
FROM SUSTAINABLE TO
REGENERATIVE TOURISM

A Practical Learning Tool for Tourism Businesses, DMOs and Destination Developers

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Purpose of this learning material

Regenerative tourism goes one step beyond sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism aims to reduce negative impacts and use resources responsibly. Regenerative tourism asks a more ambitious question:

How can tourism leave a place better than it was before?

This can mean improving nature and biodiversity, strengthening local communities and culture, creating meaningful relationships between visitors and places, and developing tourism businesses that contribute to long-term local resilience.

This learning material has been adapted from knowledge, examples and approaches developed in the REGGAE – Regenerative Nature Tourism project and its guidebook *Steps towards Regenerative and Accessible Tourism: A Guidebook for Tourism Entrepreneurs*.

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1. Understanding the regenerative approach

Regenerative tourism is not necessarily a new type of tourism product. It is primarily a different way of thinking about tourism development.

Instead of asking only:

How can we reduce the negative impacts of tourism?

we also ask:

What positive contribution can tourism make to this particular place?

A regenerative approach therefore starts with the destination itself: its nature, people, culture, history, challenges and opportunities.

Four perspectives

A regenerative tourism experience should consider four interconnected perspectives:

NATURE AND ECOSYSTEMS

Can the activity contribute to healthier ecosystems, biodiversity or landscape management?

Examples could include habitat restoration, removal of invasive species, supporting wildlife conservation or financing nature management.

LOCAL COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

Does tourism create value for the people who live in the destination?

This could mean purchasing locally, involving associations and residents, preserving local traditions, supporting cultural heritage or creating new cooperation between tourism businesses and local organisations.

THE VISITOR

Can the experience change the visitor's understanding, attitudes or behaviour?

The visitor becomes more than a consumer. Through participation, learning and reflection, visitors can develop a stronger connection to the place and understand how their own actions can contribute positively.

ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

Who can participate?

Regenerative tourism should aim to create opportunities for different people to experience and connect with nature and local culture. Accessibility should therefore be considered when designing the activity, environment, information and customer **journey**.

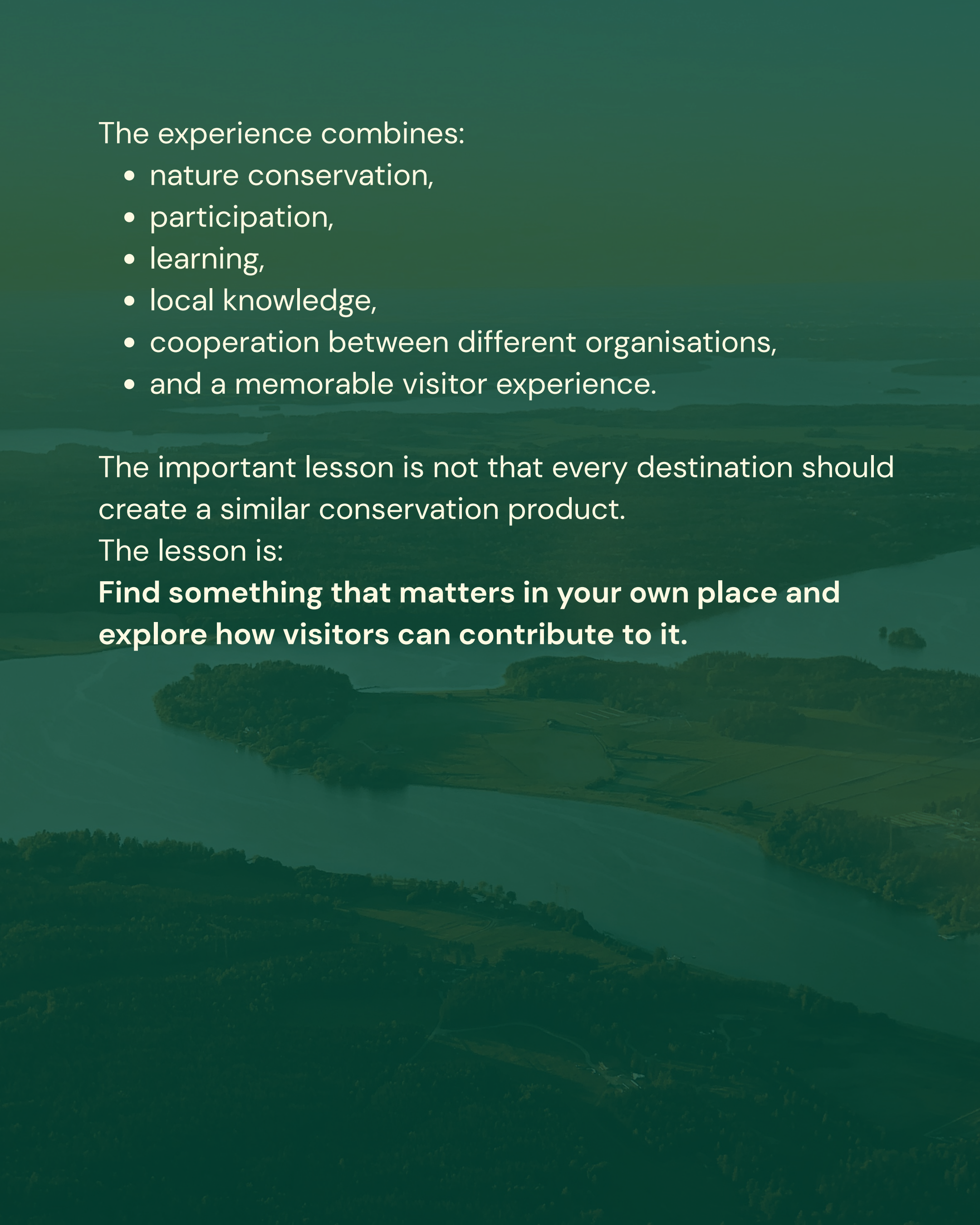
2. From visitor to contributor

One of the strongest ideas within regenerative tourism is to transform the visitor from a passive consumer into an active participant.

- Instead of simply seeing a landscape, the visitor can help care for it.
- Instead of only hearing about local culture, the visitor can meet the people who maintain it.
- Instead of only learning about biodiversity, the visitor can participate in an activity that supports it.

REGGAE example: Saimaa Ringed Seal

A practical example highlighted through REGGAE comes from Finland's Lake Saimaa. Visitors participating in Saimaa Ringed Seal activities have been able to contribute to conservation work connected with the endangered Saimaa ringed seal. Building artificial snowdrifts helps create suitable breeding conditions during winters when natural snow conditions are insufficient.

An aerial photograph of a landscape featuring a large, calm lake in the center. The lake is surrounded by dense green forests and rolling hills. In the foreground, there are more forested areas and some small, cleared patches of land. The background shows distant hills under a clear sky. The overall scene is serene and natural.

The experience combines:

- nature conservation,
- participation,
- learning,
- local knowledge,
- cooperation between different organisations,
- and a memorable visitor experience.

The important lesson is not that every destination should create a similar conservation product.

The lesson is:

Find something that matters in your own place and explore how visitors can contribute to it.

3. The Regenerative Product Check

Choose an existing tourism product, experience or destination. It can be for example accommodation, a guided tour, hiking, food tourism, cultural tourism, an event or another visitor experience.

Work through the following questions.

STEP 1 – Start with the place

What makes this place special?

Consider:

- natural environment,
- biodiversity,
- landscape,
- local history,
- traditions,
- cultural heritage,
- people and communities.

Then ask:

What does this place need more of, or what needs to be protected, restored or strengthened?

STEP 2 – Identify a positive contribution

What could your tourism activity contribute?

For example:

- restoration of a habitat,
- maintenance of a cultural landscape,
- support for an endangered species,
- removal of invasive species,
- litter collection,
- maintenance of trails or heritage sites,
- support for a local association,
- preservation of traditional skills,
- purchase of local products,
- support for local cultural activities.

The contribution does not have to be large.

A small regenerative element added to an existing tourism product can be more realistic for a small business than creating an entirely new product.

STEP 3 – Find partners

Regenerative tourism is difficult to develop alone.

Consider cooperation with:

- other tourism businesses,
- destination management organisations,
- local residents,
- associations,
- NGOs,
- landowners,
- nature conservation organisations,
- museums and cultural organisations,
- municipalities,
- researchers and educational organisations.

Ask:

Who knows the place and the issue better than we do?

Involve them.

STEP 4 – Involve the visitor

How can the visitor participate?

Participation could involve:

DOING

Taking part in a practical activity.

LEARNING

Understanding why the activity matters.

CONNECTING

Meeting local people or hearing local stories.

REFLECTING

Helping the visitor understand how the experience relates to their own choices and behaviour.

A regenerative experience should ideally create a connection between the visitor, the activity and the place.

4. Make the experience accessible

Accessibility is more than physical infrastructure.
Consider the entire visitor journey.

Ask:

- Is information about accessibility easy to find before the visit?
- Is the activity understandable for different visitors?
- Can parts of the experience be adapted?
- Are there unnecessary physical barriers?
- Can visitors with visual, hearing, mobility or cognitive limitations participate?
- Can older visitors participate comfortably?
- Is staff able to answer questions about accessibility?

The goal does not necessarily have to be to make every activity suitable for everyone.

The important principle is to understand barriers, communicate honestly and improve accessibility wherever possible.

5. Create value and consider pricing

Regenerative activities still need to be economically realistic.

A tourism business cannot create long-term positive impact if the business itself is not viable.

Ask:

Who pays for the positive contribution?

Possible approaches include:

- including the contribution in the normal product price,
- offering a regenerative activity as an optional add-on,
- donating part of the price to a local partner,
- developing the activity together with an association,
- creating packages involving several businesses,
- combining tourism income with external funding where appropriate.

The regenerative element can also create additional customer value.

Visitors are not only buying an activity. They are buying the opportunity to participate in something meaningful.

6. Communicate the impact

Regenerative tourism offers powerful stories, but communication must remain credible.

Avoid vague statements such as:

“We give back to nature.”

Instead explain:

WHAT WAS DONE?

For example: Visitors helped restore a meadow.

WHY WAS IT NEEDED?

The meadow is an important habitat that requires regular management.

WHO WAS INVOLVED?

The tourism business, visitors and a local conservation association.

WHAT WAS THE RESULT?

For example, the amount of habitat managed, funds raised, volunteer hours contributed or another concrete result.

Good communication connects the visitor to the place while showing genuine results.

7. Measure what changes

There is no single universal method for measuring regenerative tourism.

However, this should not prevent businesses and destinations from following their own impacts.

Possible indicators

NATURE

- area of habitat restored or maintained,
- number of conservation activities,
- amount of litter or invasive species removed,
- nesting sites or habitats created,
- money contributed to nature management.

LOCAL COMMUNITY

- local businesses involved,
- local products purchased,
- money retained locally,
- associations supported,
- local people participating,
- cultural heritage activities supported.

VISITORS

- visitors participating in regenerative activities,
- visitor understanding before and after an experience,
- willingness to support similar activities,
- reported connection to nature or place.

ACCESSIBILITY

- accessibility information provided,
- barriers identified and removed,
- staff trained,
- accessible alternatives introduced.

The purpose of measurement is not simply reporting. It helps determine whether the activity actually makes a positive difference.

8. Practical exercise: Regenerate one product

Choose an existing product from your business or destination. Complete the following sentences:

Our product is:

The place or community it depends upon is:

Something in this place that should be protected, restored or strengthened is:

Our tourism activity could contribute by:

Visitors could participate by:

We should cooperate with:

We could improve accessibility by:

We could finance the regenerative element by:

We could measure the result through:

The story we could communicate to visitors is:

9. Final reflection

A tourism product does not become regenerative simply because it takes place in nature or because it uses environmentally friendly practices.

Ask yourself:

Does our activity leave something positive behind?

Does it strengthen the nature, culture or community on which tourism depends?

Are local actors involved in deciding what is valuable and what is needed?

Can visitors understand and participate in the positive contribution?

Can we show what changed as a result?

If the answer increasingly becomes yes, the product is moving from sustainability towards regeneration.

Key message

TAKE CARE → GIVE BACK → STRENGTHEN →
REGENERATE

Sustainable tourism seeks to reduce harm.

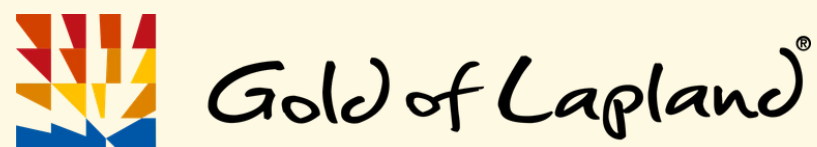
Regenerative tourism seeks to create the conditions in which places, communities, ecosystems, visitors and tourism businesses can thrive together.

Source and further learning

Adapted for REGENERATE from knowledge and examples developed within the Interreg Aurora project **REGGAE – Regenerative Nature Tourism**, particularly:

Hofman-Bergholm, Maria & Kåll-Fröjdö, Sara (eds.) (2026): Steps towards Regenerative and Accessible Tourism – A Guidebook for Tourism Entrepreneurs.

(Source: “Steps towards Regenerative and Accessible Tourism: A Guidebook for Tourism Entrepreneurs”



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