

Community-Led Regeneration: Revitalising Livelihoods, Rewilding Nature and Reimagining Tourism

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the degree of

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Certificate of original authorship

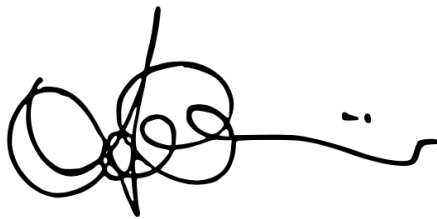
I, Fuchsia Claire Sims, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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Regeneration is like gravity, unseen but ever-present. It draws life into coherence, holds communities in orbit, and anchors us to place. Often unnoticed, it is the quiet force that binds people to purpose, ecosystems to care, and futures to the choices we make today. To cultivate regeneration is not simply to restore, but to realign, to create a new centre of gravity around which cultures, economies, and ecosystems can thrive. Quietly powerful, regeneration fosters belonging, balance, and the conditions for renewal. It becomes a gravitational field that draws people, place, and planet into harmony, sustaining life for generations to come.

“We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.”

- Proverb often attributed to Indigenous tradition

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which I live, work, play and learn. I pay my respect to their elders, past, present, and emerging, and extend that respect to all Indigenous peoples who contribute to the ongoing stewardship of planet earth. As I explore pathways forward for regenerative tourism, I recognise that true regeneration must be grounded in Indigenous wisdom, and guided by respect, reciprocity, and care for Country.

Before we can regenerate, we must first reconnect.

Begin here.

Pause.

Breathe.

Feel the ground beneath your feet.

Let your shoulders drop, your breath steady, your senses awaken.

Now, bring to mind a place you love.

A real place, not an idea.

Perhaps a sun-warmed patch of earth,

a cool stream winding through ancient stone,

the wind racing over wild cliffs,

or the quiet hush beneath tall trees.

It may be a place from your childhood.

A street corner alive with neighbours,

a market square humming with voices and colour,

a place of gathering, rich with community character.

Picture it.

Smell the air.

Feel the textures — the soil, the stone, the timber worn smooth by many hands.

Notice the pulse of wildness, the heartbeat of community within you.

Let it settle in your body, a place that knows you,

and that you know, beyond words.

Now imagine this place, not merely surviving, but thriving.

Its future shaped with care,

protected by your choices,

revived through community, courage, and reciprocity.

This thesis is not simply about tourism.

It is about belonging.

About remembering that we are of place, not separate from it.

It is about asking not only *what can we take*,

but *what can we give back?*

As you read on, I invite you to hold that place —

and that feeling — close.

Let it guide your thinking, soften your critique,

and open you to a deeper vision of what regeneration can truly mean.

*Dedicated to my roots — and the leaves of tomorrow;
to my grandparents Patrick James, Fay Margaret, Oliver Arthur and Iris May;
to the lands, waters, forests, and creatures that sustain us;
and for future generations of all beings.*

May this continue to spark positive change.

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List of publications

1. **Sims, F.**, Williams, M.-A., & Elliot, S. (2007). Understanding the mobile experience economy: A key to richer, more effective m-business technologies, models and strategies. International Conference on the Management of Mobile Business. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICMB.2007.70> [Published prior to PhD]
2. **Sims, F.** (2020). Gamifying responsible travel: Adventure Junky. In M.S. Nikolova (Ed.), Behavioral economics for tourism: Perspectives on business and policy in the travel industry (pp.236–239). Academic Press.
3. **Sims, F.**, Gay, V., & Madden, B. (2025). Roots and resilience: A regenerative tourism framework for revitalising communities, rewilding nature, and redesigning visitor experiences. Paper written for the International Research and Technology Transfer in Hospitality Industry Conference, Chandigarh University, India (IRTTHI 2025) [Full Paper Accepted] extended version in preparation for the Journal of Sustainable Tourism.
4. **Sims, F.**, Gay, V., & Madden, B. (2025). Regenerative Tourism in Practice: A Community-Led Case Study on Bruny Island, Tasmania. Annual Conference of the Euro-Asia Tourism Studies Association (EATSA 2025) [Abstract Accepted] extended version in preparation for the Journal of Tourism Futures.
5. **Sims, F.**, Gay, V., & Madden, B. (2025). Gamification in Adventure Junky: Motivating Sustainable Travel Through Play. Paper written for the Annual Conference of the Euro-Asia Tourism Studies Association (EATSA 2025). [Abstract Accepted] extended version in preparation for Journal of Tourism Futures or Tourism Geographies.
6. **Sims, F.**, Gay, V., & Madden, B. (2026). Roots & Resilience: A Community-Led Framework For Regenerative Tourism to Empower, Rewild and Revitalise, 36th Annual Council for Australasian Tourism and Hospitality Education (CAUTHE 2026) Conference [Extended Abstract Accepted]
7. **Sims, F.**, Gay, V., & Madden, B., Blueprints for a Regenerative Future: Insights from 50 Frameworks on the Co-Design of Tourism Systems” Journal Information Technology & Tourism (in preparation).
8. **Sims F** et al, Borneo Orangutan Regeneration using AI , Nature, (field study underway and paper in preparation).
9. **Sims, F.**, Gay, V., & Madden, B, Vitality, Viability, Evolution: Developing and Applying the VVE-5 Model for Evaluating Regenerative Tourism Potential, Journal of Sustainable Tourism (in preparation).

Commonly used acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AJ	Adventure Junky
BIA	B Impact Assessment
BI	Bruny Island
CGP	Carbon Guardian Program
CBT	Community-Based tourism
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DMO	Destination Management Organisation
ERB	Environmentally Responsible Behaviour
GPT	Generative Pre-trained Transformer
DT	Design Thinking
IIRC	International Integrated Reporting Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NTO	National Tourism Organisation
OP	Offsetter Program
OTAs	Online Travel Agencies
PAR	Participatory Action Research
QM	Q Methodology (statistical method for studying subjectivity)
R ³	Roots & Resilience: Regenerative (R ³) Tourism Framework
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
VVE	Vitality Viability Evolution Model
VVE-5	Regenerative Potential Index (VVE-5)

Key terms

Co-evolution a reciprocal process by which human and natural systems adapt and evolve in response to each other over time, recognising that social and ecological changes are dynamically interconnected (Rogers et al., 2013)

Co-design (*or collaborative design*), is a participatory design approach that actively involves end users, stakeholders, and community members in the design process to ensure that outcomes reflect their needs, values, and lived experiences. Rather than designing *for* people, co-design emphasises designing *with* people, fostering shared ownership, mutual learning, and collective creativity.

Community-led refers to initiatives, processes, or developments that are initiated, shaped, and driven by local communities themselves, rather than being imposed or directed by external actors. In a community-led approach, decision-making power, agenda-setting, and resource control rest primarily with the community, drawing on its local knowledge, cultural values, and lived experiences.

Ecological Stewardship Ecological stewardship refers to the responsible management and care of natural ecosystems, emphasising actions and mindsets that sustain, restore, and enhance ecological integrity over time. It involves recognising human interdependence with natural systems and fostering practices that support biodiversity, ecosystem functions, and resilience. Ecological stewardship integrates ethical responsibility, scientific knowledge, and participatory governance, positioning individuals and communities as active custodians of the living world rather than passive users of resources (Berkes et al., 2003; Chapin et al., 2010).

Livelihoods encompass the means and resources through which individuals and communities sustain their wellbeing, including income, food security, cultural practices, and social networks. In a regenerative context, revitalising livelihoods involves enhancing local capacity, equity, and resilience in ways that align with ecological stewardship and cultural continuity.

Participatory Governance is a model of decision-making in which citizens and stakeholders are actively involved in shaping policies, planning, and outcomes that affect their lives and communities. It goes beyond representative democracy by embedding inclusive, transparent, and collaborative processes into governance structures, ensuring that diverse voices, especially those historically marginalised, contribute meaningfully to the design, implementation, and evaluation of initiatives.

Place-based refers to approaches, strategies, or frameworks that are deeply rooted in the specific

ecological, cultural, historical, and social characteristics of a particular location. A place-based approach values local knowledge, honors Indigenous and community relationships to land, and designs actions that are responsive to the unique identity, conditions, and potential of that place.

Regeneration refers to processes that restore, revitalise, and enhance the health, vitality, and capacity of social-ecological systems to flourish over time. It goes beyond sustaining what exists to actively renewing and evolving the living, cultural, and economic fabric of place.

Regenerative Mindset is a way of thinking and being that recognises life as an interconnected, evolving system and seeks to align human activity with the principles of regeneration, reciprocity, and co-evolution. It reflects a paradigm shift from extractive, mechanistic worldviews to one that values wholeness, living systems, and place-based stewardship.

**The regenerative tourism mindset refers to a way of thinking that shifts beyond sustainability toward actively restoring and enhancing the social, ecological, cultural, and spiritual health of a place. It is rooted in systems thinking, relationality, and place-based values, and is underpinned by ethics of reciprocity, care, and long-term stewardship.*

Regenerative Potential refers to the inherent capacity of a place, system, community, or process to evolve toward greater health, vitality, and resilience over time. In the context of tourism and community development, it reflects the ability of local social-ecological systems to not just recover from disruption, but to continuously regenerate their living, cultural, and economic fabric in ways that enhance wellbeing for both people and planet.

Regenerative Tourism is a paradigm-shifting, mindset-based approach to tourism that evolves through sustainability's focus on minimising harm, towards actively restoring, revitalising, and reweaving the ecological, cultural, social, and spiritual fabric of place. Rooted in living systems thinking, place-based ethics, and community-led stewardship, regenerative tourism fosters reciprocal relationships between people, nature, and the more-than-human world. It seeks to generate net-positive outcomes, enhancing the vitality, resilience, and wellbeing of destinations, ecosystems, communities, and visitors alike. Through participatory, systems-aware practices, regenerative tourism transforms how tourism is conceived, designed, and governed, aiming not only to sustain, but to heal, empower, and regenerate.

Reimagining Tourism refers to the process of fundamentally rethinking the purpose, design, and impacts of tourism. It involves moving beyond extractive or consumerist models toward practices that centre community agency, ecological health, and long-term regenerative outcomes.

Rewilding is an ecological and cultural practice aimed at restoring natural processes, habitats, and species interactions to strengthen ecosystem resilience and biodiversity. In regenerative tourism, rewilding emphasises both ecological renewal and the re-establishment of reciprocal human–nature relationships.

Sustainable Mindset a way of thinking that seeks to meet present needs “without compromising the ability of future generations” (Brundtland Report, WCED 1987) to meet theirs. It focuses on maintaining the health

of social, ecological, and economic systems by reducing harm, conserving resources, and balancing human needs with environmental limits. Unlike a regenerative mindset, which aims to actively restore and enhance systems, a sustainable mindset prioritises the responsible use and preservation of today's resources to ensure their availability and stability into the future.

Sustainable Tourism is tourism that meets the needs of present visitors and host communities while protecting opportunities for the future. It seeks to minimise the negative social, cultural, economic, and environmental impacts of tourism, while maximising its benefits for local communities, ecosystems, and economies.

Systems Thinking is a holistic analytical approach that focuses on understanding the interconnections, relationships, and patterns within and between components of complex systems. Rather than isolating individual parts, systems thinking examines how components interact over time within a dynamic, interdependent whole, enabling deeper insight into causes, feedback loops, and potential leverage points for change.

Visitor in the context of tourism, a visitor is a person who travels to a destination outside their usual environment for leisure, business, or other purposes, and whose presence is temporary and can have significant social, cultural, environmental, and economic impacts. The term "visitor" is increasingly preferred in regenerative and community-led tourism contexts because it emphasises relationship, presence, and responsibility, rather than passive consumption.

Visitor Experience refers to the personal perceptions, emotions, learning, and memories formed by individuals as they engage with a destination, activity, or tourism setting. It encompasses both tangible elements (such as attractions, services, and infrastructure) and intangible aspects (such as cultural interactions, sense of place, and emotional resonance). The quality of the visitor experience is shaped by pre-visit expectations, on-site encounters, and post-visit reflections, and can influence both visitor satisfaction and destination image (Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Hosany & Gilbert, 2010).

VVE-5 (Vitality, Viability, Evolution – 5-point Index)

The VVE-5 Index is the applied, participatory extension of the VVE (Vitality, Viability, Evolution) model developed in this research. The suffix "5" denotes its five-level scoring system, which ranges from –1 (actively harmful) through 0 (neutral) to +3 (strongly regenerative). Whereas VVE provides the conceptual foundation for assessing regenerative potential, VVE-5 operationalises it as a decision-support tool for communities, using accessible criteria and community-friendly evaluation language (see Appendix 16B).

NOTE: Full Glossary of terms used in this thesis can be found in Appendix 1.

Preface

This research journey began not in a library or lecture hall, but in the jungles of Costa Rica, surrounded by sloths and toucans more than twenty years ago. As a river guide and instructor with Outward Bound, I lived at the edge of wild rivers and dense rainforest, guiding young people through moments of fear, resilience, and discovery. I witnessed the extraordinary power of adventure to change lives. At the same time, I began to see its shadow side: tourism that consumed more than it gave, that extracted from the very communities and ecosystems it depended on. The paradox was stark—adventure could heal, but its economic engines too often harmed. That seed of contradiction has never left me.

In the years that followed, I set out to understand how experiences, whether in nature, culture, or technology, could create deeper meaning. This led me from guiding rivers to studying international business, and eventually to Copenhagen, where I explored the then-nascent “experience economy.” Even before smartphones, I was asking how digital tools might extend human connection, memory, and value. Those questions first appeared in a 2007 IEEE paper, *Understanding the Mobile Experience Economy*, but they echoed much further: how do we design experiences, travel, digital, or otherwise that enrich, rather than diminish, life?

Adventure Junky was one entrepreneurial answer. Conceived as “Earth’s first sustainable travel game,” it invited travellers to compete not for luxury or status, but for positive impact and purpose. Players earned points for low-impact choices and shared their adventures with a global community. It proved there was an appetite for a different way of travelling, but it also revealed the limits of scoring sustainability from afar. Communities had no voice in the game that judged their places.

That realisation brought me back full circle: to the question that haunted me in Costa Rica, and to the commitment that fuels this PhD. How can tourism regenerate rather than extract? How can technology serve communities instead of bypassing them? How can play become a path to stewardship?

This doctoral journey has been both academic and entrepreneurial, both personal and collective. It has asked me to rebuild Adventure Junky from the inside out, guided not by the logic of growth alone but by the values of resilience, reciprocity, and regeneration. It has carried me home to an island off an island, where community, culture, and ecology intersect in fragile and inspiring ways, and where more than 200 local people contributed their voices to shaping a regenerative vision for tourism, for Bruny and Beyond.

To write this preface is to acknowledge that this thesis is not just a document. It is the continuation of a life’s work: a weaving together of rivers and research, games and governance, systems and stories. It is

offered as a blueprint for individuals, communities, local governments, and ventures that wish to be sparks of regenerative change, igniting new ways of thinking, living, governing, and creating systems that restore landscapes, livelihoods, and the living creatures that depend on them.

May this work plant the kind of ideas that take root in wild places and community soil, nurtured by research, guided by local purpose-driven entrepreneurship, and grown to regenerate the way we live and explore together.

Table of Contents

Certificate of original authorship.....	1
Acknowledgments.....	5
List of publications.....	7
Commonly used acronyms.....	8
Key terms.....	9
Preface.....	12
List of Figures.....	18
List of Tables.....	19
Abstract.....	20

Chapter - 1 Introduction

1.0 Tourism Industry Context: Growth, Scale, and Impacts.....	21
1.1 Why Tourism Needs to Change.....	22
1.2 Why Changing Tourism is Challenging.....	24
1.3 Regenerative Tourism.....	25
1.4 Research Problem and Research Questions.....	28
1.5 Research Methodology and Methodological Framework.....	31
1.6 Key Contributions.....	33
1.7 Outline of the Thesis.....	33
1.8 Limitations of the Research, Key Assumptions and Justifications.....	34

Chapter 2 - Literature Review: Research Gaps and Insights

2.0 Introduction.....	36
2.1 Defining “Sustainable” and “Regenerative” in the Context of Tourism.....	37
2.2 The Evolution of Tourism Thinking.....	39
2.3 Sustainable Tourism and Regenerative Tourism Comparison.....	42
2.4 Critical Evaluation Regenerative Tourism.....	44
2.5 Related International Case Studies of Regenerative Tourism in Practice.....	67
2.6 Tourism Pledges: From Responsible Travel to Regenerative Commitments.....	81
2.7 Regenerative Tourism in Policy and Governance Models.....	85
2.8 Community Regenerative Tourism Challenges.....	87
2.9 Methods for Regenerative Co-Design and Implementation.....	89
2.10 Operationalising Regenerative Tourism at the Community Level.....	90
2.11 Scope of the Thesis: Focusing on a Community-Centric Framework.....	101
2.12 Chapter Summary.....	102

Chapter 3 - Conceptual Background: Cross-Sectoral Frameworks

3.0 Introduction.....	104
3.1 Theoretical Foundations: Scholarly Literature on Regenerative Tourism Frameworks.....	104
3.2 Practical Frameworks: Best Practices in Sustainable and Regenerative Tourism.....	112
3.3 Regenerative Entrepreneurship: Frameworks for Scaling Tourism Transformation.....	168
3.4 Comparative Synthesis of Framework for Regenerative Tourism.....	173
3.5 Governance, Accountability, and Accessibility:.....	175
3.6 Potential Impact and Benefits of a Community-Led Regenerative Framework.....	177
3.7 Chapter Summary.....	182

Chapter 4 - Research Objectives, Questions and Methodology

4.0 Introduction.....	184
4.1 Research Gap.....	185
4.2 Research Questions.....	186
4.3 Justification of Research Questions.....	187
4.4 Research Methodology.....	188
4.5 Ethical Research Considerations.....	190
4.6 Chapter Summary.....	194

Chapter 5 - Research Methodological Framework

5.0 Introduction.....	195
5.1 Step 1: Scope and Scale Determination.....	197
5.2 Step 2: Megatrend Analysis.....	205
5.3 Step 3: Scenario Planning.....	210
5.4 Step 4: Stakeholder Analysis.....	218
5.5 Action Research.....	226
5.6 Step 5: Design Thinking (Action 1) - Co-Design of Ideas & Initiatives.....	231
5.7 Step 5: Q Methodology (Action 2) - Perspectives and Relative Priorities.....	235
5.8 Step 6: VVE-5 Index (Action 3) – Regenerative Potential and Comparative Evaluation.....	240
5.9 Chapter Summary.....	247

Chapter 6 - Bruny Island Case Study: Implementation and Learnings

6.0 Introduction.....	249
6.1 Islands as Living Laboratories for Regenerative Tourism.....	250
6.2 Case Study: Bruny Island (Lunawanna-alonnah), Tasmania (Lutruwita).....	252
6.3 Shared Pathways Forward for Bruny Island Tourism: Guardians, Champions, Thinkers.....	295
6.4 Chapter Summary.....	298

Chapter 7 - A Practical New Community-Led Regenerative Tourism Framework

7.0 Introduction.....	299
7.1 Roots & Resilience: Regenerative Tourism Framework.....	300
7.2 Applications of the R ³ Framework.....	311
7.3 Benefits, Limitations and Impact of the R ³ Framework.....	339
7.4 Enhancing the R ³ Framework to Drive Regenerative Tourism Innovation.....	342
7.5 Chapter Summary.....	347

Chapter 8 - Entrepreneurial Opportunities for Innovation and Impact

8.0 Introduction.....	349
8.1 Cultivating Regenerative Ventures: From Frameworks to Actionable Tools.....	350
8.2 Adventure Junky 1.0: Transforming from Sustainable to Regenerative.....	354
8.3 Adventure Junky 2.0: A Regenerative, Community-Led Redesign.....	360
8.4 Scaling Up: White-Labeling the VVE-5 for the Tourism Industry.....	366
8.5 Chapter Summary.....	366

Chapter 9 - Research Contributions, Implications and Future Research

9.0 Introduction.....	368
9.1 Contributions to Knowledge.....	369
9.2 Contributions to Practice.....	372
9.3 Contributions to Knowledge.....	372
9.5 Limitations.....	373
9.6 Future Research.....	373
9.7 Conclusion: From Reimagining Tourism to Reimagining Futures.....	374

Bibliography..... 375

Appendix 1 - Glossary of Key Terms.....	391
Appendix 2 - Evolution of Regenerative Practice Across Sectors.....	399
Appendix 3 - Maslow's Hierarchy of Regenerative Travel Needs.....	400
Appendix 4 - Ten Principles for Regenerative Tourism.....	401
Appendix 5 - Domains and Challenges of Regenerative Tourism.....	402
Appendix 6 - Regenerative and Sustainable Tourism Frameworks.....	403
Appendix 7 - Cross-Sectoral Framework Comparison Matrix.....	408
Appendix 8 - Bruny Island Case Study: Bruny 2044 Project Local Context.....	424
Appendix 9 - Bruny 2044 Recruitment and Community Engagement.....	425
Appendix 10 - Step 1: Scope and Scale.....	427
Appendix 11 - Step 2: Stakeholder Analysis.....	435

Appendix 12 - Action Cycle 1: Design Thinking Community Actions.....	439
Appendix 13 - Action Cycle 1: Outcomes.....	445
Appendix 14 - Action Cycle 2 Q Methodology Community Actions.....	448
Appendix 15 - Action Cycle 2: Outcomes.....	452
Appendix 16 - Action Cycle 3: VVE-5 Index Evaluation Community Actions.....	463
Appendix 17 - New Regenerative Q Tool Roadmap.....	470
Appendix 18 - Impact and Benefits of the R ³ Framework.....	471
Appendix 19 - Using AI to Assist the Application of the R ³ Framework	473
Appendix 20 - Carbon Footprint of Global Tourism.....	478
Appendix 21 - Artefact: Adventure Junky Offsetter Program.....	479
Appendix 22 - Adventure Junky 1.0.....	483
Appendix 23 - Adventure Junky 2.0 “ Living Tourism”	493
Appendix 24 - Social Business Model Canvas – Adventure Junky 2.0.....	497
Appendix 25 - Adventure Junky 2.0 “Living Tourism” Roadmap.....	499
Appendix 26 - The Regenerative Experience Economy (REE):.....	501
Appendix 27 - Achievements During PhD Candidature.....	503

List of Figures

Figure 1. Methodological framework for community-led regenerative tourism.....	32
Figure 2. Triple Bottom Line model as applied to tourism.....	38
Figure 3. The shift from Ego to Eco to Seva as a regenerative mindset transformation.....	47
Figure 4. Conceptual Overview of the Six-Phase Regenerative Tourism Research Methodological Framework.....	190
Figure 5. The specific methods used in the methodological framework for this thesis.....	197
Figure 6. Vitality, Viability, Evolution (VVE) Model and its Applied Adaptation into the Regenerative Potential Index (VVE-5).....	241
Figure 7. Map of Bruny Island, Lunawanna-alonnah	256
Figure 8. Summary of research activities during the Bruny Island Case Study.....	261
Figure 9. Summary of Stakeholder Survey Results.....	274
Figure 10. Bruny Island Field Work Process.....	277
Figure 11. Bruny Island Action Research Cycles.....	278
Figure 12. Design Thinking: Community Co-Design and Evaluation Process.....	280
Figure 13. Visual Overview of all Bruny Island Q Study Factors 1, 2 and 3.....	286
Figure 14 Q Study: Community Prioritisation and Worldview Discovery Process.....	287
Figure 15. VVE-5 Pathway to Community-Led Regenerative Decision-Making.....	290
Figure 16. Combined VVE-5 scores of top five statements per factor compared with the regenerative potential benchmark.....	291
Figure 17. Community VVE-5 rankings per statement.....	292
Figure 18. Benchmark factor Z-scores by statement (s1–s34 order).....	292
Figure 19. Roots & Resilience: Regenerative (R ³) Tourism Framework.....	303
Figure 20. Participatory Tools Aligned with the R ³ Framework Steps.....	343
Figure 21. The VVE-5 Framework.....	351
Figure 22. Adventure Junky 1.0 Scoring Formula with Weightings and Normalisation Limits.....	358
Figure 23. Adventure Junky 2.0 Scoring Formula with Weightings and Normalisation Limits.....	359
Figure 24. Proposed Adventure Junky 2.0 community-facing evaluation screen.....	362

List of Table

Table 1. Nature’s Unifying Patterns: A Biomimicry Design Compass for Regenerative Tourism.....	167
Table 2. Estimated interstate and overseas visitors to Bruny Island, 2004–2022.....	259
Table 3. Megatrends and Strategic Responses for Bruny Island Tourism.....	269
Table 4. Bruny Island Stakeholder Influence–Interest Matrix.....	257
Table 5. Bruny Island Community initiatives achieving maximum regenerative potential scores (VVE-5).....	291
Table 6. Translating research methodology and learnings to R ³ Framework	302
Table 7. Alignment of Potential Impact and Benefits (Chapter 3, Section 3.4) with R ³ Framework.....	341
Table 8. AI-Enabled Supports for Each Step of the R ³ Framework.....	345
Table 9. Regenerative Q Tool: From Community Input to Actionable Insights.....	353
Table 10. Feature Evolution: Adventure Junky 1.0 (Sustainable) to 2.0 (Regenerative).....	364

Abstract

Tourism, one of the world's largest and most influential industries, has the potential to shape the futures of places, communities, and ecosystems. However, too often it undermines the very systems on which it depends, driving environmental degradation, social inequity, and economic leakage. If tourism is to become a force for positive change, it must move beyond sustainability and embrace regeneration, where destinations, communities, and visitors actively participate in restoring and revitalising local environments and cultures.

This thesis develops the Roots & Resilience Regenerative (R^3) Tourism Framework, which redefines tourism as a living system requiring continuous care, coevolution, and stewardship. Unlike sustainability approaches that focus on minimising harm, regenerative tourism seeks to revitalise the social, cultural, ecological, and spiritual fabric of places, positioning communities as co-authors of their futures. The R^3 Framework integrates six components — scale and scope analysis, megatrend analysis, stakeholder analysis, scenario planning, design-led action research, and regenerative evaluation — to guide a participatory and entrepreneurial approach to tourism design.

Using Bruny Island, Tasmania, as a living case study, this research tests and refines the framework in a setting where vulnerabilities and opportunities are highly visible. The Bruny Island study demonstrates how regenerative tourism can be cultivated through community leadership, adaptive governance, and stakeholder co-design, balancing economic viability with ecological and cultural preservation.

The contributions of this thesis are threefold: theoretical, by advancing regeneration as a paradigm beyond sustainability through the R^3 Framework; methodological, by developing tools such as the VVE-5 Index and Regenerative Q Tool to make regenerative evaluation participatory and accessible; and applied, by providing first-of-kind empirical insights and entrepreneurial prototypes, including the conceptual redesign of Adventure Junky 2.0. Together, these contributions demonstrate how academic inquiry can be embedded in real-world contexts, generating knowledge that is both rigorous and actionable.

Ultimately, this research repositions tourism as a regenerative industry and a force for restoration rather than exploitation. By empowering communities, enriching visitor experiences, and regenerating ecosystems, it reframes tourism as a catalyst not only for local transformation but for a wider call to Reimagining Futures.