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Welcome to WE(i) Talk! We are thrilled to publish the third edition of this series and hope you enjoy it!

Wellbeing, environment and innovation are at the core of WE(i) Think’s concept agency services, as we work on hospitality and tourism related projects. There is so much being said on each of these topics and so much available that it can be challenging to sort through, with overuse of the words and lacking clarity.

We intend to open the discussion on various topics, giving you the tools to better understand them, their impact on the overall hospitality and tourism industry, and their role in the overall experience.

We hope that the WE(i) Talk magazine will inspire you to bring more of these elements to your property, hospitality and tourism projects as well as in your life.
FOCUS ON REGENERATION

We continue the WE(i) Talk series with Regeneration. This intriguing topic will help to better understand the real meaning of a regenerative approach, with ours focusing on tourism.

TRADE IN 'SUSTAINABILITY' FOR 'REGENERATION'

The question is whether the buzz word 'sustainability' really is the appropriate word for all the world wants to achieve in the future. A small debate of choice of language, followed by some insights into the tourism world and the significance of using a circular, regenerative, restorative and transformative approach for a better tomorrow.

As the hospitality industry has suffered due to the recent pandemic, this issue highlights some key factors in introducing regenerative travel to your business and destination.

It might just be the perfect opportunity for the hospitality industry to turn the page and discover what our audiences' impressions are, what we think and what experts such as Alice Charles and Chalana Perera have to share.

Available on our platforms and website for your convenience.
"TRAVEL IS NOT ABOUT DISTANCE. IT IS ABOUT A STATE OF MIND"

AZIZ ABU SARAH
Benefiting from the coverage of Cop26, sustainability is a highly talked about topic these days. Joining the discussion, we thought it was a great time to launch our WE(i) Talk series on Regeneration, pushing the discussion from “to sustain” towards “to regenerate” and dig out what this implies.

“WE DO NOT INHERIT THE EARTH FROM OUR ANCESTORS; WE BORROW IT FROM OUR CHILDREN.”
AMERICAN INDIAN PROVERB

To help in our exploration of Regeneration, we asked students from the Hotel Management School Maastricht - Zuyd Hogeschool to answer a few questions around this topic. Here are their answers:
1. What is regenerative tourism?

Regenerative tourism focuses on more than just accommodating guests and offers - a framework for over consumption, communities, sustainability and well-being, and collaborations for world recovery. 

@femkemeeuwisse

It is something even better than sustainability. It is a tourism that help us to participate in the fight against climate change. Indeed, when we are travelling, we should think conscientiously about not damaging the space around us so that it will still be available for future generations. In other words, it is the idea that tourism leaves a better place than it was before. By regenerative, we mean the capacity to be renewed or restored. 

HMSM Student

2. How do you see regeneration applied in the hospitality industry?

I believe so far the application is rather limited. Mostly it can be seen in hotels collaborating with governments and other organisations to preserve nature and ecosystems and raising awareness. Another point would be to make guests aware of the interaction and interdependence with nature and surroundings (mostly in resort style hotels that are out in a nature area for example). But also trying to create separate revenue streams in order to not be too dependent on tourism, trying to stop extreme mass tourism for example that harms local economies and eco systems. 

@maurin_g
By making more and more companies aware of the situation the world is at the moment and its outcome if we continue to act the way we are doing now. The hospitality sector is known to use a lot of energy and products in an unsustainable way to give the guests a ‘unique experience’. However, there are many opportunities to reduce the consumption in the hospitality sector, to start with the solar energy, using more electrical sources than gas, use filtered water instead of the source, use lights which use less energy, make customers more aware of meal consumption etc. The same also applies to the travel sector. @leonkapcik

3. How can we encourage the industry and customers to think and consume travel in a regenerative way?

Transparency is a crucial aspect in my opinion. By being open and honest about the operations and actions a hospitality business is taken and sharing why they do what they do concerning regeneration. This will show customers the importance and the positive consequences of the regenerative movement. @bente_dv

I think for the industry a financial incentive is required. There will be some forerunners giving a good example, but as long as it's less profitable to become regenerative I don't believe many companies will invest much into it. The loaning policy of banks, ideals of investment funds and perhaps legislation could help towards accelerating the regenerative movement. It should also be made clearer to both hotels and guests how one can be more regenerative and what it means exactly. This way guests can consider factors when choosing their hotel and hotels can more easily implement it. Grants for hotels which implement generative measures might also be a good stimulant. @sven.bakker_
“WHEN YOU TRAVEL, IT REALLY HAS TO BE A JOURNEY OF PURPOSE, MEANING, DISCOVERY, ADVENTURE, EXPLORATION AND LEARNING.

WE HAVE TO TURN FROM BEING TOURISTS ON THIS PLANET, TO PILGRIMS ON THIS PLANET.”

SATISH KUMAR
It is hard not to have heard of ‘sustainability’ in recent years. Surprisingly, the word has been in the talks of global leaders since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, where the serious issue of (mostly) climate change and its impact were addressed.

As aspirational as it sounds, ‘being and acting sustainable’ opens an important question: what exactly are we sustaining and how long for?

How about considering a more descriptive, more suitable word: Regeneration!

Regeneration can be looked at on a wide spectrum and spans across many sectors and offers many possibilities. For obvious reasons, we’re sticking to regenerative tourism. Regenerative tourism is “creating the conditions for life to continuously renew itself, to transcend into new forms, and to flourish amid ever-changing life conditions” (Hutchins and Storm, 2019).

After a radical impact on the tourism sector through the pandemic, ‘regenerative tourism’ has stormed the industry even more, with the intent to be more than just a passing trend.
The recent pandemic’s impact on the tourism sector, slowed down international travel and put a spotlight on local gems, which may just be the opportunity to take ‘regeneration’ to the next level. The thought is to add value and allow for meaningful experiences rather than volume, improving the quality of a destination rather than quantity, pushing forward local culture with a holistic approach to the overall wellbeing of the destinations and their communities.

Community involvement and working in harmony with nature are vital, not only from an environmental and architectural perspective, but to create a long-term benefit to a community, strengthening their stories, culture and sense of belonging for generations to come.

Anna Pollock, a long-time advocate for

Whilst the two meanings may be similar, ‘sustainable’ much rather describes leaving something ‘as is’ and not causing additional damage. An idea, that would mean sustaining something already ‘broken’ would only result in the same ‘broken-ness”. This is where ‘regenerative’ goes a step beyond sustaining; through renewing or restoring, the future of travel should aim to leave a place better than it was before. Once that net positive impact of growth and repair has been done, sustaining its condition can be back on the table.

As passionate travel lovers, we probably all agree that trotting around the globe should enrich our lives and those of locals. But sadly, tourism has taken a nasty turn in the last years, leaving many communities and entire ecosystems damaged and ravaged by it.
In particular, luxury travel is no longer synonymous with the extravagance and self-indulgence of previous times. A new approach of forward-thinking travellers is demanding more eco-friendly holidays, that care for the planet and the communities they visit.

Pre-pandemic, tourism represented 10% of the global GDP and accounted for 1 out of 10 jobs. But worldwide border closures and travel restrictions since early 2020, may cost the sector over 121 million jobs and losses projected at a minimum of $3.4 trillion (World Travel & Tourism Council and UFC). A regenerative approach could be a way to attract the new generation both as employees and customers of a changing industry in need of purpose.

holistic travel and founder of Conscious Travel thinks of regenerative tourism

...“NOT AS ANTI-GROWTH, BUT AS GROWING THE THINGS THAT MATTER MOST TO US. AND THAT IN WAYS THAT BENEFIT THE ENTIRE SYSTEM AND NEVER AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHERS.”
The hospitality industry is currently facing significant challenges.

We have all seen the shocking pictures of tourists storming popular cities like Barcelona, Venice and Amsterdam. Planes landing every other minute and cruise ships with thousands of quick-visitors have not only contributed to polluting air and water through travelling, but have also left the beautiful hot-spot-mini-stops in total chaos, without bringing significant value to local businesses. As a result, many of its residents have changed their view on ‘tourism’ as rents and local restaurant prices have skyrocketed, leaving locals unable to afford living and enjoyment of their own locations.

Mass-tourism and poorly managed destination tourism damages wildlife and ecosystems, not only through increased pollution and waste. It also assists in standardization of destinations and cultures as they lose their uniqueness and the local community, whose interests are often overlooked, and who slowly lose part of their identity.

 Authorities are attempting to combat overtourism through various tools and strategies such as restricting inbound tourist numbers, tourism tax increases, limiting length of stays (especially in Airbnb accommodation in cities like Barcelona), regular surveynance of its citizens to view determine their views on tourism and by introducing sustainably-driven marketing strategies that educate tourists. The list of solutions in place that help manage tourism and preserve the destination and its community is considerably longer.
As hospitality is a people-business, the health and wellbeing of employees and guests, and the way we interact with each other are key to maintain and rise well-being. Therefore, it is our health and future that depends strongly on the health of our planet, its people and ecosystems.

It is vital that hospitality looks beyond the designs and service attitudes, and builds those healthy connections between the travellers, and local environments and their people, ensuring they are meaningful and regenerative.

**CAN REGENERATIVE TOURISM BE THE FUTURE OF TOURISM?**

As most of us appreciate tourism in one way or another, and care about others and the place we live in, we must strive for a healthier and fairer future. And the only way to get there is through regeneration.

With regenerative tourism, there is an opportunity for travellers to return home enriched, reconnected, enlightened with new perspectives, and even prepared to contribute to their own communities. For many, there is an itch, urging us to find products and services that meet our values.

Regeneration can have an important influence on tourism and the way we travel. A key factor of introducing regeneration is to focus on solutions that are innovative enough to support themselves but at the same time address major environmental and sociological problems. Transforming and improving communities and economies to more regenerative models requires systemic change.

Despite tourism having contributed massively to these problems, it has the potential to be the solution itself; by using its global reach, diversity of the sector and the overall passion of travellers and workers. Tourism can help increase the value of a destination and its community. Focusing on the destination itself rather than tourism, one can decide how tourism fits into the destination, and not the other way around.

The same applies to local communities. We need to be thinking about how regenerative tourism is impacting those living in the destination, those both directly and indirectly involved in tourism. Destinations can work on finding new ways, effective and inclusive ways, to benefit the local community whether it be through infrastructure, social interaction or any regenerative contribution for that matter, to ultimately enhance the tourism experience.
“TOURISM HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BECOME AN AGENT OF POSITIVE TRANSFORMATION THAT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL.

TOURISM IS NOT THE TOOL COMMUNITIES NEED TO CREATE A HEALTHIER, MORE EQUITABLE, AND MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR LOCALS.

IT IS A TOOL THAT SUPPORTS COMMUNITIES’ GOALS AND INITIATIVES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.”

Anna Pollock
First things first – we are wellbeing experts. We are not sustainability experts and do not pretend to be so, there are other companies who are specialised in this area that we would be happy to recommend.

What does ‘being a wellbeing expert’ mean in the context of regeneration? We are passionate about the general wellbeing of our planet: people, fauna and flora. We reflect in our projects our care for communities and local environment, providing a holistic vision of wellbeing to benefit guests, employees, locals, and nature, curating concepts and experiences embracing their destination. Our approach looks at development to operations with regeneration at its core and the willingness to build projects that matter.

With our passion to give back and promote regeneration, WE(i) Think has teamed up with Studio Puisto and originated “The Hospitality of the Future Think Tank”, designed to generate in-depth research creating a framework for other hospitality professionals to learn from and apply in their investment choices, design and construction alternatives, operations possibilities, F&B and wellness experiences, and their contribution to communities and all parties involved.

The initiative is dedicated to work with and towards the UNWTO SDGs, providing hospitality and tourism stakeholders the knowledge, tools and network to implement sustainable solutions benefiting our planet and all its inhabitants, for many generations to come.
As a positive collateral effect, WE(i) Think projects definitely benefit from the knowledge, research and connections we (and our members) gain through ‘The Hospitality of the Future Think Tank’.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. It’s time to replace sustainable with regenerative, if we want to see some action.

2. A regenerative approach can be applied across any sector.

3. Regenerative travel and tourism is a major business opportunity for the hospitality sector, especially considering the current climate and pandemic-affected conditions.

4. A regenerative tourism strategy could be an agent to improving the lives of many...
"TRAVEL IS THE MOST INTENSE MODE OF LEARNING."

KEVIN KELLY
With almost 2 decades of experience spanned across the public and private sectors, Alice’s career is admirable. Her expertise covers city and urban planning, real estate, urban development, regeneration, construction, infrastructure, environment, climate change and public policy. Alice leads the World Economic Forum’s cities and real estate work streams, including the Global Future Council on Cities and Urbanization, the Real Estate industry Action Group, the Future of Urban Development and Services Initiative. She also co-leads the Systemic Efficiency-Transitioning Energy & Buildings initiative and the production of all city and urban development related content and curation of events at World Economic Forum summits. She is a recipient of the Irish Echo Irish 40-Under-40 Award 2017 for Irish and Irish Americans who have distinguished themselves in their respective fields of work before the age of 40.

"CIRCULAR BUILDINGS - IT'S ALL ABOUT REUSING, UPCYCLING AND RECYCLING BOTH THE BUILDING AND THE MATERIALS WITHIN THE BUILDING"
Alice and Celine delve into an in-depth discussion right from the start, beginning with circular economies and in particular circular buildings. Alice highlights the desire for net zero carbon buildings, as many investors are investing only in accordance with climate targets. As governments, organisations and commissions come together to push forward green deals, impact investment and look at broader solutions for the future uses of buildings in cities around the world, it is clear that science based targets are driving this transition of buildings.

Alice underlines the need to create ultra efficient buildings by reusing materials. Consider deconstructing a building, and reconstructing it elsewhere. She uses the example of the Olympics which requires an enormous number of resources to develop new infrastructure every 4 years.

Ultra efficient and circular buildings should also consider certification, where some incorporate not only the efficiency of the building itself but the efficiency for the people using the building, embracing designs that are good for physical and mental health.

Alice explains the various ways regenerative building and design can work. There are different solutions according to types of buildings, whether they are commercial, civic, social housing, residential...the list goes on. But the point is, there are solutions and these can have huge benefits for cities and the people living in them.

Of course, the question of cost lingered in the conversation. For this to work, there has to be a proactive relationship led by government, society and the financing sector. “Bringing communities together to bundle assets, to have economies of scale, reduce the overall cost of that retrofit, and incentivise investment,” says Alice.

And what about hotels? We all know hotels as an asset class tend to be quite resilient, but we have also all witnessed the impact of the pandemic on the industry. Retrofitting might just be the solution to giving unviable hotels a new life as residences, according to Alice. Alice also explains the importance of investing in new, viable solutions and the impact this can have on a hotel.

"LOOKING AT THE LIFECYCLE COST ASSOCIATED WITH DOING NOTHING, IT APPEARS THAT ACTING IS MORE EFFECTIVE. IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE TO DO NOTHING."
“GIVING IS NOT JUST ABOUT MAKING A DONATION. IT IS ABOUT MAKING A DIFFERENCE”

KATHY CALVIN
Chalana Perera lived in Europe before moving to his native Sri Lanka to start his own venture RETRACE Hospitality, a private advisory practice specialized in regenerative hospitality investments. Passionate about regeneration, his home country and hospitality, Chalana is on a mission to empower and encourage local developers and operators to protect and preserve natural habitats, local communities and a rich and deep-rooted culture through purpose-driven hospitality investments. It is a great pleasure to have Chalana share insights into the positioning and regeneration of a hospitality-cum-coastal mangrove site in Sri Lanka.

THE CONTEXT

- Old fishing village, including houses that were damaged by the 2004 Tsunami and repurposed using locally sourced construction materials exclusively from the site (glass and wood from the demolished building; clay, minerals, bricks and stones). The 9 units, hidden in the forest, were completely regenerated and embedded in the ecosystem around them.

- Biodiversity enhanced through natural rainwater catchment areas instead of...
building rooms which would block natural waterflows on site and to make-up for depleting ground water tables as a result of neighboring large-scale resorts consuming more water than local site is able to provide naturally.

- Reintroduction of native flora and fauna species (instead of ornamental plants), conservation and regeneration of mangroves (which brings benefits such as carbon sequestration, water and air purification and biodiversity enhancement), replenishment of ground water table and permaculture on site for native species and humans to benefit from.

- Furniture created out of upcycled materials washed up on shore from the sea (waste, debris), inclusion of onsite biogas digester to convert organic waste into either compost for onsite permaculture, or to create energy.

**THE PROCESS**

- Before beginning a regenerative project, investors, developers and operators must be able to answer one fundamental question: what will the “end” of this asset’s life look like? If the response includes perpetual improvement for all stakeholders including the local site and native environment, then it is regenerative by default.

- Regeneration in hospitality development starts with the thought or idea of doing better from the onset of conceptualization. Profits will be the result of purpose-driven decisions through every stage of the asset and projects life cycle: combining what is practical
and holistically beneficial (not making decisions just out of convenience or on a cost-basis).

- The “ecosystem” or site-specific conditions should shape the entire project from investment strategy, design, construction, and operations. The entire project should be framed around improving the existing site conditions.

- Decision-making process (similar to “Design Thinking”) should be a result of answering the following: What will this site look like when it is no longer a hotel? What needs to be done to make this location better than it currently is? How can we improve the quality of the site and enhance the investor, developer, operator, guest, employee experiences simultaneously?

- Everything local: local architects, local project developer, local materials, local experiences, local fabrics, local supply chains, local technology etc

- Hotels are not complicated structures, essentially, they are a big house. Like in your own house, you consider the footprint of taking showers, consuming energy, steaming, washing, etc. - so simply apply that to hospitality.

THE APPROACH

- It’s about rethinking the entire approach to projects or a business in a systemic way that eliminates waste, depletion and damage, and instead reinvigorates. The whole point of regenerative models is to have a minimal footprint from the beginning: the principal challenge for the travel and tourism sector is transport.

- Like with everything that starts as a trend or fad and is successful, regeneration will eventually become mainstream through communication, and the story will sell itself, if delivered with genuine intent, clear purpose and a consistently high-quality, while shifting consumer behavior and newer generations influencing business decisions and policy.
IN A NUTSHELL

Regeneration is about systemic change, it is a paradigm shift that requires efficient and sometimes “minimalistic” thinking but creates value and continuous upside potential going beyond just “sustaining”. It is about adding value and continuously improving for all stakeholders. There are far more long-term economic and financial gains from a regenerative approach than a linear approach to growth. Every business that wants to be regenerative, means new business opportunities and new opportunities for “material wealth creation”, but return requirements and margins should not necessarily be looked at the same as they are in typical linear economic models.

It’s not about “compensating” for previous damage done

"...IT’S ABOUT BEING MORE MINDFUL AND ACCEPTING THE NEED TO BE BETTER"

Focus on learning new approaches that are more in-tune with the resources available to us, and that are more harmonious and in balance with our personal well-being, which ultimately influences planetary well-being.

A lot of things are for our short-term pleasure: material items, food consumption, lifestyle choices. By accumulating experiences, trips, goods, we tend to not remember all of them, but only the most impactful. Consume high, refined quality - by doing so, travel experiences will be more defining and will set the pace for regeneration at grassroots levels across the world.
Whilst climate change and the effects of the global pandemic has had a significant impact on the hospitality industry, those operating within it are uniquely positioned to respond to the lessons learned. Our experience of the pandemic to date left us with a new appreciation for nature and we have significantly re-appraised our attitudes to wellness.

Simultaneously, extreme weather events have catalysed a new sense of urgency in our flight against climate change as we see the impact of the planetary tipping points we have crossed. To date, sustainability has taken the role of only minimising or offsetting environmental and cultural damage, but the hospitality industry can play an essential role in going way beyond this point.

From materiality and design, to programming and effective community engagement, regenerative tourism in its dedication to repairing damaged natural capital can play a vital role in rebalancing the value exchange between a hotel, its guests and its local environment and community.

The hospitality industry can look to other sectors for examples of how this ‘re-balancing’ can be achieved. For example, last year University College London Press published Community-Led Regeneration, A Toolkit for Residents and Planners (Sendra & Fitzpatrick, 2020). Drawing from London case studies of communities opposing social housing demolition and/or proposing community-led plans, this book provides a toolkit that residents and planners working with communities can use to amplify their voices to effect change. The tools include the use of formal planning instruments, as well as other strategies such as sustained campaigning and activism, forms of citizen-led design, and alternative proposals for the management and ownership of housing by communities themselves.
For the hospitality industry, there is a lot to learn from the approach set out in this publication, one that certainly has influenced our own approach to development, which focuses on generating inclusive discussions with local communities prior to site selection and before development plans are submitted. Another great example of early stage community engagement is found in Salt Hotel groups ‘Salt School’, a free local community training programme operating up to a year prior to new openings. The model has since been borrowed by hotel groups such as Sydell and others.

For planned regeneration projects to have the most impact both socially and economically, local partnerships are key. Local Charities and NGO’s will already have the knowledge and expertise on what their community needs and many will be open to building new programmes which have shared values between developers / operators and the local partner. Although labour intensive this approach encourages a circular economy and plays a significant role in guaranteeing the positive value exchanges required in truly regenerative tourism.

The coronavirus pandemic has shown just how powerful community self-organising, mutual aid and the solidarity of local support networks can be. We have seen hospitality both rely solely on their local community and in turn support them with their available resources. For the future and as the industry is still in recovery, we hope to see existing partnerships strengthened, new partnerships formed and a deeper understanding of the power of regenerative hospitality.
WE(i) Think’s multi-disciplinary team has a wide range of experience in development, implementation and operation of hospitality and wellness services with the world’s most prominent luxury brands.

WHO ARE WE(i)?

With more than 10 years experience in hospitality and tourism development and corporate operations, including F&B and Spa global strategies and concepts, Celine brings enormous knowledge and insight with her personal balance of holistic wellbeing in her life and the pursuit to change the industry for the better.

Celine Vadam

Tina is specialised in hotel operations in luxury and lifestyle brands as well as design and feasibility. Sharing her passion to create spaces where happiness and well-being can be celebrated, having a positive affect on people’s lives is where she strives to make an impact both professionally and personally.

Tina Harringer

Laura's experience ranges from operations in rooms and F&B, events, to sales & marketing and concept development. She shares her expertise in the service of creating curated, high standard experiences that bring happiness in people’s lives, with a strong belief all emotions and actions are directly affected by our well-being.

Laura Vandenhende
WHAT WE(I) DO
WE(I) THINK

WE(i) Think offers an innovative and collaborative generation of advisory services, putting the project’s concept at the heart of our work.

WE ARE CONCEPT ADVISORS.

We translate your idea into a unique viable project, bridging the gap between commercial concept and design vision, operations and development.

WE GIVE PURPOSE TO YOUR IDEA, MAKING IT MORE THAN ‘JUST’ A BUSINESS.

blurbs that spark that little bit of curiosity in your future clients.

WE(i) Think provides a holistic approach to wellbeing, initiating synergies between all departments of a property from top to bottom and involving all stakeholders – ownership, employees, guests and local communities.

We create bespoke indoor and outdoor wellness concepts, facilities, programs and packages, including sleep, healthy F&B outlets, non-invasive to medical destination spas, vibrant fitness areas, mindfulness activities and fun educational practices for internal and external guests of all ages, ethnicity and gender.