share their identity with their guests. This will require a level of caring curiosity about what’s really going on in our communities and a willingness to truly listen, observe, engage and get engaged. That implies far more than doing occasional surveys.

7. Focus on Communities

*How healthy are they? Are they alive & flourishing?
Listen, observe, engage and get engaged
Build the collective capacity to CARE*

15

The role of the DMO in the future will, in addition to its conventional marketing function, be to create the conditions for a destination community to flourish. No one person or institution can make that happen – we can only create, contribute and foster the right conditions for thriving to emerge. That will mean building the collective capacity of the community to care about the place they call home, to shape, enrich and extend the way they attract, receive and serve guests, because: *If it takes a village to raise a child, then it takes a destination community to receive and serve a visitor well.*

Today's reality is that most communities exist in name only. Destinations are collections of people, inhabitants, enterprises and agencies located within a recognised geographical or political area who serve tourists relatively independently of one another. Conscious interaction, collaboration and broad community engagement are rare. Despite this, each visitor experience is always an amalgam, a collective total of many smaller experiences delivered by suppliers often unaware of each other. There is no shared vision coming from the community for the scope, scale and nature of tourism – in other words how much, what kind, when and where the community wishes to welcome visitors and in what way. In many cases they are not consulted, let alone involved in any planning, but are told what's good for them after a decision has been made.



So the first step is in discovering individually and collectively “who is this place that has called each individual to be there?” and what does the place mean to them, what do they dream it becoming and what do they fear happening to it? This is best done through the art of convening and hosting conversations that matter; supporting a community learn about their options; while

developing the knowledge and skills needed to co-create a flourishing visitor economy that works for them. I envisage each community embarking on a collective, action-oriented learning *Journey of Discovery* and this is what we're about to develop and test in Flanders. Our focus right now is addressing this question:

“What knowledge, capacity & skills does a community need develop in order to create and nurture a flourishing destination that revitalises and regenerates the community?”

It will inevitably be an intensive, interactive process that, once stimulated from the outside, will be maintained and shaped from within a community. There are no quick fixes or wins but, in my opinion this is the only and best way of avoiding overtourism-related problems in the future while raising the **net positive value** of the tourism economy to unprecedented highs.

I've chosen in this oral presentation to give you a glimpse of what it might take to create a visitor economy that regenerates rather than extracts. Regeneration encompasses a far richer vision with several inter-related implementation steps than the time today permits me to cover. But I will be writing, sharing and speaking more about it over the weeks to come.

What I haven't covered today is the WHY – partly as this has been the subject of many of my articles and speeches over the past few years. So I have prepared an addendum which highlights the primary reasons why we must change the fundamental operating model to cope with

a). our success in terms of numbers and growth;

- b). the change drivers from outside tourism that are rendering the old model obsolete; and
- c). the growing pressure from systemic flaws from within tourism itself. During the course of the afternoon give me your card and I'll send both presentations to you.

In conclusion, given what I have been sharing with you, I invite you to ponder one final question throughout the afternoon and the months ahead: *How do we build a living tourism fit for a LIVING planet?*



Thank you!

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Postscript

Dear Reader,

Thank you for listening to these ideas. If you have read this, then regardless of your response and position, please drop me a line and share your first thoughts. I do not claim to have all the answers but have been in a position to ask lots of questions over the past few years.

We live at a time of huge turmoil. Nature is collapsing under the weight of human ambition. We don't have much time nor the luxury of manouvering into a competitive position as destinations, instiutions or consultants. Unless we come together and develop a shared vision for a better future, we'll just get more of the same and there's limited chance the tourism economy will be able to function as it does today.

As one of the largest and primary sources of tourists as well as becoming one of the most popular destinations, Europe has a responsibility to lead and the ETC is in the best position to lead the leaders. I hope these thoughts and yours will enable us to fullfil that role.

Kind regards

Anna Pollock

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