

Co-Creating Regenerative Communities:

Regenerative Community Development™, A Foundational Methodology for Human and Planetary Thrivability

Leah Veronica Gibbons, PhD
Founder, New Earth Awakening™
Creator, Regenerative Community Development™
<https://newearthawakening.life>
tribe@newearthawakening.life; lvgibbons@outlook.com
+1-941-224-6256



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Welcome

Communities are where many of the conditions that shape human and planetary life come together. People, ecosystems, food, water, energy, livelihoods, health, relationships, culture, governance, infrastructure, and human development continually interact and create the places people call home. Yet development typically addresses these aspects of community life separately, often overlooking the relationships through which *communities function as living systems*.

Regenerative Community Development™ (RCD™) offers a different approach. Grounded in living-systems science and informed by thirty years of interdisciplinary research and practice, the RCD™ Methodology provides a practical process for helping communities intentionally cultivate the conditions through which people, places, ecosystems, and the larger living systems of which they are part can increasingly thrive.

At the heart of RCD™ is a simple but transformative question:

How can we create conditions that allow more life to emerge and thrive?

Regenerative Community Development™ (RCD™) is a living-systems methodology for consciously co-creating thriving communities.

The RCD™ Methodology unfolds through four interrelated, recurring processes: Perceiving; Assessment & Discernment; Co-Creation; and Commitment & Certification. Together, these processes develop practitioners' and community members' regenerative capacities as they participate in developing the capacities and Thrivability of the living systems of which they are part.

RCD™ is intended for community leaders and members, nonprofit organizations, educators, investors, funders, developers, planners, municipalities, and others seeking practical ways to co-create communities in which people and the rest of life can thrive together.

The invitation is not simply to create better developments.

The invitation of RCD™ is to cultivate communities capable of continually generating greater life and Thrivability.

II. Why Regeneration? Why Now?

Humanity is entering a period of profound transition. Climate instability, biodiversity loss, housing affordability, declining health, economic uncertainty, social fragmentation, and political polarization are converging within communities around the world. Although these challenges are often addressed independently, they increasingly reveal the limitations of fragmented approaches to problems that arise within deeply interconnected living systems.

Over the past half century, sustainability has transformed planning, development, business, and public policy. It has encouraged us to reduce waste, conserve resources, improve efficiency, limit ecological harm, and consider the long-term consequences of our decisions. These contributions remain essential and provide an important foundation for responsible development.

But sustainability is not enough.

Reducing harm does not necessarily restore vitality. Greater efficiency does not necessarily create resilience. Environmentally responsible buildings do not necessarily create healthy communities. Economic growth does not necessarily produce wellbeing. And sustaining systems that are already ecologically degraded, socially fragmented, or incapable of meeting human needs cannot be our ultimate goal.

The challenge therefore extends beyond sustaining what exists.

What if development could increase wellness, vitality, abundance, prosperity, and ecosystem health?

What if development could increase the capacity of living systems to thrive?

These questions mark the transition from sustainability to regeneration.

Regeneration does not replace sustainability; it builds upon and moves beyond it. While sustainability asks how we can reduce harm and maintain the conditions necessary for life, regeneration asks how we can participate with and *as* living systems in ways that restore vitality, strengthen relationships, develop capacity, and enable life to continually renew, adapt, evolve, and thrive.

This represents a fundamental shift in the purpose of development.

Rather than asking only: *How can we minimize or mitigate negative impacts?*

Regenerative development asks: ***How can we create conditions that allow more life to emerge and thrive?***

The distinction is profound. When development is guided primarily by minimizing harm, success is often measured through reduced impacts, greater efficiency, compliance, or achievement of predetermined performance standards. These outcomes remain valuable, but they represent only part of what development can accomplish.

Regenerative development expands the possibility. It asks how human participation can nurture ecological vitality, strengthen relationships, cultivate belonging, increase resilience, develop human potential, generate meaningful prosperity, and reveal possibilities inherent within a particular place and living system. Development becomes not simply an intervention upon a place, but participation in and *as* life's ongoing capacity for renewal and emergence.

Ultimately, however, regeneration is not the destination.

Regeneration is a process that manifests Thrivability.

Thrivability is a characteristic of a living system that is healthy and continually expressing more life. It recognizes that healthy communities, ecosystems, cultures, societies, and people are not static achievements to be maintained, but dynamic participants in living systems capable of continual learning, adaptation, creativity, renewal, and development.

The progression is therefore:

Sustainability → Regeneration → Thrivability (Figure 1)

Sustainability establishes essential foundations by reducing harm and protecting the conditions necessary for survival. Regeneration develops the capacity of living systems to renew and generate more life. Thrivability describes the expanding possibility that emerges as those capacities and relationships become increasingly life-generating.

This shift provides the foundation for Regenerative Community Development™. Rather than viewing development primarily as the creation of projects, RCD™ understands *development as conscious participation in the ongoing development of living systems*—with every decision offering an opportunity to increase the capacity of people, communities, and Earth to thrive together.

III. Why Community?

If regeneration occurs through living systems, an important question follows: At what scale can we most effectively cultivate the conditions for thriving? Regenerative Community Development™ proposes that community is the most powerful scale for regenerative change.

Communities are large enough to influence ecological, economic, cultural, governance, and built systems, yet small enough for people to experience meaningful relationships, belonging, participation, and direct connection with place. Community is also where many of the systems that shape everyday life converge. Housing, food, water, energy, mobility, livelihoods, education, relationships, culture, governance, health, recreation, ecosystems, and the built environment are often treated as separate sectors, but within communities they continually interact.

This makes community particularly important for regenerative development. A home can be designed regeneratively, but the wellbeing of the people living within it and the vitality of the ecosystem it is within will still be influenced by their neighborhood, relationships, food systems, transportation choices, economic opportunities, surrounding ecosystems, and sense of belonging.

An ecosystem can be restored, but its long-term vitality is intertwined with the relationships that surrounding communities develop with it. An individual can cultivate health, resilience, awareness, and purpose, but the ability to sustain and express those capacities is profoundly influenced by family, culture, community, institutions, and place.

Regeneration therefore cannot be understood solely as an individual endeavor, an ecological action, or a development strategy. It emerges through increasingly reciprocal and life-generating relationships within and among living systems. Community is where these relationships become tangible enough to experience, shape, and continually develop together.

Seen in this way, community becomes more than a location in which development occurs. It becomes a living context through which ecological and human life can become increasingly connected, mutually supportive, adaptive, and capable of thriving. This is why community offers such an important entry point for regeneration.

IV. Communities as Catalysts

The regenerative potential of community becomes even clearer when communities are understood as living systems. Living systems are dynamic, relational, adaptive, self-organizing, and continually evolving. Their qualities emerge through interactions and relationships among their parts and cannot be fully understood by examining those parts independently. A forest is not simply a collection of trees; its vitality emerges through relationships among plants, animals, fungi, microorganisms, soil, water, climate, nutrients, disturbance, and countless other processes interacting across space and time. Communities function the same way.

A community is not simply a collection of people and buildings. Its character, vitality, resilience, and capacity to thrive emerge through relationships among people, ecosystems, culture, governance, the built environment, human development, and the patterns of daily life through which these continually influence one another. This helps explain why communities with similar physical infrastructure can produce profoundly different experiences and outcomes. The difference often lies not in any single component, but in the relationships and patterns among them. (Figure 2)

Nested and Networked Communities of Communities

Living systems do not exist independently. They exist within other living systems and in relationship with other living systems. Individuals participate within families, social networks, cultures, organizations, communities, ecosystems, economies. Communities participate within landscapes and bioregions. Ecosystems interact locally to globally through water, wildlife, nutrients, climate, disturbance, and other ecological processes. Communities connect with other communities through economic exchange, transportation, culture, information, migration, learning, and relationships.



Figure 2. Regenerative Communities as Thriving Living Systems

Regenerative communities cultivate conditions in which people, relationships, ecosystems, culture, livelihoods, built environments, and everyday life can become increasingly life-generating and mutually supportive. Thrivability emerges through the vitality and relationships of the living whole.

Life is therefore organized simultaneously through nesting and networking. Individuals participate in families and households; families participate in communities; communities exist within and participate with ecosystems; ecosystems form larger landscapes; landscapes participate in bioregions; and bioregions form part of the living planetary system. At the same time, people connect with each other, families connect with other families, communities with other communities, and ecosystems across landscapes. Living systems are thus holarchic: each is a whole in itself while also participating within larger wholes and networks of relationship. (Figure 3)

Community as Catalyst

Because community sits at the intersection of so many nested and networked systems, changes at the community scale can propagate in multiple directions. Community conditions shape individual health, identity, opportunity, relationships, learning, purpose, and human development. Families and individuals, in turn, shape community culture, governance, economy, and collective capacity. At larger scales, community choices influence ecosystems, watersheds, landscapes, regional economies, neighboring communities, cultural networks, and bioregional patterns.

This means that regeneration at the community scale can catalyze change both downscale and upscale. A community that cultivates healthy food systems, meaningful relationships, ecological vitality, local livelihoods, participatory governance, beautiful and life-supporting places, and opportunities for personal development creates conditions that influence the people within it.

Those people carry new capacities into families, organizations, workplaces, institutions, and other communities. At the same time, the community itself participates in larger ecological, economic, cultural, and social systems, influencing the conditions beyond its physical boundaries. Community is therefore not simply one scale among many. It is an unusually powerful leverage scale because so many aspects and systems of life intersect there and because change can move through it in multiple directions. (Figure 4)

From Managing Parts to Participating with and *as* Living Systems

Typical development rarely works with communities in this way. Planning, design, financing, construction, governance, ecological management, economic development, health, and human development are commonly divided among different disciplines, institutions, phases, and decision-making processes. Each may be handled competently, yet the community as a living whole can disappear from view.

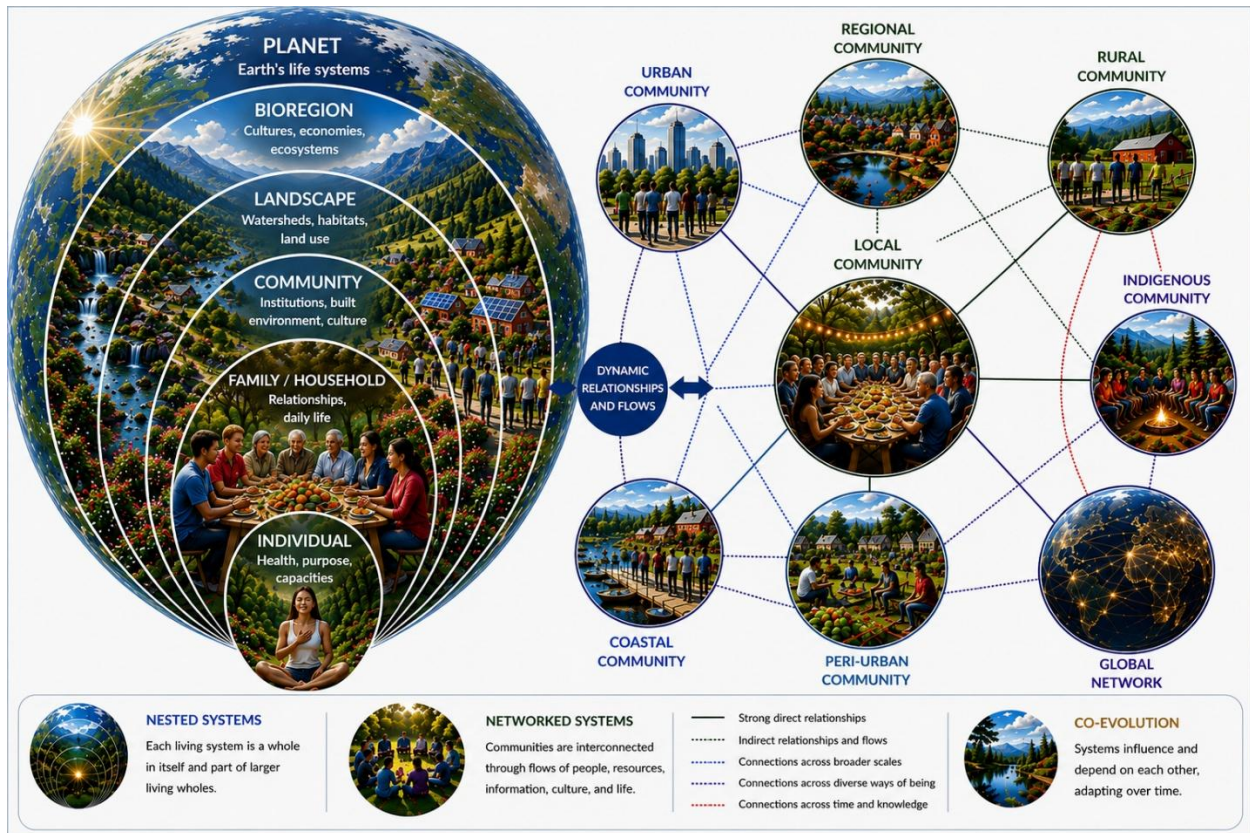


Figure 3. Living Systems: Nested and Networked Communities Across Scales

Living systems are nested communities of communities and simultaneously interconnected through dynamic networks of relationship and exchange. Communities occupy a powerful connecting position within this nested and networked organization. Changes in their capacities and relationships therefore influence individuals and families, ecosystems and landscapes, other communities and networks, bioregions, and ultimately planetary systems.

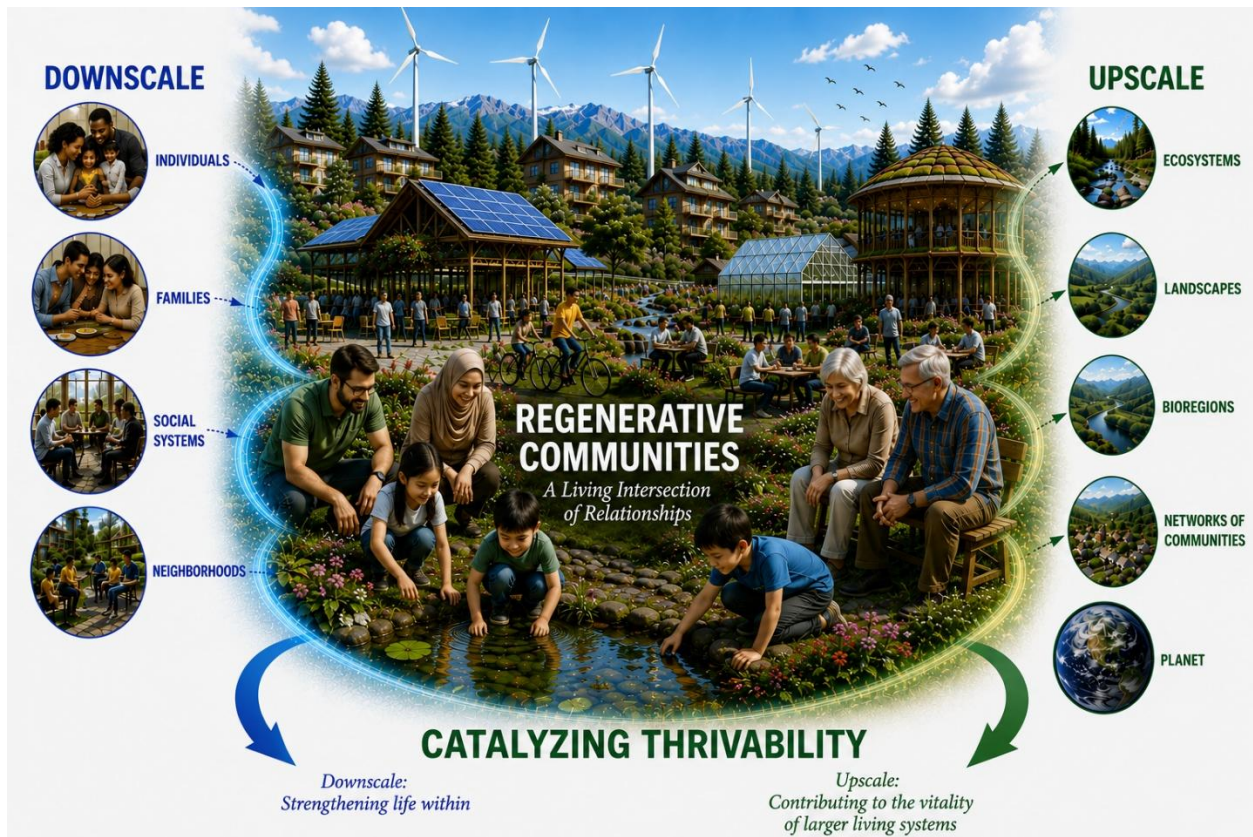


Figure 4. Regenerative Communities as Thrivability Catalysts

Communities occupy a powerful position within nested and networked living systems, connecting the wellbeing and development of people and local systems with the vitality of larger living systems. By developing regenerative capacities and strengthening life-generating relationships, regenerative communities catalyze increasing Thrivability downscale—within individuals, families, social systems, and neighborhoods—and upscale through ecosystems, landscapes, bioregions, networks of communities, and ultimately the planet.

When development treats community primarily as a collection of components to be designed, optimized, built, and managed, it misses the relationships through which vitality, resilience, belonging, adaptation, and new possibilities emerge. Living systems cannot be fully engineered

from the outside. They respond, learn, self-organize, form new relationships, and reveal possibilities that cannot all be predicted in advance.

This creates a practical need: if communities are living systems, development requires guidance for consciously participating with them as living systems. We need ways to understand place and potential, cultivate relationships, co-create shared purpose, act intentionally, observe what emerges, assess change, learn, adapt, and evolve. We need to learn how to dance with and *as* living systems to enable our collective thriving, rather than simply impose plans upon them that constrict and diminish life.

The Regenerative Community Development™ Methodology was created to meet this need and guide our conscious co-creation with and *as* life.

V. The Regenerative Community Development™ Methodology

The Regenerative Community Development™ Methodology emerged from a question that has guided my inquiry and work for thirty years:

How do humans and Earth enter into mutually nurturing relationships that increase the capacity for life to thrive?

Exploring this question has taken me across disciplines often treated separately, including ecology, anthropology, sustainability, community development, construction and the built environment, human wellbeing and potential, leadership, regenerative design and development, Indigenous wisdom and practices, inner growth, and spiritual development. Across these fields and ways of knowing, a consistent pattern emerges: life thrives through relationships.

RCD™ translates this living-systems understanding into a practical methodology for consciously co-creating thriving communities based on how living systems function. Rather than treating development as a linear process that ends when construction is complete, RCD™ understands

community development as an ongoing relationship with and *as* a changing living system. The methodology provides enough structure to guide purposeful participation and action while preserving the responsiveness, learning, adaptation, and emergence that living systems require.

From Problem-Solving to Life-Generation

Conventional planning and development—and even sustainability approaches—frequently begin by identifying problems: what is wrong, what is missing, what needs to be fixed, what risks must be mitigated, and what requirements must be satisfied. These are necessary questions, but they are not sufficient. Living systems possess capacities and possibilities that cannot be understood solely by studying their deficiencies.

Regenerative Community Development™ therefore asks an additional question: *What is the unique potential of this place, and how can our conscious participation with it increase its capacity to express that potential and generate more life?* Problems are not ignored; they are addressed within a larger developmental process oriented toward life-generation.

A housing challenge, for example, becomes more than a question of how many units can be constructed. It becomes an inquiry into how housing might simultaneously contribute to affordability, belonging, health, ecological vitality, beauty, accessibility, economic opportunity, social connection, resilience, and quality of life. A degraded landscape becomes more than a site requiring mitigation; it can become an opportunity to restore ecological function, rebuild biodiversity, reconnect people with place, support wellbeing, and create new educational and cultural possibilities.

The **RCD™ Methodology** unfolds through four interrelated, recurring processes: **Perceiving; Assessment & Discernment; Co-Creation; and Commitment & Certification**. Together, these processes help practitioners and community members develop their regenerative capacities as they participate in developing the capacities and Thrivability of the living systems of which they are part. (Figure 5)

The processes are distinguishable but inseparable. Perception informs assessment and discernment; assessment and discernment inform co-creation; co-creation brings regenerative potential into expression; and commitment makes regenerative intention and participation increasingly explicit, sustained, transparent, accountable, responsible, and collaborative. What emerges through participation becomes the living system we perceive anew, beginning another cycle of development.



Figure 5. Regenerative Community Development™ Methodology

The RCD™ Methodology is a continual, iterative process of Perceiving, Assessment & Discernment, Co-Creation, and Commitment & Certification. These interrelated processes continually inform and reinforce one another as people and communities develop greater capacity to participate consciously with and as living systems. What emerges through each cycle becomes the living system perceived anew, opening new possibilities for continued development and increasing Thrivability.

Perceive → Assess & Discern → Co-Create → Deepen Commitment → Perceive Anew

This is not a rigid sequence. Each process continually informs and reinforces the others as people and communities learn, adapt, develop, and evolve together.

Perceiving Communities as Living Systems:

RCD™ Perceiving Process

Working regeneratively requires learning to perceive communities differently. The **RCD™ Perceiving Process** provides a simple framework for helping practitioners and community members perceive the complexity, interrelationships, dynamics, and potential of communities as living systems. (Figure 6)

Conventional planning and development often divide community life into separate sectors, disciplines, departments, and areas of expertise. These distinctions can make complexity more understandable and workable, but they can also obscure the relationships through which living systems actually function. Regenerative practice requires learning to distinguish what is useful to examine while continually reconnecting those distinctions to the living whole.

RCD™ uses four intersecting lenses to support this way of seeing: **Domains, Dimensions, Components,** and **Scales**. Each helps us perceive something different about the same living system. They are not separate parts of a community or a hierarchy of categories. Together, they provide practical scaffolding for perceiving complexity without reducing the living system to its parts.

Domains: Process and Manifestation

Domains describe two ways we perceive the expression of a living system through time: through the processes by which it develops and life flows, and through the manifestations those processes and flows produce at particular moments.



Figure 6. Perceiving Community as a Living System

RCD™ uses interconnected lenses to make the complexity of living systems more perceivable and workable. Domains, dimensions, components, and scales help us inquire into different life-giving flows, facets, expressions, relationships, and contexts of community life while recognizing that these distinctions are conceptual scaffolding rather than separate parts of the living system. Together, they help us perceive the community as an interconnected, dynamic, and continually evolving living whole.

Process — Life-giving flows. *How are life-giving flows moving through the community?*

Communities are continually becoming through the flows and processes of life: relationships, decisions, learning, adaptation, exchange, ecological processes, cultural evolution, development, renewal, and countless other interactions through which the living system changes over time. These include both processes already occurring within the living system and the design, development, and living processes that people intentionally create, implement, and continually evolve as participants within it.

From a regenerative perspective, how life flows through these processes is as important as—and often more important than—the outcomes visible at any particular moment. Processes can enable, strengthen, circulate, and renew life, or they can constrain and diminish its expression. Regenerative processes cultivate life-giving flows that strengthen relationships, capacities, vitality, reciprocity, learning, adaptation, and the potential of the living system.

We therefore attend not only to *what* a process produces, but to how life moves through it: what relationships and capacities it generates, what it enables or constrains, how it affects the larger living whole, and what possibilities it opens for what may emerge next. We learn to ask: *Where is life flowing? Where is it constrained? What is being strengthened, renewed, or diminished? What might enable greater life and regenerative potential to emerge?*

Manifestation — Expressions of Life. *What has taken form at this moment?*

At any point in time, we can perceive manifestations of these ongoing processes: a building, business, organization, ecosystem condition, governance structure, food system, public space, cultural practice, pattern of relationship, or other observable expression of community life.

Manifestations are not final products. They are temporary expressions of ongoing living processes and life-giving flows that continue to evolve, influence the larger system, and create conditions for what becomes possible next. We therefore ask not only, *What has taken form?* but also, *What is this manifestation expressing about the life of the system, and what possibilities is it creating for what may emerge next?*

Dimensions: Ecological and Sociocultural

Dimensions help us distinguish two broad facets of communities as living systems: ecological and sociocultural.

The **Ecological Dimension** directs attention toward the more-than-human life, ecological relationships, conditions, and processes through which a place lives and renews itself: soil, water, air, plants, animals, microorganisms, biodiversity, habitats, climate, nutrient cycles, watersheds, and the larger ecological systems of which human communities are part.

The **Sociocultural Dimension** directs attention toward the uniquely human capacities and expressions that arise through consciousness, culture, relationship, reflection, choice, and intentional action: wellbeing, knowledge, values, worldview, identity, meaning, relationships, organizations, economies, governance, technologies, infrastructure, institutions, creativity, leadership, and collective life.

This distinction does not separate humans from nature. Humans are participants within ecological systems. Rather, distinguishing the sociocultural dimension recognizes that human consciousness and agency introduce particular capacities—and responsibilities—for reflection, choice, design, learning, and intentional participation in the development of living systems.

Regeneration emerges through the dynamic relationship between these dimensions, not through either one independently.

Components: Learning to Perceive the Living Whole

Living systems are too complex to perceive all at once. The **RCD™ Living-System Components** provide a sequence of inquiry through which practitioners and community members can progressively develop their capacity to perceive how a living system functions and emerges as a whole.

These components are distinguishable but inseparable. They are not independent pieces that can be understood in isolation. Each shapes and is shaped by the others, together generating the patterns, capacities, identity, vitality, and emergent qualities of the living system.

Beings — *Who and what is participating and co-creating?*

People, families, organizations, plants, animals, microorganisms, ecological communities, institutions, and other participants in the living system.

Relationships — *How are they relating?*

Relationships of reciprocity, cooperation, care, belonging, exchange, dependence, influence, collaboration, competition, and mutual support.

Flows — *What moves among them?*

Water, nutrients, food, energy, organisms, materials, money, information, knowledge, culture, attention, care, and other forms of exchange.

Systems — *What patterns and structures organize those relationships and flows?*

Ecosystems, economies, governance, culture, infrastructure, institutions, food systems, social networks, technologies, and other organizing patterns through which community life functions.

Capacities — *What can this living system currently do and become?*

Its capacities to learn, adapt, self-organize, collaborate, respond to change, renew, create, maintain vitality, develop resilience, manifest new possibilities, and regenerate.

Place — *What particular living context gives all of this its form?*

The ecology, landscape, climate, history, culture, identity, memory, relationships, constraints, gifts, and patterns that make this place unlike any other.

Potential — *What greater expression of life is becoming possible?*

What capacities are waiting to develop? What relationships could become more life-generating? What latent possibilities could emerge as the system develops greater vitality, coherence, and capacity?

The sequence helps us progressively build a more integrated perception of the whole: who and what is here; how they relate; what flows among them; what patterns and systems emerge through those relationships and flows; what capacities the resulting living system possesses; how all of this is shaped by the uniqueness of place; and what greater potential may be waiting to emerge.

The sequence should not be mistaken for a linear causal chain. In living systems, these components continually influence and co-create one another. Place shapes beings, relationships, flows, and systems; systems alter relationships and flows; relationships generate new capacities; capacities transform systems; and emerging potential can influence present choices and development. We distinguish the components in order to better perceive the whole—not to reduce the whole to its components.

Scales: Perceiving Nested and Networked Living Systems

Regenerative thinking and practice also require learning to perceive and work across **Scales**.

Individuals, families and households, organizations, communities, ecosystems, landscapes, bioregions, and planetary systems are nested within and connected to one another through dynamic networks of relationship and exchange. No community exists in isolation.

What happens at one scale can strengthen, constrain, or transform possibilities at others. A household decision can affect community relationships and resource flows. Community development can influence surrounding ecosystems and landscapes. Regional economic or ecological systems can expand or constrain what becomes possible locally.

Working regeneratively therefore means attending not only to what an action may generate here, but also to what it may enable or constrain across the nested and networked living systems of which a place is part.

Four Intersecting Lenses

Together, the four lenses provide a simple structure for learning to perceive living-system complexity:

- **DOMAIN** — *How is the living system developing and expressing?*
Process • Manifestation
- **DIMENSION** — *What broad facet of the living system are we considering?*
Ecological • Sociocultural

- **COMPONENT** — *What are we attending to within the living system?*
Beings • Relationships • Flows • Systems • Capacities • Place • Potential
- **SCALE** — *At what nested or networked level are we looking?*
**Individual • Family/Household • Organization • Community • Ecosystem •
Landscape • Bioregion • Planetary**

These lenses intersect rather than forming a hierarchy. We might examine ecological flows at a watershed scale, sociocultural relationships within an organization, the processes through which community capacities are developing, or manifestations of those processes in a neighborhood, landscape, or bioregion. Each lens changes what becomes visible while remaining connected to the whole.

The distinctions help us perceive complexity, but the living system itself remains whole. Dimensions, domains, components, and scales continually interact and co-create through the relationships and exchanges of place. Thrivability emerges through these dynamic relationships as different expressions of community life strengthen, constrain, and transform one another. (Figure 7)

The same structure can support deeper processes of regenerative reflection, assessment, and discernment. At its simplest, however, the RCD™ Perceiving Process teaches us to ask:

How is life flowing through the processes of the community, and what is being expressed or manifested? What dimensions of life are involved? Who and what is participating, how are they relating, what is flowing, what systems and capacities are emerging, how is place shaping the whole, and what greater potential is becoming possible? At what scales are these patterns operating—and how are those scales influencing one another?

As practitioners and community members develop greater capacity for living-systems thinking, the scaffolding itself can become less necessary. Rather than beginning primarily with categories, we learn to perceive more directly the relationships, patterns, dynamics, capacities, and possibilities emerging within the living whole—and to participate more consciously in their development.

Our own development expands our capacity to perceive, participate in, and catalyze thrivability. This is regeneration at its core.



Figure 7. *Living Relationships of Place*

Dimensions, domains, components, and scales are useful lenses for perceiving complexity, but in living communities they are inseparable. People, ecosystems, culture, livelihoods, built environments, relationships, flows, and capacities continually interact and co-create through place. As these relationships become increasingly reciprocal and life-generating, they can mutually reinforce one another, enabling greater expressions of life, regenerative potential, and Thrivability throughout the living whole.

Assessing & Discerning Life and Thrivability:

RCD™ Assessment & Discernment Process

The RCD™ Perceiving Process invites us to become increasingly open, attentive, curious, and receptive to the community as a living system—to notice its beings, relationships, flows, systems, capacities, place, potential, and the processes continually shaping what manifests across ecological and sociocultural dimensions and scales.

The **RCD™ Assessment & Discernment Process** builds on this capacity for perception. At particular moments in the ongoing life of a community, it invites us to pause and reflect on what we are perceiving so that we can better understand the community's current expression of life and developmental trajectory—and discern how our participation might support greater life and regenerative potential. (Figure 8)

Assessment and discernment are closely related but distinct.

Assessment helps us understand how fully the community is expressing life and its unique potential, its developmental trajectory, and how human participation is influencing both.

Discernment helps us decide how we might think, relate, choose, and act to support greater life and regenerative potential.

Assessment: Turning Perception into Data and Understanding

Assessment turns what we perceive into data that can help us understand the living system's current expression of life and potential, its developmental trajectory, and the influences shaping both.

Because communities are continually changing, any assessment is necessarily a snapshot in time. We pause within the ongoing processes of life to intentionally observe, document, describe, characterize, and, where useful, measure what we are perceiving.

Data within RCD™ is not limited to what can be quantified. Quantitative indicators can be considered alongside qualitative, observational, relational, and experiential forms of knowing. Together, these can help make visible ecological conditions and processes; patterns of relationship and exchange; flows of water, energy, materials, information, resources, and care; capacities for learning, adaptation, collaboration, and renewal; and qualities such as belonging, trust, meaning, wellbeing, relationship with place, community identity, and participation.

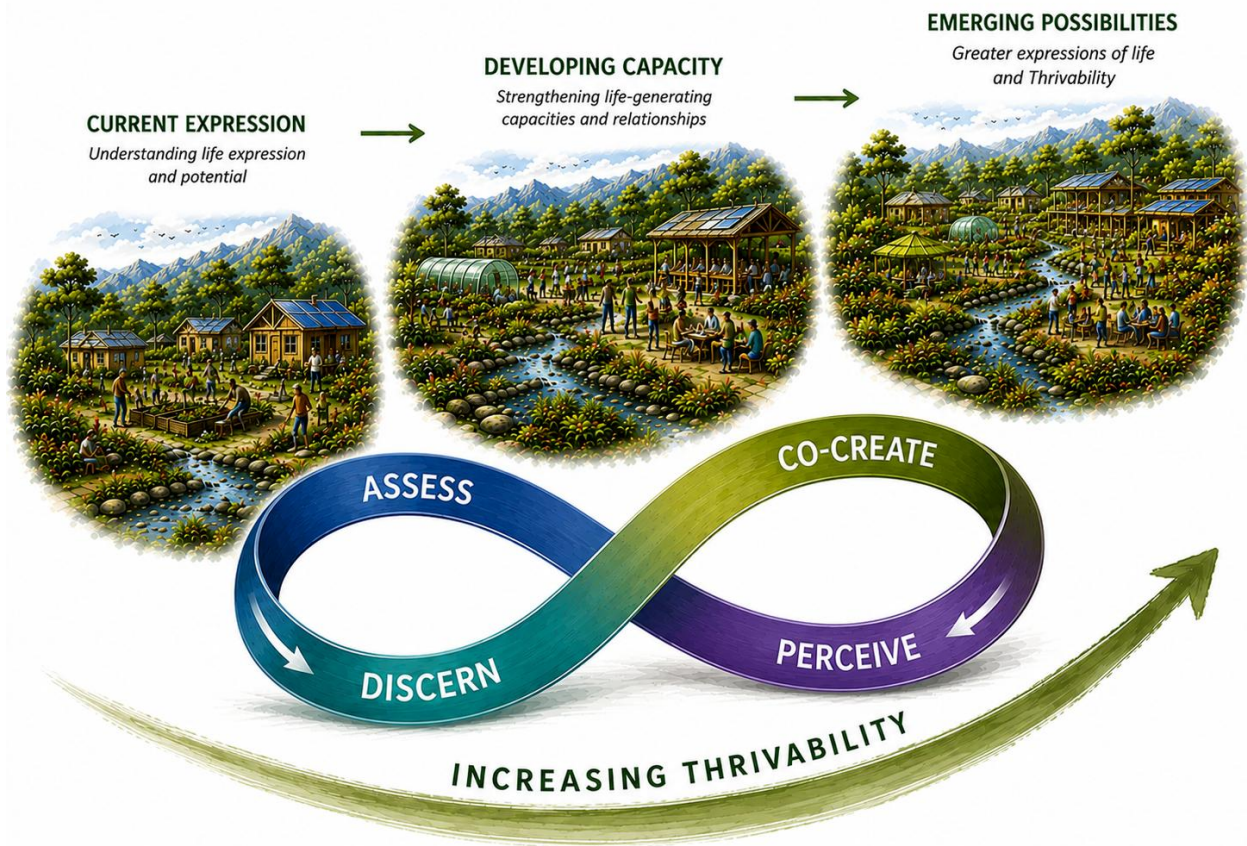


Figure 8. RCD™ Assessment & Discernment as a Developmental Process

The RCD™ Assessment & Discernment Process creates reflective moments within the continual development of a living system. Perception becomes data that helps us understand the community's current expression of life and potential, its developmental trajectory, and the influences shaping both. Discernment informs how we co-create to support greater life and regenerative potential. Through recurring cycles of perceiving, assessing, discerning, and co-creating, developing capacities and relationships can open new possibilities for greater expressions of life and increasing Thrivability.

The four lenses of the RCD™ Perceiving Process—Domains, Dimensions, Components, and Scales—provide a structure for determining what we might observe and assess. We can examine ongoing processes and their current manifestations; ecological and sociocultural dimensions; beings, relationships, flows, systems, capacities, place, and potential; and the patterns and influences operating across nested and networked scales.

The purpose, however, is not measurement for its own sake, nor is it to reduce the complexity of life to indicators or a score. The data helps us explore more fundamental questions:

To what degree is this community expressing its unique essence, life, and potential? Is it moving along a regenerative or degenerative trajectory? How are human thinking, relationships, choices, and actions influencing its expression of life and developmental trajectory?

These questions require us to look beyond isolated conditions. Life happens through relationships and interactions. Water flows. Energy flows. Nutrients cycle. Organisms move. Money circulates. Information travels. Knowledge is shared. Materials enter, transform, and leave. Care is given and received. Decisions alter flows of resources and opportunity. Cultural values shape relationships, governance, economies, physical development, relationships with land, and ideas about what constitutes a good life.

Assessment therefore helps us understand not only what is manifesting, but the relationships, processes, patterns, and capacities contributing to those manifestations and whether they appear to be increasing or diminishing the living system's capacity to generate and express life.

Discernment: Choosing How to Participate

Discernment builds on perception and assessment by moving from understanding toward conscious participation. The aim is to become increasingly capable of responding to and participating within the living system rather than imposing predetermined solutions upon it.

Given what we now understand about the living system and its trajectory, how might we participate in ways that enable greater expressions of life and potential?

Discernment asks:

What is supporting life, and what is constraining it? What wants attention? What should be protected or nurtured? What regenerative capacities could develop? What relationships could become more life-generating? What potential is becoming possible? How are our current ways

of thinking and acting influencing the system? What changes in human thinking, relationships, choices, or actions might enable the community to express more life? What is ours to do?

Discernment does not assume that regenerative participation always requires intervention. Sometimes it may mean changing an existing system or behavior. Sometimes it may mean developing a missing capacity, strengthening a relationship, altering a flow, or removing a constraint. At other times, it may mean recognizing, protecting, connecting, or creating space for life-generating processes already underway.

Assessment and discernment can thus help reveal regenerative and degenerative patterns, strengths and vulnerabilities, emerging and underdeveloped capacities, constraints, leverage points, priorities, and possibilities. Together, they help practitioners and community members make increasingly informed decisions about how their participation might support the community in generating, sustaining, renewing, and expressing greater life.

Assessment and Discernment as Development

Assessment and discernment are therefore developmental processes, not simply evaluative ones.

A young community, for example, may initially need to develop financial viability, infrastructure, ecological health, organizational capacity, trusting relationships, or foundational social systems. As those capacities develop, possibilities that were previously inaccessible may emerge: deeper cultural development, stronger local economies, more sophisticated ecological integration, expanded educational functions, greater community leadership, or collaboration across neighboring communities and bioregions.

Each cycle of perceiving, assessing, discerning, co-creating, learning, and adapting changes the living system from which the next cycle begins. The community does not return to the same starting point. It begins again with new conditions and experiences, potentially stronger relationships, expanded capacities, altered patterns and flows, and possibilities that were not previously visible or achievable.

Thrivability is therefore developmental rather than static. The question is not whether a community has achieved a predetermined ideal, but whether it is becoming increasingly capable of generating, sustaining, renewing, and expressing life and its own unique potential.

And the process develops people as well as communities. Practitioners and community members become increasingly capable of perceiving relationships rather than fragments, recognizing patterns and feedbacks, integrating different forms of data and ways of knowing, sensing

regenerative and degenerative trajectories, working across dimensions and scales, discerning emerging possibilities, and recognizing how their own thinking and participation influence what becomes possible.

Our capacity to perceive, assess, discern, and participate regeneratively develops as the living systems we participate within develop. Each changes what becomes possible through the other.

Acting With and As Life:

RCD™ Co-Creation Process

Perception helps us understand the community as a living system.

Assessment and Discernment help us understand its expression of life and developmental trajectory and consider how we might participate to support greater life and regenerative potential.

The **RCD™ Co-Creation Process** moves that understanding into *shared participation and action* with and as the living system.

Co-creation asks: *How do we work together, as a living whole, to bring regenerative potential into expression?*

Regenerative development cannot be created by any individual, profession, organization, or sector acting alone. Communities emerge through the participation of many people and organizations interacting with one another, place, and the larger ecological systems of which they are part. Bringing regenerative possibilities into expression therefore requires developing the capacity to work across differences, perspectives, disciplines, interests, and ways of knowing while recognizing ourselves as participants within and co-creators of the living system and remaining responsive to the living whole.

Co-creation may include developing shared vision and purpose; building relationships and trust; integrating knowledge and perspectives; navigating differences, conflict, and power; making decisions and distributing responsibility; designing strategies, systems, places, and practices; coordinating action; and continually learning from what emerges.

Regenerative co-creation is therefore more than collaboration among people. It is conscious participation with and as a whole living system.

Rather than imposing predetermined solutions upon a community or place, participants respond to and work with what perception, assessment, and discernment reveal. They seek mutually reinforcing possibilities through which ecological vitality, human wellbeing, relationships, culture, livelihoods, governance, infrastructure, and other expressions of community life can strengthen one another and contribute to the vitality of the whole.

This does not mean that everyone must agree on everything or share the same worldview, values, interests, or ways of knowing. Regenerative co-creation requires enough shared purpose, relationship, trust, communication, and collective capacity to work constructively with difference while remaining oriented toward the life and potential of the community. Co-creation is also an ongoing form of inquiry. Once decisions and actions enter a living system, they alter relationships, flows, conditions, capacities, and possibilities. Some effects may be intended; others may be unexpected. New capacities may emerge, constraints may become visible, and possibilities that could not have been anticipated may arise.

We therefore co-create, perceive what emerges, assess and discern what it means, learn, adapt, and co-create again.

Over time, the capacity to co-create becomes part of the regenerative capacity of the community itself. People become increasingly capable of working together, relating with place, responding to change, navigating complexity, learning from experience, and bringing emerging possibilities into expression.

Regenerative development is not something we do *to* a community. It is something we learn to co-create *within and as* the living systems of which we are part. (Figure 9)



Figure 9. Co-Creating as a Living Whole

Regenerative co-creation brings diverse people, perspectives, capacities, and ways of knowing into shared participation with one another and the living systems of place. Through shared purpose, relationship and trust, collective discernment, shared participation and action, and learning from what emerges, communities develop greater capacity to bring regenerative potential into expression. Co-creation is not simply collaboration among people, but conscious participation within and as the living whole.

Committing to Life:

RCD™ Commitment & Certification

Perception helps us see and understand the community as a living system.

Assessment helps us understand how fully the community is expressing life and its unique potential, its developmental trajectory, and how human participation is influencing both.

Discernment helps us determine how we might think, relate, choose, and act to support greater expressions of life and regenerative potential.

RCD™ Commitment & Certification takes the next step: making our intention—and increasingly aligned ways of thinking, relating, and acting—to participate regeneratively visible, explicit, and accountable.

Because regeneration is an ongoing developmental process rather than a destination, no community reaches a final state in which the work is complete. RCD™ Commitment &

Certification therefore does not certify that a community *is regenerative*. It recognizes a commitment to continually develop the capacity to perceive, assess, discern, co-create, learn, adapt, and deepen regenerative participation in ways that enable greater expressions of life and Thrivability.

The commitment is simple: *“We are committed to continually becoming more capable co-creators of thriving living systems.”*

Certification brings this commitment into a public and collaborative sphere, supporting transparency, accountability, responsibility, shared learning, and collaboration within the community and with the larger living systems and networks of which it is part.

From Compliance to Regenerative Practice

Standards and compliance remain important, but regeneration asks more:

Are our ways of perceiving, thinking, relating, choosing, and acting supporting this living system in expressing more life and more of its unique potential? Are we developing our capacity to participate in making that possible?

Standards, indicators, goals, and assessment provide valuable information, but they support a developmental process rather than define its endpoint. Through ongoing perception, assessment,

and discernment, communities can examine whether their intentions and actions are strengthening life-generating relationships, flows, systems, and capacities; learn from intended and unintended effects; and adapt and evolve as conditions and possibilities change.

Accountability therefore becomes more than demonstrating compliance. It means taking responsibility for the effects of our participation, learning from them, and evolving accordingly.

What regeneration requires changes as the living system changes. RCD™ Commitment & Certification therefore recognizes an ongoing developmental trajectory rather than movement toward a universal endpoint.

From Practice to Embodiment

Regenerative practice becomes transformative as it is increasingly embodied in the actual life of the community—its relationships, decisions, systems, culture, physical environment, and responses to change.

People develop within and as the living systems they co-create, becoming increasingly capable of perceiving patterns, discerning potential, collaborating, adapting, learning, relating with place, and making choices that support the vitality of the living whole.

Over time, regeneration becomes less something a community does and more a way the community learns to be. (Figure 10)

From Embodiment to Communion with and as Life

At its deepest level, regenerative development invites a shift from understanding ourselves primarily as managers of living systems toward recognizing ourselves as conscious participants *within and as life*.

Communion with life describes this embodied orientation of participation, reciprocity, awareness, relationship, responsibility, and belonging. It does not require a particular religion, doctrine, metaphysics, or spiritual belief. It has practical consequences: people, ecosystems, economies, cultures, places, and built environments are understood not primarily as separate entities or resources, but through the relationships and processes by which they participate in and influence the vitality of the larger living whole.



Figure 10. RCD™ Commitment & Certification: Regenerative Embodiment

RCD™ Commitment & Certification recognizes an ongoing commitment to regenerative relationship, participation, practice, and embodiment rather than achievement of a fixed state. Through conscious relationship with self, one another, place, and the rest of life, people and communities continually develop their capacity to participate responsibly and regeneratively within and as living systems. Certification brings this commitment into a public and collaborative sphere through transparency, accountability, responsibility, learning, and collaboration. Through recurring cycles of perceiving, assessing and discerning, co-creating, and deepening commitment, regenerative ways of relating and participating can become increasingly embodied in the life of the community.

RCD™ Commitment & Certification represents a public commitment to continually deepen our capacity to participate consciously, reciprocally, responsibly, and constructively within and as the living systems we co-create.

The aim is not perfection or completion, but continued development. Commitment & Certification provides a way to reflect upon and share how the community is increasing its capacity to express and generate life and manifest its unique potential—and how we are developing our own capacity to participate in making that possible.

Regeneration thus becomes an ongoing practice of perception, assessment, discernment, conscious participation, learning, adaptation, relationship, responsibility, co-creation, and increasing Thrivability.

Foundations in Practice and Research

Regenerative Community Development™ is grounded in thirty years of interdisciplinary scholarship, research, professional practice, and applied community work spanning ecology, anthropology, sustainability, the built environment, community development, human potential and development, leadership, and place-based inquiry. Further synthesized and refined through Dr. Gibbons' doctoral work in Sustainability and application across diverse regenerative community contexts, RCD™ has developed through an ongoing reciprocal relationship between research and practice: theory informs application, while experience within the complexity of living systems continually deepens and evolves the methodology.

VI. Looking Ahead: Toward a Regenerative Future

Regenerative Community Development™ begins with communities, but it does not end there.

Throughout this framework, we have seen that communities participate within nested and networked living systems. Individuals, families, communities, ecosystems, landscapes, bioregions, and the planet continually influence and co-create one another. Regeneration at any one scale therefore creates possibilities at others.

This is the larger promise of community-scale regeneration.

A regenerative community can revitalize ecological systems, create healthier places to live, strengthen relationships, cultivate meaningful livelihoods, develop human potential, and increase local resilience. And its influence can extend much further. The people who develop within that community carry new capacities into other places. Knowledge and practices travel. Enterprises connect. Ecological flows expand across property boundaries. Relationships among communities create opportunities that no individual project could generate alone.

As regenerative communities become increasingly connected, they begin functioning as networks of mutually reinforcing regenerative capacity, potential, and life expression. Communities share learning, resources, expertise, markets, educational opportunities, research, leadership, and experience while retaining the unique expression that emerges from each particular place.

This creates the possibility of moving from regenerative projects toward *regenerative regions and bioregions*.

A network of communities within a watershed, for example, collectively contributes to water quality, habitat connectivity, food systems, ecological restoration, local economies, education, and community resilience. Networks of developments share learning and resources while each responds uniquely to its own ecological and cultural context. Municipalities, nonprofits, businesses, educational institutions, landowners, residents, and community organizations increasingly coordinate their activities around the thriving of the larger living system they share. Cultures become consciously co-created across communities for collective thriving.

Regeneration then becomes less about creating exceptional projects and more about *cultivating patterns of life that propagate across landscapes and relationships*.

Development as Relationship

This larger possibility returns us to something fundamental.

At its deepest level, regeneration is about relationship. It concerns relationships among people; between people and place; among communities and ecosystems; between individual wellbeing and collective wellbeing; among present and future generations; and among the countless human and more-than-human communities through which life continually creates itself. Many

Indigenous and longstanding wisdom traditions contain concepts and practices that we might understand as forms of right relationship.

This is why regenerative development can also be understood as a form of **practical relational spirituality**. (Figure 11)

Here, spirituality refers to an experienced recognition of relationship, meaning, belonging, and participation within something larger than the isolated self.

For some people, this understanding may remain entirely grounded in ecology and living-systems science. For others, it may include contemplative practice, spiritual experience, Indigenous or ancestral traditions, ceremony, nature connection, or other ways of experiencing relationship with life.

Regenerative Community Development™ does not require agreement about the nature of those experiences. It does recognize their practical implication:

How we understand our relationship with life influences how we participate in it and co-create as it.

When people experience themselves as separate from the systems around them, development can easily become an exercise in managing external resources for human purposes. When people recognize that human health, prosperity, meaning, and possibility arise within relationships with other people, communities, ecosystems, and Earth, different questions become possible: How might our buildings participate in ecological health? How might our economies strengthen communities, people, and ecosystems rather than merely extract value from them? How might food systems nourish soil, bodies, relationships, livelihoods, and culture simultaneously? How might communities help people develop greater capacities for health, connection, creativity, meaning, awareness, and contribution? How might development create a more alive living system because humans participated there?

These are practical questions. They are also relational ones.

From Separation to Participation

Regenerative development ultimately invites a shift from thinking primarily about what humans can obtain from living systems toward asking how humans can participate within them in

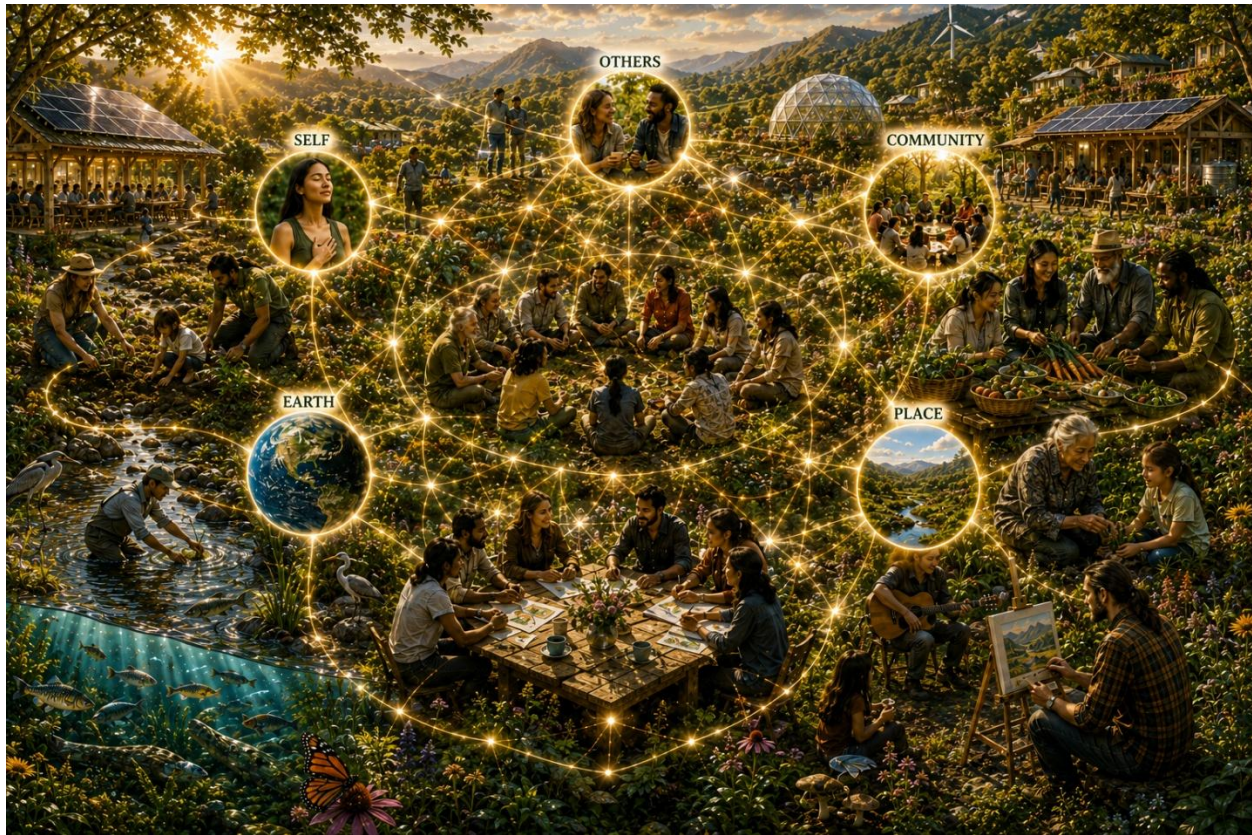


Figure 11. RCD as Practical Relational Spirituality

RCD understands spirituality as the lived, embodied knowing that we are interconnected parts of a greater living whole, and the ways of relating and living that arise from that awareness. Through conscious relationship with self, others, community, place, and Earth, this knowing becomes practical—expressed through attention, reciprocity, care, participation, stewardship, responsibility, and conscious co-creation. Rather than existing as a separate component of regenerative practice, practical relational spirituality can permeate the whole of community life, transforming relationship into practice, practice into a regenerative way of life, and our way of life into thriving.

mutually nurturing ways. Human thriving and planetary thriving need not be opposing goals. Within regenerative development, they become expressions of the same living process.

This does not diminish human needs or aspirations. Human beings need housing, food, livelihoods, health, safety, connection, beauty, meaning, opportunity, and joy. Regeneration asks how meeting these needs can simultaneously increase the vitality of the larger systems that make human life possible.

The relationships become reciprocal: A healthy forest contributes to human health. Healthy people contribute to healthy communities. Thriving communities revitalize ecosystems. Vital ecosystems create conditions for future generations. Meaningful livelihoods vitalize communities, people, and place. Revitalized landscapes generate new economic and educational possibilities. Strong relationships increase resilience. Beauty cultivates attachment to place and the desire to care for what one loves.

The question is no longer simply how humans can reduce our negative impact upon Earth.

It becomes:

How can humans and Earth enter into mutually nurturing relationships that increase the capacity for life to thrive?

That question has guided the development of Regenerative Community Development™ and remains open by design.

There is no universal answer.

A community adjacent to a tropical forest will answer it differently from an urban neighborhood. An affordable housing development will express it differently from a rural village, conservation community, retreat center, school, organization, or municipality. Different cultures will bring different knowledge, histories, values, practices, and possibilities.

Regeneration invites each to discover how it can become more fully alive.

An Invitation to Co-Create Thrivability

The challenges confronting humanity are significant. Technical innovation, policy change, ecological restoration, better buildings, new economic models, and improved infrastructure will all be necessary.

But regeneration asks for something more.

It asks us to develop our capacity to perceive relationships, participate within complexity, learn from living systems, cultivate our own human capacities, consciously co-create conditions through which life can continue to emerge, and embody regeneration as the process through which life expresses more life.

Communities provide a powerful place to begin.

Within communities, the personal becomes relational, the relational becomes cultural, the cultural becomes structural, and the structural influences ecological and planetary systems. Communities allow us to experience directly that the wellbeing of individuals, families, societies, economies, and ecosystems is not separate.

They are communities within communities, participating within and as one living world.

Regenerative Community Development™ offers a methodology for making that understanding practical: perceiving communities as living systems; assessing their expression of life and developmental trajectory; discerning regenerative potential; co-creating with and as the living whole; deepening commitment and responsibility; learning from what emerges; and continually developing the capacities through which greater Thrivability becomes possible.

The work is never finished because life is never finished. Each cycle of regeneration creates new capacities from which something more can emerge. Each thriving person contributes to thriving relationships. Each thriving community contributes to thriving landscapes. Each network of regenerative communities contributes to thriving regions and bioregions. And each of these participates in the continuing regeneration of Earth.

The possibility before us is not simply to create better developments. It is to consciously co-create communities that become ongoing expressions and generators of life—places in which people and Earth continually increase one another's capacity to thrive.

That is the invitation of Regenerative Community Development™.

And it begins wherever people choose to participate consciously *as* life. (Figure 12)



Figure 12. Consciously Co-creating as Life

Regenerative Community Development™ ultimately invites us to recognize ourselves not as separate actors working upon communities, ecosystems, and Earth, but as life consciously co-creating itself. People, communities, landscapes, waters, ecosystems, and the larger living world exist within an ever-changing web of relationship through which life continually gives, receives, adapts, renews, and emerges. As these relationships become increasingly conscious and regenerative, communities consciously co-create with and as the larger living whole, creating conditions for greater expressions of life and Thrivability—life continually breathing itself into being.

About the Creator

Leah Veronica Gibbons, PhD, is a regenerative systems thinker, Mystic Scholar-Practitioner, and founder of New Earth Awakening™ whose work explores how humans can consciously co-create with living systems to manifest greater life and Thrivability.

For thirty years, her work has moved across disciplines and between ways of knowing often treated as separate: ecology and human potential, scholarship and embodied knowing, science and spirituality, research and lived experience, practical implementation and visionary possibility. Her work integrates scholarly inquiry and professional practice with direct, embodied and mystical ways of knowing, allowing each to inform and deepen the others. Her central inquiry has remained consistent:

How can humans and Earth enter into mutually nurturing relationships and consciously co-create thriving life?

Dr. Gibbons developed the Regenerative Community Development™ Framework as a practical response to that inquiry. Grounded in living-systems thinking and developed through interdisciplinary scholarship, research, teaching, professional practice, Indigenous wisdom, embodied knowing, and direct engagement with communities and place, RCD™ helps people learn to perceive communities as living systems and consciously co-create the conditions through which their distinctive potential can emerge.

Her academic background includes a PhD in Sustainability from Arizona State University, an MS in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology from the University of Tennessee, and a BS in Biology and Anthropology from Vanderbilt University. Her professional work has included regenerative community development, sustainability, ecological inquiry, construction and the built environment, education, leadership, human potential, conscious embodiment, transformation, and the creation of tools for assessing and developing regenerative capacity.

Her work increasingly explores what becomes possible when regenerative practice develops beyond the application of principles and techniques into a way of perceiving, knowing, relating, co-creating, and being.

This inquiry is central to **New Earth Awakening™**, the larger wisdom and practice ecosystem within which RCD now lives. New Earth Awakening explores the development of human beings,

communities, and networks capable of **consciously co-creating thriving ways of being, living, relating, leading, developing, and creating community**—not only through changing what we do, but through transforming how we perceive, know, relate, embody, and co-create.

Dr. Gibbons' work is at once practical, scholarly, mystical, and visionary. She works with what exists while remaining oriented toward what wants to emerge; with measurable conditions and lived experience; with rigorous inquiry and direct ways of knowing that cannot always be reduced to measurement; with the realities of human and ecological crisis and the knowing that these conditions can become catalysts for profound transformation. At the heart of this work is a simple recognition:

We are inseparable parts of the living systems we seek to regenerate. As we develop their capacity to generate and support life, we develop our own. And as we change how we perceive, know, relate, and co-create, we change what becomes possible through us.

About New Earth Awakening™

New Earth Awakening™ (NEA) is a living movement and regenerative wisdom ecosystem guiding the conscious co-creation of thriving human cultures, communities, and living systems aligned with the intelligence of life itself.

NEA brings together regenerative systems science, embodiment, ecology, consciousness, culture, relational coherence, living-systems design, Earth wisdom, shamanic practice, and spirituality within a growing ecosystem of research, practice, community, and real-world experimentation. Its work begins from the recognition that the worlds humans create arise from how we perceive, experience, know, relate, value, understand, and embody ourselves in relationship with one another, Earth, and the larger web of life.

Regeneration therefore becomes both an **outer and inner developmental process of expressing more life**. As we regenerate places, relationships, communities, institutions, and ecological systems, we simultaneously develop our own capacity to perceive, relate, grow, embody, and consciously co-create thriving ways of living as New Earth.

RCD provides one practical doorway into this work.

Through regenerative practice, people can begin by learning to perceive relationships rather than fragments, potential rather than problems, living processes rather than static objects, and themselves not merely as observers or managers of systems but as **co-creators within them**.

For those who wish to continue further, New Earth Awakening explores the deeper developmental journey from understanding interconnection toward experiencing, embodying, and living it—and from conscious co-creation **with Life toward conscious co-creation as Life**.

Remember • Reconnect • Regenerate™



Your Thrivability Guide, Leah Veronica Gibbons, PhD

<https://newearthawakening.life/>

tribe@newearthawakening.life

lvgibbons@outlook.com

+1-941-224-6256

Continue the Journey

Regenerative Community Development™

For communities, organizations, developers, municipalities, funders, leaders, and collaborators interested in applying RCD to co-create thriving people, places, communities, organizations, and living systems. RCD also provides guidance in **Regenerative Leadership**, developing the perceptual, relational, co-creative, and living-systems capacities needed to lead within complexity and cultivate conditions for Thrivability.

New Earth Awakening™

For those interested in going deeper, New Earth Awakening™ is a **living movement and regenerative ecosystem** supporting personal, community, and planetary transformation and the conscious co-creation and manifestation of thriving human cultures, communities, and living systems aligned with the intelligence of life itself.

Collaboration & Co-Creation

Dr. Gibbons welcomes conversations with people and organizations developing and exploring regenerative communities, regenerative leadership, research and education, regenerative projects, place-based initiatives, New Earth Awakening, and other opportunities to consciously co-create and manifest greater Thrivability in the world.

**<https://newearthawakening.life/>
tribe@newearthawakening.life; lvgibbons@outlook.com
+1-941-224-6256**

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