

TRANSITION TOWARDS REGENERATIVE TOURISM

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Abstract: *Tourism has long been celebrated for its potential to drive economic growth and cultural exchange. However, conventional tourism models often prioritize profit over sustainability, resulting in environmental degradation, social inequity, and cultural commodification. The concept of regenerative tourism emerges as a transformative approach that goes beyond sustainability, aiming not only to minimize harm but also to restore and enhance ecological systems, cultural values, and community well-being. This paper explores the transition towards regenerative tourism by analyzing key principles, global practices, and the challenges faced in implementing this paradigm. The study highlights the importance of collaboration between governments, local communities, and private stakeholders in creating tourism models that regenerate natural resources, empower communities, and foster resilience. Ultimately, the transition towards regenerative tourism offers a pathway for creating resilient destinations, empowering communities, and addressing the challenges of climate change and over-tourism on a global scale*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been recognized as one of the most dynamic sectors of the global economy, contributing significantly to employment opportunities, foreign exchange earnings, and socio-cultural exchange across nations. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), international tourism accounted for more than 10% of global GDP prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, positioning it as a critical driver of development, especially for countries heavily reliant on this sector. However, the rapid growth of mass tourism has also revealed its limitations. Issues such as environmental degradation, cultural commodification, resource overexploitation, and unequal distribution of benefits have raised concerns about the long-term sustainability of conventional tourism models.

The discourse on sustainable tourism has attempted to address these challenges by advocating for practices that minimize negative impacts while maintaining economic viability. Yet, sustainability alone may not be sufficient to address the complex socio-ecological crises of the twenty-first century, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and social inequality. In response, the concept of regenerative tourism has emerged as a transformative paradigm. Unlike sustainability, which focuses on reducing harm,

regenerative tourism seeks to create net-positive outcomes by restoring ecosystems, revitalizing cultural heritage, and enhancing community resilience.

This transition towards regenerative approaches represents both a challenge and an opportunity for destinations worldwide. It requires systemic change that incorporates community participation, circular economy practices, and governance models grounded in equity and collaboration. For countries like Indonesia, with its rich cultural traditions and diverse natural resources, regenerative tourism offers a strategic pathway to align local wisdom with global sustainability goals. By embedding regeneration into tourism development, destinations can move beyond simply preserving resources to actively improving them for future generations.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the principles of regenerative tourism and explore the pathways through which destinations, particularly in Indonesia, can transition toward regenerative practices. Through a review of global best practices and a critical analysis of opportunities and barriers, this study highlights the significance of moving beyond sustainability to embrace regeneration as a guiding framework for the future of tourism.

THEORETICAL BASIS

Theories used in this research are:

1. Systems theory explains that a tourism destination is a complex socio-ecological system, consisting of interrelated elements such as society, economy, culture, and environment. According to von Bertalanffy (1968), a system is composed of interacting components that work together to maintain equilibrium. In regenerative tourism, systems theory provides a lens to understand how interactions among stakeholders—tourists, local communities, industries, and ecosystems—must be managed holistically to achieve restoration and resilience.
2. Resilience theory emphasizes the capacity of socio-ecological systems to withstand disturbances, recover, and adapt to change. Folke (2016) highlights that resilient systems not only return to their original state but also develop adaptive capacity to thrive in the face of challenges. In the context of regenerative tourism, this theory underlines the importance of enhancing community and ecosystem resilience to cope with climate change, mass tourism, and global uncertainties.
3. Community-based development theory underscores the significance of local participation and empowerment in development processes. Scheyvens (1999) argues that community involvement fosters a sense of ownership, enhances equity in benefit-sharing, and strengthens cultural identity. For regenerative tourism, this theory demonstrates that local communities must be active agents, co-designing tourism initiatives that align with their cultural values and aspirations, ensuring inclusivity and long-term benefits.
4. Sustainable development theory serves as the foundation for regenerative tourism. The Brundtland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED], 1987) defines sustainable development as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In tourism, this implies balancing economic growth, social equity, and environmental conservation. Regenerative tourism goes beyond sustainability by not only

minimizing harm but also creating net-positive impacts that restore ecosystems and enhance community well-being.

5. Regenerative design theory, as developed by Mang and Haggard (2016), advocates for development that actively contributes to ecological and social regeneration. Rather than simply reducing negative impacts, regenerative design emphasizes positive contributions such as restoring biodiversity, revitalizing local culture, and enhancing human well-being. This theory provides a framework for creating experiences and infrastructure that enhance rather than exploit destinations.
6. Transition theory analyzes the process of systemic change from one socio-technical regime to another. Geels (2002) explains that transitions occur through multi-level interactions involving policy, technological innovation, stakeholder collaboration, and behavioral shifts. In regenerative tourism, transition theory illustrates the pathway from conventional, extractive models of tourism toward models that prioritize ecological restoration, cultural preservation, and community resilience.

Together, these frameworks highlight that regenerative tourism is not merely an incremental adjustment in management practices but a transformative paradigm shift that seeks to restore, enrich, and sustain socio-ecological systems for future generations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative research approach, which is suitable for exploring complex socio-ecological and cultural processes such as the transition towards regenerative tourism. A qualitative approach allows the researcher to capture in-depth perspectives, lived experiences, and contextual realities of stakeholders involved in tourism development. A case study design was adopted to investigate how regenerative tourism principles are being implemented and transitioned within Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. This design enables the researcher to conduct a holistic analysis of social, cultural, environmental, and institutional dynamics that influence tourism practices. The study was conducted in selected destinations in Lombok, chosen for their unique cultural heritage, community involvement, and emerging sustainable tourism initiatives. Data Collection Methods: 1. In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including local community members, government officials, tourism entrepreneurs, NGOs, and visitors. These interviews allowed participants to share their insights, challenges, and aspirations regarding regenerative tourism. 2. Participant Observation: The researcher engaged in direct observation of tourism activities, community practices, and environmental initiatives. This method provided first-hand understanding of how regenerative principles are integrated into tourism operations and community life. 3. Document Analysis: Policy documents, tourism development plans, sustainability reports, and community records were analyzed to understand institutional support and strategies related to the transition towards regenerative tourism. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with relevant knowledge and direct involvement in tourism development, ensuring the collection of rich, context-specific information. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved coding interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents. Emerging themes were categorized to identify patterns related to drivers, barriers, and strategies in transitioning towards regenerative tourism. To ensure credibility, triangulation was conducted by comparing findings from interviews, observations, and documents. Member checking was

also applied by sharing preliminary interpretations with participants to confirm accuracy. Transferability was addressed by providing detailed contextual descriptions of the research site. Ethical standards were upheld by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality, and respecting local cultural values. The research was designed to minimize disruption and foster mutual respect between the researcher and the community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative research conducted in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, revealed several key findings regarding the transition towards regenerative tourism:

1. Community Awareness and Participation

Local communities demonstrated increasing awareness of the importance of sustainable and regenerative practices. Interviews indicated that residents recognized the value of preserving natural resources and cultural heritage. However, their participation remained uneven across different villages, with stronger engagement in communities directly involved in community-based tourism initiatives.

2. Governmental and Institutional Support

Policy documents and interviews with government officials highlighted that the provincial government has begun to integrate sustainable development into tourism planning. Programs such as ecotourism training and community empowerment workshops have been introduced. Nevertheless, these efforts are still fragmented and often limited in scope, indicating the need for more consistent and holistic policies aligned with regenerative tourism principles.

3. Challenges in Implementation

Several barriers were identified, including limited access to training, insufficient infrastructure, and dependency on external investors. Local entrepreneurs expressed difficulties in adopting regenerative practices due to financial constraints and lack of technical expertise.

4. Emerging Best Practices

Case studies from selected villages, such as traditional weaving centers and community-based homestays, showed promising practices that align with regenerative tourism. These included waste management initiatives, promotion of local culture, and involvement of women and youth in tourism enterprises.

5. Stakeholder Collaboration

The transition process requires stronger collaboration between stakeholders. The study found that partnerships between NGOs, local government, and communities contributed to more effective initiatives, particularly in environmental restoration and cultural revitalization projects.

The findings highlight that Lombok is at an early stage of transitioning towards regenerative tourism. The results resonate with Systems Theory, which emphasizes the interconnection between stakeholders. The fragmented efforts identified in this study suggest that while individual components (government, community, private sector) are active, integration remains a challenge.

Applying Resilience Theory, Lombok's communities have shown adaptive capacity in responding to tourism challenges, such as environmental degradation and economic shocks. However, resilience must be strengthened by enhancing education, diversifying income

sources, and building ecological restoration programs.

From the perspective of Community-Based Development Theory, the study confirms that empowerment and participation are essential. Villages that involved locals in decision-making processes showed higher levels of ownership and success in implementing regenerative practices.

The study also demonstrates the limitations of relying solely on Sustainable Development Theory. While sustainability seeks balance, regenerative tourism requires moving beyond neutrality to create net-positive impacts. Current policies in Lombok show a shift in this direction but require further integration of Regenerative Design Theory, focusing on restoring ecosystems and revitalizing cultural heritage.

Finally, drawing on Transition Theory, the Lombok case illustrates that moving from conventional to regenerative tourism is a gradual, multi-level process. This transition involves cultural shifts within communities, innovation among entrepreneurs, and supportive governance structures. The early-stage practices identified in Lombok serve as “niches of innovation” that could eventually transform the broader tourism regime if adequately supported.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusion

This study highlights that Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, is in the early stages of transitioning towards regenerative tourism. The findings indicate that while there is growing awareness and emerging practices among local communities, several challenges persist, including limited resources, insufficient infrastructure, and fragmented policy implementation.

The application of multiple theoretical frameworks—Systems Theory, Resilience Theory, Community-Based Development, Sustainable Development, Regenerative Design, and Transition Theory—demonstrates that regenerative tourism requires more than incremental sustainability measures. It represents a transformative paradigm shift in which tourism not only reduces negative impacts but also actively restores ecosystems, revitalizes cultural heritage, and enhances community well-being.

Overall, the research confirms that Lombok holds significant potential to become a model for regenerative tourism in Indonesia and Southeast Asia if systemic collaboration, capacity building, and policy alignment are strengthened.

B. Recommendations

1. Strengthening Policy Integration

Government at the provincial and local levels should adopt comprehensive policies that align tourism development with regenerative principles, ensuring that initiatives go beyond sustainability and contribute positively to ecological and cultural restoration.

2. Capacity Building for Local Communities

Training and education programs are essential to equip local communities, particularly women and youth, with skills in regenerative practices, entrepreneurship, and environmental management.

3. Promoting Collaborative Governance

Stronger partnerships between government, NGOs, private sector actors, and local communities are required to foster collective ownership and shared responsibility in tourism

development.

4. Scaling Up Best Practices

Successful initiatives in villages—such as community-based homestays, cultural preservation projects, and waste management programs—should be documented, supported, and scaled up across Lombok.

5. Fostering Innovation and Investment

Support should be provided for innovative projects that integrate regenerative design in tourism infrastructure, renewable energy, and ecosystem restoration, with careful attention to inclusivity and local benefits.

By adopting these recommendations, Lombok can strengthen its pathway towards regenerative tourism and contribute to global discussions on how destinations can achieve positive, restorative impacts through tourism.

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