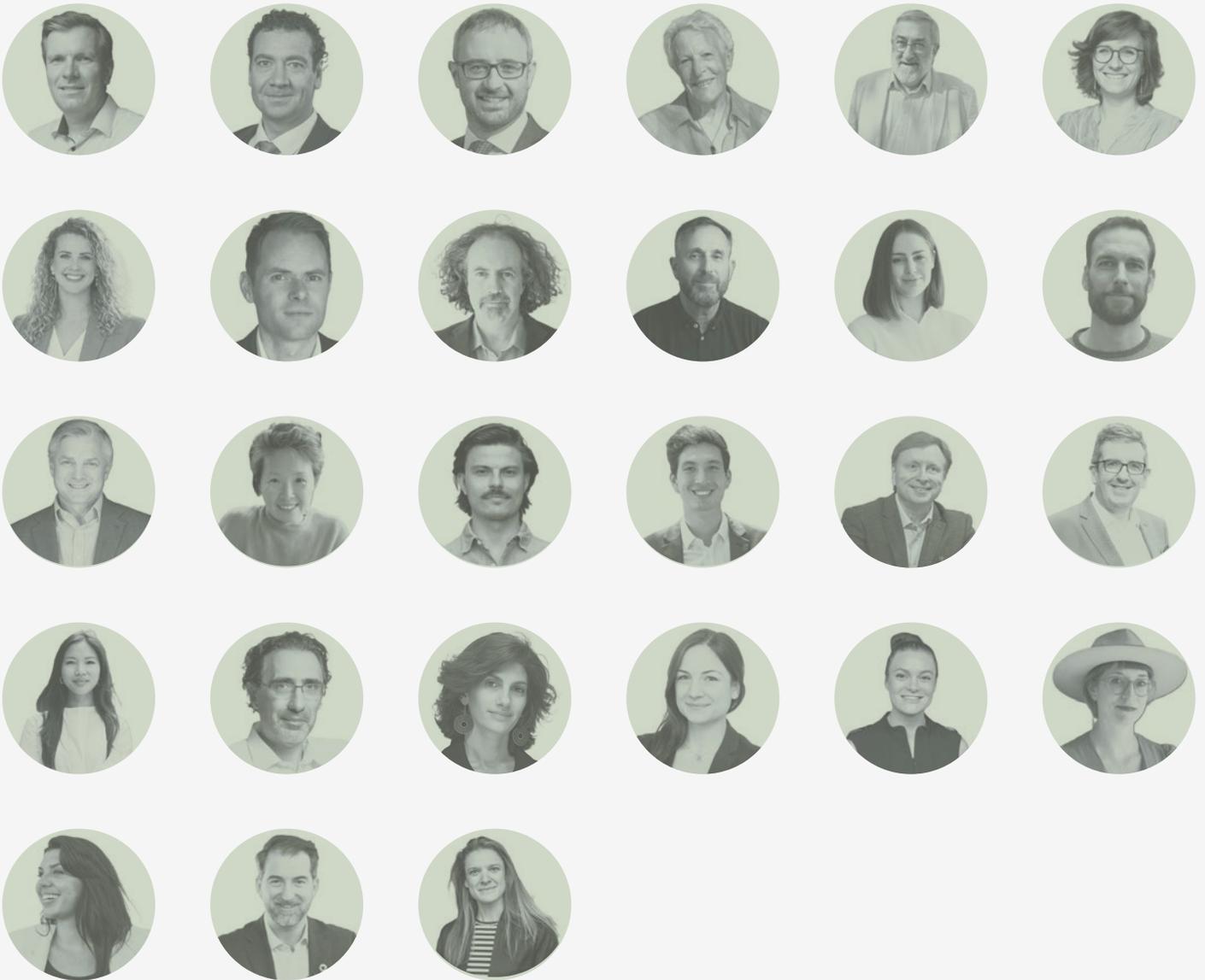


HYB26

Sustainability Edition

The Regenerative Question - What Hospitality Must Become



The Hotel Yearbook

Foresight and innovation in the global hotel industry



HYB



When Hospitality shapes places, not just stays

Community stewardship

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Regenerative hospitality reframes hotels from standalone assets into locally embedded infrastructures that strengthen ecosystems, communities, and destination resilience. Diane Binder argues that the real shift is from “doing less harm” to actively serving place – with independent and franchised hotels acting as catalysts for land restoration, cultural vitality, and shared prosperity, supported by new governance, measurement, and blended finance models.

For years, sustainability has been the hospitality industry's preferred language of responsibility. Reduce energy use; offset emissions; certify operations; report progress. And yet, wherever we look, the tensions are intensifying.

Destinations are grappling with climate shocks, water stress and biodiversity loss. Residents are pushing back against tourism that extracts more than it gives. Natural ecosystems are under mounting pressure. Infrastructure is strained. Workforces are fragile, seasonal, and increasingly hard to retain. In many places, the social license for tourism is wearing thin.

Regeneration matters because these are no longer marginal risks. They are structural. And hospitality sits at their intersection: at its best, hospitality can help restore degraded environments, revitalize local economies and foster meaningful relationships between guest and host communities. At its worst, it can accelerate the extraction and overuse of resources, erode local cultures and leave little economic benefit behind.

The regenerative question, then, is not whether hotels should “do better.” It is whether hospitality can redefine its role: from an industry operating in places to an actor contributing to the resilience of places.

This question matters even more when we consider who actually shapes hospitality worldwide. Around half of global hotel room capacity, and the vast majority of hotel properties, is operated by small and medium-sized independent hotels; roughly 60% of branded hotels globally operate under franchise models. In other words, hospitality is largely delivered by actors with a strong local footprint and often significant operational autonomy.

WHY LOCALLY EMBEDDED HOTELS CAN SHIFT DESTINATIONS

Hotels that are deeply rooted in their territories, whether independent, franchised or branded, occupy a unique position in destination ecosystems. They hire locally, source locally, influence land use and infrastructure needs, shape narratives of place, mediate relationships with residents, farmers, artisans, and municipalities. Their governance is closer to the ground, and their decisions are faster.

An independent hotel does not need thousands of rooms to influence food systems, water use, waste practices, cultural preservation, or land stewardship. It needs clarity about its role within a living system, and the courage to align operations accordingly. Regeneration does not require scale, but rather intention and coherence.

If hospitality is to become a lever for territorial resilience, it will not be through a handful of iconic flagships alone. It will be through thousands of independent hotels quietly reshaping how they relate to nature, community, and value creation.

WHAT REGENERATIVE HOSPITALITY IS, AND IS NOT

Regenerative hospitality is often misunderstood. It is not a greener version of business-as-usual. It is not an ESG upgrade. It is not a label, a certification, or a checklist.

At its core, regenerative hospitality treats the hotel not as a standalone asset, but as an enabling infrastructure within a living system.

This means a shift in perspective :

- From optimizing internal efficiency to strengthening external resilience
- From minimizing harm to actively contributing to ecosystem vitality
- From guest-centricity alone to stewardship of place

In a regenerative approach, hospitality becomes a catalyst: a space where people reconnect with nature, where cultural heritage is lived rather than displayed, where food, energy, water, and waste practices reinforce ecological cycles rather than break them.

Regenerative hospitality is an investment in the resilience of a territory: it considers hospitality as of service to the place. Through its practices, it enhances the resilience of assets, preserve destination attractiveness, mitigate physical climate risks as well as supply chain disruption risks; regenerative hospitality also delivers non-financial value such as social license to operate, ethical leadership, skills development and boost the entrepreneurial ecosystem of the destination.

What regenerative hospitality is not is equally important. It is not about copying a model. It is not about scaling a format. It is not about extracting value under a different narrative.

It is about designing hospitality as adjacent to public good, even when privately operated.

THE TENSION POINTS HOTELS CAN NO LONGER AVOID

Moving toward regeneration is a journey that requires shifting mindsets and paradigms, and exposing tensions. As outlined in the “[Regenerative Moonshot](#)” white paper launched by Regenopolis and Igarapé Institute alongside the World Economic Forum in Davos, four tension points emerge.

Financing is the first. Regeneration unfolds over long-time horizons vs. short-term profitability and cash-flow constraints. Hotels face daily trade-offs: occupancy growth vs. capacity within social and ecological boundaries, short-term returns vs. long-term restoration.

Governance follows closely. Many regenerative projects begin with strong founder vision, but resilience requires structures that protect purpose beyond individuals. The tension between control and stewardship becomes unavoidable.

Awareness and education present another challenge. Regenerative values are often experienced viscerally, through place, rhythm, and relationships, yet they must be transmitted consistently to staff, guests, partners, and investors without collapsing into slogans or compliance.

Measurement remains one of the most difficult frontiers. Traditional hospitality metrics capture financial performance and guest satisfaction, but regeneration also concerns biodiversity recovery, cultural vitality, social cohesion, and human transformation. Measuring everything risks reducing meaning; measuring too little risks losing credibility. And if we consider hospitality as part of a nested system, then how do we measure the ripple effect over land restoration, guest transformation, renewed dignity and well-being?

Across these operational challenges sit deeper paradoxes :

- Scale versus sufficiency
- Experience versus extraction
- Measurement versus meaning
- Governance versus control
- Capital velocity versus ecological time
- Well-being versus growth

Regenerative hospitality does not eliminate these tensions but has to work through them.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

In practice, regenerative hospitality takes many forms. No two territories are the same.

In Brazil, the [Ibiti Project](#) illustrates what long-horizon territorial stewardship can look like when hospitality is embedded within a broader regenerative ecosystem. There, hospitality revenue supports land restoration, local entrepreneurship, cultural programming, and education. The hotel is not the project; it is one function within it.

In southern Morocco, the work developed through 700'000 heures Impact around Tizkmoudine shows a different pathway. Micro-hospitality operates as a catalytic lever in a fragile rural context, helping revive an abandoned village, restore oasis-based agroecology, support women-led cooperatives, and preserve cultural memory. Scale is deliberately limited; impact is not, if supported the right way for long-lasting effects and replication.

These examples are not blueprints. They illustrate logics: hospitality as accelerator and catalyst, not extractive engine; guests as participants, not consumers; revenue as enabler, not endpoint.

What matters is not their form, but what they reveal: place is the teacher.



(c) 700,000 heures Impact, Tizkmoudine, Morocco

HOW HOTELS CAN MOVE THROUGH THE TENSIONS

Emerging practice points toward three converging pathways.

First, impact models must follow the regenerative journey, not only KPIs. Measurement should track pressures and progress across nested systems - ecological, social, economic - without pretending everything can be reduced to a dashboard.

Second, governance must evolve toward stewardship. Purpose needs legal, financial, and cultural protection. Freedom to experiment works only when boundaries are clear and trusted.

Third, financing must diversify. Regenerative hospitality cannot rely on a single balance sheet. Blended capital, combining hospitality revenues with philanthropy, public finance, impact investment, and emerging nature-based mechanisms, is essential.

AN OPEN INVITATION

Regenerative hospitality is not a destination. It is a way of organizing relationships over time.

What the sector needs now is not a perfect model, but shared direction and connections.

If enough hotels, across ownership models, geographies, and cultures, anchor their decisions in place, align around common principles, and share learning openly, something larger can emerge: a constellation of regenerative territories, connected by practice rather than standardization.

Hotels should ask a simple question: what does this place need to thrive, and how can hospitality help?

Hospitality will not solve the crises of our time. But it can become something better than it is today. As an industry that touches land, food, culture, labour and imagination at once, it is a powerful lever for transformation and a force for planetary regeneration. This makes them powerful coordination nodes, often more agile than public institutions and more grounded than global platforms.



“Show me only chemical-free,
bed bug-safe hotels.”



What becomes searchable
becomes bookable.

