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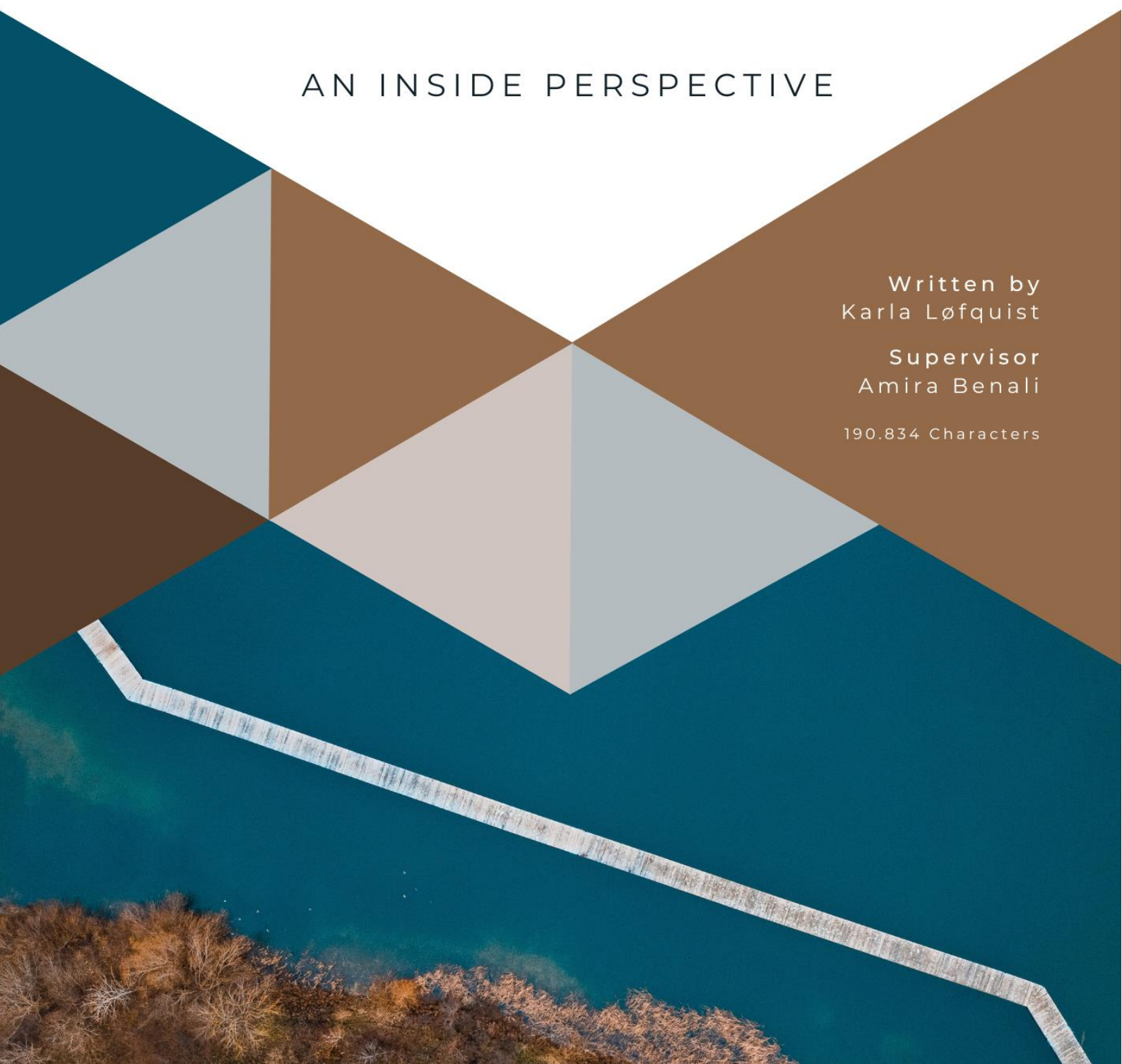
REGENERATIVE TOURISM IN DANISH DESTINATIONS

AN INSIDE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This thesis aims to explore the perspectives and practices adopted by tourism professionals in Danish tourism organizations and assess their potential for embracing a regenerative approach to tourism development. By examining their perspectives and practices, I seek to understand the opportunities and challenges involved in transitioning toward regenerative tourism in Denmark.

Design/methodology/approach – This approach defines regenerative tourism and explores its principles and practices and its transformative potential for stakeholders. It outlines how living systems theory and, subsequently thinking, can help tourism professionals in transitioning mindset and approach from sustainable tourism to regenerative tourism. The research employed a two-fold approach to gain insights into regenerative tourism in a Danish context. Firstly, a thematic analysis to assess the level of understanding among Danish tourism professionals regarding regenerative tourism development. Building upon the insights gained from the thematic analysis, a transformative stakeholder analysis was then undertaken. This analysis focuses on identifying the transformative power and potential of various tourism roles within the Danish tourism industry. Additionally, it aims to explore how tourism professionals can actively support and harness this transformative power, by examining the various roles and responsibilities within the industry, I seek to understand the ways in which tourism professionals can contribute to and promote positive change. The thesis concludes by identifying opportunities and challenges for tourism professionals when working collaboratively with stakeholders toward regenerative tourism in Denmark.

Findings – The study underscores the significance of education, awareness, and collaboration among tourism professionals and stakeholders in driving a fundamental shift toward regenerative tourism. The study reveals that the act of communing plays a crucial role as a regenerative change agent in advancing sustainable practices and fostering positive transformation. As key stakeholders, they have the power to drive and influence regenerative initiatives at the local level. Moreover, the act of hosting can play a crucial part in driving regenerative development, underscoring the importance of a bottom-up transition to regenerative tourism, and emphasizing that it will originate from the people and will be driven by their collective efforts. Additionally, the analysis highlights the need to perceive places as equal stakeholders in this transformative process and acknowledge the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature.

Originality/value – This study adds to the existing research on regenerative tourism by providing further contextualization. It contributes to the conceptualization of transformative roles and tourism living systems and validates living systems theory and thinking. Additionally, the study provides an inside snapshot of Danish tourism practices.

Keywords – Regenerative Tourism, Tourism Living Systems, Mindset Change, Tourism Roles, Transformative Stakeholders, Tourism Management, Danish Tourism, Danish Destinations

Paper type – Interpretive

PREFACE

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to each participant. Your contribution has been instrumental in shedding light on this emerging field and its potential to shape the future of regenerative travel.

Your enthusiasm and willingness to share your experiences have provided me with invaluable insights into the intricate aspects of Danish tourism practices and developments. By sharing your thoughts, preferences, and perspectives, you have played a crucial role in helping me understand how regenerative tourism can be implemented effectively in Danish destinations.

I am truly grateful for your participation, your involvement has been invaluable, and I sincerely hope that my research findings will contribute to the advancement of regenerative tourism practices in Danish destinations. Together, we can work towards creating a regenerative future for tourism.

Thank you all!

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Please note, all appendices are included separately with the thesis submission to Aalborg University and are not public accessible.

INTRODUCTION

Our world is caught between the imminent impacts of the climate crisis, the ongoing repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, and growing concerns regarding environmental degradation and social inequalities (Gössling & Higham, 2021; United Nations, 2023). This change in social-ecological consciousness is transforming tourism as we know it (Dredge, 2022; Pollock, 2022). A paradigm shift is under way and the concept of regenerative tourism is gaining popularity among experts (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022; Cave et al., 2022; Dredge, 2022; Fusté-Forné & Hussain, 2022; Gibbons, 2020; Mathisen et al., 2022; Pollock, 2015; Tomassini & Cavagnaro, 2022).

The regenerative mindset is rooted in a living systems worldview, with the aim of fostering conditions that enable all entities of life to renew and restore themselves. It recognizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living beings and the environment, emphasizing the importance of nurturing and sustaining the natural systems that support life. This mindset acknowledges that changes in one part of the system can have ripple effects on the entire system (Mang & Reed, 2012; Reed, 2007). Dias (2018) describes it as:

“Regeneration aim to building healthy human and natural networks, drawing on universal principles and patterns, in which “sustainability” and resilience is a byproduct of systemic health. Is not just about reducing impact or doing good things to nature, it is about recognizing that we are part of nature and that our activities need to be designed and integrated in a way it contribute and add to the whole, instead of just extract” (Dias, 2018, p.316).

Regenerative development takes a systemic approach, viewing global challenges such as climate change and health challenges as opportunities for positive change and growth (Dias, 2018). It fosters collective action among diverse cultures and disciplines, working towards a common goal of

protecting, restoring, and revitalizing the natural environment and local communities (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022; Dias, 2018), and as such will have a transformative effect on mindset, systems, and practices (Dredge, 2022). By adopting regenerative principles, tourism shifts from being extractive to regenerative, aiming to leave a positive footprint on the destinations. This shift in mindset prompts a profound change in tourism systems and practices, encouraging sustainable resource management, community engagement, and cultural preservation. It fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of the interrelationships between humans and nature, leading to more responsible and conscientious behaviors (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022; Dredge, 2022; Gibbons, 2020). This paradigm shift is already taking place around the world and in Denmark, in small ground-up ways that are progressively intertwining into a wave of transformation (Dredge, 2022). The transformative power of regenerative tourism lies in its ability to reshape the tourism industry from a linear, resource-depletion model to a circular, regenerative one.

In Denmark tourism professionals are navigating the multifaceted and complex web of opportunities and challenges as they strive to establish sustainable tourism practices as part of the newly released report ‘National Tourism Strategy 2022’. According to the Government, it is crucial for tourism professionals to demonstrate environmental and social accountability as well as the capacity to generate economic value (Erhvervsministeriet, 2022). The Danish sustainable tourism practices have the potential to serve as significant turning points in the journey towards regenerative and thriving systems (Gibbons, 2020). As the country aims to embrace a more sustainable approach to tourism, these practices are providing a smooth transition towards a regenerative future.

In addition, guests are also increasingly demanding regenerative tourism practices. Guests are seeking intimate and unique experiences, rather than distant and exotic ones. The transformative impact of their journey is paramount, as they value self-discovery and meaningful engagement with

destinations. Active involvement and contribution, rather than passive observation, are preferred by guests who strive for a deeper connection with the places they visit (Erhvervsministeriet, 2022; Med Pearls, 2021; VisitDenmark, 2022).

Thus, regenerative tourism offers a promising path forward for the Danish tourism industry, helping to ensure its long-term sustainability and viability. Regenerative tourism provides a framework for developing tourism experiences that restore and revitalize the environment and protects and support local communities.

Investigating whether Danish tourism organizations are working towards regenerative tourism and understanding the capacities and involvement of various stakeholders in this context holds significant relevance and interest. With increasing concerns over environmental and social challenges, regenerative tourism aligns with the global sustainability agenda (Gibbons, 2020; Myers, 2020; Reed, 2007). Understanding how tourism organizations embrace this concept can provide insights into their efforts to address these pressing challenges. Researching the involvement of tourism organizations and stakeholders in regenerative tourism can uncover existing practices, strategies, and initiatives implemented to restore and enhance natural and cultural assets. Additionally, examining their approaches will provide valuable insights into the implementation of regenerative principles within tourism destinations and investigating the various stakeholders' involvement in regenerative tourism in Denmark will highlight the collaborative efforts and partnerships that underpin regenerative tourism development. Therefore, my research question is as follows:

Research question

What kind of opportunities and challenges do tourism organizations experience when working collaboratively with stakeholders towards regenerative tourism?

Examining the capacities of tourism organizations in implementing regenerative tourism practices is crucial for assessing their readiness, resources, and challenges. It enables an evaluation of the institutional frameworks, policy support, infrastructure, and human capital necessary to drive regenerative initiatives effectively. Exploring the relevance and interest of tourism organizations in implementing regenerative tourism practices offers valuable insights into the sustainable tourism landscape in Denmark. This thesis aims to uncover the extent to which tourism organizations embrace regenerative principles, the involvement of different stakeholders, and the capacities available for implementing such practices. By understanding the current state and identifying areas for possible improvement, this thesis can contribute to the advancement of regenerative tourism in Denmark.

Qualitative Research into Transformative Roles in Danish Tourism

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the transformative potential of tourism, not only in terms of economic development but also in fostering positive social and environmental change. This realization has sparked a shift towards understanding and harnessing the transformative roles that various stakeholders play within the tourism industry (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022; Grin et al., 2018; Nandasena et al., 2022; Ritz & Rimanoczy, 2021). This thesis delves into the transformative roles of placing, communing, stewarding, hosting, and guesting within tourism living systems, as defined by Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al. (2022). Through a comprehensive transformative stakeholder analysis, my research examines the dynamic interactions and contributions of these key stakeholders in shaping and enhancing the regenerative tourism experience. Additionally, my research focuses on exploring the adoption and perception of regenerative tourism within Danish tourism organizations. Utilizing a thematic analysis approach, I aim to provide insights into the collective understanding and widespread implementation of

regenerative tourism practices in Denmark. To acquire appropriate and valuable research information, the empirical data for this thesis will predominantly rely on in-depth interviews conducted with Danish tourism professionals, employed in official tourism organizations within Denmark.

With this thesis I aim to contribute to the ongoing contextualizing body of work on regenerative tourism while also contributing to the conceptualization of transformative roles in tourism and the validation of existing theories and assumptions. The thesis is intended for both international and national tourism colleagues and those new to the profession. The thesis will provide a snapshot of the transformative stakeholders through the perspective of Danish tourism managers and destination directors in the Scandinavian tourism market at a time of great change.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review elaborates the adaptation of a regenerative mindset as a theoretical position for advancing regenerative tourism and suggests that by embracing regenerative principles and transformative roles, tourism professionals can work together to create more sustainable and resilient destinations.

Academic Understanding Regenerative Tourism Practices

Regenerative tourism is a response to growing concerns about the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and local communities (Dredge, 2022; Pollock, 2019). Based on Western science and the living cultures of Indigenous peoples (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, & Nygaard, 2022), regenerative tourism aims to create a more sustainable, circular, and resilient tourism industry that actively contributes to the restoration and regeneration of natural and cultural resources, while creating value

for local communities and guests (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, & Nygaard, 2022; Dredge, 2022; Pollock, 2019). Gibbons (2020) defines the term 'regenerative' as a process of renewal and restoration that goes beyond traditional notions of sustainability. Similarly, to Gibbons (2020), Mang and Haggard (2016) argue that it is not enough to simply minimizing the negative impacts and thus, sustaining the existing worldview, and continues that regenerative tourism, on the contrary, seeks to create positive impacts by actively contributing to the regeneration of ecosystems, communities, and cultural heritage. Bellato, Frantzeskaki, and Nygaard (2022) concurs and adds that it requires a shift in mindset from traditional tourism practices that prioritize growth and profit, to a more holistic and integrated approach to tourism developments that considers the social, cultural, environmental, and economic dimensions of regenerative tourism. Dredge (2022) agrees and points out, that this approach emphasizes the need to balance the interests of different stakeholders, and to promote just and inclusive forms of tourism that benefit all parties, as a bottom-up approach, that is place bound and community-centered.

According to Reed (2007) a regenerative approach is based on systems thinking, holistic problem-solving, and collaboration across different sectors and stakeholders. It seeks to create regenerative cycles that promote resilience, adaptability, and long-term sustainability. Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al. (2022) agrees and adds that tourism stakeholders should adopt a living systems approach to tourism, which views tourism as an interconnected and interdependent system of living organisms that are constantly evolving and adapting. This approach involves recognizing the complex and dynamic relationships between tourism, society, and the environment. To achieve this, tourism stakeholders need to adopt new roles and practices that are aligned with Living Systems Theory. These include adopting a systems perspective that considers the interconnections between different parts of the tourism systems, promoting community engagement and participation, embracing innovation and experimentation, and prioritizing regenerative outcomes over short-term gains.

Subsequently, the next step involves determining the implications of regenerative tourism for organizations and businesses operating in the tourism industry, which Pollock (2022) points out still lacks sufficient regenerative certifications. Another challenge with regenerative tourism is that it is vague and lacks clear operational guidelines. According to Hussain and Haley (2022), there is a lack of clarity about what constitutes regenerative tourism and how it differs from other forms of sustainable tourism.

Hussain et al. (2022) argue that regenerative tourism involves a complex and dynamic system of interactions between natural, social, and economic factors. This complexity can create uncertainty and ambiguity, which can make it difficult for tourism professionals to implement regenerative tourism practices. Gössling & Higham (2021) agrees and argues that clusters of tourism stakeholders within destinations have an enormous power to change the trajectory of how tourism is conducted, if they know how and can contribute to prioritizing value over volume. However, evidence suggests that many destination planners have yet to take proactive measures. Hussain and Haley (2022) continue by pointing out that institutional barriers, such as regulatory frameworks, policies, and market forces, can also hinder the adoption of regenerative tourism. Many of these barriers are deeply entrenched in the tourism industry and changing them will require significant effort and resources. Regenerative tourism requires a collective effort from all stakeholders, and effective collaboration and coordination are critical for its success. Furthermore, Hussain and Haley (2022) notes that there is a limited scientific understanding of regenerative tourism, which can hinder its adoption. There is a need for further research to develop a clear understanding of the principles, concepts, and practices of regenerative tourism.

Working Towards Regenerative Tourism Practices

Several studies have examined the concept of regenerative tourism and its potential regenerative benefits for destinations. For example, a study by Becken and Kaur (2022) who designed a conceptual framework that contextualizes the discourse on tourism value within a broader context. Through tourism strategies, stakeholder input, and discussions with government officials, a values-based framework for tourism was developed, which brings attention to the fact that there are deep-rooted ontological and epistemological inquiries concerning the significance of tourism that persist. These queries are especially important to the connection between humans and the environment, which is at the core of tourism travel. While another study by Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019) examined the potential of degrowing tourism by suggesting several ways in which degrowth can be implemented in the tourism industry, such as prioritizing quality over quantity, promoting local and community-based tourism, and encouraging reduced or slower transportation. Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019) argue that tourism ought to be reconceived as a human activity centered around the rights and interests of the local communities who welcome guests, rather than being viewed solely as a business sector designed for profit.

When working towards a regenerative paradigm, understanding that sustainable and regenerative tourism are closely related and share many similarities are crucial, but there are also distinct differences that set them apart, as Becken and Kaur (2021) noted and thus, conducted a study to construct a conceptual framework for understanding the value of tourism from a government perspective, and the difference between sustainable tourism and regenerative tourism based on literature. A section of Becken and Kaur's (2021) work is illustrated below.

Characteristics	Sustainable Tourism	Regenerative Tourism
Scale	<i>Cross-scale:</i>	<i>Place-based:</i>

	Destination needs are considered in national and global decision making.	Decision-making is collaborative and recognizes place and its unique geography, human history, culture, local environment, and changing human needs.
Underpinning values and belief	<i>Human around Nature:</i> Tourism seen as economic activity but seeking to internalize external costs.	<i>Human in Nature:</i> Tourism occurs within the biosphere and socio-cultural systems and understand/respect system dynamics and boundaries.
Ideology and solutions	<i>Technological and managerial:</i> Improved technology and management are preferred solutions to minimize negatives impacts and increase positive ones.	<i>Innovative, Adaptive, Responsive:</i> Allow for entrepreneurship and support small business, or alternative business models (e.g., social enterprise). Adapting to change and dynamics of living systems is the normal.
Understanding and wealth	<i>Commercial – damage control:</i> Allocates resource towards generating benefit for non-commercial return, but focus remains on creating financial wealth.	<i>Multiple well-beings:</i> Seeks a balance across multiple wealth and promotes fair distribution of benefits.
Systemic perspective	<i>Industry Focused:</i> Industry needs are understood as being part of a 'sector', these president community and environmental needs.	<i>Holistic:</i> Tourism is a sub system that functions within a larger system. The health of all human systems depends on each other and the health of the natural system.
Organizing principles	<i>Efficiency:</i> Systems are driven towards increasing efficiency.	<i>Biomimicry:</i> Principles such as redundancy, abundance, and regulating feedback loops are important. Learning from nature and collaborating with it are central.

Participation	<i>Participatory:</i> Input from a wide range of stakeholders is sought before decisions are made.	<i>Distributed – networked:</i> Participation involving all parties of the larger whole in ways that empower people. Everyone provides their unique contribution towards system health.
Knowledge base	<i>Multi-disciplinary:</i> Includes a broad range of disciplines including engineering and environmental management.	<i>Trans-disciplinary:</i> Knowledge comes in many forms, including Western science, indigenous, and practical knowledge.

Figure 1. Comparison of sustainable and regenerative tourism (Becken and Kaur, 2021, p. 55)

As figure 1. describes, there are at least eight notable distinctions between sustainable tourism and regenerative tourism. The primary focus of sustainable tourism is to strike a balance between the negative and positive impacts of tourism, acknowledging the trade-off involved. When discussing sustainable tourism, the main emphasis lies in finding a delicate balance between the negative and positive effects that tourism can have on destinations and communities. Sustainable tourism aims to minimize the detrimental impacts while maximizing the beneficial outcomes, ensuring a harmonious relationship between tourism activities and the environment, culture, and socioeconomic aspects of the destination (Pollock, 2022). What is common in all eight distinctions of regenerative tourism is the recognition that humans are part of nature and that everything is interconnective and interdependent living systems. This understanding should guide the tourism practices, argued by Becken and Kaur (2021). According to Gibbons (2020) and Bellato, Frantzeskaki, and Nygaard (2022) there is no need to completely discard the idea of sustainable development goals. Rather, they can be seamlessly integrated into a regenerative development process. While formulating and executing regenerative development goals, sustainability and sustainable development goals can play a crucial role as intermediate milestones in transitioning systems to regenerative and thriving ones.

To achieve this, it is essential to integrate and harmonize sustainable development goals in order to maximize their positive systemic impacts.

The transition from sustainable to regenerative tourism presents a myriad of challenges, necessitating strong leadership and creative solutions to address this complex issue as (Grin et al., 2018) emphasize in their study on transformational leadership. Here they conclude that the need of having a shared vision and ambition is crucial, because it can motivate stakeholders by outlining a productive approach to address a complex problem. Additionally, this shared vision provides direction and credibility to the collaborative efforts needed for systemic innovation.

According to a study by Cave et al. (2022), collecting valuable insights into the challenges that tourism professionals face as facilitators of regenerative tourism includes disapproving culture, power dynamics, and organizational structures. Furthermore, tourism professionals are advocating for practical tools, fresh perspectives, and real-world examples to promote regenerative tourism. Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al. (2022) responded by proposing to consider tourism as a part of a broader living systems, that includes natural and social ecosystems which aims to create mutually beneficial relationships between them. Furthermore, Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al. (2022) suggest that various stakeholders, including policymakers, businesses, and communities, can play transformative roles in achieving regenerative tourism. Policymakers can create enabling conditions for regenerative tourism through regulatory frameworks and incentives. Businesses can adopt regenerative practices and develop innovative business models that prioritize sustainability and social responsibility. Communities can engage in co-creation and co-design processes to ensure that tourism benefits their well-being and cultural identity.

Regenerative Tourism Development in a Danish Context

To my knowledge, there is an absence of academic research on regenerative tourism in Denmark, despite discussions among Danish academics and professionals regarding its importance (Dragin-Jensen, 2022). However, there are academic articles addressing Danish tourism stakeholders' practices. Andersen et al. (2018) called out the Danish tourism stakeholders as failing to approach sustainable tourism development as a comprehensive concept, lacking long-term vision while prioritizing economic gain. Implying that Danish tourism stakeholders have shortcomings in their approach to sustainable tourism. This critique underscores the need for a more comprehensive, long-term, and balanced approach. A Danish/Norwegian case study by Liburd et al. (2022) explored ways in which collaborative design in tourism can transform practices. It highlights the importance of cultivate dynamic interconnections, navigate complexity, and foster a culture of stewardship alongside stakeholders. It recognizes the significance of collaboration as a means to address the intricate challenges faced by the tourism industry. Liburd et al. (2022) continues and argues that the challenges undertaken by tourism professionals demands courage, trust, and a willingness to take risks as they navigate uncharted territory. They must contend with the unknown, which has yet to take shape.

Embracing a Regenerative Mindset as a Researcher

The regenerative mindset serves as the overarching framework that sets the scene for further research and constructs the foundation of the investigation, propelling this thesis forward.

By adopting a regenerative mindset, I embrace a holistic and forward-thinking perspective that goes beyond traditional sustainability approaches. This mindset acknowledges the urgent need for transformative change and recognizes the interconnectedness between tourism and its broader socio-

ecological context (Dredge, 2022). The regenerative mindset guides the selection of research questions, theories, methodologies, and analytical frameworks. It provides a lens through which I examine the complex dynamics of regenerative tourism, exploring how destinations can actively regenerate and enhance their ecological, socio-cultural, and economic aspects.

The regenerative mindset also drives my exploration of transformative tourism roles and collaborative approaches within the tourism industry. It encourages a systems-thinking approach, recognizing that tourism is deeply intertwined with local communities, ecosystems, and cultural heritage. This mindset fosters an understanding that regenerative tourism requires collective action, involving various stakeholders working together towards a common goal (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022).

By setting the scene with a regenerative mindset, I acknowledge the importance of shifting from a linear and extractive model of tourism to one that is regenerative and sustainable. This mindset acts as a catalyst for change, encouraging me to critically examine existing practices and propose innovative solutions that can create positive impacts in tourism destinations. Furthermore, the regenerative mindset enables me to envision a future where tourism contributes to the restoration, revitalization, and resilience of destinations. It sets the stage for investigating the potential of regenerative tourism in addressing pressing environmental and social challenges, such as climate change, environmental degradation, and social inequalities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter provides a comprehensive exploration of Living Systems Theory and the conceptualization of transformative roles in tourism. By examining these theoretical frameworks, the

aim is to uncover the dynamic interplay between Living Systems Theory and the potential for stakeholders to assume transformative roles within the Danish tourism industry.

Living Systems Theory

Living systems theory offers a holistic framework for understanding the complex dynamics and interconnectedness of various phenomena in the natural and social world. Rooted in the principles of systems thinking, this theoretical perspective provides a lens through which I can explore and understand the intricate web of relationships and processes that shape reality.

Living systems theory is an interdisciplinary theory that view systems as living entities that interact with their environment and adapt to changing circumstances. According to Miller (1985) all systems, including biological, social, and organizational, exhibit similar characteristics such as self-regulation, growth, and adaptation to internal and external changes. Living systems theory considers systems as dynamic and interdependent entities that are constantly interacting with their environment. These systems comprise numerous interdependent parts that collaborate to form a complex cohesive entity (Miller, 1985; Snooks, 2008). Snooks (2008) argues that living systems are not fixed and static, but rather evolve and change over time in response to internal and external factors. Vancouver (1996) explains, that one of the central principles of living systems theory is that these living systems are self-regulating, which entails the capacity to adapt and change in response to their environment. Feedback loops enable self-regulation within these systems, whether positive or negative. Positive feedback loops reinforce and amplify existing behaviors, while negative feedback loops provide corrective mechanisms to maintain balance within the systems (Miller, 1985; Vancouver, 1996).

Critics of living systems theory contend that it can be overly abstract and theoretical and may not offer practical solutions for specific problems. Kihlström (2012) argues that living systems theory

may simplify complex systems, reducing them to basic models and frameworks that fail to capture the complete complexity of real-world systems. However, many practitioners and scholars still find living systems theory useful in understanding and enhancing intricate human and no-human systems, including tourism (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022; Dias, 2018; Kaspar, 2014; Mang & Reed, 2012; Pollock, 2019; Sanford, 2019). Living systems theory is highly relevant to my thesis as it offers a comprehensive framework of understanding that can greatly benefit tourism professionals. By applying this theory to the tourism industry, professionals can gain valuable insights into the complex dynamics and interactions that shape the industry's functioning, as well as begin to practice tourism as living systems with a holistic approach.

In order to apply the principles of living systems theory to tourism, it is necessary to perceive tourism as organic living systems, rather than a collection of isolated static components. To gain a comprehensive understanding of a specific tourism system, it is necessary to identify the core of the system, around which tourism is organized, and examine the reciprocal relationships within the broader context in which tourism exists, as all systems are part of larger and smaller systems. Through living systems, tourism professionals can investigate the potential of an ongoing quest for greater wholeness and vitality which is regarded as the driving force behind regeneration (Mang & Reed, 2012).

Living Systems Thinking

According to Sanford (2019) living systems thinking and the capacity to evolve are the basis for regenerative practices. Thus, a culture and community that prioritize improvement and progress are necessary for tourism organizations to overcome the limitations of a preservation-focused mindset. Rather than simply reinforcing old ideas and practices, it is necessary to engage in a process of

questioning and rethinking in order to transition towards regenerative practices. This process can encourage tourism professionals to become aware of the consequences and outcomes of their actions. Developing this capacity is a conscious effort, requiring deliberate practice to fully integrate a responsible mindset and begin to positively contribute to living systems (Sanford, 2019).

Involvement in regenerative tourism requires consideration of all internal and external factors. Sanford (2019) argues that to solely rely on a separate sustainability program as a component to apply, is unlikely to succeed, as it is not a fundamental mindset shift of the entire organization to foster a holistic well-being. Regenerative work requires establishing systems that enable each tourism professional to find ways to contribute, which creates a daily disruption of comfort and habitual thought processes. Real regenerative change can only be brought about by taking tourism professionals off autopilot and empowering them with control. This includes fostering the unique skills of tourism professionals and facilitating their integration into the broader living systems in which they function (Pollock, 2015; Sanford, 2019).

Living systems theory provides a holistic framework for understanding the complex dynamics and interconnectedness of various phenomena in both the natural and social world. Rooted in the principles of systems thinking, this theoretical perspective offers a comprehensive lens through which I can explore and understand the intricate web of relationships and processes that shape reality, particularly in the context of tourism. In tourism living systems, various components and stakeholders interact and influence one another, forming large and small dynamic tourism living systems. Applying living systems theory to tourism allows me to analyze and understand the interdependencies, the feedback loops, reciprocal relationships, and emergent properties that characterize tourism living systems.

Transformative Roles in Tourism

With the conceptualization of transformative roles in tourism I aim to explore the varied roles significance for achieving sustainable and inclusive outcomes. When delving into the multifaceted dimensions of these roles, I seek to uncover how different stakeholders can actively contribute to and drive transformative processes within the tourism sector.

Stakeholders are individuals or groups who can impact or are impacted by tourism development. According to Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al. (2022) stakeholders can be human or non-human entities that play essential roles in the functioning of tourism living systems, influencing overall performance and success. Every tourism destination is composed of a unique set of stakeholders, which may encompass government, organizations, businesses, communities, guests, nature, wildlife, climate, and other entities that collaborate to shape the destination's tourism offerings. Ideally, when stakeholder interests are identified and aligned towards a common goal, the full potential of the destination can be unlocked. This involves integrating the diverse perspectives and needs of stakeholders into a cohesive plan that benefits all parties involved, allowing everyone to benefit from the shared purpose (Becken & Kaur, 2021). Stakeholders' involvement is crucial for the creation of healthy and sustainable tourism living systems, particularly in the implementation of regenerative tourism practices (Mang & Haggard, 2016). The various stakeholder roles within tourism living systems are closely intertwined and interdependent, with each playing a vital part in sustaining tourism living systems, indicating a symbiotic relationship among them (Araneda, 2019; Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022; Pollock, 2019). Without any one of these stakeholders, tourism living systems could experience significant decline or degradation.

Figure 1, borrowed from Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al. (2022), showcases the interaction of essential stakeholders in a dynamic manner, with penetrable boundaries that facilitate continuous growth and transformation. Placing represents the environment from which everything

else originates. Stewarding encompasses dual roles as stewarding, directly or indirectly, engages in one or more activities, such as communing, hosting, and guesting. The roles are actions, as the names implies, and they strive to protect and serve the community and place as well as supporting the other stakeholders in a regenerative manner. The roles are not fixed, but rather fluid, as stakeholders can shift or take on multiple roles, resulting in dynamic development and improvement (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022).



Figure 1. Transformative roles in tourism (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022, p. 321)

The act of placing refers to the inherent interconnectedness of the natural environment and is the geological, hydrological, and biological history of a location, which encompasses its flora and fauna, ecological dynamics, and the patterns that bring about vitality in the area. Understanding placing entails acknowledging the human cultural patterns that have taken shape within the place. Similar to how vegetation shapes and modifies its surroundings, humans are both products of their environment and possess the capacity to shape and influence their own surroundings (Araneda, 2019). Through observation and comprehension of these natural and cultural patterns, tourism professionals can gain a deeper appreciation of the distinctive traits of a place and strive to enhance its long-term sustainability and well-being (Mang & Haggard, 2016). It is within this interconnected web that life thrives, and the identity of a place takes shape. Placing creates the essential conditions for the occurrence of tourism, providing the backdrop and resources that attract guests and facilitate their experiences (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022; Pollock, 2019).

The act of communing encompasses the resourcing of guests and non-guests. It involves the development and celebration of the unique cultures and characteristics of a place, as well as the support for relationships and networks within the community. Communing extends beyond tourism activities and involves various stakeholders such as community members, non-tourism businesses, government entities, civil society organizations, residents, legislation, and policy systems and processes. With its transformative potential, communing can act as a key catalyst for generating positive change (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022; Sheldon et al., 2017). Furthermore, the act of communing indirectly involves both guests and hosts as they contribute to the support system of tourism. Guests bring their perspectives, experiences, and interactions to the destination, while hosts provide the necessary infrastructure, services, and experiences that enhance the guests stay. Together, guests and hosts form an integral part of the communing process, shaping

the dynamics and outcomes of the tourism experience (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022).

The act of stewarding refers to the crucial process of protecting, restoring, and revitalizing both the physical and social aspects of a place and its community. This involves stakeholders who are invested in the well-being of the place and who undertake actions to promote its sustainability and vitality (Pollock, 2015). These stakeholders can include residents, businesses, community organizations, and government bodies, and their level of involvement in tourism may vary. In this regard, stewarding is a collaborative effort that involves various stakeholders working together towards a shared vision for the place. The responsibility for managing and promoting the life and health of the place falls on the shoulders of these stakeholders, who take ownership of issues and challenges faced by the community. It is important to note that stewarding roles are not limited to specific groups of stakeholders and can be carried out by those involved in communing, hosting, or gisting. This interconnectivity underscores the importance of collaboration among stakeholders to achieve common goals for the place and its community. Thus, stewarding is a critical aspect of regenerative tourism development that ensures the long-term preservation and enhancement of the place and its community (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022).

The act of hosting is a critical role, as it has the potential to drive regenerative development and directly involves providing services to guests that facilitate their participation in tourism living systems. This can include a wide range of services, such as hospitality, transportation, and tours. Hosting is primarily focused on meeting the needs and desires of guests, while also aligning with the values and priorities of the local community and place. Effective hosting requires a deep understanding of the local environment and culture, as well as the ability to create experiences that are both enjoyable for guests and respectful of the local community. Hosting also involves managing the impact of tourism on the local environment and community. This requires a careful balance

between providing high-quality services to guests and preserving the natural and cultural resources that make the destination attractive in the first place (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022; Pollock, 2019).

The act of guesing refers to the process of actively engaging with communities and developing meaningful connections with places. Guesing involves the intention of forming deeper connections with themselves, local communities, and the environment. Through this process, guesing can generate new relationships to places (Araneda, 2020; Pollock, 2012). Guesing encompasses the exchange of perspectives and knowledge between different places and communities, leading to a restoration of well-being (Araneda, 2019). It involves the act of both bringing and taking away lessons and experiences, with the aim of developing deeper connections and fostering positive relationships between individuals and the places they visit (Pollock, 2015). Guesing involves paying for the services received, which provides resources to support the sustainability and development of other communities and places. The role of guesing is fulfilled by individuals who travel from their original locations and arrive at their desired destinations (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022).

The conceptualization of transformative roles in tourism is a crucial aspect of my thesis, and it aligns well with the principles of living systems theory. By exploring the varied roles and their significance in achieving sustainable and inclusive outcomes, I aim to shed light on the transformative potential within the tourism sector. This approach recognizes that tourism is not a static industry but a dynamic system that can bring about positive change when stakeholders actively engage in transformative processes. By examining these transformative roles, my research aims to highlight the importance of collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders. Understanding the significance of these roles and how they interact with one another allows for the identification of potential synergies and areas for cooperation. Furthermore, living systems theory underscores the adaptability and self-organization

within a system. This perspective can be applied to the transformative roles in tourism by recognizing that stakeholders have agency and the ability to drive change.

METHODOLOGY

The following will outline the interpretivist theoretical approach, followed by a detailed explanation of the data collection method involving interviews.

Interpretivist Research Philosophy

Throughout this thesis, an interpretivists approach has been chosen to investigate and highlight the qualitative data. By researching within the interpretivist paradigm, I recognize that the reality is multiple and relative (Acharyya & Bhattacharya, 2019; Antwi & Hamza, 2015). As an interpretivist, I believe that there is no objective reality that exists independently of human perception and interpretation, thus a relativist ontology will be applied (Dudovskiy, 2022), which stresses the subjective and culturally dependent aspects of reality (Rassokha, 2022). I also believe that knowledge is constructed by the individual subject, based on their experiences, perceptions, and interpretations, thus a subjectivist epistemology will be applied (Dudovskiy, 2022). This view sees knowledge as always mediated by the subject's personal biases, beliefs, and cultural background. Consequently, individuals engage in interactions that influence and give rise to their own unique interpretations and constructed versions of reality (Couch et al., 2016). In the pursuit of knowledge, individuals inevitably engage in the process of interpreting reality through social constructs, such as language, consciousness, and shared meanings, which serve as gateways to accessing and understanding the world around us. In the interpretive paradigm, the process of understanding social phenomena involves both observation and interpretation. This interpretation process is often guided by some

abstract pattern or framework that will help me make sense of the data and develop a deeper understanding of the social phenomenon being studied. However, it is important to note that the interpretation of data in interpretive research is not a purely objective process, but is influenced by my own perspectives, experiences, and beliefs. As a result, it is important for me to be aware of own biases and perspectives, and to engage in reflexivity throughout the research process (Antwi & Hamza, 2015).

Case Presentation: Danish Destinations

In Denmark, tourism is a dynamic interaction between multiple stakeholders such as destination organizations, municipalities, relevant businesses and interest organizations, ministries, and experts. It entails partnerships between specialized development organizations, such as Visit Denmark, Danish Coast and Nature Tourism, Meet Denmark, and Danish Metropolitan Tourism. Furthermore, Danish tourism is organized on two levels, each playing a specific role in the public tourism promotion system. A national level is led by the Danish government and a decentralized level is represented by an interest organization called Danish Destinations. This organization serves as a voice for 16 Danish destinations and can facilitate communication and collaboration between the different players in Danish tourism. Danish Destinations strive to develop tourism, promote their destinations as tourism hotspots in collaboration with local communities, and generate local, regional, and national results from tourism (Danske Destinationer, n.d.).

At the national level, overarching strategies are developed to ensure a cohesive approach to tourism efforts by both private and public actors. In 2022 Denmark received a new National Tourism Strategy that sets the course for Danish tourism. According to the Government (Erhvervsministeriet, 2022, p. 12) the vision towards 2030 for Danish tourism is *"tourism must strengthen the Danish economy and*

Danish society through environmentally, economically and socially sustainable growth that creates value for residents, tourists and local communities" (translated by author). In short, the approach is centered on three aspects of sustainability: environmental, economic, and social. It appears that the Danish National Tourism Strategy is supportive of advancing regenerative tourism development more, than the previous tourism strategy from 2016 (Regeringen, 2016), as it aims to further awareness and protection of nature, promote distribution of tourism flows, and become increasingly more mindful of local communities and tourism professionals (Erhvervsministeriet, 2022). Considering that the National Tourism Strategy is relatively new, it raises questions about the extent to which it has been implemented. Given that the primary focus is on ensuring sustainable destinations, it becomes even more interesting to explore whether destinations possess adequate resources to foster the development of regenerative tourism, or if there are gradual ways to integrate regenerative practices. Moving forward, this thesis will investigate the various tourism organizations that are dedicated to supporting, promoting, and enhancing Denmark as a travel destination.

Data Collection

The primary data collected for this thesis will consist of nine semi-structured interviews with six tourism managers and three destination directors from tourism organizations within Danish Destinations. Additionally, one destination director intended to provide a more nuanced picture by inviting a colleague from the municipality to the interview, which was not declined as I respected the social construct established by the destination director. Secondary data will consist of academic papers, official tourism websites and tourism reports and will provide additional insights into tourism organizations situation and help to corroborate or extend the findings from the semi-structured interviews to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Mason, 2002). By triangulating data from multiple sources, I can develop a more robust and nuanced

understanding of the phenomenon being studied. By applying exploratory techniques, such as in-depth interviews I provide a deeper understanding of the complexities and nuances of the topic and allows for the identification of new and unexpected themes and patterns. To avoid limitations such as potential research bias and a small sample size (Kallio et al., 2016), all sixteen tourism organizations in Danish Destinations were invited to participate through the same standardized mail invitation (Appendix A), thus, no bias in the selection process occurred for me. As a result, nine interviews were conducted, representing a sample with a participation percentage exceeding 50%.

The structure of the interview guide was influenced by themes identified from the literature review, especially Dredge (2022) and Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al. (2022) academic papers about regenerative tourism and transformative roles in tourism was an inspiration and created a red thread throughout the interview guide. The dominant themes identified in relation to regenerative developments was organizational structure, values, collaboration, and regenerative developments. The interviews were constructed in Danish with broad and open-ended questions, allowing participants to share their experiences and perspectives on the phenomenon of interest while also providing me with some flexibility to probe further on specific topics (Mason, 2002) In order to ensure participants' freedom of expression and foster a comprehensive understanding during the interviews, they were conducted in Danish, accommodating the participants' native language. However, as my study language is English, the interview cited in the analysis have been translated accordingly. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that translation introduces the potential for nuances or meaning to be lost in the process.

The first interview acted as a pilot test prior to the formal interviews in order to identify any potential issues with the interview guide, and thus provided an opportunity to refine it. During the interview process, the first tourism manager who was interviewed expressed difficulty in connecting their work to regenerative developments. As a result, the term "sustainability" was added to the question to help

contextualize the discussion. By doing this, I ensured that the interview questions were clear, relevant, and effectively captured the information from the participants. This led to more robust data and improved the overall quality of the thesis (Kallio et al., 2016). I wanted to understand how the participants perceived and made sense of their experiences, rather than trying to establish a standard or universal truth (Kallio et al., 2016). The aim is to explore the subjective experiences of the participants and gain insights into the social and cultural context that shapes their experiences as tourism managers and destinations directors. By exploring similarities and differences between data samples I have gained a richer understanding and thus, the findings of this thesis will be based on experiences from the field of tourism and not on academic theoretical wonder.

Ethics and Protection of Participants

Consent and human considerations throughout the project are an integral requirement of ethical qualitative research interviews (Husband, 2020), thus, GDPR regulations were taken into account (Datatilsynet, n.d.). Accordingly, when citing the participants in the analysis no names nor destination will be mentioned. When citing participants, they will be referred to as "Tourism manager 1," "Destination director 2," or, in one case, as "municipality consultant". When a participant is introduced for the first time, a reference to the original transcription will be provided. This approach enabled the reader to gain insight into the cited participants' position and perspective while preserving the participants' anonymity. The purpose of the interviews was not to know who did what where, but to encourage critical reflection on ongoing professional learning, constructs of identity, and agency (Husband, 2020). The dialogic space offered potential for critical reflection on concepts, ideas, and opinions as answers were constructed, allowing me to actively construct knowledge in partnership with the participants (Husband, 2020).

Analysis Methods

The research structure in this thesis is illustrated in figure 2. As displayed, the analysis is divided into two parts: a thematic analysis and a transformative stakeholder analysis. The findings of the thematic analysis and the transformative stakeholder analysis will be further processed in the discussion through the existing academic literature.

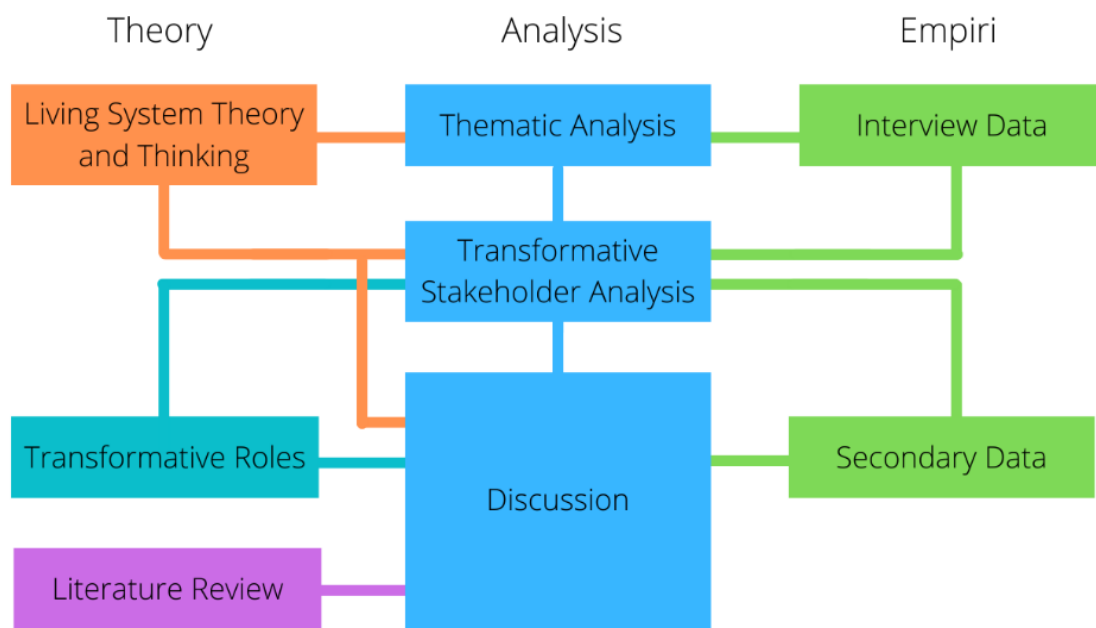


Figure 2. Research Structure

Thematic Analysis Methods

Upon reflections of the interactions with participant via mail and initial conversations, it became evident that there was a struggle to grasp an extensive understanding of the concept and potential of regenerative tourism for the Danish tourism industry. Consequently, I recognized the need to conduct a thematic analysis initially to assess the extent of comprehension regarding regenerative tourism, as

it serves as an essential steppingstone in the research process, providing a solid basis for deeper investigations into the transformative roles in tourism.

The thematic analysis involves the identification and examination of one recurring theme and pattern that emerged from the interview data, as participants openly shared their reflections on the meaning of regenerative tourism for themselves and their organizations. Focusing on this theme of reflection the analysis aimed to explore the participants' perceptions and responses related to regenerative tourism. This involved closely examining their expressed attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that were associated with the concept (Caulfield, 2023). The thematic analysis allowed for a systematic and in-depth exploration of the participants' understanding and engagement with regenerative tourism, shedding light on their level of comprehension and enthusiasm for this approach.

Through the analysis, commonalities and variations in the participants' perspectives and experiences regarding regenerative tourism were identified. It provided insights into the factors that influenced their attitudes and behaviors, revealing patterns and nuances within their responses (Caulfield, 2023). This enabled a more comprehensive understanding of how regenerative tourism was perceived within the context of Danish tourism and how it aligned with the participants' existing knowledge and practices. The analysis can offer a clearer picture of the participants' receptiveness and readiness to embrace regenerative practices, as well as any challenges or limitations they might face. Through the application of a thematic analysis, a solid foundation for further exploration and investigation can be established.

Transformative Stakeholder Analysis Methods

The transformative stakeholder analysis undertaken in my research aims to assess stakeholders' potential for regenerative impact. This analysis provides a deeper understanding of the power

dynamics at play among these stakeholders and highlights the possibilities for collaboration and collective action towards promoting regenerative tourism practices (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022). The analysis entails a systematic examination of the key stakeholders involved in the Danish tourism sector, including the act of placing, communing, stewarding, hosting, and guesting. The stakeholder analysis is divided into two levels: a macro level and a micro level, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the transformative stakeholders in the Danish tourism industry. This approach includes a brief macro level presentation to establish the broader context of the Danish tourism living systems, followed by a micro level presentation focused on the specific involvement and engagement of the stakeholders within the realm of tourism, from the perspective of the participants.

The macro-level presentation will set the stage by offering an overview of the Danish tourism industry as a living system. This presentation will consider the various interconnected components and dynamics that shape the industry, such as tourism policies, economic factors, cultural heritage, environmental considerations, and social impacts. By exploring these foundational aspects, a contextual understanding of the Danish tourism living systems will be established. This macro-level perspective will provide the necessary background to understand the intricate web of relationships and processes that influence and shape the transformative stakeholders' roles within the industry.

Subsequently, the micro-level presentation will delve into the specific involvement and commitment of the transformative stakeholders within the tourism sector. This presentation will focus on the stakeholders' individual roles, contributions, and impact on the industry. It will analyze their attitudes, behaviors, and practices, considering their efforts towards promoting transformative and regenerative tourism approaches. The micro-level perspective aims to provide an understanding of the transformative stakeholders, highlighting their unique perspectives, challenges, and potential areas of collaboration.

By combining the macro and micro-level presentations, a holistic perspective on the transformative stakeholders in the Danish tourism industry will be achieved. This dual presentation approach recognizes the interplay between the broader industry context and the individual stakeholder actions. It allows for a comprehensive analysis of the stakeholders' transformative potential within the living systems of Danish tourism. Moreover, this approach enables an in-depth exploration of the complex interactions, feedback loops, and emergent properties that shape the industry's sustainable and inclusive outcomes, to determine their potential to drive transformative change in the industry, towards regenerative practices.

Thesis Limitation

It is important to acknowledge the research limitations as the thesis primary data solely presents the perspective of tourism professionals working within tourism organizations. This limited scope may not fully capture the perspectives of other stakeholders such as tourism businesses, local communities, guests, or environmental organizations. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted within this context. Additionally, tourism professionals are working with sustainability on a strategic and operational level. While they prioritize sustainability practices and initiatives, their efforts are often centered around minimizing negative impacts and promoting sustainable practices. The scope of their work may be limited to areas such as resource conservation, waste management, or community engagement, without fully embracing the concept of regenerative tourism. As a result, their involvement with regenerative tourism may be at a preliminary stage, characterized by pilot projects or small-scale experiments rather than widespread implementation.

Securing Thesis Quality

The various components of the thesis are interlinked, to maintain an academic standard. For instance, the interview themes have been shaped by the literature review, which has also established the foundation for the theoretical framework of regenerative and transformative roles in tourism. As the research is based on an interpretivist perspective, the data collected provides valuable insight into the perspectives and understanding of each participant. As an interpretivist researcher, I facilitate a thorough examination of the research areas, instilling transparency, and reliability in the thesis. This, in turn, upholds validity and reliability. The thesis' validity is upheld by ensuring that all phases of the thesis are relevant to the research question and are consistent with the thesis' framework. Moreover, the thesis' reliability is maintained by collecting reliable data. The thesis' credibility has been upheld by utilizing validity and reliability throughout my brainstorm, research design, and data interpretation phases (Guest et al., 2014).

ANALYSIS

The analysis conducted is divided into two parts: a thematic analysis and a transformative stakeholder analysis. The thematic analysis involves identifying and analyzing participants reflections of regenerative tourism. The transformative stakeholder analysis focus on identifying the stakeholders who play a crucial role in the tourism industry, and their regenerative impact.

Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis explores the curiosity and sometimes difficulty that tourism professionals face in understanding and defining regenerative tourism, as well as the challenges that exist for its implementation.

Apprehension of Regenerative Tourism

During the interviews, I noted that the participants faced some difficulty in crafting a comprehensive definition of regenerative tourism and translating it into practical approaches for regeneration. Additionally, the participants might not fully grasp the link between sustainability and regenerative tourism, as some participants note:

“Regenerative tourism development is a somewhat difficult quantity. Just as sustainability can be a difficult quantity” (Tourism manager 1, p. 3) translation by author (see Appendix B for full interview transcripts).

“(…) this regenerative thing, so how do we find our feet in it? (…) can you build on it or do you have to throw out everything old and start over? (…) we have spent time finding out about sustainability and what we can do and what we can't do. What we can say and what we can't (...) I'm still a bit hesitant and I'm still a bit out and about trying to figure out how we define it (regenerative tourism) exactly” (Tourism manager 9, pp. 1-4) translation by author (see Appendix J for full interview transcripts).

The quotes describe the difficulty in understanding regenerative tourism and how it can be incorporated into their ongoing tourism practices. The participants indicate that they recognize the need to navigate and define regenerative tourism and highlight the ongoing process of exploration and understanding required to fully embrace its concepts and practices. Although participants

generally had a basic understanding of sustainable and regenerative tourism, I observed, during the interviews, that the differentiation between the two concepts appeared to be simple at first glance but became more uncertain and intricate upon closer examination. One participant reflects on the complexity and varying interpretations of regenerative tourism:

“So, if the guest cycles around and also cleans up after themselves and then at the same time throws some flower seeds, is that what you mean (by regenerative tourism)?” (Tourism manager 8, p. 3) translation by author (see Appendix I for full interview transcripts).

The participant is asking for guidance on how to understand the question that has been asked, by creating an example of the guests doing all sorts of things that are normally connected to sustainability or order. I see this engagement as an indication of the need for clarity and understanding of what regenerative tourism entails. Another acknowledges the multifaceted nature of regenerative tourism:

“...on the one hand it's quite concrete, and on the other hand, it can have 100 different shades. So, when you work with regenerative tourism, you can do it without knowing it, or you can believe you are doing it without doing it right” (Tourism manager 1, p. 4) translation by author.

The participants reflect on regenerative tourism and its numerous interpretations, which highlights the importance of knowledge and proper implementation to ensure the effective practice of regenerative tourism. One participant suggests that tourism can have a regenerative effect by creating a virtuous cycle of economic, social, and environmental benefits, and emphasizes the potential for tourism to generate positive and lasting impacts on the destination, supporting its long-term sustainability and development. In the following quote, regenerative tourism is described as job expansion with the possibility of staff moving to the destination with their families:

“(Due to an expansion of tourism season, tourism businesses hire additional staff, that moves to the destination) *they become citizens, and their children go to institutions and then you get a return from tourism which is regenerative*” (Tourism manager 8, p. 3) translation by author.

However, it is important to note that the regenerative effects such as more jobs and new residents, may vary depending on various factors. Such as the scale and management of tourism activities, the integration of tourism in local communities, and the consideration of environmental and cultural aspects in tourism development. Indicating that there may be a lack of understanding or awareness regarding the holistic nature of regenerative tourism. While the expansion of the tourism season and the subsequent hiring of additional staff can bring certain benefits to a destination, it is important to consider the broader implications and principles of regenerative tourism. Another participant emphasizes the need to shift the success criterion in tourism from solely focusing on the number of tourists to a more comprehensive measure that highlights the vibrancy and well-being of the urban community:

“(...) push the success criterion to focus on the vibrant urban community, instead of the number of tourists. There are different ways of measuring it, and I find that interesting. You have to change the way of thinking. So regenerative development in tourism is to look all around and does not have a goal of more tourism but sees tourism as a tool for solving a place-based problem” (Tourism manager 6, p. 4) translation by author (see Appendix G for full interview transcripts).

The participant demonstrates a shift in thinking that aligns with the concept of regenerative development in tourism, which emphasizes a holistic approach to address place-based problems and leveraging tourism as a tool for positive change.

I noted that the participants showcased numerous interpretations of sustainable and regenerative tourism ideas and projects at multiple stages of creation. Furthermore, when asked, "Can your

organization support regenerative development in your destination, and if so, how?" all participants responded positively and provided additional elaboration. One participant highlighted the potential role of tourism organizations in supporting regenerative development by informing and inspiring others, and leading projects that contribute to positive change:

"Yes, we can do that (support regenerative development) by both informing about it and inspire to do it. And then we have the opportunity to lead some projects where we can act and help with political influence" (Tourism manager 6, p. 5) translation by author.

The participant highlights the multifaceted role of tourism organizations in supporting regenerative development. Implying that tourism organizations can leverage their position and influence and play an instrumental role in promoting and advancing regenerative practices within the tourism industry.

Regenerative Tourism in Practice

During the interviews, I noted that the participants found it challenging to envision how regenerative tourism practices could be implemented in a meaningful way. One participant highlighted the complexity of choosing appropriate environmental measurements in the context of regenerative tourism:

"(...) so even if we put on this regenerative hat, we go out and do a tiny bit of good out here, and a tiny bit of good out there, but a lot of bad in other areas. It is therefore difficult to know which (environmental) measurements we should use" (Tourism manager 3, p. 4) translation by author (see

Appendix D for full interview transcripts).

The participant expresses the frustration that comes with evaluating and labeling tourism as regenerative tourism. Implying that tourism organizations may face difficulty in selecting appropriate environmental measurements that accurately reflect their regenerative efforts. Another participant

concur and emphasizes the significance of measuring the starting point and progress of regenerative initiatives in order to make a positive impression:

“(...) what does it mean to give more than you take or making a positive impression instead of just going to zero. To do so, you must go in and measure what the footprint was when you started, and how many actually measure the regenerative initiatives. You don't really do that yet” (Tourism manager 1, p. 4) translation by author.

The participant highlights the need for greater efforts within the tourism industry to develop standardized measurement frameworks for regenerative outcomes. One participant suggests that there is hesitancy among industry stakeholders to confidently declare their initiatives as regenerative tourism:

“(...) it's a bit like greenwashing and greenhushing. When do we dare to say that something is regenerative? None of us have really jumped on that yet” (Tourism manager 4, p. 5) translation by author (see Appendix E for full interview transcripts).

The participant suggests a hesitation or reluctance to fully embrace the concept of regenerative tourism. The comparison to "greenwashing" and "greenhushing" implies a concern that the term "regenerative" may be used loosely or insincerely, similar to how "greenwashing" involves making misleading or exaggerated environmental claims. The participants statement indicates the need for a collective effort to establish clear definitions and guidelines for regenerative tourism. Additionally, all participants agreed that the crucial aspect was to ensure that tourism projects are sustainable and comprehensible, to avoid losing the support of tourism stakeholders. One participant suggests a focus on the practical outcomes and goals of sustainable and regenerative tourism, rather than getting caught up in semantics or specific labels:

“(...) it doesn't matter whether you call it sustainability or regenerative (tourism), as long as we can help push the right development, because we might just confuse (businesses)” (Tourism manager 9, p. 5) translation by author.

The participant argues for the perspective of tourism businesses and emphasizes the significance of simplicity and punching in the right direction above all else. Indicating tourism organizations importance in driving sustainable and regenerative practices, both good and bad. Another participant suggests that their tourism organization is driven by a sense of responsibility:

“(...) we (as a tourism organization) want to help create a better world” (Destination director 2, p. 2) translation by author (see Appendix C for full interview transcripts).

The participants have a desire to contribute to a better world through the tourism organization's actions and initiatives. Which implies that the tourism organizations commitment to sustainability and their recognition of the industry's impact on society and the environment are likely to guide their decision-making and strategic efforts. Another participant emphasizes the need for a holistic approach to tourism development:

“(...) it does not help that it is only isolated in one place, we should ideally try to adopt this way of thinking everywhere, so that we are not just talking about certifications, but more about a holistic approach to tourism development” (Tourism manager 6, p. 3) translation by author.

The participant recognizes that sustainable and regenerative practices should go beyond individual tourism organizations. Instead, the participant proposes a more comprehensive approach that encompasses various aspects of tourism. Implying that the participant has a belief in the power of a collective shift in mindset and practices within the tourism industry. Another participant suggests that while there are some people who use the concept of regenerative tourism, it has not gained significant traction or recognition among a broader range of tourism stakeholders:

“(...) we are some who talk about regenerative (tourism), but out in the wider industry there is no resonance yet” (Tourism manager 4, p. 6) translation by author.

The participant is stating that term "regenerative" may not be widely recognized or understood, and there may be limited awareness or interest in adopting regenerative practices among industry professionals. Indicating that regenerative tourism is not yet widely understood, acknowledged, or embraced as a mainstream approach to tourism development.

Thematic Analysis Findings

The findings reveal that the participants are willing to explore definitions of regenerative tourism and are open to regenerative practices in tourism. The findings also indicated that the lack of a consensus or certification for what qualifies as a regenerative tourism product, creates an obstacle for the participants, which may hinder their ability to support and guide tourism businesses in regenerative development. Additionally, the findings indicate that some participants are embracing a regenerative paradigm, while others found the practical approach ambiguous and complex to navigate. Furthermore, the findings indicate that there is no mainstream renaissance of regenerative tourism yet.

Thus, despite the growing academic interest in regenerative tourism, there is a lack of clarity and consensus around its definition, principles, and practical application. This can create challenges for tourism professionals and businesses who are trying to incorporate regenerative approaches into their operations and strategies. This indicates the need for continued efforts to raise awareness, educate stakeholders, and foster a broader understanding and adoption of regenerative principles within the tourism sector.

Transformative Stakeholder Analysis

In order to explore the transformative stakeholder roles from the viewpoint of tourism professionals, a brief macro level presentation will be provided to establish the context of the Danish tourism living systems in which the stakeholder operates. Once the foundational aspects are established, a micro level presentation will offer a more comprehensive understanding of the stakeholder's involvement and engagement within the realm of tourism. This dual presentation approach aims to provide a holistic perspective on the transformative stakeholders in the Danish tourism industry.

Macro Level of the Act of Placing

Denmark places a strong emphasis on environmental stewardship and sustainability, leading to a well-maintained and healthy natural environment. Denmark's commitment to clean sanitation ensures the proper management and treatment of waste, contributing to a hygienic and sanitary living environment (Regeringen, 2020). The country's water bodies are carefully monitored and protected, resulting in excellent water quality for both drinking and recreational purposes (Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland, n.d.) and Denmark boasts clean and fresh air, thanks to strict regulations on emissions and a focus on renewable energy sources (UN Environment, 2015). This dedication to maintaining a clean environment contributes to the overall well-being and quality of life for residents and guests alike, as well as its coastline, beaches, and forests which provide ample opportunities for outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling, and swimming. Some of the popular destinations in Denmark include a range of historical and cultural museums and castles (Birbeck & Seavey, 2023), and many sustainable activities such as cycling in Copenhagen, bird spotting in Møn, watching the stars in Zealand, climbing in Bornholm, seeing the two seas meet in Skagen, experiencing the highest density of lakes and forests at the lake district, engaging in watersports at Cold Hawaii, picking oysters and clams at the Wadden sea, and seeing large flocks of starlings form fascinating patterns in

the sky in Southern Jutland (VisitDenmark A, n.d.). Additionally, Denmark's approach to nature conservation showcases its commitment to protecting and preserving the country's natural heritage. Through the establishment of protected areas, sustainable land and resource management practices, and a focus on wetlands and marine ecosystems, Denmark strives to maintain its rich biodiversity and ecological balance (Miljøstyrelsen, n.d.). In addition, Denmark has multiple UNESCO World Heritage Sites, showcasing the country's commitment to protecting the environment and preserving its cultural and natural heritage (VisitDenmark B, n.d.).

As such, Denmark is actively engaged in environmentally sustainable tourism, aiming to share its eco-friendly initiatives with guests and encourage the adoption of environmentally conscious practices. The Government's National Tourism Strategy prioritizes collaborative partnerships for sustainable tourism development. In line with this, a new initiative has been launched to enhance collaboration among national, local, public, and private entities. The primary focus of this partnership is to develop a measurement method that effectively accounts for greenhouse gas emissions in tourism and individual guests' climate footprints. This comprehensive approach will not only measure CO₂ emissions but also serve as a basis for identifying and implementing new initiatives aimed at reducing CO₂ emissions (Erhvervsministeriet, 2022).

Micro Level of the Act of Placing

During the interviews I asked, “which stakeholders would you say are the most important for you to collaborate with?” None of the participants answered, “the places or the environment”. This observation could imply that the participants may not perceive the natural environment as an actively involved stakeholder, or that the question itself is presented in a manner that downplays the natural environment's significance and leads to it being overlooked. However, several participants recognized

the significance of sustainability as a fundamental principle for tourism organizations, demonstrating their awareness of the need to maintain the natural environment:

“Sustainability is part of our strategy. In virtually everything we do, sustainability is mentioned”

(Tourism manager 4, p. 4) translation by author.

“(...) we have an overarching strategy called "Business in balance with nature" (...) it is the heart of everything we undertake, all activities, all efforts both internally and externally, must have sustainability in mind” (Destination director 7, p. 5) translation by author (see Appendix H for full interview transcripts).

The participants are stating that sustainability is ingrained in their tourism strategy. This indicates a commitment to ensuring that sustainability is integrated into all aspects of the tourism organizations’ activities, including stakeholders. Moreover, the participants suggest, that sustainability is a core value that drives decision-making and action within the organization. Another participant recognizes the potential impact of guests on the environment and seeks to mitigate this impact:

“Working with the code of conduct (...) by saying “we know, you're used to walking around the city. Now you have to hear what happens when you are in nature” (...) People may be there, but we have to make sure that they are proper, and we also have to make sure that we distribute them a little so that it doesn't become too much at once” (Destination director 2, p. 2-4) translation by

author.

The participant acknowledges the importance of managing the number of guests to prevent overcrowding and negative impacts on the natural areas. This implies the need of educating and guiding guests on responsible behavior when visiting natural areas. The participant continues by highlighting the potential positive impact on guests, when promoting outdoor activities and nature-based experiences:

“(...) It is the bigger picture. If we get parents to go out into nature with their children instead of, worst case, sitting in front of Netflix at home. Well, then we can possibly help prevent divorces, by people having some good experiences together” (Destination director 2, p. 2) translation by author.

The participant is acknowledging that tourism can help facilitate positive choices. The participant is indicating that promoting outdoor activities and experiences can have a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing by encouraging people to disconnect from technology and spend time in nature. I observed that the participant's reference to the "bigger picture" which could imply the acknowledgment that tourism is part of a larger, interconnected system and that outdoor activities may have far-reaching effects beyond individual experiences, potentially impacting other areas of people's lives. Indicating the natural environment as a powerful stakeholder. Another participant noted the demand for sustainable and authentic experiences among European guests, and the challenge that destinations face in meeting this demand:

“(...) they (the European market) increasingly demand sustainable, local, place-bound unique experiences, and we simply don't have enough of them” (Destination director 7, p. 2) translation by author.

The participant acknowledge that the European market is displaying a growing demand for sustainable, local, and unique experiences. Additionally, the participant reports that there is currently a shortage of such offerings to meet these demands. This indicates that guests are seeking experiences that are closely tied to the specific destination they are visiting, rather than generic or standardized offerings. The statement also implies that destinations may need to make changes to meet these demands and that there is room for improvement in providing sustainable and authentic experiences for guests. One participant reflects on the shift in perspective towards sustainable tourism

development, where the focus is not solely on how tourism can benefit the economy, but also on how it can contribute to the overall sustainability of the destination:

“(...) one should not ask what sustainability can do for tourism, but what tourism can do for sustainability” (Tourism manager 6, p. 4) translation by author.

The participant suggests that tourism should not be seen as an end in itself, but rather as a means to achieve sustainable development goals. This perspective recognizes that tourism can have both positive and negative impacts on the environment, society, and economy, and emphasizes the importance of balancing these impacts for the long-term well-being of the destination. Another participant agrees and highlights the priority of nature and its role in setting the agenda for human activities:

“(...) (new ways of viewing sustainability) have really just turned the bucket on its head and said ‘what if it was nature that set the agenda before man?’” (Tourism manager 4, p. 3) translation by author.

The participant suggests that the concept of sustainability has undergone a significant shift, with a new perspective emerging that prioritizes nature's role in setting the agenda over human influence. The participant is implying that the traditional approach to sustainability which focus on minimizing negative impacts on the environment and society, without considering the long-term consequences of human actions, is replaced by a new approach which recognizes that humans are part of natural living systems, and that our well-being is dependent on the health of the environment.

Findings in The Act of Placing

The findings on macro level reveals that Denmark's strong commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability is evident through its well-maintained natural environment, clean sanitation

practices, excellent water quality, and focus on renewable energy sources. The country's dedication to maintaining a clean environment enhances the overall well-being and quality of life for residents and guests, offering abundant opportunities for outdoor activities. Denmark's approach to nature conservation and protection of UNESCO World Heritage Sites further demonstrates its commitment to preserving its cultural and natural heritage. Additionally, Denmark actively promotes environmentally sustainable tourism through collaborative partnerships and initiatives aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Overall, Denmark's efforts showcase its determination to be a leader in eco-friendly practices and inspire guests to adopt sustainable behaviors.

The findings on micro level reveals that the participants in the study acknowledged the importance of sustaining the natural environment, they did not perceive places as active stakeholders. However, it is evident that sustainability is a core value that drives decision-making and action within the tourism organization. This includes the recognition of the importance of educating and guiding guests, managing the number of guests to prevent overcrowding and negative impacts on natural areas, and promoting outdoor activities for mental health and well-being. It is essential to recognize that tourism is part of larger interconnected living systems, and outdoor activities can have far-reaching effects beyond individual experiences, potentially impacting other areas of people's lives. Consequently, tourism professionals may need to make changes to meet these demands and strive for sustainable and authentic experiences for the community and guests. Balancing these impacts is crucial for the long-term well-being of the destination, the community, and guests. Furthermore, there is a growing understanding that humans are an integral part of natural living systems, and our well-being is dependent on the health of the environment. This perspective aligns with the principles of regenerative tourism, emphasizing the importance of restoring and improving the natural environment while providing meaningful experiences for visitors.

Macro Level of the Act of Communing

Denmark is placing emphasis on preserving its rich cultural heritage while also supporting the ways of life of its residents. Denmark's history and cultural heritage entails many museums, galleries, and historical and natural sites that showcase the country's past (Birbeck & Seavey, 2023). Denmark is also home to a vibrant arts and cultural scene, with numerous festivals, concerts, and exhibitions taking place throughout the year (Dotzer, 2023; Festivalkits, 2023). Danes are renowned for their happiness (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, n.d.), and this reputation could be attributed, in part, to the concept of "hygge" (translated; coziness). The concept of hygge embodies the Danish approach to happiness and well-being. By creating cozy and inviting environments, savoring simple pleasures, and nurturing meaningful connections, Danes prioritize a sense of contentment and joy. Hygge is a valuable reminder to slow down, appreciate life's small moments, and prioritize self-care, ultimately contributing to the overall happiness of the Danish people (VisitDenmark C, n.d.). Additionally, the Danish Government is committed to empower local communities in sustainable development. The Government's National Tourism Strategy elaborates that it is essential for tourism and the local community to interact and develop together, taking into account the needs of both guests and residents. National and local development, such as infrastructure, urban space, culture, and nature, must involve residents and local communities. Moreover, positive effects of tourism should be experienced by residents. The strategy states that a holistic development is necessary to avoid issues like overcrowding and traffic congestion, waste pollution, noise such as construction, nightlife, and transportation, which can lead to negative perceptions of tourism in the community (Erhvervsministeriet, 2022).

Micro Level of the Act of Communing

The micro level analysis of the act of communing is divided into two distinct stakeholders: communities and municipalities, as each stakeholder holds its own significance and power, and thus plays a unique role in communing.

The act of Communing as Community

During the interviews, I noted that all participants expressed a strong desire to contribute to and support their local communities by striving to add social economic value:

“(...) it is also a parameter of success that we manage to cooperate with the municipalities”

(Tourism manager 4, p. 2) translation by author.

“Creating more jobs is a success criterion (for us)” (Tourism manager 4, p. 2) translation by

author.

“We are successful if we have an impact on our tourism businesses” (Destination director 5, p. 2)

translation by author (see Appendix F for full interview transcripts).

“(...) (success is to) ensure ongoing local support” (Tourism manager 9, p. 2) translation by author.

Each participant emphasizes, using their own words, that social economic value serves as a measurement tool for success. The participants suggest that success is not only based on financial gains, but also on collaboration with local municipalities, creating jobs, impacting tourism businesses positively, and ensuring ongoing local support. This indicates that the participants recognize the importance of maintaining positive relationships with stakeholders and communities, as well as promoting sustainable development. One participant also emphasized the importance of building a positive relationship with communities:

“(...) we can support these local communities and create some strong communities that also benefit from tourism (...) We have a very close link with the local population (through our volunteer program), and it makes a huge difference that we feel their support” (Tourism manager 9, p. 2)

translation by author.

The participant suggested that by supporting communities through various programs, such as volunteer programs, tourism organizations can create stronger communities that benefit from tourism. This implies that the community's support is crucial for the success of tourism. This reinforces the idea that tourism is not a standalone industry but rather an integral part of larger living systems. Another participant states that tourism has become an integral part of the way of life at the destination and in the community:

“Fortunately, we are the destination with the most satisfied local population in the country (...) tourism is a condition of life here” (Destination director 7, p. 4) translation by author.

The participant suggests that their tourism organization has been successful in positively impacting the community. Indicating the importance of the relationship between tourism organizations and the local communities, and the need for the organizations to prioritize community engagement and support. Another participant agrees and highlights the importance of considering both short-term and long-term impacts of tourism development and the need for a balanced approach:

“Can you justify spending so much time on such a small target group (Danish Handicap Federation)? My heart says yes, but I must constantly look at the bigger picture. The more people who can understand that we fill in something that is bigger than the small tourism image, that it also includes the diversity we have, the more people will also help to contribute to it” (Destination director 2, p. 6) translation by author.

The participant recognizes the potential impact of including a small target group in tourism development and how it can contribute to a larger goal, despite the economic challenge. This implies a commitment to promoting diversity and inclusivity in the destination and an understanding of how it can benefit both the tourism industry and society as a whole.

The act of Communing as Municipality

When I asked, “which stakeholders would you say are the most important for you to collaborate with?” the majority mentions the municipalities. One participant notes the crucial role that municipalities play in the tourism industry:

“(...) the municipalities are important because they are the gatekeepers of access and permits and sit and decide a great many things” (Tourism manager 6, p. 3) translation by author.

The participant underscores the significance of municipalities in the decision-making process, particularly regarding access, permits, and various other matters. Indicating that the municipality has decision-making power that affects the tourism industry in Denmark. Another participant, a municipality consultant, emphasizes the interdependence between municipalities and tourism organizations and businesses in order to operate effectively within the local community:

“(...) they (tourism organizations and businesses) depend on us (municipality) to create the framework for them to do their work” (Municipality consultant, p. 1) translation by author (see

Appendix H for full interview transcripts).

The participant states that tourism organizations and businesses rely on municipalities to establish the necessary framework and conditions for them to operate effectively within a given jurisdiction. This implies that municipalities play a crucial role in creating an environment conducive to tourism by developing and implementing tourism strategies, plans, and regulations. Moreover, it implies the

importance of collaboration and communication between different stakeholders within the destination. Many participants agree and one participant highlights the important role of municipalities in promoting social sustainability:

“It is the municipalities that have access to residents who are on the edge of the labor market, so it is very easy for them to supply the raw material to create something socially sustainable” (Tourism manager 4, p. 5) translation by author.

The participant emphasizes the need for collaboration between municipalities, tourism organizations and businesses to ensure that tourism development is inclusive and benefits local communities. Another participant emphasizes the importance of collaboration and partnership between tourism organizations and municipalities in achieving common goals, specifically related to climate goals and sustainability:

“Let’s see if we (tourism organization and municipalities) can do something together. Can tourism do something in relation to some of the climate goals that the municipalities have and do we have some common goals? With us, the municipalities are also quite different in how far they are and things like that, and that is also a challenge, you could say. If you are well advanced and work a lot with sustainability and someone has only just started with it properly, then there is a reconciliation of expectations” (Tourism manager 6, p. 2) translation by author.

The participant acknowledge that municipalities vary in their level of progress in sustainability initiatives, which presents a challenge in reconciling expectations and working together effectively. Additionally, the participant implies a willingness to work together and recognize the role that tourism can play in contributing to broader societal goals, such as those related to climate change. The same participant continues and highlights the challenges in communication within and between municipalities:

“We have talked about creating a forum or a place where we can meet, because there are challenges in the communication. In the municipalities you can become aware that you do not know what is going on in the other administration in the same municipality and that there is no communication across the municipalities. As a destination, we would like to be the glue and bind the stakeholders together and be able to convey and communicate something crosswise. So, we have talked a lot about being the one who holds the ropes on communication across our municipalities”

(Tourism manager 6, p. 2) translation by author.

This participant emphasizes the need for a forum or platform where stakeholders can gather and collaborate. The mention of challenges in communication within municipalities suggests that there may be limited awareness or knowledge of the activities and initiatives taking place in different administrative units within the same municipality. This lack of communication can hinder coordination, collaboration, and the sharing of best practices among municipal departments or divisions. Furthermore, the statement points out the absence of communication across municipalities, indicating a need for improved inter-municipal collaboration. In many destinations, tourism development involves multiple municipalities working together to create a cohesive and attractive visitor experience. However, the lack of communication between these municipalities can result in fragmented efforts, inconsistent strategies, and missed opportunities for collaboration. The desire to be the "glue" and hold the ropes on communication across municipalities reflects a proactive approach by the tourism organization to bridge these communication gaps, in order to unify societal goals.

Findings in The Act of Communing

The findings on macro level reveals Denmark's commitment to preserving its cultural heritage, supporting the ways of life of its residents, and empowering local communities in sustainable

development showcases the country's comprehensive approach. By prioritizing a harmonious balance between tourism, cultural preservation, community well-being, and sustainable development, Denmark sets a strong example for creating a positive and inclusive destination experience for residents and guests alike.

The findings on communities' micro level reveals the potential for communing as a key regenerative change agent. It is clear that the support and engagement of the local community are crucial for the success of tourism initiatives, and tourism organizations prioritize community engagement and support, as the active involvement of the community can result in mutually beneficial outcomes. By actively involving and listening to the community, tourism initiatives can better align with local needs, respect cultural values, and contribute to the overall well-being of residents. Furthermore, there is a growing recognition of the importance of promoting diversity and inclusivity within destinations. Embracing diversity not only fosters a sense of social justice but also brings about economic benefits. By welcoming guests from diverse backgrounds and promoting inclusivity, tourism organizations can create more authentic and enriching experiences while also generating positive social and economic impacts for the community and society as a whole. Embracing the transformative power of the community, tourism can become a catalyst for positive change.

The findings on municipalities micro level reveals that municipalities play a crucial role as transformative stakeholders in the tourism industry of Denmark. With decision-making power that directly affects tourism development, collaboration, and communication between different stakeholders, including municipalities, are essential for achieving common goals. The inclusive nature of tourism development, benefiting local communities, underscores the importance of collaboration and partnership between tourism organizations and municipalities. By working together, they can ensure that tourism initiatives align with the needs and aspirations of the local community, fostering sustainable and inclusive growth. Furthermore, the collaboration between

tourism organizations and municipalities extends to broader societal goals, particularly those related to climate change and sustainability. As tourism has the potential to contribute to climate goals and environmental sustainability, the partnership between these stakeholders becomes even more critical. The desire to establish a platform for effective communication and information sharing among stakeholders reflects a unified approach towards achieving societal goals. By unifying the efforts of tourism organizations, municipalities, and other stakeholders, tourism organizations can aim to create a harmonious and coordinated approach that aligns tourism development with broader societal objectives.

Macro Level of the Act of Stewarding

Denmark is a welfare state, with all residents receiving services and benefits that contribute to enhancing their quality of life. Denmark faces no threat of natural disasters, and its capital city, Copenhagen, is renowned as one of the safest cities globally (World Population Review, 2023). Additionally, Denmark is recognized as one of the happiest and safest countries in Europe. The country has extremely low crime rates, and individuals, including children, report feeling safe. This high level of security can be attributed to the emphasis on equality and a shared sense of responsibility for social welfare (World Population Review, 2023). Additionally, a new infrastructure plan aims to lay the foundation for the green transition of transportation, as the Government is investing DKK 160 billion in infrastructure. By 2035, the plan aims to further connect all of Denmark and reduce the feeling of distance between rural and urban areas (Regeringen, 2021). The Danish Government is also focused on sustainable tourism, as the environment, climate, and social cohesion shall not be compromised by continued growth.

The National Tourism Strategy for sustainable growth aims to set a common direction towards 2030, outlining development tracks and initiatives for municipalities, destination organizations, national

tourism organizations, and the business world to work together towards sustainability. The strategy also serves as a framework for allocating funds for local and transverse tourism projects through the Danish Business Promotion Board. The vision of the National Tourism Strategy aims for Denmark to become the top tourist destination among Northern European countries for its environmentally friendly tourism practices, as well as certifying all official tourism organizations by 2030 (Erhvervsministeriet, 2022). The National Strategy also aims to create employment opportunities and ensure decent working conditions for a diverse range of employees. By integrating tourism into society, it becomes more appealing and beneficial. Positive indicators include an improved perception of tourism's contribution to Danish society and a target of at least 80% job satisfaction among tourism professionals (Erhvervsministeriet, 2022). Additionally, to the Government's tourism strategy, all metropolitan destinations in Denmark (Copenhagen, Aarhus, Odense, and Aalborg) have opted to become certified in the GDS-Index as sustainable cities to further showcase their commitment to sustainability. The vision of the GDS-Movement is to create flourishing communities and destinations through regenerative tourism and events (Global Destination Sustainable Movement, 2023).

Micro Level of the Act of Stewarding

Tourism organizations face a multitude of intricate and interconnected challenges, which prompts the participants to delve deeper and explore the underlying complexities during the interviews. All participants highlighted the interdependence between stakeholders and tourism organizations:

“(...) we (tourism stakeholders) *can't live without each other*” (Tourism manager 8, p. 4) translation
by author.

“(...) we can't do very much without the (tourism) businesses” (Tourism manager 9, p. 3)

translation by author.

The participants convey the interdependence and interconnectedness of tourism stakeholders, highlighting that they rely on each other for their mutual existence and success. Indicating the importance of collaboration and mutual support between stakeholders and tourism organizations. One participant highlights the complexity of collaborating with tourism businesses on sustainability issues and acknowledges that there are various challenges that different businesses and tourism organizations may face:

”There are 100 different businesses that we collaborate with regarding sustainability and there are many different challenges. Some don't have resources, and some don't have money, some want to but can't figure it out, and some don't even know it's a challenge yet. So, everyone is very, very different in terms of who they are and what they can do” (Tourism manager 1, p. 1) translation by

author.

The participant also emphasizes the diversity of businesses, indicating that each one is unique in terms of their capabilities and challenges. The participant is implying the need for a tailored and nuanced approach to working with businesses on sustainability initiatives. Another participant argues that the municipalities and the business board need to come together and identify the specific areas they want to invest in:

“(...) even with the new EU funds, there must be a co-financing of 60%. Which means we have to put the municipality together with the business board to say, "we have this area, we would like this and that..." and then they have to find out if it is something they want (...) I can put people around my table. I am the link” (Project manager 8, p. 4) translation by author.

The participant emphasizes their role as a link between stakeholders and indicates the importance of having the right stakeholders around the table to make the collaboration work. One participant concurs and reports a lack of influence or control over the installation of public infrastructure:

“(...) we have no influence on e.g., setting up (public) charging stands (for electric cars), (public) waste stands - in other words practical things” (Tourism manager 6, p. 2) translation by author.

The participant suggests a perceived lack of influence or control that tourism stakeholders have over practical infrastructure development. In the context of regenerative tourism, the availability of necessary infrastructure plays a significant role in supporting environmentally friendly practices and enhancing the overall visitor experience. However, the statement implies that tourism stakeholders feel they have limited influence or decision-making power when it comes to these practical infrastructure elements. The same participant adds that in collaboration efforts, a misalignment between goals and metrics can hinder the ability to accurately assess and communicate the success and impact of tourism initiatives:

“There are some goals such as number of overnight stays, which I don't think says very much. For us, it's about stakeholders working with experience and attractions and not so much about accommodation, and that becomes the challenge, because we talk a lot about what we want, but we still measure kind of old-fashioned things that don't say anything about anything” (Tourism manager 6, p. 1) translation by author.

The participant questions the effectiveness of these metrics in capturing the true value and impact of tourism experiences and attractions. Indicating a shift towards a more holistic and experiential approach to tourism. This perspective recognizes that a visitor's experience encompasses more than just accommodation and considers the broader range of activities, attractions, and interactions that

contribute to their overall satisfaction. Another participant suggests that time is highly valued within the context of the tourism industry:

“It is important to understand that our profession is in operation, many of them are in perpetual operation, we all are and we are busy, so when you have to set aside time for something, there has to be a gain, it has very much been an economic gain that has been focused on, but I also think that the human gain has started to take up more space, also in relation to the climate” (Destination director 2, p. 4) translation by author.

The participant highlights that for businesses and individuals involved in tourism operations, their time is a precious resource that needs to be utilized efficiently and effectively. The participant also suggests the need for tangible gains when investing time in certain activities. Indicating that time spent on initiatives and projects should yield positive outcomes that contribute to the success and sustainability of the business. Furthermore, the participant recognizes the emerging shift towards acknowledging the value of human gains has derive prominence and is obtaining more attention and resources. Another participant highlights the interdependency and collaborative nature of sustainability efforts within the tourism industry. While organizations can develop sustainability strategies and set goals, their success is ultimately reliant on the actions and cooperation of various stakeholders who are directly involved in implementing sustainable practices:

“We can work on it (sustainability strategy) and set goals, but we are dependent on others who are actually the ones who have their hands on the stove” (Tourism manager 6, p. 2) translation by author.

The participant emphasizes the interdependence and shared responsibility among stakeholders in driving sustainability in the tourism industry. While tourism organizations can provide leadership and set goals, achieving meaningful progress relies on the active involvement and collaboration of others

who directly contribute to sustainable practices on the ground. One participant has another perspective and highlights the difficulty of managing a broad strategy that encompasses numerous responsibilities and the need to strategically prioritize their actions to ensure the most effective use of their resources:

“(...) we have a strategy that is really broad. We spread ourselves over far too many different things. Especially when we are a small (tourism) organization, we cannot accommodate all the different things that we are told to do” (Tourism manager 3, p. 2) translation by author.

The participant highlights the challenges faced by a small tourism organization that has adopted a broad strategy, attempting to address numerous diverse aspects within the industry. The participant feels overwhelmed and finds it difficult to effectively manage and accommodate all the different tasks and responsibilities that are expected. It indicates the importance of realistic goal-setting, efficient resource management, and transparent communication with stakeholders. The same participant also highlights the significance of involvement in driving sustainability efforts within tourism organizations:

"When you talk about sustainability, it's not something you just stick on. It's something you have to work on involving in all parts of the organization" (Tourism manager 3, p. 2) translation by author.

The participant reports the significance of organizational-wide involvement in fostering sustainability, by implying the need for a holistic approach, where sustainability is deeply embedded in the organization's values, operations, and decision-making processes. Another participant highlights the importance of alignment and collaboration between different levels within the organization:

“(...) when something comes from above, it also has to sort of pull together from below. Otherwise, it doesn't make sense” (Destination director 2, p. 1) translation by author.

The participant suggests that for any action or directive to be meaningful and successful, there needs to be a collective effort and alignment of efforts from both higher-level entities and those at lower levels. This implies that for initiatives or directives to be successful, there should be active participation and support from individuals at all levels within the organization and from stakeholders. One participant reference Danish Destinations and recognizes the value of collaboration and the potential benefits that arise from pooling resources, expertise, and insights:

“(...) if we think we all have the answers to everything, then it's a bit naive. But if we're open and willing to share our information, I actually think, overall, we'll get a better product and that is what Danish Destinations contribute to” (Destination director 5, p. 2) translation by author.

The participant suggests that claiming to have all the answers or solutions to every problem is unrealistic and naive. Instead, by being open and willing to share information, organizations can collectively improve their product or offerings. This implies the importance of humility and collaboration, as well as a culture of learning and openness to new ideas and perspectives. Another participant concurs and emphasizes the importance of supporting and lifting each other up within the industry:

“(...) such a collaborative project as Danish Destination, where we get a common language, I think is really strong, and I regularly say to my colleagues that there is so much potential in this, that we come even closer together and really support and lift each other up (...) a trust has also been created that we dare to be vulnerable towards each other” (Destination director 2, p. 3) translation by author.

The participant suggests that the collaborative nature of the Danish Destinations encourages tourism organizations to provide mutual assistance and encouragement, creating a supportive network within the Danish tourism community. The participant highlights the strength and positive impact of the

collaborative project by Danish Destinations and mentions the trust that has been established through this collaborative effort, implying that trust plays a crucial role in building strong relationships and effective partnerships. The participant also acknowledges the value in creating a shared understanding and platform for cooperation among tourism organizations. Indicating that this common language serves as a unifying force, enabling them to work together more effectively towards common goals.

Findings in The Act of Stewarding

The findings on macro level reveals that Denmark's welfare state status and commitment to social welfare, safety, and sustainability contribute to a high quality of life for its residents. The country's focus on green transportation, sustainable tourism, and collaboration among stakeholders further reinforces its dedication to environmental and social well-being. Denmark strives to become a leading destination for environmentally friendly tourism practices and aims to create flourishing communities, create job opportunities as well as a positive and fulfilling work environment for tourism professionals. Overall, Denmark's holistic approach ensures a balance between the welfare of its people, the preservation of its natural and cultural heritage, and the promotion of sustainable development.

The findings on micro level reveals the importance of collaboration, mutual support, and tailored approaches to sustainability initiatives. They serve as a link between stakeholders, highlighting the need for diverse perspectives and the right stakeholders around the table to drive effective collaboration. The limitations of traditional tourism metrics in capturing the true value and impact of experiences and attractions can prompt a shift towards a more holistic and experiential approach to tourism metrics. This acknowledges the interdependence and shared responsibility among stakeholders in driving sustainability. Efficient resource management and transparent communication

are crucial, recognizing the value of time as a precious resource for businesses and individuals involved in tourism operations. Realistic goal-setting and organizational-wide involvement foster sustainability, ensuring it becomes deeply embedded in tourism organizations values, operations, and decision-making processes. The collaboration in Danish Destinations gives tourism organizations a common language which serves as a unifying force, enabling tourism professionals to work together more effectively towards common goals. Moreover, the potential benefits arising from pooling resources, expertise, and insights, highlight the importance of a culture of learning, openness to new ideas, and trust-building in establishing strong relationships and effective partnerships.

Macro Level of the Act of Hosting

With a strong focus on green development, the country ensures that tourism is developed in close cooperation with local communities to minimize negative impacts and maximize benefits (Erhvervsministeriet, 2022). According to the National Tourism Strategy the collaboration across national, local, public, and private tourism efforts will be strengthened. This partnership will support the dissemination of certification schemes, raise awareness of the business potential of sustainability, and promote the transition to eco-friendly accommodation facilities. This entails specific certifications, such as Green Key certification, in order to meet the goal of certifying 70% of all accommodations by 2030 (Erhvervsministeriet, 2022). The certifications are issued by GREETS (Green Responsible Eco Experience & Traveling Symbols) and was invented by i.e. HORESTA. HORESTA is a Danish trade organization representing the hospitality industry. The organization was founded in 1896 and has since been working to promote the interests of its members and to develop the hospitality industry in Denmark (Horesta, n.d.). Additionally, the National Tourism Strategy aims to attract more foreign guests and invest in tourism products and experiences that can enhance guests' consumption while benefiting local communities and Denmark as a whole. Some indications being

an increased number of overnight stays and two-thirds of all overnight stays must occur outside of the peak season of July and August. Furthermore, the National Tourism Strategy also aims to inspire Danes to explore their own country as guests (Erhvervsministeriet, 2022).

Micro Level of the Act of Hosting

When I asked, “which stakeholders would you say are the most important for you to collaborate with?” The majority answered that tourism businesses as the most important stakeholders to include in collaboration. The emphasis on tourism businesses as important collaborators suggests that their involvement is perceived as crucial for the success of collaborative efforts. As essential players within the tourism industry, businesses possess valuable insights, resources, and expertise that can significantly contribute to collaborative initiatives. Their active participation can help shape strategies, implement projects, and drive positive outcomes. Going forward I will assume that tourism businesses are serving as hosts in some capacity, whether it be small or large and thus, tourism businesses will be referred to as host or hosting. One participant highlights the significance of partnering with individuals or groups who are motivated and enthusiastic about collaboration:

“Those who want to cooperate are the most important to cooperate with (...) They took a chance and threw themselves into it and saw the cool result” (Destination director 2, p. 3) translation by author.

The participant emphasizes the importance of collaboration with individuals or groups who actively seek and desire cooperation. The participant suggests that those who are willing to take the initiative and fully engage in collaboration are the most valuable partners to work with. Their willingness to take a chance and wholeheartedly commit to the cooperative effort leads to positive and impressive outcomes. This reinforces the idea that cooperative endeavors thrive when all participants share a

genuine desire to work together and actively contribute to the collaborative process. Additionally, I observed that numerous participants emphasized the critical role of tourism organizations in promoting regenerative efforts and facilitating positive collaboration among hosts within a destination:

“I will (support regenerative development), if we don't do it then I don't actually know who the drivers for it will be” (Destination director 2, p. 7) translation by author.

The participant expresses a commitment to supporting regenerative development and states a sense of uncertainty regarding who else might take on the role of driving this type of development if they themselves do not. This suggests a recognition of the importance and urgency of regenerative practices and a willingness to take responsibility for promoting and advancing them. Another participant highlights the belief that it is tourism organizations' responsibility and task to create a framework that facilitates the implementation of regenerative tourism for tourism businesses. The participant recognizes that providing a supportive and enabling environment is crucial for businesses to adopt regenerative practices effectively:

“(...) it is our responsibility and task to see to that we create a framework that makes it easy for them (tourism businesses) to implement (regenerative tourism)” (Tourism manager 4, p. 6)

translation by author.

This perspective acknowledges the role of tourism businesses as key actors in implementing regenerative tourism. By creating a framework that makes it easier for businesses to incorporate regenerative practices, the tourism organization aims to facilitate the adoption and integration of a regenerative approaches throughout the destination. This indicates that there is a recognition of the importance of promoting regenerative tourism and supporting businesses that are working towards this goal. One participant highlights the importance of supporting small hosting businesses in this

endeavor and emphasizes the need for collaboration and community-based efforts to achieve regenerative tourism practices:

“(...) I think that regenerative tourism is carried by the small or the one-person businesses and it is them that we must support, because if they are good at doing regenerative tourism, then it is not a given that they are trained economists or marketing experts or something, and we have to take care of that together with our business center and stand shoulder to shoulder so that we get them off to a good start” (Destination director 2, p. 7) translation by author.

The participant advocates for a collaborative approach to supporting small hosting businesses, with the business center and standing "shoulder to shoulder" with them. Indicating that a community-based approach is needed to promote regenerative tourism, rather than relying solely on individual hosting businesses or organizations. Another participant argued that there are certain criteria that must be met for a product to be considered regenerative, particularly in the context of tourism:

“(...) when people make products that meet the criteria that are set for, among other things, regenerative (development), well, then we want to help it further on its way in becoming a tourism product” (Tourism manager 5, p. 4) translation by author (see Appendix F for full interview transcripts).

The participant highlights the willingness to support and assist in the development and promotion of tourism products that align with regenerative criteria. The participant expresses a desire to contribute to the advancement of such products and facilitate tourism businesses' journey towards producing regenerative products. Moreover, the participant indicates the need for regenerative standards and guidelines to ensure that tourism products and practices are aligned with regenerative development goals. Another participant emphasized the role of facilitation:

“Our task is primarily to facilitate. Create networks, create coherence, and of course also bring in knowledge and experience from other places (...) our primary task is to facilitate and inspire and lead the way. After all, it is not us who have the executive part in many of these things. It is our businesses, our municipalities and our locals who ultimately have their hands on the stove”

(Destination director 7, p. 6) translation by author.

The participant suggests that their task is primarily to facilitate and create networks and coherence, rather than being directly involved in the execution of tourism products and practices. This indicates that there is a need for coordination and collaboration among various stakeholders. The participant acknowledges that it is ultimately hosts who have the executive part in many of these things, indicating that they are the ones responsible for implementing regenerative tourism products and practices. The participant also emphasizes the importance of bringing in knowledge and experience from other places, suggesting that there is a need for continuous learning and innovation. All participants agree that there is a need for education and training in the process of implementing regenerative developments. One participant took a more proactive approach and reported that they are actively taking steps to promote regenerative development by launching product development initiatives and courses themselves:

“(...) (we support regenerative development) by inspiring stakeholders and by launching some specific product development initiatives and courses ourselves” (Tourism manager 3, p. 5)

translation by author.

The participant expresses the tourism organizations commitment to regenerative tourism by taking concrete actions aimed at inspiring stakeholders and initiating specific regenerative product development initiatives and courses. This indicates that the participant believes that inspiration is a key factor in encouraging hosts to adopt regenerative development practices. Many participants also

emphasized the importance of host development and are providing resources to support the growth and success of host businesses, as one participant states:

"We have a large number of one-to-one business development courses" (Destination director 7, p.

2) translation by author.

The participant highlights the availability of one-to-one business development courses within the destination. The participant indicates that these courses play a significant role in supporting the growth and development of businesses and recognizes the unique challenges and opportunities that each host business faces, thus providing customized support to address these factors. One participant emphasized the importance of adopting a digital and sustainable approach in all aspects of tourism development, as well as emphasizing the practical benefits of this approach:

"Everything we do, we must do as digitally and as sustainably as possible. In other words, it must come from within, so that it also works properly for our businesses" (Destination director 2, p. 2)

translation by author.

The participant emphasizes their organization's commitment to conducting activities with a focus on digitalization and sustainability. The participant expresses a commitment to integrating digital solutions and sustainable practices into their operations, with a focus on ensuring that these approaches align with the needs and interests of hosting businesses. This indicates that this approach should be applied broadly and comprehensively, as well as align digital and sustainable practices with the needs and capacities of hosts. While some hosts may recognize the need to become more sustainable, and thus more regenerative, a participant reports a personal observation about how some hotels react to discussions about sustainability certifications:

“(...) when you talk about it (sustainability certifications) with hotels, they get a dull look in the eyes and in a little while they will say, “no, we don't want to talk about it again”” (Tourism manager 6, p. 3) translation by author.

The participant highlights hotels' responses to discussions about sustainability certifications and suggests that when the topic is raised, hotels can tend to exhibit disinterest or may be reluctant to engage in further conversation. This could indicate that some hotels either do not place much value on sustainability certifications or are reluctant to pursue them due to the cost or effort required. Another participant suggests that many hosts do not see it as relevant to their operations. The participant highlights the challenges that many hosts face in finding the time and resources to invest in sustainability initiatives:

“I don't see much demand from the tourism businesses to become greener or that they were interested in it at all. There are maybe 1/5 who have it on the agenda. They know they have to get started, and it is something they should do, and it will be a requirement in the future, but there are also many who do not really think it is relevant to them. And then those who think it is relevant, there are many of them who find it difficult to find time and resources for it. It is also because many of them do not experience that their guests demand it, but of course they have not asked the guests”
(Tourism manager 3, p. 1) translation by author.

The participant reports a lack of demand and interest among tourism businesses in becoming greener or prioritizing sustainability practices. The participant suggests that only a small portion, approximately 1/5, of businesses have sustainability on their agenda or are actively pursuing greener initiatives. This indicates that there may be a lack of awareness among hosts about the level of demand for sustainable practices among their guests. The participant notes that many hosts do not experience pressure from guests to become more sustainable but acknowledges that this may be because they

have not asked for feedback on this issue. The participant's statement highlights the challenges and limitations of promoting sustainability within the hosting community, including the need to raise awareness among hosts about the importance of sustainability and the challenges they face in implementing sustainable practices. Many participants agree, and one participant expresses frustration and suggests that while they are doing their part to promote sustainability, it can be challenging to get others in the hosting community to do the same:

“I can stand here and say, “I lift my part of the circle, where are the rest of you?”. It is really difficult for a community, if people don't feel it is a community (...) there will always be someone who says that sustainability is very good, but not for me” (Destination director 2, p. 7) translation by author.

The participant acknowledges that some hosts may be resistant to the idea of sustainability and may not see the value it has to host businesses. The participant emphasizes the importance of a sense of community in promoting sustainability and suggests that if hosts do not feel a sense of community, it can be difficult to motivate them to act in a sustainable way. Indicating the need for collaboration and collective action in promoting sustainability. On the other hand, the same participant raises a concern:

“(...) A (Green Key) certification can be expensive. Can we expect that a small bed and breakfast with Kirstine at age 72, must be forced to give DKK 30,000 for a certification and spend a lot of time on paperwork, which she may not be capable of” (Destination director 2, p. 1) translation by author.

The participants highlight a concern about the cost and administrative burden of obtaining a Green Key certification, particularly for small bed and breakfast establishments operated by individuals, who may face limitations in terms of resources and capacity. Indicating that the cost of certification may be a barrier for small businesses to participate in sustainable tourism certifications initiatives.

The same participant continues and suggests that tourism organizations play a role in connecting stakeholders and promoting sustainability initiatives. The participant states that they try to approach this work incrementally, by starting with small successes and building momentum over time:

“(...) we are the connecting link and try to get people in and then make a tiny success and then get it spread over time. Because if we come up with big arm movements and good thoughts, people say it's fine, I have my own everyday life to take care of, but if you can make a tiny business case on it, it begins to be interesting” (Destination director 2, p. 5) translation by author.

The participant acknowledges the importance of making a business case for sustainability initiatives and suggests that while hosts may be receptive to the idea of sustainability, they may not be motivated to act on it unless they can see tangible benefits to their host businesses, rather than relying on big, abstract ideas that may be difficult to implement. Which indicate that promoting sustainability requires a strategic approach that takes into account the motivations and values of different hosts. Multiple participants agree and one participant elaborated on their strategic approach to support and promote sustainability in host businesses:

“(...) Our sustainability barometer is a survey we do every year, where we can measure how the companies work with sustainability on various parameters” (Tourism manager 1, p. 2) translation by author.

The participant reports that their tourism organization uses a sustainability barometer, which is an annual survey that measures how hosts are working with sustainability on various parameters. Indicating that by using a measurement tool, the tourism organization can gather data on the current state of sustainability practices within the destination and identify areas for improvement. Another participant emphasizes a focus on promoting local entrepreneurship and community involvement in tourism development:

“(...) the more local ownership we have in the destination, the larger part of the value creation will stay in the area” (Destination director 7, p. 1) translation by author.

The participant highlights the positive correlation between local ownership in a destination and the retention of value within the area. The participant suggests that when local stakeholders have a higher level of ownership and control over tourism-related activities, a larger proportion of the value created by the tourism industry remains within the local community. Indicating a focus on promoting local host entrepreneurship and community involvement in tourism development, by encouraging locals to become hosts, more of the economic benefits generated by tourism will stay within the destination, rather than being extracted to external host businesses.

Findings in The Act of Hosting

The findings on macro level reveals that Denmark prioritizes sustainable tourism through green development and close collaboration with local communities, through the strengthening of partnerships, promote eco-friendly certifications, attract foreign guests, and encourage domestic exploration. By prioritizing sustainable tourism products and experiences that benefit both visitors and local communities, Denmark strives to create a thriving and responsible tourism sector that enhances the overall well-being of the country.

The findings on micro level reveals that hosting has the potential to lead regenerative development efforts. The act of hosting plays a crucial role in promoting regenerative tourism and sustainability. Collaboration among hosts with a shared goal is essential for effective and productive collaboration. A community-based approach is needed to foster regenerative tourism, supported by regenerative standards and guidelines. Continuous learning, innovation, and education are vital for hosts to implement regenerative developments successfully. The importance of a sense of community,

collaboration, and making a business case for sustainability initiatives cannot be overstated. However, challenges such as cost, administrative burdens, and lack of awareness may hinder hosts' in applying for a sustainability certification. Tourism organizations play a vital role in connecting stakeholders, promoting sustainability initiatives, and providing support tailored to each host business. Furthermore, tourism organizations promotion of local host entrepreneurship and community involvement further contributes to retaining economic benefits within the destination. By working together and embracing sustainability, hosts can drive positive change and create a more regenerative and sustainable tourism industry.

Macro Level of the Act of Guesting

Denmark is a popular destination for both domestic and international guests (Nielsen, 2023). Denmark is renowned for its high standard of living and quality of life, which often attracts guests who are interested in experiencing the Danish lifestyle and culture. This includes aspects such as good cycling opportunities, welcoming and friendly population, relaxing and safe environment to recharge and unwind, local cuisine and organic foods, local city life, good fishing opportunities, and a suitable number of other guests. Denmark has an image as an environmentally friendly holiday destination in the four local markets, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden. The trends dominating Danish tourism markets include values-based tourism and sustainable tourism. Furthermore, the market is increasingly dominated by green idealists, who place a high value on sustainable options, such as ecology, outdoor activities, respecting local communities and contributing to the local economy without causing disruption (VisitDenmark, 2022).

Micro Level of the Act of Guesting

According to some participants, the purpose of tourism development work, is to accommodate guests.

One participant suggests that their primary focus is meeting the needs and preferences of guests:

“We basically do our tourism development work for tourists” (Tourism manager 8, p. 2) translation
by author.

The participants statement aligns with the general goal of tourism development, which is to create a destination and tourism experiences that are attractive and enjoyable for guests. By framing the organizations work in this way, the participant implies that the needs and desires of guests are a central consideration in the decision-making and planning processes. Although, when I asked, “which stakeholders would you say are the most important for you to collaborate with?”, very few participants answered “the guests” as an important collaboration partner. This could indicate that some tourism organizations do not prioritize guests in their collaboration efforts, or they may not see guests as active contributors to regenerative tourism development. On the other hand, it might indicate that tourism organizations do not view guests as the primary partner for collaboration, since hosts serve as the intermediary between them, resulting in no direct interaction. One participant reports that their tourism organization has pinpointed a particular target market of guests who are deemed to be value-creating:

“(…) what is particularly interesting is that we attract the right guests, the value-creating guests. A value-creating guest is not just an economic income, but it is a guest who adds something of value to the area” (Tourism manager 8, p. 2) translation by author.

The participant suggests that what is particularly interesting is the ability to attract "the right guests" or "value-creating guests." These guests are not solely defined by their economic contribution but are individuals who bring something of value to the area beyond financial considerations. This indicates

that the tourism organization places importance on the non-economic contributions that guests can make, such as cultural exchange, environmental conservation, or community development. By attracting value-creating guests, the participant implies that the tourism organization's approach can have a positive impact on the area beyond just economic benefits. Another participant proposes a tourism project that is designed to engage guests in sustainable practices:

“The project aims to make sustainability an experience for tourists, and in addition we would like to develop some regenerative tourism experiences/products” (Tourism manager 6, p. 1) translation
by author.

The participant proposes the creation of opportunities for guests to actively participate in sustainable activities, aiming to cultivate a deeper understanding and appreciation for sustainability among them. Integrating sustainability into the tourism experience allows guests to directly participate in regenerative practices, contributing to the conservation and enhancement of the local environment and communities. This approach could enable guests to have a meaningful and transformative experience that promotes a sense of connection and responsibility towards the destination. Furthermore, the participant implies that the tourism organization will strategically select projects that align with regenerative goals. The same participant saw guests as a potential resource and suggested involving guests in citizen science, which is the participation of non-professionals in scientific research or data collection:

“(...) we have also talked about creating some (regenerative) experiences where we use citizen science” (Tourism manager 6, p. 5) translation by author.

The participant suggests incorporating citizen science into the creation of regenerative experiences. Citizen science allows guests to actively contribute to scientific knowledge and understanding. Indicating that empowering guests can contribute to meaningful conservation efforts, while also

giving guests a unique and engaging experience. Through hands-on participation, tourists gain a deeper understanding of environmental issues, develop a sense of ownership and responsibility, and contribute to scientific knowledge. This immersive experience could foster a connection to nature, promote environmental stewardship, and encourage a more sustainable and informed approach to guessting. Another participant suggests the potential for a tourism experience that involves environmental conservation and regeneration:

“(…)(maybe) invite the tourists out (in the wetlands) and help with that (floating boats for bird nests), then the guests will have a good experience, and we will create some better conditions than there were before” (Destination Director 3, p. 5) translation by author.

The participant proposes that by inviting guests to participate in setting up floating boats, they can have a positive experience while also contributing to the improvement of the local ecosystem. From the tourists' perspective, such an experience could offer a unique and immersive opportunity to connect with nature and contribute to conservation efforts. The guests can actively engage in environmental stewardship, witnessing the positive impact they can have on the local ecosystem. Such a hands-on experience could foster a sense of connection and responsibility towards nature, leading to a more meaningful and memorable experience for the guests. Another participant suggests the idea of hiring a guide with Down's Syndrome and notes that as a guest, this would provide a unique and memorable experience:

“Imagine, that you come as a hiker and have booked a guide at a point and your guide is a person with Down's Syndrome. Then as a tourist you would get an experience you will never forget and as a person with Down's Syndrome you would get a paycheck” (Tourism manager 4, p. 5) translation by author.

The participant's suggestion of hiring a guide with a disability highlights the potential for tourism to be more inclusive and diverse. Indicating that it could be a transformative experience that goes beyond traditional tourism encounters. Both the guests and the guide with Down's Syndrome benefit from this unique interaction. Such an encounter for the guests could lead to a greater appreciation for diversity and a more profound understanding of the capabilities and contributions of individuals with Down's Syndrome. For the guide with Down's Syndrome, being employed as a guide could provide not only a source of income but also a sense of purpose, accomplishment, and increased self-esteem. It could offer an opportunity to showcase their skills and knowledge while breaking down barriers and stereotypes surrounding disability. This experience could contribute to their personal growth, independence, and social integration within the community.

Findings in The Act of Guesting

The findings on macro level reveals Denmark's popularity as a tourist destination is driven by its high quality of life and environmentally friendly image. The country appeals to guests seeking a relaxed and safe environment, opportunities for cycling and outdoor activities, and a chance to experience local culture and cuisine. Denmark's commitment to sustainability resonates with green idealists who value ecological practices and contributing to local communities.

The findings on micro level reveals the recognition of the central role of guests and their needs. While some tourism organizations may overlook the active contribution of guests to regenerative tourism, it is important to prioritize their involvement in order to succeed with regenerative tourism development. By integrating sustainability into the tourism experience, guests can directly participate in regenerative practices, promoting conservation and community enhancement. Empowering guests to engage in scientific research and offering immersive experiences can foster a connection to nature,

promote environmental stewardship, and encourage sustainable guest behavior. Empowering guests to engage with and appreciate social diversity, by actively encouraging tourists to embrace and participate in diverse experiences, the tourism industry can create a more inclusive environment that celebrates and respects different cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives. This transformative approach allows guests to have a meaningful experience that contributes to personal growth, independence, and social integration within the community. By valuing guests as active partners in regenerative tourism, positive impacts extend beyond economic benefits and create a sense of connection and responsibility towards the destination.

As a researcher, I have observed that the data concerning the act of guesing holds a distinct characteristic, as participants lack experiences with direct guests contact, and primarily rely on hosts for experience development. However, despite this indirect involvement, participants have generated valuable insights and ideas regarding regenerative experiences for guests. These insights reflect the tourism professionals' ability to transform their mindset and expand their understanding of the potential for environmental well-being, community well-being, and the well-being of the guests they serve.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this research is to investigate *what kind of opportunities and challenges Danish destinations experience when working collaboratively with stakeholders towards regenerative tourism*. As a result of the thematic and transformative stakeholder analysis significant opportunities and challenges in implementing long-term regenerative developments were identified. Opportunities and challenges were carefully explored through multiple stakeholder roles with the aim of illuminating the opportunities and challenges that tourism professionals in tourism organizations are

experiencing. To engage in a conversation about regenerative advancements in Danish tourism, it is essential to consider the following factors. In the thematic analysis, tourism practitioners face ambiguity around definition, principles, and practical application of regenerative tourism. Cave et al. (2022) had similar observation regarding the application and implementation of regenerative tourism, stating that practical tools and real-life examples are essential for translating regenerative tourism into actions.

In the transformative stakeholder analysis on a macro level, Denmark is committed to environmental stewardship, preserving natural and cultural heritage, empower local communities, and promote eco-friendly certifications, which resonates with guests. Resulting in an environment that encourages tourism professionals to engage in sustainable tourism practices, and thereby maturing and advancing the concept of regenerative tourism, as described by (Gibbons, 2020). In the act of placing, a balance must be struck between tourism's positive and negative impacts on the environment and recognize humans as integral parts of larger biological living systems, who can experience numerous benefits through a stronger connection with nature, which concur with the work of Mang and Haggard (2016), Araneda (2019) and Becken and Kaur (2021). Moreover, in alignment with the principles of living systems thinking, it is crucial to recognize that places themselves are stakeholders with their own aspirations, and tourism professionals must consider them accordingly as stated by Araneda (2020) and Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al. (2022). In the act of communing, a balance must be struck between tourism's positive and negative impacts on society, furthermore, communing has the potential to be a key regenerative change agent with the power to ignite change from a bottom-up approach, as Dredge (2022) argued.

In the act of stewarding, fostering a shared regenerative vision among tourism organizations and stakeholders will facilitate collaborative endeavors, which align with Grin et al. (2018) and Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al. (2022) findings. Furthermore, stewarding is met with the duality

between opportunity and challenge when striving to promote organizations-wide involvement and tourism professionals' willingness to embrace change and take risks in order to implement regenerative tourism. In the act of hosting, each individual hosting business is distinct and will encounter unique opportunities and challenges, as well as has the potential to be leading regenerative development efforts. Which correspond with Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al. (2022), Pollock (2019) and Bellato, Frantzeskaki, and Nygaard (2022). In the act of guesting, a diverse relationship with places and communities fosters deeper connections with themselves, the local community, and the destination, as Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al. (2022) reports. This connection can be utilized as guests can be active contributors and co-creators of regenerative tourism.

In the following discussion I will elaborate crucial strategic focus points and knowledge to assist in the transition to regenerative tourism.

The Dual Nature of Opportunities and Challenges

After identifying the opportunities and challenges, I acknowledge the delicate balance between them. Opportunities can be perceived as challenges depending on one's perspective, and vice versa. This duality is rooted in the unique perspectives, experiences, and attitudes of individuals, as argued by Acharyya and Bhattacharya (2019) and Antwi and Hamza (2015). The dual nature of opportunities and challenges highlights the complexity of human perception and the subjective nature of how individuals interpret and respond to different situations. It emphasizes the importance of considering multiple perspectives and embracing a mindset that acknowledges both the potential benefits and obstacles inherent in any given circumstance. Moving forward with a regenerative mindset, tourism

professionals can embrace a more holistic approach that perceives challenges as catalysts for transformative progress and expansion, as argued by Dias (2018).

For tourism organizations aiming to transition to regenerative tourism practices, this becomes particularly relevant. The perception of opportunities and challenges in transitioning to regenerative tourism practices also depends on the specific context in which organizations operate. Factors such as regulatory frameworks and cross-level collaborate strategies described in the macro level findings and community engagement, will influence the implementation of regenerative initiatives. Thus, it is advisable for organizations to conduct thorough assessments of the destination's potential, strengths, weaknesses, and stakeholders' attitudes to align their practices effectively and secure strategies to facilitate challenges as opportunities to transform.

Bridging the Gap: Uniting Sustainability and Regeneration in Danish Tourism

The result of the analysis reveals that the participants possessed a level of familiarity with the concepts of sustainability and regeneration. They understand the basic definitions and principles of each concept. However, there is a prevailing ambiguity and a void when it comes to recognizing the similarities and differences between sustainability and regeneration, as Becken & Kaur (2021) have illuminated. This void in understanding hinders the realization of the full potential of regenerative tourism. It limits the ability of professionals to adopt a more holistic and integrated approach that addresses how the organizations sustainability efforts are an intermediate step toward regenerative tourism, as described by Gibbons (2020). To bridge this gap, it is crucial for tourism professionals to recognize the inherent connection between sustainability and regeneration. They need to understand that sustainability can form the foundation for regenerative practices. When integrating regenerative principles into sustainability efforts, tourism professionals can create a more comprehensive and

transformative approach, as underscored in Becken & Kaur's (2021) work. This shift in mindset encourages innovation, collaboration, and the adoption of more transformative strategies. It allows professionals to envision tourism as a catalyst for positive change, where sustainability and regeneration go hand in hand. It is crucial to promote a shift from a fragmented perspective to a more integrated and interconnected approach, encouraging professionals to explore the potential synergies between these two concepts, as advised by Bellato, Frantzeskaki, and Nygaard (2022), Pollock (2015) and Sanford (2019).

Educating Tourism Professionals about Regenerative Tourism

Knowledge and skills equip tourism professionals to understand the principles, practices, and potential of regenerative tourism, as stated by Pollock (2015) and Sanford (2019). When investing resources in their education, organizations empower professionals to grasp the concept of regenerative tourism and by implementing living systems thinking enables professionals to integrate regenerative practices into their work, leading to more sustainable and resilient tourism operations, as separate programs will likely be unsuccessful (Sanford, 2019).

The collaboration within Danish Destinations offers tourism organizations a common language, promotes unity and effective collaboration. The potential benefits arising from merging resources and learning together emphasizes the importance openness, and trust-building. By embracing these principles, tourism professionals can harness the power of collective knowledge, drive innovation, and work together towards shared success.

Educated professionals are better equipped to implement regenerative practices efficiently and effectively, and by investing in education, organizations ensure that their professionals have the necessary mindset, tools, and competencies to implement regenerative initiatives successfully,

resulting in long-term well-being for the environment, communities, stakeholders, guests, and the organization itself.

Acknowledging Places as Tourism Stakeholders

Acknowledging places as active tourism stakeholders is a critical aspect of regenerative tourism practices, as argued by Araneda (2019), Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al. (2022), Mang and Haggard (2016) and Pollock (2019). It involves recognizing that destinations are not just passive backdrops for tourism activities but active participants with their own needs, interests, and voices, as illustrated by Araneda (2020). This perspective considers places as living systems that shape and are shaped by tourism as reported by Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al. (2022). By acknowledging places as stakeholders, tourism professionals can foster a more inclusive and collaborative approach to destination management. Which involves adopting an environmental perspective, and gaining a deeper understanding of places unique characteristics, cultural heritage, and environmental assets, as well as working actively to improve its long-term sustainability and overall well-being, as advised by Mang and Haggard (2016). This recognition promotes regenerative tourism practices that has positive impacts, respect local cultures, preserve natural resources, and enhance the overall quality of the destination (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, & Nygaard, 2022; Dredge, 2022; Pollock, 2019). Acknowledging places as active tourism stakeholders requires a shift in mindset from viewing destinations as mere commodities to recognizing their intrinsic value and agency (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022; Sanford, 2019), and involves understanding that regenerative tourism is about voicing places by protecting, restoring, and revitalizing the cultural and natural integrity of places (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022).

The Reciprocal Relationship with Nature

In today's consumer-driven society, it is easy to view nature as a commodity to be exploited or consumed for our immediate needs. However, this perspective overlooks the intrinsic value and profound significance of nature in our lives. To truly appreciate and experience nature's vitality, we must engage in a process of reconnecting with it, as argued by Araneda (2020). Nature has long been recognized as a source of inspiration, solace, and rejuvenation for individuals. However, the relationship between humans and nature goes beyond mere appreciation in regenerative tourism. It is a reciprocal bond where humans protect and restore nature, and in return, being in nature and relating to it yields profound well-being and numerous positive effects. According to Duedahl et al. (2022) engaging with nature and fostering a deeper connection have been shown to have numerous positive effects on human well-being, such as physical health, mental and emotional well-being, a sense of spiritual connection and environmental consciousness.

The reciprocal relationship between humans and nature is a symbiotic one. As we protect and restore the natural world, we reap the rewards of improved well-being and various positive effects. Recognizing the intrinsic value of nature and taking steps to safeguard it, generates multiple benefits. When we immerse ourselves in nature and foster a deep connection, we nurture a profound appreciation for the Earth's resources and our interconnectedness with all living beings, as reported by Mang and Haggard (2016). Embracing this reciprocal relationship will undoubtedly contribute to a more sustainable and harmonious future for both humanity and the natural world.

Empowering Communities and Municipalities as Key Regenerative Change Agents

Based on the findings of my thesis, I can assert that tourism professionals play a crucial role in empowering communities and municipalities to become key regenerative change agents of tourism

transformation. To foster regenerative change within a destination, the research findings reports that it is important to facilitate community engagement, sustainability, and regenerative practices within a destination. Tourism professionals can benefit from promoting cross-collaboration, community engagement, capacity building, empowerment, benefit-sharing, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship.

When prioritizing cross-collaboration and communication with communities and municipalities and involving them in decision-making processes it will foster ownership and empower them to actively drive regenerative change, which aligns with the findings of Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al. (2022), Gössling and Higham (2021), Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019) and Hussain and Haley (2022). Regular dialogue and transparent communication channels allow for the exchange of ideas, concerns, and feedback between tourism professionals, communities, and municipalities. By actively listening to community voices, addressing concerns, and adapting strategies accordingly, tourism professionals can build trust, strengthen relationships, and ensure that regenerative tourism initiatives are aligned with the needs and aspirations of the local population. Tourism professionals can empower communities and municipalities by provide capacity-building opportunities and educational programs that equip communities and municipalities with the knowledge and skills needed for regenerative tourism practices. Building local capacity enhances the ability of communities and municipalities to transform mindset and take on leadership roles and actively contribute to regenerative tourism efforts, as argues by Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al. (2022) and Dredge (2022). Tourism organizations can advocate for economic diversification, by creating mechanisms to channel tourism revenue back into the community and supporting local businesses. By ensuring fair distribution of economic gains, tourism professionals foster social cohesion, reduce wealth disparities, and increase community support for regenerative tourism practices, as advocated by Tomassini and Cavagnaro (2022). Lastly, tourism professionals continuing sustainability awareness of the importance of

protecting and revitalizing cultural and natural heritage are conveying regenerative change, as noted by Gibbons (2020).

Thus, when tourism professionals take the initiative to empower communities and municipalities, they possess the potential to assume the role of regenerative change agents. In doing so, tourism professionals play a pivotal role in transforming communities into regenerative change agents.

The Duality of Organization-wide Participation

The result of the analysis reveals that tourism professionals face a duality between opportunity and challenge when striving to promote organizations-wide involvement. One on hand the presented opportunity is the potential for organizational-wide involvement in regenerative efforts. This opportunity arises from the recognition that regenerative tourism is not just the responsibility of a few individuals or departments but requires a collective commitment and engagement throughout the entire organization. When all levels of the organization are involved, there is a greater likelihood of implementing regenerative practices effectively and achieving meaningful impact. However, the challenge lies in getting active participation and support from individuals at all levels within the organization. This observation concurs with Hussain and Haley's (2022) argument that institutional barriers can hinder implementation of regenerative tourism. While the opportunity for organizational-wide involvement exists, it can be difficult to mobilize and motivate employees to actively contribute to regenerative initiatives. This challenge arises due to various reasons, such as lack of awareness, lack of facilitating abilities, competing priorities, resistance to change, or a perceived lack of personal benefits, as reported by Andersen et al. (2018), Becken and Kaur (2021), Cave et al. (2022) and Sanford (2019).

To address this challenge, tourism professionals may need to emphasize the importance and benefits of regenerative tourism to all colleagues. This involves creating a shared understanding of how regenerative tourism aligns with the organization's values, goals, and long-term success. As Grin et al. (2018) expressed, complex problems need shared vision and shared ambition. It is crucial to acknowledge tourism living systems and the quest for greater wholeness as Mang and Reed (2012) explained and to communicate the reciprocal relationship, the positive impacts that regenerative tourism practices can have on the environment, local communities, guest experiences, and the overall well-being of the organization. By fostering a sense of ownership and empowering colleagues to contribute their ideas and efforts, tourism professionals can overcome the challenge of active participation and support, as noted by Liburd et al. (2022) who argued that collaborative design can foster a culture of stewardship. Sanford (2019) reports prioritizing a culture that values improvement and progress as a key to encouraging engagement and collaboration and reported that in order to be successful with real regenerative change in tourism organizations, tourism professionals need to be empowered with control. The thin line between the opportunity for organizational-wide involvement and the challenge of active participation highlights the importance of effective leadership and change management within tourism organizations in order to create systemic innovation, as argued by Grin et al. (2018).

Tourism Organizations Willingness to Embrace Change and Take Risks

The willingness of tourism organizations to embrace change and take risks is crucial in implementing regenerative tourism practices, as stated by Becken and Kaur (2021) and Liburd et al. (2022). Regenerative tourism goes beyond traditional approaches to sustainability and requires a transformative mindset, as argued by Gibbons (2020). It challenges organizations to rethink their strategies, policies, and operations to foster positive environmental and socio-cultural impacts, as

described in Becken and Kaur's (2021) study. Their findings revealed that embracing change involves moving away from established practices and venturing into uncharted territories, which concur with Liburd et al. (2022) arguments. When embracing change, organizations can position themselves as pioneers in the industry and contribute to the long-term sustainability and resilience of tourism destinations. Taking risks is an inherent part of the change process. It requires organizations to step outside their comfort zones, experiment with new ideas, and challenge the status quo, as argued by Hussain and Haley (2022), Liburd et al. (2022) and Sanford (2019). Not taking risks can also lead to missed opportunities for growth and improvement.

Denmark's potential for regenerative tourism practices

Based on the macro findings in the transformative stakeholder analysis, I can argue that Denmark has a strong frame for regenerative tourism practices for both tourism professionals, businesses, communities and guests. As stated by the Danish National Tourism Strategy (Erhvervsministeriet, 2022) Denmark's is committed to eco-friendly practices and sustainability by showcasing a determination to be a leader in this field. Denmark not only sets an example for other destinations, but also inspires guests to adopt sustainable behaviors. The country's comprehensive approach is evident in its efforts to empower local communities in sustainable development, recognizing their role as key stakeholders. This holistic approach ensures a harmonious balance between the welfare of its people, the preservation of its natural and cultural heritage, and the promotion of sustainable development. Denmark's vision for a thriving and responsible tourism sector aligns with its broader societal goals, emphasizing the importance of enhancing overall well-being. By appealing to green idealist guests who value ecological practices and contributing to local communities, Denmark has successfully created a tourism sector that resonates with like-minded individuals. This not only attracts guests who prioritize sustainability but also fosters opportunities for a sense of shared

responsibility and collaboration among tourism organizations, businesses, and communities to lead regenerative development efforts.

Leading Regenerative Development Efforts

Based on the findings of my thesis, I can assert that tourism professionals play a crucial role in encouraging local hosting entrepreneurship in order to further regenerative tourism, as noted by Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al. (2022) and Dredge (2022). Moreover, according to Aquino et al. (2022) tourism social entrepreneurship has gained recognition for its ability to achieve inclusive outcomes for host communities, and it is seen as a catalyst for bringing about systemic changes in the tourism industry and host destinations.

Social entrepreneurship refers to the application of innovative and sustainable business models to address social and environmental challenges. It involves creating ventures that combine financial viability with a strong social or environmental mission. Social entrepreneurs aim to generate positive impacts by leveraging market forces and promoting inclusive growth (Aquino et al., 2022). When regenerative tourism is combined with the principles of social entrepreneurship, regenerative tourism has the potential to create significant positive change by fostering community development, promoting cultural preservation, and driving environmental conservation.

Balancing financial viability with social and environmental goals can be a significant challenge for social entrepreneurs in regenerative tourism. However, according to de Lange and Dodds (2017) social entrepreneurship can serve as a foundation for other financially rewarding endeavors which spawned from it, as well as foster environmental and social regulation change, and additionally, social entrepreneurship can attract international guests.

Successful social entrepreneurship necessitates collaboration and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, including local communities, government bodies, NGOs, and guests (de Lange & Dodds, 2017). Building strong partnerships, fostering trust, and navigating diverse interests and priorities can be complex but crucial for long-term success. It is therefore advisable to help and facilitate such collaborative endeavors, as tourism organizations have the experiences in navigating complex collaborations. Additionally, tourism organizations can develop networks, share best practices, and advocate for policy changes as these steps help expanding the influence of social entrepreneurship in regenerative tourism.

Thus, if tourism professionals provide expertise, support, and foster the growth of local hosting entrepreneurship, particularly social entrepreneurship, the potential for significant regenerative outcomes occurs.

Guests as Primary Partners for Collaboration

Guests can be active contributors and co-creators, rather than passive consumers. They have the potential to make meaningful contributions to the conservation and enhancement of the local environment and communities as stated by Araneda (2019) and Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al. (2022). Thus, engaging guests in regenerative practices, such as participating in conservation projects, supporting local initiatives, or learning about sustainable practices, they become agents of positive change. When involving guests, tourism professionals can tap into their knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm to address environmental, social, and cultural challenges in the destination. It also provides an opportunity for guests to have a deeper and more meaningful connection with the place they are visiting, fostering a sense of responsibility and stewardship as argued by Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al. (2022) and Pollock (2015).

Thesis Findings Validate Existing Theories and Strengthen Knowledge Foundation

The findings of my thesis often serve to confirm or support existing theories or assumptions from the literature review and theoretical framework. This validation contributes to the overall strength and credibility of my research (Stenfors et al., 2020; Yadav, 2022). By aligning with established knowledge, the thesis findings not only provide further evidence but also extend the understanding of the topic under investigation. When the thesis findings confirm existing theories or assumptions, it demonstrates that the research has been conducted within a solid foundation of prior knowledge (Yadav, 2022). It indicates that I have thoroughly reviewed the existing literature and theoretical frameworks, and the data collected during the research process aligns with those established concepts. This congruence strengthens the reliability of the thesis findings and enhances their significance within the academic discourse (Stenfors et al., 2020; Yadav, 2022).

Moreover, the confirmation of existing theories or assumptions through empirical evidence provides a sense of continuity in knowledge. It reinforces the validity and robustness of the theory and concepts, showing that they hold true in the context of my thesis research (Stenfors et al., 2020; Yadav, 2022). This confirmation serves as an important contribution to the scholarly community, as it adds further support and confidence to the existing body of knowledge. Additionally, when my thesis findings align with theories or assumptions, it enables researchers to build upon the existing knowledge. By validating established theories and assumptions, I can delve deeper into the topic, explore nuances, or propose extensions to the existing theories. This iterative process of knowledge accumulation allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and opens avenues for future research and academic discourse (Yadav, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this thesis has been to evaluate the existing tourism practices in Denmark and determine the extent to which regenerative tourism holds precedence. Thus, this study has addressed the following research question:

What kind of opportunities and challenges do tourism organizations experience when working collaboratively with stakeholders towards regenerative tourism?

To address the research question effectively, the thesis delved into the perspectives of key transformative stakeholder roles in regenerative tourism development. Adopting a research design rooted in the framework of Living Systems Theory and the conceptualization of transformative roles in tourism. The study employed thematic analysis, and transformative stakeholder analysis to explore the dynamics within the Danish tourism industry. Embracing an interpretivist paradigm with a relativist ontology approach and a subjectivist epistemological approach, the thesis investigated tourism professionals' experience with stakeholder collaboration and subsequently, the ways in which tourism professionals can contribute to the shift towards regenerative tourism practices. The primary empirical data for this thesis comprised nine in-depth interviews conducted with Danish tourism professionals, working in official tourism organizations in Denmark.

To answer the research question in depth, I identified the experienced opportunities and challenges for Danish tourism professionals when working collaboratively with stakeholders towards regenerative tourism. However, during the discussion, the duality between challenges and opportunities and the delicate balance between them is emphasized, arguing that perspectives shape how we perceive opportunities and challenges, and that they can be interchangeable. Nevertheless, based on the research conducted in this thesis, it is evident that certain findings exhibit distinct characteristics associated with either challenge or opportunities, as the following will demonstrate.

The findings of the thematic analysis exhibit signs of being both an opportunity and a challenge, as it emphasizes the importance of education, awareness, and collaboration among tourism professionals to foster a paradigm shift towards regenerative tourism. Only through collaborate efforts and a shared understanding can the industry move towards a more regenerative future.

The macro level of Danish tourism exhibit signs of being an opportunity, as Denmark's success in cultivating a tourism sector that aligns with sustainable ideals serves as a model for other destinations worldwide. Through its leadership, a comprehensive approach, and an emphasis on collaboration, Denmark demonstrates that responsible tourism is not only possible but also beneficial for all stakeholders involved. However, a potential challenge lies in the reorganization of national strategies and the efforts of tourism professionals, shifting their focus from sustainable practices to regenerative practices, as reported by the participants.

The micro level of Danish tourism exhibit signs of being an opportunity as it highlights an emerging growth of understanding that humans are not separate from but rather an integral part of natural living systems. This realization emphasizes the significance of restoring and improving the natural environment while simultaneously providing meaningful experiences, which most of the participants argued could be associated with a challenge.

Tourism professionals recognize the transformative power of the community to drive and influence regenerative initiatives at a local level and see tourism as a catalyst for positive change, which can present itself as both an opportunity and a challenge. While the transformative power of the community is recognized by the participants, there is still a lack of tangible examples showcasing the full potential of communities as change agents for regenerative tourism. The participants implied or ask directly for compelling case studies that they can present to their stakeholders, as stakeholders also require convincing and persuasion in order to fully understand and embrace the transformative

power of regenerative tourism. Embracing a unified approach towards achieving societal goals, tourism professionals can aim to create a harmonious and coordinated approach that aligns tourism developments with broader objectives. This integrated perspective seeks to ensure that tourism contributes to the well-being of both the local community and the environment. In this context, communing emerges as a key regenerative change agent. Communing is the catalyst to shift towards a holistic and interconnected mindset, acknowledging the interdependence between nature and communities, as well as emphasizing the importance of nurturing relationships, fostering sustainable practices, and creating meaningful connections between guests and locals. Focusing on and embracing the act of communing, tourism professionals envision a tourism industry that not only generates economic benefits but also fosters the well-being of its people and the preservation of its natural and cultural heritage.

Additionally, the act of hosting exhibit signs of being both an opportunity and a challenge, as hosting can play a crucial part in driving regenerative development. The academic literature emphasizes the importance of a bottom-up transition to regenerative tourism, highlighting that it will originate from the people and be driven by their collective efforts. By empowering and engaging hosting businesses, tourism organizations can play a central role in fostering a regenerative mindset and influencing the direction of tourism development. Ultimately, it is an opportunity and a challenge to cultivate a culture of learning, collaboration, and trust-building, when Danish tourism professionals and stakeholders drives a shift towards regenerative tourism. This shift involves embracing sustainable practices, inspiring others through leadership, and recognizing the collective efforts needed to create a more regenerative future for the Danish tourism industry. Likewise, embracing guests as active partners, can present itself as being both an opportunity and a challenge. Regenerative tourism can create a mutually beneficial relationship, and guests can contribute to the well-being of the destination, while also deriving personal growth and a sense of connection.

Furthermore, the discussion showcases that sustainability can serve as the steppingstone for regenerative tourism, and engaging all levels of the tourism organization, will further the successful implementation of regenerative practices, which exhibit signs of being both an opportunity and a challenge. Hence, it becomes evident that tourism professionals must be willing to embrace change and take calculated risks to effectively implement regenerative tourism practices. The discussion also highlights places as equal stakeholders and embracing the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature. This shift in perspective requires a holistic approach that considers the well-being of both human and natural systems and can present itself as both an opportunity and a challenge for tourism professionals, as this shift necessitates tourism professionals to depart from conventional thinking and break free from established tourism practices.

Additionally, it is discussed that the findings of my thesis consistently validate and reinforce existing theories and assumptions from the literature review and theoretical framework. This confirmation adds substantial strength and credibility to the overall research conducted. This thesis has provided a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the perceptions and engagement of Danish tourism professionals regarding regenerative tourism practices, as well as their interactions with multiple stakeholders. Applying the approach outlined in this thesis yielded valuable insights, revealing areas in need of improvement, and suggesting potential solutions to foster a more regenerative approach to tourism. Hence, the theory and conceptualizations proved valuable in examining the experienced opportunities and challenges tourism organizations experience when working collaboratively with stakeholders towards regenerative tourism.

Future Research: Advancing Regenerative Tourism Knowledge

After conducting thorough research, I have discovered gaps in the understanding and awareness of the implications of introducing regenerative tourism within a Danish context. As a result, I suggest the following areas of research to enhance the existing knowledge base:

Transitioning from a Sustainability Approach to Regenerative Tourism Practices

Explore the transition process from a sustainability approach to regenerative tourism practices. Building upon the existing knowledge and understanding of transitioning from sustainable tourism to regenerative tourism, this study seeks to uncover strategies, challenges, and potential solutions for bridging the gap and effectively implementing regenerative practices within the Danish tourism industry.

Exploring the Long-Term Impacts of Regenerative Tourism

Conducting longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of regenerative tourism practices on destination sustainability and resilience. This research would provide valuable insights into the durability and effectiveness of regenerative approaches over time.

Scaling Up and Replication of Regenerative Tourism

Exploring strategies for scaling up regenerative tourism practices across different destinations and contexts. This research would focus on identifying barriers, enablers, and best practices for successfully replicating regenerative models in various geographical locations.

Assessing Economic Viability of Regenerative Tourism

Examining the economic viability of regenerative tourism practices and their potential for generating sustainable economic benefits. This research would delve into innovative business models, revenue streams, and investment opportunities that support regenerative practices while ensuring economic growth and profitability.

Impact Measurement and Evaluation of Regenerative Tourism

Developing robust frameworks and methodologies to measure the environmental, social, and economic impacts of regenerative tourism. This research would enhance the ability to assess the effectiveness and success of regenerative initiatives and inform evidence-based decision-making. When conducting research in these areas, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the consequences and potential of implementing regenerative tourism. This knowledge will inform decision-making, guide policy development, and provide practical insights for tourism stakeholders seeking to adopt and advance regenerative tourism practices.

Key Recommendations for Tourism Professionals: Mapping the Way Forward

Drawing from the findings of the thesis, a set of actionable recommendations emerges, guiding tourism professionals in their transition towards regenerative tourism practices. The following recommendations are designed to foster a holistic and sustainable approach to regenerative tourism development:

Embrace Systems Thinking for Regenerative Tourism

Ensure professionals possess a strong educational foundation as they will be better prepared to implement regenerative practices with efficiency and effectiveness. By embracing a systems thinking approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of tourism with its surrounding natural, cultural, and social systems, these professionals will have a deeper understanding of the potential impacts of tourism activities on these systems. This understanding empowers them to work towards enhancing resilience and vitality within these systems. Furthermore, by integrating regenerative principles into the ongoing sustainability efforts, tourism professionals can adopt a more comprehensive and transformative approach towards regenerative tourism. Additionally, embracing a culture that values improvement and progress serves as a catalyst for fostering engagement and collaboration. Real regenerative change in a tourism organization requires disrupting comfort zones and empowering tourism professionals with control. By fostering their unique skills and integrating them into broader living systems, meaningful progress can be achieved.

Assess Destination Potential

To effectively align tourism organizations' practices and capitalize on transformative opportunities, tourism professionals are advised to conduct comprehensive assessments of the destination's potential, strengths, weaknesses, and the attitudes of stakeholders. This thorough evaluation enables them to identify areas for improvement, devise suitable strategies, and establish a solid foundation for regenerative tourism initiatives. By understanding the destination's unique characteristics and engaging with stakeholders, professionals can develop tailored approaches that foster positive change and maximize the regenerative potential.

Engage Stakeholders

By promoting meaningful engagement and collaboration among local communities, businesses, indigenous groups, government agencies, NGOs, and other relevant stakeholders, tourism professionals can create a foundation for regenerative tourism activities. Involving these stakeholders in decision-making processes and co-creating initiatives ensures their active participation in the development and management of such activities. This can be achieved by establishing regular dialogue and transparent communication channels that facilitate the exchange of ideas, concerns, and feedback.

Preserve and Enhance Places as an Equal Stakeholder

Recognize places as invaluable stakeholders involves emphasizing the protection, restoration, and revitalization of places' cultural and natural integrity. This entails prioritizing efforts to preserve the unique attributes that make each place special. Additionally, embracing the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature becomes crucial. This can be achieved by minimizing waste generation, promoting energy efficiency, and actively preserving biodiversity and ecosystems. By acknowledging the significance of places for human health, tourism professionals can also foster a deeper connection between individuals and their surroundings, promoting well-being and a sense of belonging.

Foster Community Benefits

Tourism professionals have a crucial role in empowering communities to become agents of regenerative change by ensuring that tourism initiatives contribute to the well-being and empowerment of local communities. Moreover, promoting equitable distribution of economic benefits, encourage local and social entrepreneurship, and supporting community-led initiatives that

enhance social and economic resilience will enrich communities and consequently, enhances the attractiveness of the destination.

Cross-collaboration with municipalities

Cross-collaboration with municipalities and their various departments is crucial for achieving effective regenerative outcomes. To facilitate this collaboration, it is important to establish clear communication channels, such as regular meetings, shared platforms for information exchange, and designated points of contact among municipalities, departments, and tourism organizations. A collaborative mindset should be fostered among all parties involved, emphasizing the shared goals and benefits of working together to enhance tourism development and promote the overall well-being of the destination. Furthermore, identifying common objectives is essential for successful cross-collaboration. To ensure clarity and efficiency, roles and responsibilities of each party should be clearly defined, minimizing confusion, and ensuring that everyone understands their contributions and obligations. Additionally, sharing resources and expertise is a powerful strategy for maximizing the outcomes of cross-collaboration. By pooling resources and leveraging the strengths and knowledge of each municipality, department, and tourism organization, more efficient and effective results can be achieved. It is also crucial to involve relevant stakeholders, including local businesses, community organizations, and residents, in the collaborative process. Their perspectives and contributions can significantly enhance the success of cross-collaboration initiatives, ensuring that they are aligned with the needs and aspirations of the local community.

Educate and Raise Awareness among Guests

Guests can be active contributors and co-creators, by actively engaging in the conservation and enhancement of the local environment and communities, guests have the potential to make significant and meaningful contributions. Tourism professionals can implement educational programs and awareness campaigns to inform guests about the principles and benefits of regenerative tourism, and thus encourage responsible behavior, promote sustainable travel practices, and create opportunities for meaningful interactions between guests, communities and the natural environment.

Measure and Monitor Regenerative Progress

Establish monitoring systems and indicators to assess the effectiveness and progress of regenerative tourism initiatives. Regularly evaluate the impacts of tourism activities and adapt strategies accordingly to ensure continuous improvement and alignment with regenerative principles.

By incorporating these recommendations into their practices, tourism professionals can contribute to the transformation of the industry towards a regenerative paradigm. These actions not only benefit the destination's ecological and social well-being but also foster enhanced visitor experiences, long-term sustainability, and resilience. Embracing regenerative tourism practices can pave the way for a more harmonious and mutually beneficial relationship between tourism, the environment, communities, and future generations.

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