ECOTOURISM, REGENERATIVE TOURISM, AND THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Emerging trends and ecotourism

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Ecotourism organisations have often been at the cutting edge of new trends in sustainability. They were among the first tourism organisations adopting sustainability, they have developed techniques to operationalise key principles, and they have been quick to adopt new techniques to achieve their objectives. This chapter will examine three trends that seem likely to influence ecotourism in the coming years. These three interrelated trends are: the rise of the circular economy, the emerging focus on regenerative tourism, and the regenerative recovery. Each of these concepts is closely aligned with ecotourism principles. While some ecotourism organisations may already be applying these principles, each provides new opportunities for ecotourism products to improve their operational effectiveness.

Beyond sustainability

Sustainable tourism has been broadly adopted by policymakers and academics. In the years since the Brundtland report (WCED, 1987), the Rio Earth Summit and the development of the Agenda 21 framework (1992), and the development of the Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry (UNWTO, 1997), sustainable tourism has been embraced by policymakers, practitioners, and academics. Moyle, Moyle, Ruhanen, Weaver, and Hadinejad (2020) note that sustainable tourism has become the “dominant discourse in academic, businesses, policy and governance” (p. 106). Despite the attention given to sustainable tourism, there is a growing concern that sustainable tourism is not delivering on the promise. Ruhanen, Moyle, and Moyle (2019) note that “both researchers and policymakers consistently question the effectiveness of sustainable tourism and its practices, applications and practical adaptation” (Ruhanen et al., 2019, p. 139). Indeed, the execution of sustainable tourism programs within destinations has proven to be challenging (Dodds & Butler, 2010; Maxim, 2014). There are several reasons proposed for the lack of progress in sustainable tourism. One factor is the “wicked nature” of sustainability (Day, 2020). It is a complex activity that incorporates a wide range of tasks to be undertaken over a long period of time. Progress can be uneven and difficult to measure.
Concurrent with the general growth of sustainable tourism discourse is the development of concepts built on a foundation of sustainable development for tourism principles. These new approaches, built on the foundations of sustainable development principles, emerge to focus attention on specific aspects of the complex task. For example, Responsible Tourism, popularised by Goodwin (2011), focuses on corporate and individual responsibility for implementing sustainable principles in tourism. Fair Tourism, emerging in South Korea, is a new derivation of sustainable tourism. Geotourism, popularised by National Geographic, places a focus on “all aspects of the geographical character” (of a destination), as well as environmental and cultural responsibility (National Geographic, 2020). Slow Tourism advocates the principles of the slow food movement to improve tourism sustainability. These new expressions of sustainability often provide focus across the wide range of activities required to fully implement sustainability programs in destinations and tourism organisations. At the same time, emerging research streams have begun to address issues associated with sustainability. Some of these topics are substantial; for example, there is a significant body of work addressing resilience in the tourism system both at a business and a destination level. Emerging areas of study, including the circular economy and the regenerative movement, influence—and are influenced by—sustainability.

To understand the relationship between ecotourism and these emerging trends, it is worthwhile to review ecotourism’s relationship to sustainable tourism. At the turn of the century, a group of industry leaders decided on the “Mohonk Agreement A Framework for the Certification of Sustainable and Ecotourism” from GEN (2000), a document that outlines the relationship between sustainable tourism and ecotourism. The agreement recognises that sustainable tourism principles can be applied to any destination or organisation and describes ecotourism as a subset of sustainable tourism. Indeed, ecotourism has been an important focus of sustainable development through tourism for over 40 years. Much of the research on sustainable tourism conducted in the 1990s focused on small-scale, nature-based tourism, or ecotourism (Ruhanen, Weiler, Moyle, & McLennan, 2015), and even today, ecotourism remains one of the key themes in sustainable tourism (Buckley, 2012).

Following a review of ecotourism definitions in academic articles, Fennell (2001) has described ecotourism as tourism that tends to take place in natural areas, is concerned with conservation, is respectful of local culture, and endeavors to ensure that the benefits of tourism accrue to local people. Consistent with those findings, ecotourism is defined by Ecotourism Australia (EA)—one of the oldest ecotourism organisations—as “ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation” (EA, 2020). The Global Ecotourism Network (GEN), a leading network of ecotourism organisations, states that ecotourism is “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and creates knowledge and understanding through interpretation and education for all involved: Visitors, staff, and the visited” (GEN, 2016). GEN elaborates that the principles of ecotourism are to:

- Produce direct financial benefits for conservation
- Generate financial benefits for both local people and private industry
- Deliver memorable interpretative experiences to visitors that help raise sensitivity to host countries’ political, environmental, and social climate
- Design, construct, and operate low-impact facilities
- Minimise physical, social, behavioural, and psychological impacts on fauna and flora
- Recognise the rights and spiritual beliefs of indigenous and local peoples and work in partnership to create empowerment (GEN, 2016)
Of course, while it is acknowledged that not every product that promotes itself as an “eco-tourism” product meets these criteria, they are still a worthwhile foundation to explore regenerative tourism, regenerative recovery, and the circular economy.

**A brief primer on the circular economy**

The concept of the circular economy (CE) has been growing in influence in recent years. As an emerging movement, it has support from a variety of proponents including NGOs, most notably the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, policymakers, and academics. The Ellen McArthur Foundation has been influential in defining CE. It describes the circular economy as “looking beyond the current take-make-waste extractive industrial model, a circular economy aims to redefine growth, focusing on positive society-wide benefits. It entails gradually decoupling economic activity from the consumption of finite resources, designing waste out of the system.” Underpinned by a transition to renewable energy sources, the circular model builds economic, natural, and social capital. It is based on three principles: (1) design out waste and pollution, (2) keep products and materials in use, and (3) regenerate natural systems (EllenMacArthurFoundation, 2017). Geissdoerfer, Savaget, Bocken, and Hultink (2017) define the circular economy as “a regenerative system in which resource input and waste, emission, and energy leakage are minimised by slowing, closing, narrowing material and energy loops. This is achieved through long-lasting design, maintenance, repair, reuse, remanufacturing, refurbishing, and recycling” (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017, p. 766). As such, there is a strong focus in circular economy research on waste management. Circular economy thinking assumes that, as is the case in nature, nothing is waste, but items traditionally considered waste should either be designed out of the production process or used as resources for other activities (Schumann, 2020).

While the application of circular economy principles is gaining some traction in manufacturing and agriculture, it has been limited in tourism and hospitality (Jones & Wynn, 2019; Pattanaro & Gente, 2017). Nevertheless, there is a growing body of work on circular economy and tourism. Rodríguez, Florido, and Jacob (2020) conducted a review of CE and tourism articles that included 55 English-language articles. Jones and Wynn (2019) note that there are a growing number of Chinese-language articles on the topic as well. CE is also attracting conferences and seminars, including the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) Conference on Circular Economy in Tourism in South East Europe (2020), “Towards a circular economy and sustainable tourism on islands,” sponsored by the Association of cities and regions for sustainable resource Management (2018), and the “Advancing circularity solutions in tourism and construction” session presented by One Planet Sustainable Tourism Network (2018).

CE principles can be applied at various levels within the tourism system. From a meso perspective they can be applied to a destination community; from a micro perspective they can be applied at a business level. Rodríguez et al. (2020), in their review of circular economy contributions to the tourism industry, note several applications across several specific sectors including agritourism, cultural tourism, and maritime tourism, as well more generally in destination communities. Schumann (2020) identifies early steps undertaken by Guam in adopting CE principles, including buying local programs and CE education. Several authors identify the value of CE in ecotourism destinations (Zhang, 2014; Zhang & Tian, 2014). At a micro level,
there is evidence of hotels recognising CE in their waste-management approaches (Pamfilie, Firoiu, Croitoru, & Ionescu, 2018; Rodríguez et al., 2020). Several authors have identified the need for greater policy support in implementing circular economy activities (Falcone, 2019). Jones and Wynn (2019) note that tourism and hospitality applications focus on environmental processes including water, waste, and energy management.

While much of the focus of CE principles in hospitality and tourism has been on environmental issues, particularly waste management, the CE “is a framework for an economy that is restorative and regenerative by design” (EllenMacArthurFoundation, 2017). As such, it is closely aligned with the regenerative movement. Nevertheless, the interest in regenerative processes is developing concurrently with the circular economy movement, and thus it is worthwhile to examine this concept separately.

The regenerative movement

The regenerative movement has been influenced by several emerging steams of thought. As noted, regeneration is a critical component of the circular economy. Other important streams of thinking about the role of regeneration in socioeconomic systems derive from agriculture, architecture, and design. At least part of the appeal of regenerative approaches is the frustration with the framing of sustainability. JWT Thompson’s Innovation Group captured the sentiment by noting, “sustainability as we know it is dead. Doing less harm is no longer enough. The future of sustainability lies in regeneration: seeking to restore and replenish what we have lost, to build economies and communities that thrive, and that allow the planet to thrive too” (Stafford, Tilley, & Britton, 2018, p. 2). John Elkington, the sustainability thought leader who coined the term “triple-bottom-line,” amplifies the sentiment that “doing less harm” in not enough and now advocates for adopting a regenerative approach to sustainability (Elkington, 2020).

Regenerative design is emergent, having evolved from sustainability science, where the above-mentioned focuses on minimising environmental damage and resource efficiency gave way to regenerative design and a whole system approach to development. Critical to regenerative design and development is the co-evolution of human and earth’s living systems, including its politics. Systems thinking permits the inclusion of resilient systems embedded both in a community’s needs and in nature’s integrity. The American Heritage dictionary defines regenerate as “to revitalize, to give new life or energy to.” Regenerative design and development are organised around nine premises, chief of which is the first premise: “Every living system has inherently within it the possibility to move to new levels of order, differentiation, and organisation” (Mang & Haggard, 2016).

Regenerative design (Mang & Reed, 2012b) is an approach whose origins harken back to general systems theory, an analytical lens that emphasises the interrelationships of a system’s elements and parts embedded within the context of a larger system. As explained by Oliver, Thomas, and Thompson (2013, p. 2), “a regenerative system restores ecosystems, gives new life, and creates social and natural capital”. Additionally, these systems adopt co-evolution within relationships that are less managerial in nature, but more of a partnership between sociocultural and ecological systems. It is also the case that regenerative approaches, by their very nature, inculcate current topics such as climate change and the loss of biodiversity in their planning horizons. Its accents on restoration, revitalisation, and renewal through innate sources of energy and materials ties together systems thinking, community engagement, and respect for place (core tenets). As a design approach involving both human and ecological systems, it also borrows from the elegance of biomimicry, the imitation of elements and systems in nature that naturally resolve complex issues.
Janine Benyus, a biologist and cofounder of the Biomimicry Institute, popularised the notion of biomimicry as a modelling of nature’s graceful and inborn processes to create a healthier planet (Biomimicry Institute: https://biomimicry.org). There is abundant evidence (Mang & Reed, 2012a) of regenerative design thinking stemming from its biological subfield, ecology, and sustainability’s ecological beginnings (as distinct from the engineering-based, minimal impact, greening—especially buildings—beginnings). Regenerative design and development’s minimal requirement is a net-positive environmental benefit (Mang & Reed, 2012a). Furthermore, agriculture and forestry’s influences on regenerative design and development can be tracked through its persistent references to permaculture, a combination of agriculture and forestry which, when combined, forms agroforestry. A design system based on permaculture holds as tenets that it is possible to discern, develop, and generate new patterns in both human and natural systems, that weave them together in a dynamic whole. Permaculture considers nature as the preeminent recycler where there is no waste, but rather, infinite resources (Mollison, Slay, & Girard, 1991). Mang and Reed (2012b) offer the example of “road systems that serve as water harvesting structures and erosion control features while supporting wind-break, wildlife habitat, and firebreak functions” (p. 31). Rhodes (2017) defines its primary goal as the improvement of soil health, to restore highly degraded soil in service of enhanced water quality, flora and foliage, and land productivity. Permaculture is embedded in regenerative agriculture, and it uses inherent qualities of animals and plants with landscapes and structures to yield an integrated design system modelled on nature.

Many regenerative design approaches take their cue from the built environment, architecture, and place traditions such as green building ratings systems. Landscape architect John Tillman Lyle proposed regenerative design as a dynamic process for cities in a co-evolving participation in environmental issues (Lyle, 1996). Regardless of the tradition, from LEED ratings (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) to frameworks such as LENSES (Living Environments in Natural, Social and Economic Systems) and REGEN (the REGENerative design framework), the co-evolution between human social systems, and their communities, and ecological ones is enunciated and weighted heavily. Regenerative design might be best considered by Aldo Leopold, who suggested conditions of ecological health as defined by “the capacity of the land for self-renewal” in response to the carelessness of our fossil-fueled growth economy (Mang & Haggard, 2016). Mang and Haggard suggest that a regenerative approach “shifts the focus [of sustainable design] from slowing down entropy to building the capability of living communities to evolve toward greater value” (p. 21).

There is regenerative design and there is regenerative development about which (Mang & Reed, 2012a) make a critically important distinction. While regenerative design builds the self-renewing capacities of designed and natural systems (the designed interventions), regenerative development creates the conditions necessary for its sustained, positive co-evolution. It might be helpful to use the metaphor of gardening and gardeners in further explicating designing and designers in regenerative processes. A gardener designs an ecosystem, layered within other ecosystems, creating the healthy growth of plants given their seasonality and environmental challenges. The garden’s success stands on the shoulders of the gardener and her or his gardening acumen. So too, the designer in regenerative approaches incorporates natural, biological, and human systems to improve conditions for both.

**Regenerative tourism**

The application of regenerative design and principles in tourism is in its infancy. Even so, calls for regenerative approaches to tourism development have come from a variety of sources.
Several authors echo Elkington’s observation that sustainability fails to provide inspiration and that regenerative practices contribute to tourism. Pollock (2015) calls for tourism leaders to transcend growth and greening and adopt regenerative principles. Day (2016) calls for tourism system actors to extend beyond sustainability and adopt regenerative processes. Howard, Hes, and Owen (2008) suggest that its development is a result of frustration with the pace and adequacy of approaches that safeguard a more sustainable future. These authors also note that sustainability lacks any motivating factors to connect environmentalism with sociopolitical dimensions and that its frame of reference on minimal impact suffers in comparison to regenerative design’s focus on net-positive impacts. While the general approaches to adapting regenerative approaches are emerging, to date there are no broader frameworks to develop regenerative approaches to tourism systems. Pauline Sheldon, during her keynote address at the Travel and Tourism Research Association’s International conference (Dredge, 2019), suggested adopting the eight principles proposed by Fullerton (2015). Fullerton’s principles include:

1. In Right Relationship: Ensuring humanity’s relationship with nature is appropriate.
3. Innovative, Adaptive, Responsive: Able to respond to emerging challenges.
4. Empowered Participation: With each actor contributing to the health of the whole.
5. Honors Community and Place: Regenerative economy nurtures healthy and resilient communities.
6. Edge Effect Abundance: This principle notes that “creativity and abundance flourish at the ‘edge’ of systems where bonds holding the dominant pattern are weakest” (Fullerton, 2015, p. 9).
7. Robust Circulatory Flow: Advocates for a flow of money and information through the system and for the efficient use and reuse of materials.

While comprehensive approaches help to clarify the concepts that may be incorporated in regenerative tourism, some of the earliest examples of regenerative tourism come from the application of regenerative design to small-scale, nature-based, or ecotourism operations. Howard et al. (2008) examine the application of regenerative principles to community-based tourism on a small island in the Torres Strait (Australia). Playa Viva, an ecolodge in Mexico with a commitment to improving the local environment and community, is also presented as an example of regenerative tourism. Regenerative Travel, a travel supplier, curates a portfolio of more than 45 ecolodges they assert achieve the principles of regenerative travel.

Nevertheless, the concept of regenerative tourism, perhaps benefiting from the “do no harm is not enough” attitude and a desire of pandemic-weary citizens to improve the world from which they have been isolated, is gaining in profile with both consumers and industry. Examples of the rising profile of the topic include a *New York Times* article titled “Move Over, Sustainable Tourism. Regenerative Travel has Arrived” (Glusac, 2020); Canada’s Impact Sustainability Travel and Tourism Conference, described as “impact 2020 explored how Canadian tourism can move beyond sustainability towards being a regenerative and restorative industry” (TourismVictoria, 2020); and Vermont’s Farm to Plate program, offering a seminar of “Regenerative Tourism and Agriculture and the First International (virtual) Regenerative Travel Summit, which took place in October.
Regenerative resilience: Building back better

This chapter was written during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, and discussions of recovery from system shocks seem more pertinent than ever. As has been well documented, the coronavirus had significant impacts on the tourism system, and since the earliest days of the pandemic, there have been calls for tourism to “build back better.” Many academics and policymakers have seen the disruption in the tourism system as an opportunity to address some of the more significant negative impacts of tourism. At the same time, the tourism industry is reeling from the impacts of the virus on travel and hospitality.

Any discussion on how to build back better can be framed in terms of resilience and recovery. Resilience has been described as a “measure of the persistence of systems and their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations or state variables” (Holling, 1973, p. 14). Sydnor-Bousso, Stafford, Tews, and Adler (2011) describe resilience as the ability to withstand shocks and rebuild. It is the ability of the hospitality industry to return after disasters to pre-disaster levels of functioning or better (Sydnor-Bousso, 2009). There is a significant body of research addressing the resilience of destination communities (Hamzah & Hampton, 2013; Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2011). Resilience is considered one of the critical capabilities of long-term sustainability of tourism organisations and destination communities.

While resilience can address the ability to respond to a variety of changes, including long-term gradual change, it is a response to and recovery from exogenous, non-normative shocks that is worthy of examination. The ability to recover from a disaster—whether a flood, fire, or storm—will only become more important as the impacts of climate change become more immediate.

Recovery is a complex task that must be considered from several perspectives. Three important considerations include: time frame, scale, and perception. Time frame represents various periods of time following the event, scale refers to the type of entity being examined, and perceptions refer to those of involved parties (Marshall & Schrank, 2014). Marshall and Schrank (2014) note the importance of assessing recovery over time. Assessment of recovery in the months immediately following a disaster may fail to appreciate the long-term trauma inflicted on businesses following an event. They also point out the importance of recognising that recovery can be considered against a continuum from mere survival to recovery to a state they describe as resilient in which owners perceive they are better than they were before the event. Although there is a growing body of research on business recovery from these types of events, there is little information on how businesses and destination communities recover to levels that exceed pre-disaster levels.

While the concept of “building back better” is often touted as an ideal, several authors have noted that tourism organisations lack even basic preparations for disasters (Drabek, 1995). If we are to achieve recovery that leads to better outcomes than before the disaster, then there is need for a greater understanding of the actions required to achieve these goals.

Binna Burra Lodge: Recovery and regeneration

Binna Burra Lodge (BBL) is an ecotourism property located in the subtropical rainforest of the Lamington National Park, one of the parks in the Gondwana World Heritage Site in Australia. BBL was first established in 1933 and has been a leader in nature-based tourism in Australia. On September 8, 2019, a bushfire destroyed the historic lodge and pioneering cabins. In Chapter 16,
we examined Binna Burra Lodge in the context of climate change. In this chapter we’ll look at BBL’s recovery through the context of recovery and regeneration.

**Be as prepared as possible**

BBL has demonstrated a commitment to high-quality management. Their commitment to continuous performance improvement is evident in their over 20 years of certification as an “advanced ecotourism” operation, a recognition that requires achieving high standards across a range of business and operational criteria. BBL was prepared for the event of a disaster and had undertaken drills and training activities to be ready for disaster. BBL had considered business continuity issues and were able to quickly set up an off-site temporary office to manage immediate post-disaster issues. BBL also had insurance for different components of the operation, with the separate legal entity known as the Sky Lodges being fully covered by wildfire damage, but the central lodge and cabins could only be partially covered for wildfire damage. Despite these preparations, unanticipated challenges presented themselves in the months following the disaster. The impact of refunds and lost business were significant, and they created cashflow challenges. While BBL had insurance, there was a cap in wildfire-related funds. BBLs commitment to the wellbeing of their staff placed additional pressures on the business operations. Before the wildfire, BBL had 65 staff members of which 90% were retrenched within the first week of the disaster.

**Bias toward action and confidence**

Despite the devastation of the fires, Chairperson Steve Noakes recognised the importance of maintaining optimism on the future of BBL. Learning from other successful businesses that recovered from devastation, Noakes recognised the need to project an immediate positive message, even while those closely associated with the enterprise were still coming to terms with the shock and grief of the loss. BBL committed to a focused communication strategy with a wide range of stakeholders to maintain a positive orientation.

Throughout the process, BBL has been committed to sustainability principles that have informed their recovery response. BBL has a long commitment to ecotourism certification, has committed to continuing its Advanced Ecotourism certification in the post-wildfire era.

BBL has a clearly articulated set of principles that provide a foundation for all development. They include:

- **Conservation**: Identification, protection, conservation, presentation, and transmission to future generations of cultural and natural heritage.
- **Action**: “Walking the Talk” of sustainability being a daily activity, achieved through a process of engage, learn, do.
- **World Heritage**: Framework of World Heritage Values.
- **Tourism**: Sharing responsibility for conservation of our cultural and natural heritage through sustainable tourism management.
- **Climate Change**: Both a risk and an opportunity too big to ignore.

In addition to these, BBL is committed to the 10 principles of the United Nations Global Compact and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
Social capital, systems support, and regenerative recovery

As noted in Chapter 16, BBL developed strong relationships with key stakeholders including the tourism industry, supply chains, the government, consumers, and the community. In particular, the stakeholder support from the federal, state, and local government agencies in the days following the wildfire event laid the foundations for a solid recovery. Given the complex planning and regulatory issues BBL has to work with as a commercial enterprise in the World Heritage–listed national park, the leadership of BBL understood the need and benefits of rapid engagement with each level of government in Australia. Beyond the financial support—including a crowd-funding support program—and government support, goodwill encouraged the board and management to persevere.

BBL recognised the emotional dimensions of recovery. The Bushfire was traumatic not only for BBL management and staff, but for a wide range of stakeholders including guests and visitors from around the world. The Binna Burra Bush Fire Gallery was officially opened on the first anniversary of the wildfire and provides opportunities for stakeholders to come and share memories and testimonials of their connection to Binna Burra. These healing activities were supported by the most senior management at the BBL and included the chairperson allocating time to make “Aussie Billy-tea” on a campfire adjacent to the Bushfire Gallery and share anecdotes and remembrances with guests visiting the site. “Reflection Benches”, with the message “Looking back so the view looking forward is clearer” were provided. These activities are an important “way to reflect on the loss caused by the Sarabah bushfire at Binna Burra and in the surrounding area and celebrate the strength of the community and the return of Binna Burra Lodge” (Schultz & Barnett, 2020, p. 40).

Physical recovery and development

In the year following the wildfire, the physical recovery of the site has been a priority, and despite challenges in gaining secure single-road access into the site and sources of capital during the year following the fire, plans are under way to rebuild. BBL’s master plan, completed in 2008 after extensive stakeholder engagement, provided an important foundation on which to frame post-disaster planning. The fire created an opportunity to reimagine the BBL precinct. Binna Burra is being developed in a way that builds on their commitment to nature and has committed to ensuring that BBL will be a zero-waste, zero-emissions site. The design characteristics incorporate commitments to the following approaches:

- Climate responsive design principles.
- Incorporate salvaged materials from the property, both historically and recovered from the fires and through land management.
- Maximise use of recycled and natural materials.
- Colors to harmonise with the environment.
- Integrate water-sensitive urban design (WSUD) principles.
- Utilise renewable energy (e.g., solar, wind with battery) to power operations on the site.

The lighting plan minimises “obtrusive light” and “add[s] to the cultural values and heritage ambiance that makes our visitors feel warm and welcome” (Schultz & Barnett, 2020, p. 55). This plan is designed to use low amounts of energy, be heritage-listing compliant, and minimise any disturbance to nocturnal animals and birds.
Cultural heritage-based regeneration

BBL has maintained focus on long-term goals and principles while getting back to business. Several projects supporting the long-term goals, committed before the wildfire, ensured a continued focus on the future of BBL. BBL is committed not only to environmental sustainability, but also to sociocultural sustainability. Despite the twin challenges of the bushfires and the pandemic, BBL is committed to a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) designed to recognise and pay respect to the traditional custodians of the land on which BBL is located. BBL is working with Yugambeh Region Aboriginal Corporation Alliance (YRACA) in the development of reconciliation initiatives. The RAP has influenced the recovery process; for example, a traditional smoking and healing ceremony was undertaken by representatives of the Yugambeh Aboriginal language group (Schultz & Barnett, 2020) and was incorporated into the opening ceremony of the Binna Burra Fire Gallery.

Conclusions

Lessons from Binna Burra

Even without any onsite trading activities, BBL successfully survived the first year following the fires and seems well positioned to continue its recovery and “build back better.” At this point in the recovery, there are several possible lessons from their process. Those lessons include:

- Be prepared for disaster. Regularly assess vulnerabilities and risks, and plan accordingly.
- Work to reopen as soon as practical and maintain communication with key stakeholders throughout the recovery process.
- Effective crisis and post-crisis communication are critical for recovery. Establish and maintain consistent messaging from the most senior person in the organisation.
- Expect the unexpected and build in capacity to meet contingencies.
- Invest in building relationships with key stakeholders. Social capital is an asset that endures through disaster.
- Take time to process the emotional toll. By establishing of the Bush Fire Gallery and creating a safe place for people to come and talk about the trauma of the fire, BBL enabled healing to take place.
- Stay true to your principles. Establishing a vision and a mission provides guidance through disruption.
- Focus on both the immediate and the long term. The highest priority for BBL was re-opening; nevertheless, while working on the immediate goal, they maintained a commitment to advancing strategic initiatives including updating the master plan and progressing the RAP.

As an ecotourism product, BBL embraces many of the principles of the circular economy and regenerative tourism. In both general operations and through the recovery, BBL places priority on the 6 Rs: Reuse, Repair, Reduce, Rethink, Recycle, Refuse, Reduce. As the rebuilding process continues, BBL will use salvaged materials from the property, both historically and recovered from the fires, and through land management. Additionally, new buildings and operations will be designed to ensure that BBL is a zero-waste site. BBL also undertakes many of the activities identified as regenerative. The conservation and
perseveration of the surrounding environment is at the core of its operation. At the same time, their commitment to recognising the role of Indigenous peoples of the region and engaging them as key stakeholders in the future is consistent with the principles described as regenerative tourism.

**Emerging insights**

Early evidence suggests that the concepts of the circular economy and regenerative tourism are ideas whose times have come. There is no doubt that the positive proactive message of regenerative tourism benefits from a general frustration that the broad implementation of sustainable tourism practices is taking too long. Several authors have noted that despite the almost ubiquitous adoption of sustainable tourism rhetoric by policymakers and academics, the implementation of sustainable tourism practices has been slow. For some, “sustainability” is no longer an inspiring term. Indeed, sustainability has long been considered a jargon term (AdAge, 2010), and a poorly understood one. In addition to slow progress, it has been noted that sustainable tourism has been coopted as a means of justifying unsustainable practices (Collins, 1999). Elkington (2020), who first coined the term “triple-bottom-line,” even tried to “recall” the concept through frustration with the way it was applied. Nevertheless, both the circular economy and the regenerative movement are closely tied to sustainability. Geisdoerfer et al. (2017) propose that circular economy is a condition of sustainability. Certainly, the focus on environmental management is key to the environmental dimension of sustainability. Similarly, while some criticise sustainability as merely “not doing harm,” this may be more the fault of poorly implemented sustainability programs than a lack of concern for regenerative approaches in the core tenets of sustainability. At best, this is an exciting opportunity for these new approaches to refresh and revitalise sustainability efforts.

Regenerative recovery, or building back better, is a far less established concept than either the circular economy or regenerative tourism. This concept also has its roots in sustainability and resilience research, but it has been under research and is poorly understood. Nevertheless, as we persevere through the pandemic and prepare for emerging challenges presented by climate change, it is an important topic to address.

The general excitement of these new approaches, particularly regenerative tourism, should be tempered by some caution. The enthusiasm of the embrace of this concept is reminiscent of the Gartner Hype Cycle, where inflated expectations are preceded by a trough of disillusionment, before eventually reaching a plateau of productivity (Fenn & Blosch, 2018; Fenn & Raskino, 2008). It could be argued that sustainability faced just a cycle and is only now reaching a more productive stage. Certainly, these new concepts face many of the same challenges that sustainability faces. Each of these concepts addresses a wicked problem, and application of the concepts will vary in different locations. These concepts must be operationalised into specific actions that can be applied in a range of circumstances. Like sustainability, these approaches require systems thinking, and the full benefits of the approach will only be accrued when they are adopted throughout the system. Vargas-Sánchez (2018) notes that adoption of the circular economy principles will require change within the tourism system, and each of these processes requires the adoption of systems for “capture, processing, analysis, and reporting of data and information” (Jones & Wynn, 2019, p. 2547). Cave and Dredge (2020) suggest that regenerative tourism may require changes in the operating systems of society. Without a doubt, these are significant challenges to overcome to achieve a tourism system-wide adoption.

In the meantime, ecotourism remains a fertile ground for establishing “proof of concept” for these innovations. Just as ecotourism provided key insights for sustainable tourism studies, ecotourism operators have already adopted key techniques associated with the circular economy.
and regenerative tourism. These concepts align with the principles of ecotourism (GEN, 2016), and as research on the applications of the concepts continues, it is reasonable to expect that examples from ecotourism will remain central, as our understanding of both the circular economy and regenerative tourism grows.

References


Ecotourism and the Circular Economy


