
FROM PRINCIPLES TO PRACTICE:

Reflections from the Beginning of the ReThink Journey

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Lessons learned from our meetings with DMOs.

What does it take to move regenerative tourism from an inspiring concept to something destinations can actually use?

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Three months into the **ReThink project**, and after our first in-person consortium meeting last week, it feels like a timely opportunity to pause and reflect on what we have learned so far.

The project seeks to support destination management organisations in translating regenerative tourism principles into strategy and practice, building on existing resources such as the recently published **guidebook** from the Regenerative Nature Tourism REGGAE (Interreg Aurora) project.

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One of ReThink's objectives is also to explore how a regenerative approach could influence the way project work itself is carried out. At the start of the project, this immediately raised ideas about what regeneration could mean in practice: for example, remote meetings in nature, reflective exercises to support the team's learning, or concrete actions that strengthen the connection between people and place. At the same time, project work takes place within practical realities shaped by administrative work, schedules, parallel projects, and changing circumstances.

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Such realities – the simultaneous need for new approaches and the practical realities of existing operating environments – reflect a broader discussion around regenerative tourism. While aiming to contribute to a systemic change for regenerative futures, organisations and individuals continue to operate within existing systems and structures. Balancing is not straightforward.

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This raises important questions for all actors in the industry:

**How can projects, organisations, and businesses better align their own practices with the sustainability and regenerative principles they advocate?
What opportunities exist to experiment with new approaches within existing constraints?**

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We as tourism professionals recognised a clear purpose and value in meeting face-to-face for our project meeting, particularly for building relationships and strengthening collaboration across the consortium acknowledging the transformative power of experiences. At the same time, we acknowledge that international project work involves travel, including air travel, which has significant environmental impacts. This tension is not easily resolved and is approached within the project through transparency and reflection.

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In addition, we aimed to consider regenerative principles in our choices related to the meeting arrangements, and for example as a part of the meeting, we also took part in a small local outdoor activity in collaboration with the village volunteers and in response to a local request. This activity offered a practical opportunity to engage with the place and local actors, but maybe even more importantly served as a basis for reflecting on the different types of impacts such activities may have, including environmental, social, cultural, and economic dimensions.

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This naturally leads to another key theme emerging from the project:

impact measurement.

A central question is how the positive outcomes regenerative tourism seeks to create for nature, places, and communities can be identified and measured.

Throughout the project, existing tools and approaches will be collected to support their application in the industry.

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The project team was joined by representatives from Visit Finland and the Icelandic Tourist Board, who provided valuable perspectives from the national level. The consortium also organised its second co-development group session together with associated partners online. Discussions focused on future project outputs, which include the development of a toolbox for tourism development organisations, support materials for strategy implementation, and the structure of a future network supporting regenerative tourism development.

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Several recurring themes emerged from these discussions. Participants highlighted the need for a clearer shared understanding of regenerative tourism, practical implementation tools, examples of good practice, and approaches for measuring impacts. At the same time, discussions pointed towards broader questions related to organisational structures, governance, and the longer-term transition towards the wider mindset and paradigm change.

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What became particularly evident throughout these conversations was that many of these challenges cannot be addressed by individual organisations working alone. Building a shared understanding, developing practical approaches, and testing new ways of working all require collaboration across destinations and sectors – *and a willingness to learn from and listen to each other.*

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The tools and practical frameworks developed in the project play a central role in enabling change, as they help translate principles into action and support implementation across different contexts. At the same time, one of the most important lessons emerging so far is that transformation develops through many actors applying these tools in their own contexts, making meaningful changes within their sphere of influence, and critically evaluating and reflecting them, and learning from and sharing to one another while working towards shared goals.

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While there is an urgency for more sustainable solutions, lasting transformation rarely happens overnight. More often, it develops through continuous learning, collaboration, and small changes in everyday practices – and this is where we recognise our best opportunity to truly influence.

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With the discussion now open and the foundations in place, the ReThink project will continue exploring within its own scope how regenerative tourism development can be advanced with practical tools and networks, which are developed and tested together. The project also invites partners and stakeholders to engage in piloting and dialogue throughout the process with an open and collaborative mindset.

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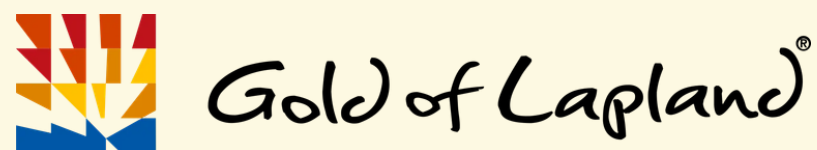
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