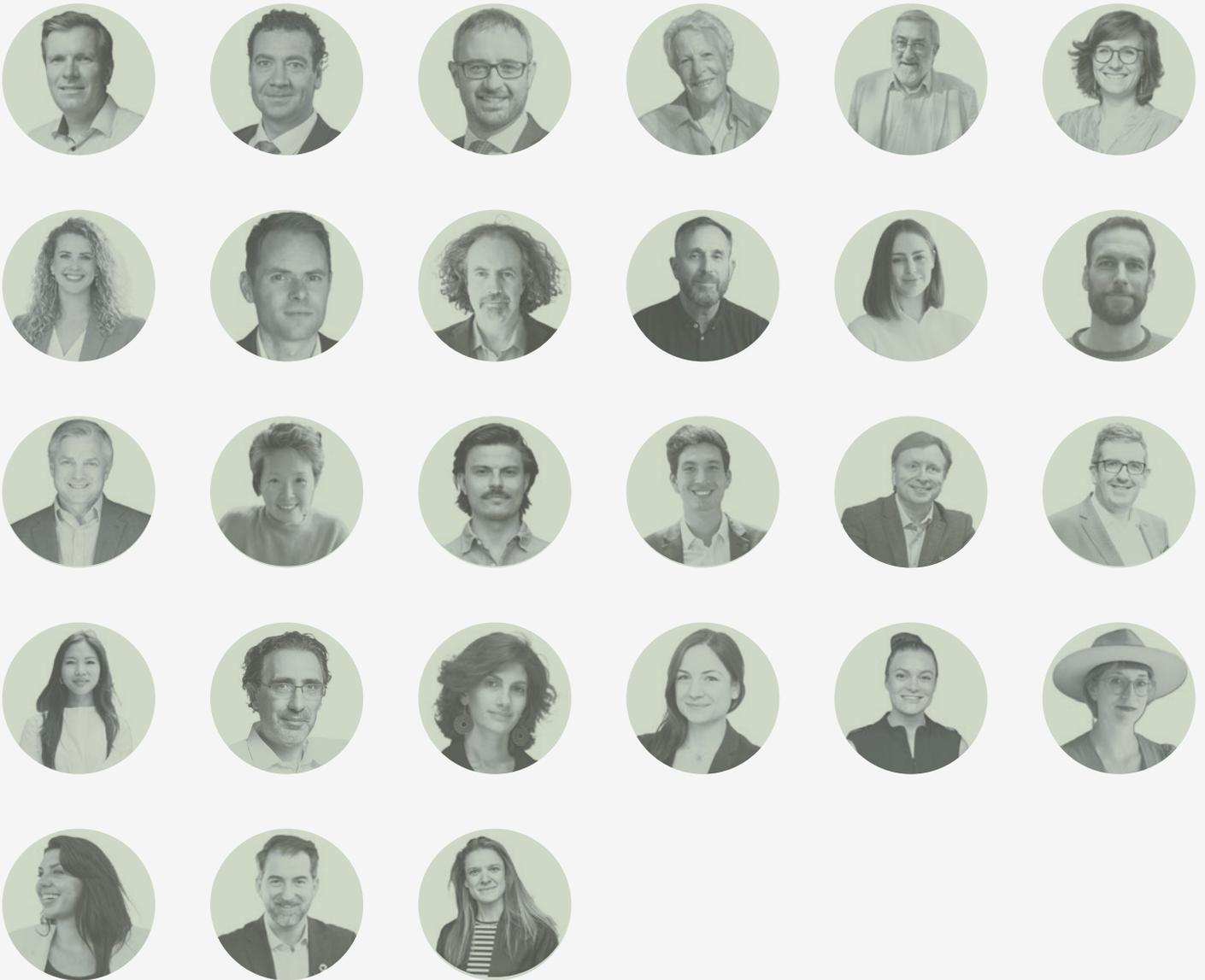


# HYB26

## Sustainability Edition

The Regenerative Question - What Hospitality Must Become



**The Hotel Yearbook**

Foresight and innovation in the global hotel industry



HYB



# What Hospitality Might Become

Post-sustainability

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*Yves Carnazzola argues that the real shift facing hospitality is not from sustainability to regeneration as competing trends, but from seeing hospitality as an industry managing impacts to seeing it as a participant in living systems. Regeneration is framed as a reorientation of purpose: from efficiency and control to coherence, shared responsibility, and place vitality, supported by new governance, financing, and accountability structures.*

## SUSTAINABILITY IS NOT THE ISSUE

Over the past two decades, hospitality has taken sustainability seriously. Real progress is visible. Environmental impacts are measured, energy use is tracked, emissions are calculated, supply chains are audited, and accountability is embedded in operations. Sustainability is no longer a goal; it is an expectation.

Sustainability emerged as a response to the excesses of mass tourism, where growth long ignored ecological limits, community well-being, and long-term resilience. It gave the industry a shared language for responsibility, along with practical tools to make impacts visible and align business practices with environmental and social concerns.

## REGENERATION AS REORIENTATION, NOT REPLACEMENT

Despite this progress, an unease persists across the sector. The regenerative question did not arise because sustainability was ignored, but because something still feels incomplete. The gap is not one of intention. Many hospitality leaders, designers, operators, and teams care deeply about the places they work in and the futures they help shape. The tension lies in the growing mismatch between what sustainability enables hospitality to manage and what hospitality, as a lived and relational practice, actually shapes.

This unease points to a deeper question about what hospitality is understood to be, not just how it performs. Regeneration is increasingly described not as a refinement of sustainability, but as a shift in purpose toward creating conditions for life, continuity, and shared futures, rather than simply sustaining existing systems.

## FROM CONTROL TO COHERENCE

This tension becomes visible at the edges of measurement and control. Sustainability has trained hospitality to focus on efficiency, reduction, and verification. It asks how impacts can be minimized, processes optimized, and performance measured. These questions are necessary, but not sufficient. They struggle to account for coherence, continuity, and relationship, or whether destinations become more resilient, communities gain agency, and ecosystems recover beyond reporting cycles.

What matters is not only what happens, but how patterns of interaction build and carry forward.

## HOSPITALITY AS A LIVING SYSTEM

Regeneration should enter the conversation not as a new label or higher standard, but as a different question altogether.

It asks whether hospitality should continue to see itself as an industry that manages impacts, or as a participant in living systems. In this view, hospitality is embedded in places that evolve over time, shaping relationships, meanings, and long-term trajectories, not only material flows.

A mechanistic approach treats hospitality as a system to be controlled and optimized against fixed targets. A living-systems perspective starts from interdependence and feedback, where care emerges through balance, diversity, and adaptation rather than predefined outcomes. This difference cannot be resolved through better metrics alone. It invites hospitality to reconsider how responsibility is shared, how value is recognized, and how decisions are coordinated among interdependent actors.

Seen this way, regeneration is not a performance upgrade, but a compass that orients hospitality toward the conditions that allow places, communities, and ecosystems to remain alive.

## THE GOVERNANCE GAP

Regeneration should not be a niche tourism product or specialized market segment. It is a broader way of rethinking how tourism is developed and governed. It relies on meaningful community involvement, shared capacity building, and inclusive decision-making, with visitors recognized as participants whose choices shape outcomes. Where sustainability works within existing structures to reduce harm, regeneration asks whether those structures support long-term aliveness.

In practice, this redistributes roles and responsibility across stakeholders. Communities, corporates, investors, public institutions, visitors, and ecosystems all play a part, with no single actor able to govern the system alone. This shift is visible where tourism is shaped from within communities. When tourism functions as a web of relationships rather than isolated activities, regenerative outcomes emerge more naturally. Yet not because they fail, but because governance and investment structures seldom support continuity.

This governance gap is mirrored by a structural financing gap. Regeneration unfolds across ecosystems, value chains, and communities, yet capital remains organized around isolated projects and single balance sheets. Activities that generate long-term ecological and social value, such as landscape restoration, community capacity-building, or cultural stewardship, are essential to hospitality resilience, yet remain underfunded because they do not fit conventional investment logics.

Addressing this mismatch requires a systemic and ecosystemic investing approach, where outcomes rather than outputs become the organizing principle. In this model, philanthropic, public, and private capital play complementary roles across a nonlinear value chain of impact. Financing becomes inseparable from poly-governance, with accountability distributed across the system rather than confined to individual balance sheets.

## THE ACCOUNTABILITY PARADOX

At the heart of this challenge lies an accountability paradox. Regeneration is often assumed to resist measurement, as if holistic change and accountability were in conflict. In practice, regenerative hospitality requires more accountability, not less, but of a different kind. Instead of being externalized and transactional, accountability must be shared and sustained. Existing sustainability systems are effective at verifying compliance, yet struggle to support collective responsibility across actors, places, and time horizons.

Relational accountability means remaining answerable to shared consequences as conditions evolve, not only at moments of audit. Individual actors may optimize their own performance while systemic outcomes remain unaddressed. Regenerative hospitality therefore depends on evaluation approaches that combine measurement with learning and adaptation, supporting coordination rather than control.

This shift also changes how value is understood. Sustainability focuses on reducing harm. Regeneration focuses on the quality of relationships that allow value to circulate and endure. In living systems, value is maintained through diversity, reciprocity, and coherence. Hospitality moves from managing impacts to participating in vitality.

## HUMAN-AI PARTNERSHIP

Such participation cannot be sustained by intention alone. It requires infrastructures that make contribution visible, responsibility shared, and outcomes legible without losing context or meaning. Outcome- and results-based financing across ecosystems depends on shared visibility, reference frames, and continuous learning across stakeholders. This is where digital commons become critical, not as platforms of extraction or control, but as shared governance infrastructure.

When paired with human-AI partnerships designed to support memory, coordination, and learning rather than prescription, digital systems help actors navigate complexity without flattening it. They retain place-based knowledge, qualitative insight, and historical context alongside quantitative signals, allowing responsibility to remain local while alignment across actors and time horizons becomes possible. Used this way, human-AI systems strengthen relational intelligence by helping practitioners see interdependencies, learn as conditions change, and remain accountable within shared living systems.

The regenerative question, then, is not whether hospitality should abandon sustainability, nor whether regeneration is the next trend. It is whether the sector is willing to reflect on the operating logics through which it acts. Sustainability taught hospitality how to manage impacts; regeneration asks what responsibility hospitality accepts for the worlds it helps shape.

## FROM PRINCIPLES TO PRACTICE

For practitioners, the regenerative shift is less a question of intent than of infrastructure. Moving beyond impact management requires operating systems able to hold context, relationships, and shared responsibility, rather than treating impact as disconnected indicators.

This calls for place-aware environments where quantitative signals and qualitative insight coexist, linking short-term actions to longer-term outcomes and systemic effects.

Digital solutions matter here not as tools for optimization or control, but as enablers of agency. When human judgment is paired with AI that supports memory, coordination, and learning, decision-making can remain local while coherence across actors and time scales becomes possible. Such systems help practitioners stay attentive to changing conditions and remain accountable without reducing complexity to abstraction.

Embedding human-AI agency at the core of hospitality systems allows regeneration to move from aspiration into daily practice, not by replacing sustainability metrics, but by situating them within living contexts where responsibility, learning, and stewardship endure.

## WHAT HOSPITALITY MIGHT BECOME

What hospitality might become is not a perfected industry, but a relational practice capable of holding complexity, responsibility, and care together. Its future will be shaped less by the sophistication of tools than by the coherence of the social, ecological, and institutional systems in which they are used.

Seen this way, regeneration extends beyond destinations themselves. By engaging hosts, practitioners, and visitors within living systems rooted in place and reciprocity, hospitality can influence how people experience responsibility beyond the duration of a stay. It does not seek to persuade, but to create conditions in which stewardship is lived.

Regeneration, then, is not a destination to reach or a model to complete. It is an ongoing commitment to remain attentive, responsive, and accountable to life as it unfolds through places, relationships, and the worlds hospitality helps shape.



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



What becomes searchable  
becomes bookable.

