ROOTS & RESILIENCE: A COMMUNITY-LED FRAMEWORK TO EMPOWER, REWILD, AND REVITALISE PLACE THROUGH REGENERATIVE TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

Tourism has the power to shape the future of places, communities, and ecosystems, but too often, it undermines the very systems upon which it depends (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Pollock, 2019). Mass tourism models frequently prioritise economic growth over ecological and cultural integrity, resulting in biodiversity loss, social inequity, and the erosion of local agency. While sustainability frameworks aim to reduce tourism's harm, they often fall short of reversing damage or fostering renewal (Dredge & Jamal, 2015). In contrast, regeneration calls for tourism to actively contribute to the revitalisation of place and the well-being of host communities (Mang & Reed, 2012).

This paper introduces the Roots & Resilience Regenerative (R³) Tourism Framework, a six-step, community-led methodology for transforming tourism into a force for ecological, cultural, and socio-economic renewal. Drawing on systems thinking, Q methodology, and entrepreneurial strategy, the R³ Framework positions tourism as a living system—one that thrives through co-design, care, and co-evolution with the communities and environments it both affects and depends upon. The framework integrates regenerative principles with practical, place-based tools that support inclusive engagement, adaptive governance, and long-term resilience.

The R³ Framework, illustrated in Figure 1, consists of six interconnected phases designed to guide communities through regenerative tourism design. Each phase is expressed in both academic terms (in bold) and community-friendly language (in brackets), reflecting its dual function as a scholarly tool and practical guide. Together, these six phases support communities to envision, prototype, and evaluate tourism initiatives that align with local priorities and regenerative principles:

- *Scope and scale analysis (Grounding in place)* helps communities define regenerative goalposts by identifying the ecological, cultural, and spatial dimensions of their local context, and clarifying their shared understanding and appetite for regenerative tourism.
- *Megatrend analysis (Scanning the horizons)* enables communities to assess external drivers and emerging risks that may influence future tourism development.
- *Stakeholder analysis (Weaving connections)* maps the network of actors, ensuring inclusive engagement and amplifying marginalised voices.
- *Scenario planning (Imagining possibilities)* supports the exploration of preferred futures aligned with local values and resilience goals.
- *Action research using design thinking and Q methodology (Co-designing futures)* combines iterative prototyping with the surfacing of shared priorities to inform locally grounded innovation (Zabala et al., 2018).

- *Action research using VVE-5 Index (Revealing what Regenerates)* equips the community to lead a systems-based assessment of tourism initiatives using the Regenerative Potential Index (VVE-5)—a novel tool developed from the Vitality–Viability–Evolution (VVE) model—to evaluate regenerative impact across ecological, cultural, and socio-economic domains (Sims, 2025).
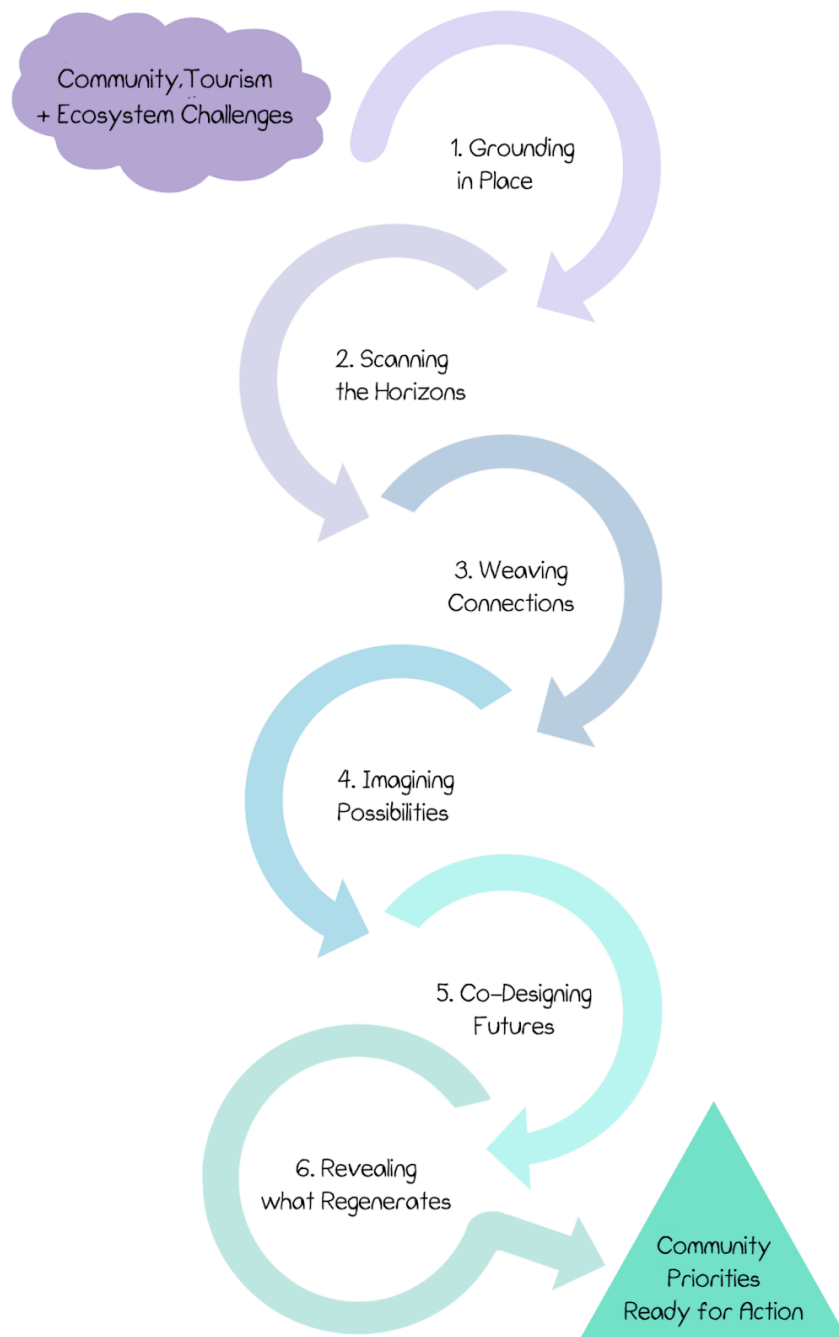
Figure 1: Roots & Resilience Regenerative (R³) Tourism Framework
A six-phase, community-led methodology that integrates systems thinking, participatory tools, and regenerative design to support place-based tourism development aligned with local priorities and long-term socio-ecological resilience.

The framework was tested and refined through a living case study on Bruny Island, Tasmania—an ecologically sensitive and culturally rich destination grappling with the complexities of rapid tourism growth. Through participatory workshops, Q methodology, and scenario planning, the community moved beyond consultation toward co-creation, leading to stronger collaboration among residents, local leaders, and tourism stakeholders. This process surfaced and aligned shared values, enabling the co-design of visitor experiences that regenerate biodiversity, honour cultural identity, and reflect community priorities. The use of the Regenerative Potential Index (VVE-5) helped the community assess which ideas most contributed to vitality, viability, and evolution, grounding decisions in both systems thinking and lived experience.

Beyond frameworks and tools, the process fostered trust, built local capacity for participatory governance, and seeded several regenerative tourism ventures and social enterprise concepts. Together, these outcomes demonstrate how regeneration is not only possible, but deeply practical, when communities are empowered to lead with care, creativity, and connection. The Bruny Island case affirms that regenerative tourism is not a fixed model but a dynamic, community-owned process rooted in shared values, local agency, and continuous learning. It also highlights the scalability and adaptability of the R³ Framework for other communities navigating similar socio-ecological transitions.

By integrating regenerative design, participatory tools, and entrepreneurial strategy, the R³ Framework bridges the gap between theory and practice, offering a roadmap for policymakers, tourism practitioners, and community changemakers to reimagine tourism as a vehicle for flourishing. In doing so, it challenges the industry to move beyond sustainability and embrace tourism's potential to restore, reconnect, and regenerate. Ultimately, the R³ Framework reimagines tourism as a force that empowers communities, rewilds ecological relationships, and revitalises the spirit of place—delivering net-positive outcomes for people, planet, and future generations.

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