

Regenerative tourism: the challenge of transformational leadership

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Abstract

Purpose – *The aims of this paper are to share how one cohort of tourism practitioners viewed the transformative change needed within the tourism industry and to explore the implications for leadership in the future.*

Design/methodology/approach – *The research design is based on a virtual whiteboard brainstorming activity incorporating both the individual and collective thinking of 20 participants in a global cohort class. Using conversational techniques to elicit cognitive knowledge and felt experience, the methodology generates shared understandings about the opportunities and challenges of implementing regenerative tourism.*

Findings – *The conversations reported in the findings of this paper provide important insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by tourism professionals as enablers of regenerative tourism. Findings included, first, that participants within the course demonstrated characteristics of transformational leadership including a strong moral positioning, embodied self-awareness, collaboration and collective action. Second, specific points of inertia that impede regenerative tourism are identified including embedded culture, power and organisational structures. Third, professionals are calling for practical tools, new frames of reference, and examples to help communicate regenerative tourism.*

Research limitations/implications – *This is a viewpoint, not a research paper. Nonetheless, it provides a rich vein of future research in terms of disruptive pedagogy, potentially gendered interest in regenerative tourism, issues of transforming the next generation and power.*

Practical implications – *Governance, organisational, destination management strategies, planning and policy frameworks, individual issues as well as contradictions within the tourism system were revealed. Transformative change in an uncertain future requires transformational leadership, characterised by moral character and behaviours that trigger empowered responses.*

Originality/value – *This paper shares insights from a unique global cohort class of tourism professionals wherein the challenges and opportunities for regenerative tourism are identified. The methodology is unusual in that it incorporates both individual and collective thinking through which shared understandings emerge.*

Keywords *Regenerative tourism, Transformational leadership, Mindset change, Tourism, Education*

Paper type *Viewpoint*

Introduction

... there is a captain who is taller and stronger than any of the crew, but he is a little deaf and has a similar infirmity in sight, and his knowledge of navigation is not much better. The sailors are quarrelling with one another about the steering – everyone is of opinion that they themselves have a right to steer, though they have never learned the art of navigation

(Plato translated by Jowett, 2001).

For the last two years, many tourism professionals have been feeling as if they have been set adrift in a pandemic storm, and now a bounce-back blitz. Government responses have swung from

“take shelter and ride it out in place”, to “hoist the mainsail because hope is on the horizon”. Poor or conflicting advice, uneven policy supports and power manoeuvres that influence who gets a place on the recovery deck have meant large swathes of the tourism and hospitality workforce have been unevenly affected. Many have left the ship opting to stay on safer shores or take their chances navigating in their own boat.

For many tourism professionals – consultants, destination managers, policymakers and researchers – these have been tumultuous times. Their professional roles expanded from traditional tourism management to include counsellor, business coach, grants writer, advocate, teams coach, virtual working technologist and foresight enabler. In the process, old ways of navigating tourism management steered by our heads (i.e. the maps and charts produced by scientific thinking) began to sit uncomfortably with knowledge bubbling up from heart and instinct. Responding to what many called “unprecedented times”, tourism professionals began to reach out for new ways of thinking and working in tourism. These new ways needed to respond to uncomfortable knowledge produced when heads, hearts and instinct work together. In this context, the Tourism CoLab began to offer a range of professional development courses in 2020 in support of those wishing to explore alternative tourism futures.

This viewpoint paper is a joint collaboration, generated by participants in one of the Tourism CoLab’s Regenerative Tourism by Design (RTxD) courses in 2021. The course sits within a suite of innovative online or in-person cohort courses that include Design Thinking, Hosting Community Conversations, Designing a CoLab, and more, where the aim is to upskill and shift how we navigate the future of tourism.

Aims

The aims of this paper are to share how one cohort of tourism practitioners viewed the transformative change needed within the tourism industry and to explore the implications for leadership in the future. Our starting point was to recognise that we are currently in a highly disruptive transition period between the old scientific mindset towards a new collective consciousness (Dredge, 2022). The evolution that is taking place in our thinking requires that we see the world has an evolving living system and that we must learn to live within the limits of that system, to regenerate and to act as co-creators of our future alongside (and not dominant over) nature. The viewpoint paper is written in the voice of diverse participants working with or towards regenerative tourism, how they perceive the challenges, the barriers, the blind spots and the opportunities for regenerative tourism (RT). In doing so, we unpack the leadership implications and opportunities for tourism education, professional development.

In addressing these aims, the paper first outlines the Tourism CoLab’s regenerative tourism by design approach as a unique education opportunity for tourism professionals. The course engages participants in new and innovative thinking with the aim of cultivating transformational leaders. Following this introduction, we briefly explore the characteristics of transformational leadership before reporting the findings from a curated conversation about the challenges and opportunities for introducing regenerative tourism with course participants. The conversation took place over two weeks and was facilitated using the virtual whiteboard, Mural. The conversation provides important insights into the way that tourism professionals think about the transformation ahead, and is useful in informing education and professional development, and provides insights into relevant conference themes in the future.

Learning as a key strategy for transformation

One of the fundamental platforms on which the Tourism CoLab has been built is that by creating opportunities for deep shared learning, we can help to evolve our thinking and leadership as we transition towards a very different future. Our mission is to create learning opportunities that assist the leaders of tomorrow to work within an increasingly Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear and Incomprehensive (BANI) world (Cascio, 2020). We are also cognizant that among the skills

required for the future the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs report identifies analytical thinking and innovation; active learning and learning strategies; complex problem solving; critical thinking and analysis; creativity, originality and initiative; and leadership and social influence (World Economic Forum, 2020). As advocates of these new skills, we also believe that disorienting dilemmas, flipped thinking and breaking down taken-for-granted assumptions can lead to shifts in mindset, values and beliefs (Sheldon, 2020; Dredge, 2022).

The Tourism CoLab is a social enterprise that seeks to disrupt traditional education offerings by addressing the need for safe, shared, inspiring, learning spaces. It creates a course that nurtures participants' development on three levels:

1. Self-work, including understanding how and why we think the way we do, barriers to thinking differently and how to unleash new thinking.
2. Relational work that enhances empathy, conversational skills, collaboration and inclusivity, and
3. Systems change – identifying the levers for change in the tourism system.

The courses are designed for change-makers, curious thinkers and the leaders of tomorrow who wish to take an active part in rewiring tourism's economic–environmental–social relationships. Tourism CoLab courses are marketed to policy writers, planners, entrepreneurs, practitioners, scholars and researchers. They enrol without prerequisites because we believe that it is the diversity of life experience, informal and formal education, and personal characteristics that lead to learning and reflection opportunities that are not provided within formal education offerings.

As a social enterprise, our mission is to help build both the individual learning opportunities, and the capacity to collaborate and unleash systems change through collective action. The style of pedagogy, instruction and the range of courses fills a gap between the industrial higher education model and practical and technical skills-based courses in, say, social media marketing, instruction in Google analytics, and e-commerce. The pedagogy does not fit the normative mould of higher education, but researchers and higher education teachers have enrolled in the programs to upskill and learn from practitioners in the group. The global cohort classes differ from traditional higher education in a number of ways.

First, the global cohort classes are delivered in five learning sessions and supplemented by five in-depth interactive, intercultural workshops wherein participants develop deep bonds of friendship and curiosity for others' experiences. Discussions often reveal deep questioning, tensions and ambiguities between the public position on the regeneration/sustainability work of their tourism organisations and their privately held views about what is really going on.

Second, the suite of courses creates a community who support each other over time, although, admittedly, a key challenge is to keep the community actively engaged across different time zones and life commitments. Co-learning, honest conversation and shared reflection are essential in the collective journey.

Third, we seek to uncover stuck ways of thinking and to explore tourism as a complex system which cannot be addressed using traditional strategic management and its rational, linear thinking approaches (Dredge and Jenkins, 2010). Instead, participants are encouraged to understand and feel comfortable with uncertainty, ambiguity and complexity. In the process, they are encouraged to turn their attention to how they might adapt, build flexibility and resilience, to let go of old thinking styles, sit in the mess, engage in sense-making and to lean into emergent practice. Put simply, tourism is a complex system, and so requires complex evolutionary actions instead of linear strategic solutions.

Fourth, we relate best to things that concern ourselves, and make sense in the ecosystems that surround us. Thus, we need to work on ourselves, on our relations and at a systems level. The tools developed by the Tourism CoLab help to make sense of participants' complex experiences. They provoke systems thinking and provide organising heuristics within a complex systems approach. These tools provide a prelude to transformation in tourism.

Fifth, the courses help people find their purpose and their place in the world. Active change makers come in many forms such as gardeners, acupuncturists, questioners and brokers (Narberhaus and Sheppard, 2015). Our ambition is to demonstrate that there are alternative, feasible ways to live, relate to others, and create value within place, people, and with the natural world beyond the traditional values of profit, growth and economic value within the context of tourism.

In sum, courses are designed to help and encourage participants to think differently and explore new perspectives. They are supported by instructors and class cohorts who support creative design experiments, create new values and cultures, challenge past ways of thinking and test new ideas.

Regenerative tourism by design cohort class

As we opened this paper, our course begins with Plato's allegory "Ship of the State" (trans. Jowett, 2001), which started an animated and engaging discussion wherein diverse and very real experiences of participants were shared. Using the allegory as a metaphor for participants' work challenges, people could feel comfortable engaging in conversation without talking directly about their own organisations. Channelling our insights from research in neuroscience and change-making, we sought to create a positive, welcoming tone for the course wherein collective reflection and learning had begun.

It was a wide-ranging discussion of rampaging self-interests, frustration, difficulty in reading the future, curiosity about the currents and what direction they were flowing. There was recognition that many voices simultaneously demand access to the helm, yet self-interest runs deep. The fight is highly individualistic, and resistance to change was a concern voiced by most participants on the course. Participants observed that few sailors/stakeholders, if any, have their sights set on where the wind, the currents and waves are taking them and what a future, which is not a projection of the past, might look like.

In the allegory, the wind, the currents and the waves, together and in unison, create something bigger and more complex than each individual driver of change. The system is far more complex than most of the sailors/stakeholders might imagine, and powerful influences as yet unseen lie beyond the horizon. A few of the sailors/stakeholders have the skills to zoom in and zoom out to see the task of navigation as a complex challenge. Some have the ability to imagine what lies beyond the horizon. A handful have the ability to blend different kinds of disciplinary knowledge, wisdom, understanding and practical action. Collectively the required skills, knowledge and wisdom may exist but working together is difficult. Resistance to change is much easier (Dredge, 2022).

In many ways, this is the story of humankind. It is the story of tourism, the free market economy, politics, a not-so-civil society and a complex system resistant to change. Using Plato's story as the point from which we set sail, the Regenerative Tourism by Design course delivered a 12-week learning journey and a hands-on experimental approach to co-creating the future of tourism.

The course brought together 20 people with vastly different skill sets, professional experience, geographical distributions and worldviews. The task was to navigate towards a deeper co-created understanding of regenerative tourism, one that could be applied and actioned within individual contexts but benefitting from collective support. The course required developing new skills sets, including inner development, meta-cognition, the neuroscience of change and mindfulness. It also required development of new technology skills such as the use of virtual whiteboards.

Reflecting the participants' interests, the focus is mostly on destinations and places, but some participants were also in the process of launching their own businesses with a regenerative edge, and were keen to learn about what they had intuitively felt was the "right" direction. The course tapped into the emotional and cultural intelligence of individuals and built common understandings. New tools and skills in intentional design were also introduced, which are crucial to translating ideas into practice. Participants become close, sharing deeply held frustrations, fears, achievements and insights. Working collectively, and intensively for 12 weeks, they followed each other, checking in and forging new friendships and professional alliances.

Cohort profile

The class was made up of participants with a diverse geographical spread, including Europe (8 participants), Asia (2 participants), Australia/NZ (7 participants), South America (2 participants), North America (1 participant) and two facilitators. While the majority of participants either worked for destination management organisations or were consultants, there was also a graduate teaching student, three university educators, one state government participant and one university administrator within the group. The diversity of participants added different perspectives and their questions added depth to discussions. An important and recurring observation was that there were only three male and 15 female participants in the group. The cohort discussed, on several occasions, whether the predominance of women in the course reflected that regenerative tourism holds more appeal for women wanting to shift away from the masculine values of capitalism (e.g. ego, meritocracy, individualism, competition, profit, scarcity, consumption) towards values generally associated with feminism, such as the ethics of care, justice and inclusivity (Oxfam, 2020). This is consistent with the growth of the “take back the economy” movement, even prior to the pandemic (Pettersson McIntyre, 2021).

Drawing from the facilitators’ insights into the neuroscience of change, conversations were opened up about knowing with head, heart and instinct, integrated intelligence (Blake, 2018) and the evolution of our collective consciousness (Kegan, 1982). Indigenous perspectives on wisdom, belonging and collective intelligence were also discussed (Brayboy and Maughan, 2009; Neale and Kelly, 2021). Research also suggests that there are gendered differences in the use of head/gut and heart/gut brains (Soosalu *et al.*, 2019). These insights on dominant thinking styles and different ways of knowing provided a constant source of reflection about how individuals were engaging in the course materials. These discussions contributed to both the inner self-development work and the relational work needed to adopt regenerative tourism. While conversations evolved over the 12-week journey, questions remained as to whether the regenerative shift is happening within a bubble of complex thinkers dominated by heart/gut/head ways of knowing, and how might we all engage with other thinking styles more effectively.

Approach and method

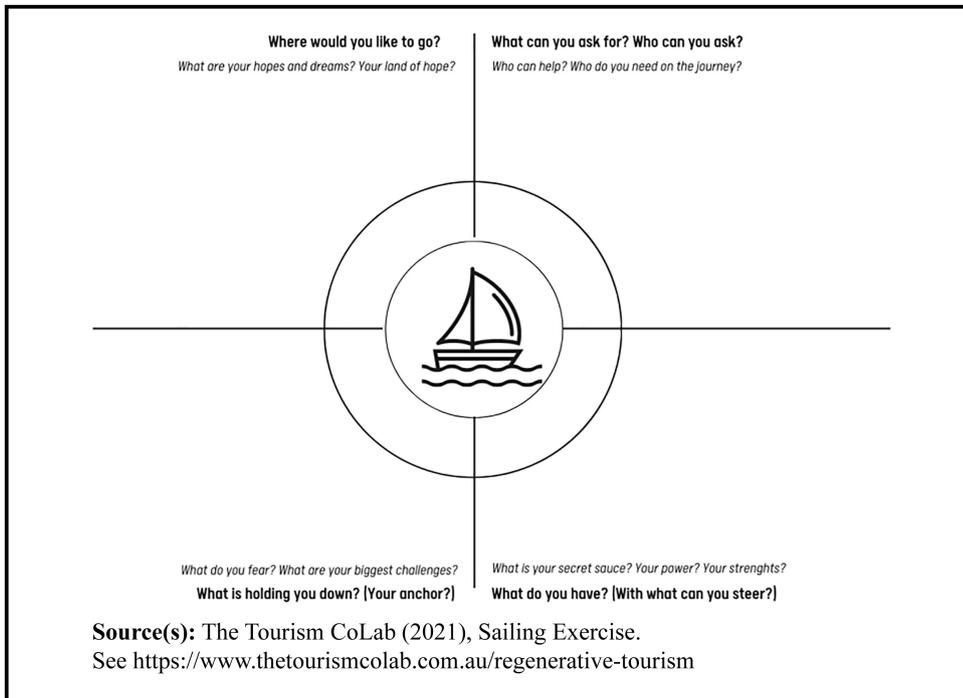
The remainder of this paper outlines the collective insights generated from one of the course’s multi-week activities. The aim of this activity was to brainstorm individually then build a collective, shared understanding about the complexity of the challenges ahead. Participants were then asked to identify priorities. The process used an adapted design thinking pedagogy. It is “adapted” because instead of placing the user or customer at the centre as per the typical UX consumer orientation of service design, we adopted a multi-facing approach where the perspectives of both humans and nature were considered. This approach builds empathy and nurtures a more holistic approach to understanding the dynamics of what is really going on. The process was as follows:

Step 1 – Introduce the virtual whiteboard Mural as the brainstorming canvas and its tools. Participants were upskilled on its use, underlying pedagogy and strengths and weaknesses.

Step 2 – Using Plato’s allegory “ship of the state” as a starting point, the cohort was presented with a virtual canvas that incorporated the following graphic (Figure 1). This graphic is an organising device based on a 2×2 matrix that helps to illustrate the complexity of navigation. Along the horizontal axis we explore past, present and future. We encourage participants to avoid linear thinking and instead contemplate layers of influence that swirl around and influence the complex problems we face. The vertical axis extends from operational detail at the bottom to higher-order thinking including visions, aspirations and blue-sky thinking at the upper end. We noted that research suggests that most strategic managers spend at least 80–85% of their time on operational details and only 15–20% on blue-sky higher order thinking (Porter and Nohir, 2018).

Step 3 – Participants were asked to individually brainstorm their issues and concerns in each of the four quadrants. Participants were provided with an explanation of the science and process underpinning ideation and its most effective use.

Figure 1 Basic heuristic framework for understanding the complexity experienced



Step 4 – Participants then, through a process of silent work, reflection, conversation and sense making, identified key themes using questions to deepen understanding of comments that others had written, and built a shared understanding around common themes. In the process, participants were provided with explanations of techniques for deep listening, the framing of good questions and conversational intelligence. Each group generated a mural that looked similar to Figure 2.

The findings described below represent the collective thinking of the three working groups.

For the purpose of the discussion below, the cohort started with their hopes and dreams. Inputs into the upper left quadrant captured the positive energy, optimism and participants' vision. The lower left quadrant (Quadrant 2) captured their frustrations, fears and what they felt was missing in their journey towards a regenerative future. Quadrant 3 asked participants to identify who they could ask for assistance and where they could find support. Quadrant 4 sought to identify any tangible and intangible assets, resources and assistance available to help them on the journey.

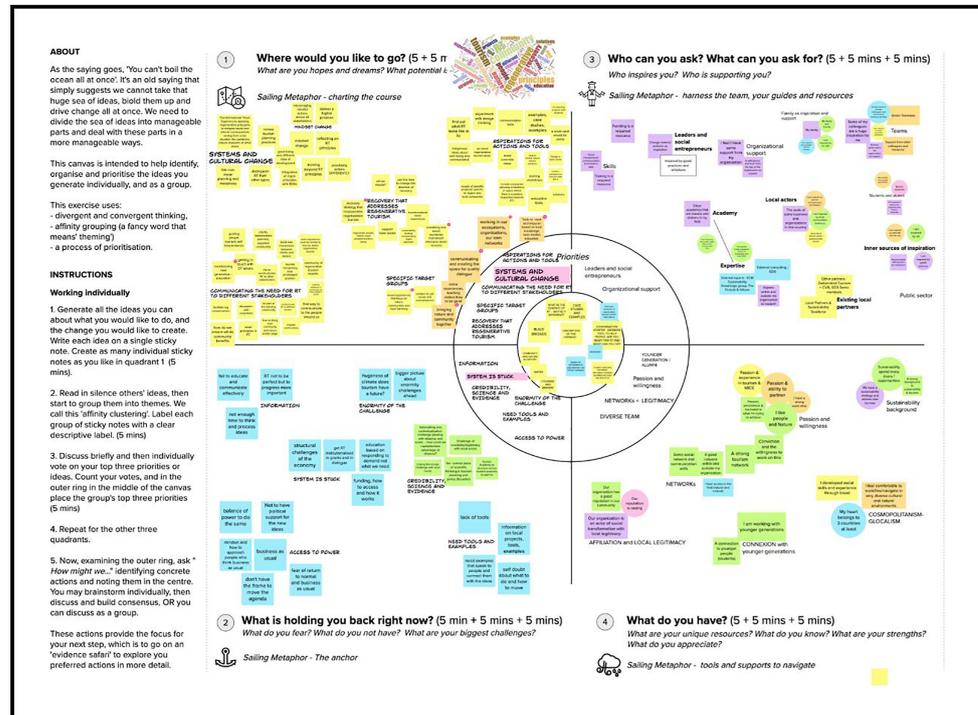
Their words, produced verbatim below, illustrate their shared frustration with the current tourism system and its structure as well as a passionate drive to pivot away from business-as-usual tourism as a COVID recovery strategy. In order to understand and make sense of participants' responses, the following explanation draws aspects of transformational leadership and the neuroscience of change. Why have we chosen these lines of literature to unpack and explore the themes?

The answer lies in the emergent nature of the discussion that took place, the way that discussions often shifted between cognitive knowledge and felt experience, and that participants were generally mid-management with a high degree of independence and autonomy in their jobs. As a result, making sense of their capacity to lead and their opportunities to exercise agency made perfect sense.

Transformational leadership and change

Research into how our brains work is revealing important insights in the relationship between how we think and feel. Woods (2020) has argued that how we feel (i.e. our somatic and psychic energy)

Figure 2 Example of a group's brainstorming using Mural



kicks in before our cognitive awareness and that these feelings shape how we learn and behave. In other words, the conscious narrative about our work, values and experience does not completely capture what is going on at a subconscious level, but it is this deep layer of consciousness that shapes our decision-making and action.

Fogel (2013) further explores the nature of felt experience arguing that the human brain has a task positive network (TPN) associated with rationality and science, and a default mode network (DMN), which is active when we are not focused on a task. When people are in DMN they are more relaxed, they think about past and future, and they have access and can connect different ways of knowing. They are attuned to others and can access a deeper form of wisdom. Fogel observes that these networks are not active at the same time but we toggle between them. Embodied self-awareness is when we have access to both the felt experiences of our DMN and the conceptual knowledge from our TPN, and that we can be non-judgemental and give the gift of presence to others who find themselves in a disregulated state. A disregulated state is characterised by anxiousness, stress, judgemental behaviour, anger, and feelings of low self-worth and lack of confidence, for example.

Kegan (1982) would argue that this state of embodied self-awareness is a key feature defining our capacity to lead into the future. He argues that in order to navigate the disruption and uncertainty ahead, we need to reach for a higher level of consciousness, to transcend our own biases and self-interest, and to act for a common collective good. In tourism, Ateljjevic (2020) has also suggested that a mindset shift is needed in tourism where we can act for the collective benefit and not individual self-interest. However, as Dredge (2022) observes, in tourism there is resistance to change. Sometimes people are not even aware of their own resistance because its origin is subconscious.

Here, transformational leadership is relevant. Originally proposed by Burns (1978), transformational leaders are those who possess both a moral character and a set of behaviours that trigger those around them to be the best they can be (i.e. to self-actualise in Maslow's hierarchy of needs). The effectiveness of transformational leaders is based upon their capacity to

establish collaboration, exercise self-awareness, communicate shared values and mobilise collective action (Bass and Riggio, 2005). Further, their approach improves resilience in not-for-profit and social enterprises (Valero et al., 2015). Regenerative leadership actively seeks to create organisations that are integrated and holistic, reconnecting left (rational, external) and right (intuitive, relational) hemispheres, inner connections to self and outer worlds, balancing masculine and feminine traits within humans and natural systems (Hutchins and Storm, 2019). But as suggested above, even transformational leadership is challenging when resistance is subconscious.

Findings

Where would you like to go?

Discussions revealed a range of cognitive and emotional attitudes towards change within and outside participants' organisations. The discussion about hopes and dreams (Quadrant 1) enabled participants to dig deep into their hopes and desires, it enabled them to explore their felt experience, revealing a deep personal desire for transformation in three areas:

Systems and cultural change. The need for systemic change in tourism was acknowledged at a cognitive level, but discussions also drew from participants' deep felt experience that the culture and values of tourism practitioners, visitors, communities and policy/planners needed to change. In particular, destination marketing or management organisations are rigidly fixed in the normative past.

The responses combined moral positioning on the future of tourism, deeply felt experiences derived from discussing the future of tourism with colleagues, and intuitive observations that the existing tourism system must be called into question:

Will we rebuild? Can we use this (COVID-affected) time to change direction? Can we counteract mainstream discourse about recovery? We cannot go 'back to normal' because pre-COVID tourism growth was not 'normal'. Recovery must address regenerative tourism. Integration of regenerative principles and the SDGs (sustainable development goals) and a strategy that incorporates regenerative tourism must counteract the mainstream discourse about recovery.

Unlock the true value of tourism beyond the economic. Put in place a different idea of development. Link non-linear thinking and messiness. Sit in the mess more. Prioritise actions DIFFERENTLY. Make regenerative tourism mainstream. How can we make regenerative tourism valuable to policymakers. Tourism planning practices must be reviewed urgently.

Participants sometimes demonstrated frustration with, and alienation from, top down policy directives, inflexible frameworks and leadership:

We need to encourage a change of mindset in policy direction and decision making to realise the benefits of regenerative tourism. We need to empower people who do not realise they have power. How can we create the 'ah-ha' moment our leaders need to change course?

What is the role of developers? Let's clarify who gives consent and what is consent. Who gets to decide what is good and desirable? Tourism is not for local benefit, it's only done for industry's chosen stakeholders.

Transformational leadership for the next generation. The key theme to emerge was the need to transform the next generation of professionals, stakeholders and communities, by creating tools and actions based on regenerative tourism principles. The conversation resonated with a deep need to empower others, to create a better future for others, and was grounded in participants' deep embodied awareness and emotional intelligence to address the disruption ahead:

We need to find ways to communicate regenerative tourism to the people around us. We need to have discussions with co-workers, and to facilitate big conversations. Quality conversations. We need to create the learning community for the future and to educate the next generation.

The system is stuck.

The effects of COVID are uneven, yet the main conversation is all about bounce-back. I feel like they (decision makers) have wiped the slate clean and will not listen to new ideas. Communities do not give consent, there is no mechanism for them to do so, so community is lost in the conversation. Tourism development is not linked with local needs.

The tourism academy as structure versus tourism academy as agency. There is a contextualisation challenge for academics, and indeed, all stakeholders, to deal with distance and scale. Scientific thinking occupies a central place in tourism planning, and policy (asks for) credibility, science and evidence. Yet regenerative tourism is new and therefore not credible. We need to have agency, to be institutionalised in grants, and in dialogue.

The enormity of the challenge is overwhelming. The hugeness of climate (change), and can we really say that tourism has a future? We need to break the ice for this conversation to happen.

Self-doubt about what to do and how to move. We lack tools, and information on local projects. We need examples that speak to people and connect them with regenerative tourism ideas. The solution is universal, but is also local.

Established power structures and practices. Among participants there was an overwhelming sense that existing power structures are a key impediment in change-making. That said, participants displayed awareness of the different agendas and interests of stakeholders and the complexity of the system:

The bounce-back recovery dialogue is louder than the regenerative perspective. There is no political support for new ideas, and they are not thinking of the social consequences.

Many people depend on tourism, so they want it (tourism) back. Livelihood dependency and few alternative routes to well-being in some locations.

Who is the audience we seek to influence – the power brokers or ourselves? Leave no one behind – slow adopters must be brought along. But our strongest fighters or advocates will give up if the pace of change is too slow.

COVID has brought over-tourism to many destinations. Links between people and the environment have not been made. There is a lack of environmental awareness among our organisation – they are mostly marketers. Short term and long-term impact are not considered.

The experience of powerlessness. In transformational leadership, self-awareness of one's own agency, and the agency of others, is important in identifying opportunities for change. Participant observations varied from a high level of self-awareness to, at times, a slightly disregulated state where doubt or confidence was in question:

I am feeling that the knowledge I have is messy – how can I inspire others when I do not yet understand? Where do I actually start?

What voice do I have, for people to listen to me! Who would actually listen and have these conversations? I feel a lack of connections and impostor syndrome.

The difficulty of communicating is there. People do not understand that regenerative tourism involves incremental steps, not big change. We do not listen to the edge where innovation is happening. In this post-truth era, you can choose your own truth.

Ensure diversity in the conversations. The language of tourism is masculine, all about performance, competition, targets. Too many white men in power – lack of diversity in decision making – gender, race background. The women in tourism are not heard.

Populist, loudest voices get heard. Nobody wants to say or is courageous enough to have an opinion that is contrary.

We should see communities as givers not beneficiaries; communities only react when they are threatened – they are not proactive. Re-engage with communities at the local level, bottom up and give them skills to engage.

What can you ask for?

Asking participants “What can you ask for?” (Quadrant 3) revealed opportunities act and a desire to lead but also to unleash the capacity of others to also drive change (i.e. to self-actualise):

We need transformational travel experiences that apply regenerative principles. We need to mitigate social and natural consequences arising from a crisis situation like the pandemic, natural disasters, or other future shocks.

Change the values and the culture of tourism. Respect, appreciation of each other and for place-based solutions. Regenerative places must connect people and nature. Let’s learn from indigenous wisdom, knowledge and practice.

Focus on the social benefits, and the equitable distribution of income and value from tourism. Regenerate people, re-birth places, and reset for people/travellers, and family.

Stakeholders’ experience must be central to how we define regenerative tourism. Build new interactions between stakeholders, visitors, hosts, business owners, governments, and community. We want coherent, nurturing, welcoming destinations.

In essence, participants were asking for “buy-in” from others in the tourism system or the opportunity to demonstrate the value of regenerative tourism taking concrete action. While funding was not specifically raised, participants were asking for enabling conditions inside their own organisations and in the wider tourism system.

What do you have (to steer with)?

Quadrant four of the Canvas captured ideas about what could help us to move forward. Following the sailboat metaphor, these would be tools and resources that would support us to set sail and navigate. Participants included the following key themes to support change in the tourism system:

Passion, willingness and skills. In the following, participants were asked to consider what they bring at individual, network and organisational levels.

Background in sustainability which can open doors and opportunities, an ability to partner, strong work ethics.

I like people and nature. I have communication skills. I have conviction and the willingness to work on this.

There is a growing RT movement already, more and more like-minded, skilled and professional people who passionately believe in change

Affiliations and local legitimacy.

Our organisation has a good reputation in our community. Our reputation is rising and is respected.

Our organisation is an actor of social transformation with local legitimacy.

Networks, connections and access.

I am working with younger generations . . . with students. Many young people see that we need to change the old, damaging ways we have been operating within.

I have a strong tourism network within and outside my organisation. I have access to the field. We also have access to indigenous wisdom if we are willing to listen. COVID has taught us to change our relationship with nature, to be more present, to listen to and reconnect with nature that is also supporting the positive change.

Conclusion

The aims of this paper were to share how tourism practitioners viewed the change needed within the tourism industry and to explore implications for leadership in the future. Participants

in the Regenerative Tourism by Design course were generally experienced professionals in middle management positions. They work with destination management organisations, with communities and with businesses, and directly experience the challenges they are describing in the course. The conversations reported in the findings of this paper provide important insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by tourism professionals as enablers of regenerative tourism.

Participants in this course were actively pursuing change within the tourism system and, through the conversations from the Canvas activity, it is evident that many are already demonstrating transformational leadership in terms of their moral positioning, embodied self-awareness, collaborations and collective action. They were not sitting back but were adopting positions as change agents who want to implement and inspire action in others, despite their frustrations.

The professionals in this cohort can see that the tourism system identified specific points of inertia embedded within culture, power and organisational structures. They recognise that part of the challenge of regenerative tourism is because its foundations are not well known and change is long term. They identified the need for practical tools, new frames of reference and examples. Indeed, these industry professionals embody the transformations in values, thought, word and deed that are needed to shift the course of tourism in the future (Bellato *et al.*, 2022).

The findings speak to the frustrations and opportunities for individuals in stimulating transformational change. The findings threw up many issues: governance, organisational, destination management strategies, planning and policy framework individual and well as contradictions within the tourism system. But it also shed light on the inner worlds and workings of people working in the sector for whom the need for transformative change is evident.

Finally, the art of navigating tourism in an uncertain future requires transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is characterised by both moral character and a set of behaviours that trigger those around them to be the best they can be. The effectiveness of transformational leaders is based upon their capacity to exercise self-awareness, establish collaboration, communicate shared values and mobilise collective action. But transformational leadership is challenging when resistance is subconscious. This paper highlights that there are many challenges to enabling regenerative tourism, and many of these challenges are deep systemic challenges that are resistant to change. That said, the participants demonstrated a high level of embodied self-awareness and emotional intelligence in the way they expressed their views, and an appreciation of the complex requirements of collaboration and activation.

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