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RESEARCH ARTICLE



A holistic and pluralistic perspective for justice through tourism: a regenerative approach

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ABSTRACT

Justice is integral in transformative tourism approaches that call for a complete restructuring of the travel and tourism sector worldwide. While justice through alternative tourism models promotes responsible, sustainable transitions in the tourism sector, these models are frequently informed by a perceived binary between the social and the environmental and long-held patterns of West-centric thought and West versus 'the rest' power dynamics, found both in tourism theory and practice and within justice frameworks. In this article, we explore the potential of the regenerative development paradigm to bridge these divides and adopt a pluriversal lens to devise a more just practice of tourism. The holistic, transformative tenets and pluralistic perspective of regenerative development and tourism are used to build a novel framework for justice. The framework's capacity to analyse, unlock and catalyse place regeneration in different knowledge systems and restore just relationships has been leveraged in two rural areas in Colombia and Ecuador. Collecting data through mixed qualitative methods that combine reflexive ethnography with *in situ* and online interviews, we identified actions taken to address local inequalities and challenges while fostering pathways to the systemic transformation of residents' livelihoods. These place-specific actions inspired by ancestral traditions have revitalised the areas' ecosystems, including local human communities and the latter's tourism activities. The discussion of results examines the potential of pluriversal regenerative development and tourism principles grounded in diverse knowledge and ethics frames to guide actions for systemic social and environmental justice.

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Introduction

Over the last few decades, the broad concepts of sustainability and sustainable development have notably shaped tourism development. The current global plan for Sustainable Development Goals helps guide tourism towards more sustainable outcomes (Sharpley, 2020). However, critics argue that the measures implemented over the years are rather 'oxymoronic' and real sustainability is yet to be genuinely pursued (Buckley, 2012; Sharpley, 2020). Issues like greenwashing, 'social washing', and linear

and servant economies reveal weak interpretations of sustainability that continue to prioritise tourism growth and the sector's ever-growing exploitative agenda (Fletcher, 2011; Hall, 2022; Sheller, 2024). Dramatically exposing the negative social and environmental consequences of this growth, the Covid-19 pandemic reignited the debate on transforming the contemporary travel and tourism sector worldwide through forms and approaches to tourism that move away from neoliberal capitalism.

Alternative tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020) is an umbrella term encompassing non-traditional tourism forms promoting sustainable transitions and contributing to 'a more just global order' (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008, p. 345). When tackling injustice, alternative tourism has generally been pervaded by West-centric thought (Kohn, 2013), prioritising humans over nature (Guia, 2021). Filling the gaps in justice and tourism scholarship (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Lee, et al., 2023; Lee & Jamal, 2008) and advancing justice through tourism calls for a *truly* pluralistic view (Mikocki, 2020). The regenerative development approach adopts complex living systems thinking (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022) which has the potential to impact justice through tourism via a synergic relationship between humans and nature within an ecosystem (Dredge, 2022) and a decolonial approach that embraces different knowledge systems (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Lee, et al., 2023).

This article explores the potential of regenerative development to devise more just tourism by adopting a pluriversal lens. It answers the following questions: (1) Which elements of the regenerative development paradigm intertwine most closely with justice? and (2) How do they address questions of (in)justice while simultaneously fostering place regeneration? We review the literature on both justice through alternative tourism and regenerative development and tourism and propose a novel framework for justice through regenerative development and tourism. The holistic, transformative and pluralistic perspectives of regenerative development and tourism are embedded within the framework which draws on elements from diverse knowledge systems; its implementation is intended to analyse, unlock and catalyse place regeneration (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Lee, et al., 2023) and restore just relationships (Caniglia et al., 2019; Pellow, 2019). The framework was tested in two rural areas (Eisenhardt, 1989) in Colombia and Ecuador impacted by political and environmental conflicts (Moreira et al., 2015); its exploration employed mixed qualitative methods combining reflexive ethnography and in-person and online semi-structured interviews. Longitudinal ex-post data analysis revealed actions that have addressed local inequalities and challenges while fostering pathways to the systemic transformation of local livelihoods. The outcome of these place-specific actions inspired by ancestral heritage has been a renewal of the whole living system, including communities and their tourism activities, with the latter acting as a catalyst or a multiplier in local transformational processes. The discussion of results assesses the potential of pluriversal regenerative development and tourism principles grounded in diverse knowledge and ethics frames to guide actions for systemic social and environmental justice.

Justice through alternative tourism: social and environmental perspectives

The broad category of alternative tourism includes 'sustainable', 'responsible', 'social' and 'soft' tourism, among others, all seen as – to a greater or lesser degree – reformist

of global tourism (Guia, 2021). Coined by Scheyvens (2002), the term ‘justice tourism’ denotes achieving justice through alternative tourism, emphasising equitable relationships between host and hosted communities, and fostering respect, solidarity and socio-economic improvement. Systematising the relationship between justice and tourism from an ethical perspective, Guia (2021) distinguished the notions of justice tourism and justice through tourism. *Justice tourism* literature (Scheyvens, 2002) delves into affirmative and political ethics grounded in (comparative) political theory and non-Western perspectives (Kohn, 2013). *Justice through tourism*, meanwhile, emphasises alternative tourism forms, intended to address injustice in different ways (Guia, 2021). The social justice dimension of the latter approach intersects with social sustainability concerns. For example, both *religious* and *ethical slow* tourism (Yoder, 2017) focus on cultural and spiritual aspects, while *responsible* (Cheer et al., 2021) and *social* tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008) prioritise communities’ livelihoods, social cohesion and territorial protection. *Hopeful* (Pritchard et al., 2011) and *humanistic* tourism (Della Lucia & Giudici, 2021) advocate human rights, dignity, ethics and flourishing (Cheer, 2020) in response to injustice and inequality. The broad category of *humanitarian tourism* places moral norms above travellers’ needs, emphasising solidarity with communities combatting local injustices (Luh Sin et al., 2015). The justice perspective in alternative tourism perpetuates West-centric and colonial framings and West versus ‘the rest’ power dynamics (de Sousa Santos, 2014; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008; Kohn, 2013). Moreover, it treats social and environmental issues separately, paying little attention to ‘collective’ and communal values (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Lee, et al., 2023), or, indeed, to environmental justice – which many consider a facet of social (Haughton, 1999) or spatial justice (Marcuse et al., 2009). Marcuse (1998) contends that when social justice is prioritised, environmental degradation, nature’s ill-health, and the unfair distribution of resources can all persist, unseen. Noting this failure to understand the inextricable links between environmental and social justice, Guia and Jamal (2024) urge the adoption of a pluriversal and relational ‘posthumanist ethics’ in response to existing injustices (p. 8).

The environmental justice literature (Lee & Jamal, 2008) asserts that environmental injustice and ‘geographic inequality’ (Marcuse et al., 2009; Scruggs et al., 2023) are inseparable from socio-economic disparities (Bullard, 1983). Environmental discrimination disproportionately affects those on low incomes, disadvantaged by class, gender and ethnicity, among other factors (Bullard, 1983). The unequal geographic distribution of environmental goods, benefits, costs, and risks is more evident in the Global South, marked by colonial legacies (de Sousa Santos, 2014), impacting Indigenous (Scheyvens, 2002; Schlosberg & Carruthers, 2010) and local communities (de Sousa Santos, 2014). Tourism policies influenced by ‘global economic and financial mechanisms’ in these systems tend to favour foreign stakeholders and local elites over local communities (Lee & Jamal, 2008, p. 55). In former colonies and rural areas marked by historical inequalities, in places where people have reclaimed their agency and rejected external political control and exploitation, thereby (re)gaining control over local resources and forms of capital (Leff, 2000), we obtain insights into how the rights of a place and/or community can best be (re)asserted (de Sousa Santos, 2014; Kasabov, 2014).

From regenerative development to regenerative tourism: a holistic transformative approach

Regenerative development, and its derivative regenerative tourism, are seen as transformative concepts underpinning diverse systemic and complex adaptive approaches aimed at the long-term socio-economic renewal of societies, communities, and territories globally (Bellato & Pollock, 2023). Its ecological dimension spans various disciplines, including architecture, engineering, environmental studies and, finally, social sciences and tourism (Bellato & Pollock, 2023). The integration of these disciplines and the reconciliation of the original ecocentrism of environmental sciences and the social sciences' anthropocentrism has created a holistic approach to living systems that recognises the feedback loops between physical, natural, economic and social forms of capital (Caniglia et al., 2019). Works by Reed (2007), Mang and Reed (2012) and Hes and Du Plessis (2015) established the foundations for research and praxis in regenerative development. The *ecological worldview* considers humans to be part of the natural environment (Du Plessis & Brandon, 2015), and *holistic living systems thinking* posits the interconnectedness within complex systems, whose parts interact, co-exist, and co-evolve (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022; Benne & Mang, 2016). A *collective mindset* and *collaborative* actions (Cave & Dredge, 2020; Pollock, 2015) are vital for maintaining a thriving ecosystem and fostering mutually beneficial relationships, understanding, and trust (Pollock, 2015). They lead to *net positive results* for the ecosystem's health and well-being (Hes & Du Plessis, 2015). Adopting an environmental justice lens, Pellow (2019) advocated harnessing the concepts of regenerative development to tackle inequalities and power discrimination and build just systems in 'bio-regionally based' (i.e. bioregional) contexts (Caniglia, 2019).

Informed by these tenets, regenerative tourism (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, & Nygaard, 2022; Dredge, 2022) has gone on to diversify the pillars of regenerative development and enrich its ethos. The primacy of place becomes a 'central organising concept', encouraging roles and behaviour that produce system-wide effects (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022) and fostering economic regeneration grounded in increased interactions at the local level (Pearson et al., 2024). Indigenous and ancestral teachings, transmitted by primary knowledge holders such as elders, shape human–nature relationships (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Lee, et al., 2023; Matunga et al., 2020). Local populations are considered to be the stewards of the places in which they live (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022). Together with marginalised groups and visitors, they actively promote the health and development of those places (Becken and Kaur, 2021; Pollock, 2019). The notion of *anthropo-bio harmonisation*, conceived by the Global Initiative for Regenerative Tourism, understands individuals' conscious interactions with themselves, others and nature as enhancing the *sense of place* experienced in ecosystems (IGTR, 2020). The development of these pillars has challenged the dominant Western and colonial framings within modern tourism (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Lee, et al., 2023): regenerative tourism recognises 'other ways of thinking, being and knowing about tourism' (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015, p. 4) and fosters place-sourced epistemologies (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Lee, et al., 2023) and multicultural dialogue.

The pluriversity of the regenerative ethos means that this 'epistemological decolonisation' (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015) also impacts justice through regenerative

tourism. It challenges inequality and power discrimination as experienced by *all* disempowered and disadvantaged beings (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, & Nygaard, 2022), legitimating Indigenous and minority voices and more-than-human agency (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Lee, et al., 2023; Dredge, 2022). ‘Decolonial regenerative tourism’ (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Lee, et al., 2023) has commonalities with a ‘climate de-colonialism’ (Sheller, 2023) rooted in *mobility justice* (Sheller, 2021): both recognise the disproportionate impact of people, resources, information mobility on minorities and rural and Indigenous communities (Sheller, 2023). Epistemological decolonisation and global climate ethics are equally cognisant of the need for a truly pluralistic view if radical and just change is to be realised.

Framework for justice through regenerative development and tourism

Informed by theory, the research design combines the primary constructs and core issues from the reviewed literature in a novel framework for justice through regenerative development and tourism. It employs a dual-entry approach, intertwining place regeneration and justice through a regenerative development paradigm (Figure 1). The framework leverages the holistic and transformative principles that underpin it, highlighting ecosystems’ evolutionary potential (Mehmood et al., 2020) and pluriversal perspectives – their capacity to incorporate bioregionally-based knowledge systems into the regenerative processes (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Lee, et al., 2023; Chambers & Buzinde, 2015). The application of these key principles can result in place transformation (Caniglia, 2019) and restore just relationships among different forms of capital locally (Benne & Mang, 2016; Pellow, 2019).

The regenerative development and tourism entry (see left side in Figure 1) draws from diverse concepts in the literature, synthesising them in the form of three interconnected pillars and unlocking their potential to inspire holistic place-based transformation. The concepts of *anthropo-bio harmonisation* (Du Plessis & Brandon, 2015; IGTR, 2020), the *collective-collaborative mindset* (Dredge, 2022; Pollock, 2015), and *net positive results* (Hes & Du Plessis, 2015; Pollock, 2015) appear frequently in the literature and practice, described using a variety of terms that refer to the same concepts. The *anthropo-bio harmonisation* pillar captures the complexity of bioregional contexts and the feedback loops – generated by different actors and their interactions (IGTR, 2020) and diverse forms of capital (Caniglia et al., 2019) – that lead to harmonious development over time (Du Plessis & Brandon, 2015). The more-than-human ethos in living systems values all entities, their principles, and laws (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022). Imbalances in the ecosystem (Caniglia et al., 2019) trigger bioregional adaptive responses which, in turn, result in increased harmonisation.

The *collective-collaborative mindset* legitimates all actors, encouraging inclusive decision-making and actions (Mehmood et al., 2020) to catalyse broad participation in place transformation (Dredge, 2022). Custodians of place-sourced knowledge guide place-specific shifts and evolutionary processes (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Lee, et al., 2023; Chambers & Buzinde, 2015), improving ecosystem well-being (Caniglia, 2019; Dredge, 2022). Tourism drives critical change (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022) by generating common goods and fostering shared values through meaningful experiences in harmony with nature. The *net positive results* pillar captures the reharmonising

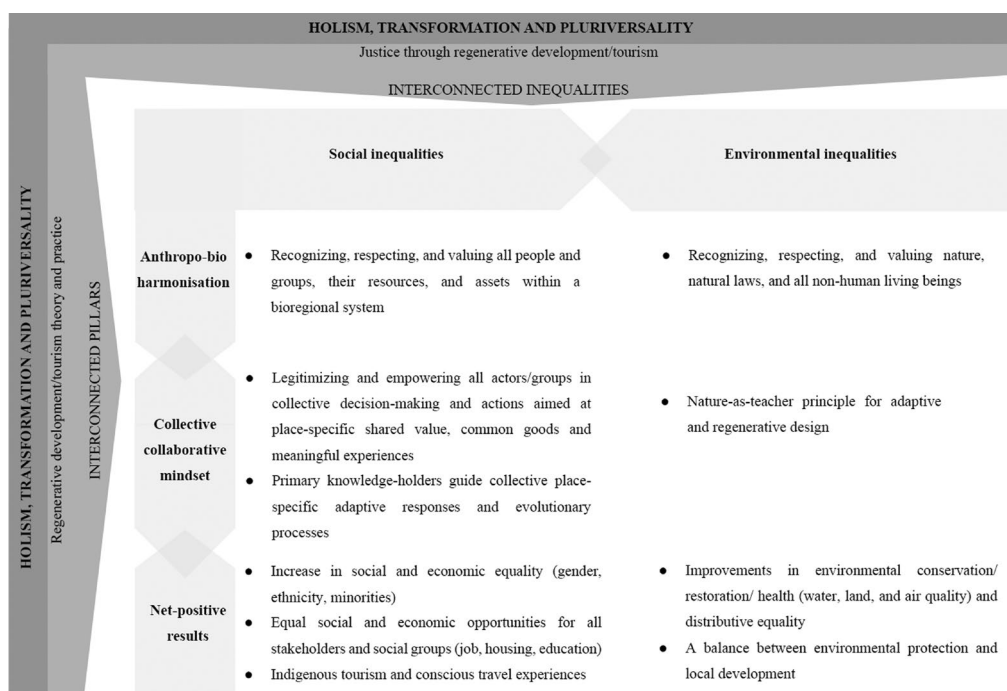


Figure 1. Framework on justice through regenerative development and tourism (Source: Authors).

of the whole living system (Dredge, 2022; Pollock, 2015) through increased socio-economic equality (Bullard, 1983), environmental distributive equality (Lee & Jamal, 2008), and a thriving natural environment (Ateljevic, 2020; Mehmood et al., 2020). Conscious travel experiences (Pollock, 2015) drive place regeneration and stimulate further change.

By inducing holistic changes, the regenerative pillars can help to tackle injustice and power inequalities (see upper entry in Figure 1). While reclaiming agency results in structural change, the framework adopts a social (Guia, 2021) and environmental (Lee & Jamal, 2008) perspective on inequality. Regaining agency in relation to place identity and social rights challenges the power discrimination, exclusion and marginalisation that harm low-income, disadvantaged and minority groups (Pellow, 2019; Sheller, 2023), particularly in post-colonial and rural areas (Chandler, 1982; Kasabov, 2014). The self-legitimation and empowerment of these groups can produce bioregional changes (Pellow, 2019) and thus establish just relationships among humans and with nature (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022; Caniglia et al., 2019; Pellow, 2019). Indigenous tourism and conscious travel transform social and environmental consciousness (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008; Pollock, 2015), facilitate meaningful encounters between visitors and hosts (Dredge, 2022), and provide new opportunities for all groups to thrive (Sanford, 2019). Similarly, reclaiming agency over land and the exploitation of natural resources mitigates human–nature power imbalances (Pellow, 2019) and the inequitable geographic distribution (Lee & Jamal, 2008; Marcuse et al., 2009) of environmental goods, risks, costs, and benefits. Recognising nature and non-human beings as peers within a living system (Matunga et al., 2020; Pellow, 2019) can prompt place-sourced adaptive responses (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Lee, et al., 2023; Mang

& Reed, 2012), leading to improvements in environmental conservation, restoration and health, and to harmonious relationships throughout the system (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Lee, et al., 2023).

Rural areas in Colombia and Ecuador: colonial legacies and community reclamation of agency

The proposed framework's potential is tested in two rural areas in Colombia and Ecuador. These countries, home to rich Indigenous cultures and a history of Spanish colonisation, have endured longstanding political conflicts and socio-economic crises (Chandler, 1982; Moreira et al., 2015), leading to issues including poverty, repression, exploitation and land displacement. From the mid-1960s to the early 2010s, Colombia endured prolonged armed conflict between the national army, various drug cartels and guerrilla groups, exacerbating social inequality (Moreira et al., 2015). Next door, Ecuador and Peru were caught up in sporadic military disputes over territories in the Amazon (Arnoldi & Arnoldi, 1995) which were simultaneously experiencing uncontrolled deforestation driven by cattle breeding, oil extraction, and gold mining which provoked environmental crisis, depopulation, and the abandoning of traditional ways of living.

National efforts to tackle these issues began in the late twentieth century, but challenges persist. Among the rural settlements that have struggled with the aforementioned problems, San Rafael in Colombia and the Sacha Waysa Indigenous community in Ecuador stand out for their remarkable efforts to effect a radical socio-environmental transformation. In San Rafael, a small municipality (around 13,000 multiethnic people) in the Southwestern Antioquia region, the social fabric was torn apart, and traditional economic activities were severely curtailed by armed conflict. The forests in which the *Inca Kichwa* community of Sacha Waysa live, in the Ecuadorian Amazon around Cotundo, have been decimated by the livestock industry. In the face of adversity, both communities have endeavoured to reclaim their identities and rights over natural and cultural resources. Rural and Indigenous tourism initiatives have been crucial to the regeneration of social capital and livelihoods, paving the way for a radical and just transformation of the areas' living systems.

Data collection

The interpretative capacity of the framework for justice through regenerative development and tourism was tested by analysing the abovementioned initiatives (Eisenhardt, 1989). Data were collected longitudinally between 2018 and 2023 using a mixed qualitative method combining reflexive ethnography with semi-structured interviews (in-person and online) (Jones & Watt, 2010). Following Geertz (1974) and Katz (1994), our fieldwork emphasises the relevance of conversations with natives (using this term in the 'strict sense of the term' (Geertz, 1974, p. 27)) and defining the field spatiotemporally. Here, the natives and the fields are the members and living places of the local and Indigenous communities in San Rafael and Sacha Waysa members that are part of the 'Huasquila Ecolodge' project. The ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in 2018. One co-author was directly involved in participatory action research (Chiu, 2003), an approach which emphasises researchers' active collaboration with communities to address issues with which the latter are confronted

while concurrently observing ongoing processes relevant to their research aims. The position of the researcher is thus that of participant-as-observer (Reeves et al., 2013). Leading local sustainable tourism practitioners recommended these communities to the researcher as potential fieldwork locations. The two-month fieldwork included research design and obtaining access to the field, followed by a month focused on data collection through semi-structured interviews (Morse et al., 2002; Reeves et al., 2013). Primary data covered the identity and history of the area, local population, the inequalities it has suffered, and how it has responded to challenges. Post-pandemic, between 2022 and 2023, additional online interviews with project coordinators assessed the current situation and ongoing activities.

Data analysis

Data collected between 2018 and 2023 underwent two ex-post reflexive interpretations (Alvesson et al., 2008). The first round (2019–2021) involved interrogating the information gathered for transparency, validity, ethical conduct and interpretation, taking into account the researcher's background and involvement with the communities. The second round (May 2022–May 2023) included manual analysis to explore existing inequalities and describe the actions and outcomes that have led to just bioregional systems. Our ex-post longitudinal approach allowed us to examine communities' transformation and evolution through the lens of our framework. Revising and analysing the collected material over an extended period of time allowed us to intertwine place, time and memories, reducing spatiotemporal distances, and enhancing our reflexivity with regard to data analysis and interpretation (Reeves et al., 2013).

Pathways to development and justice in rural communities in Colombia and Ecuador

The primary findings of the study concern local communities' actions to tackle challenges and inequalities and catalyse pathways to local regenerative (tourism) development and justice. The significance of the results is discussed with reference to the application of the previously described framework (Figures 2 and 3).

From San Rafael's local tourism network to the 'Zafra nature reserve'

Decades of economic instability, threats to life and poor security in San Rafael have paralysed local institutions and hindered community participation in civil society, limiting opportunities for development, education and overall progress. By the early twenty-first century these factors had led to depopulation and the near collapse of residents' livelihoods, with illegal activities becoming a primary means of survival. At this point, community members, including peasants and cultural associations, decided to confront these challenges by actively working towards rebuilding their life conditions through self-organisation and independent actions (Figure 2). They reclaimed agency over their land on the basis of shared ethical principles, recognising the value of local heritage, community bonds and a sense of place. One member describes the start of community networking:

Inspired by solidarity, equity, and continuous education, we created an 'alive' organisation embodying these principles. Our collaborative and supportive approach extended internally and externally, allowing us to engage with our surrounding environment, influencing the actions of other participants in the area, and, most importantly, fostering positive interactions with nature. [Female, mid-40s]

In 2014, this informal organisation became the official (legally constituted) local tourism network which, as of 2023, has more than 150 members involved in soft services and various productive activities. Collective actions have resulted in conscious tourism experiences. Guided tours to places of particular historical interest in San Rafael help visitors to understand the area's harsh past and appreciate the community's spirit and skills as they renew a vulnerable area and safeguard local heritage. A network member explained in interview:

Our goal is for tourism to support this community actively, promoting people's wellbeing and the ecosystem's health. Tailored offerings inspire visitors' sensitivity to the sense of place, ensuring us an income to sustain our daily lives without harm to our ecosystem. We collectively strive to prevent uncontrolled development disruptions to the tranquillity [in the place] and nature. [Female, mid-40s]

Entrepreneurial non-tourism-related activities, education and environmental initiatives are important elements of the area's harmonious development. Organic agriculture and coffee production have been restored, and fishery, beekeeping and agroforestry introduced. The recurring event 'Tourism which transforms' showcases transformative tourism practices in Colombia's vulnerable rural areas. Finally, 35 ha of reforested land were designated as the 'Zafra' nature reserve. Education has had a strategic role, nurturing these processes for the long term through novel school curricula for young people and capacity building for adults. San Rafael is now thriving; its guests enjoying their hosts' authentic knowledge-systems, place, foods and other goods. The jobs and income from both traditional and new activities (within tourism and not), have allowed locals to stay in, or return to, the area. A local tour operator manages tourist flows to maintain the environment's carrying capacity.

Despite these positive outcomes, the community of San Rafael still faces challenges. The number and variety of stakeholders engaged in economic activities limits the impact of socio-environmental shifts and place regeneration, hindering further tourism network development and the introduction of new initiatives. Illegal activities still harm the community's life and progress, threatening the positive results and prosperity achieved to date. In addition, poor local infrastructure restricts access to certain areas, making it difficult for the tourism network to operate across the territory. The coordinators of the 'Zafra' nature reserve comment on the results achieved:

Our dedication transformed 'Zafra' and San Rafael into inspiring places where visitors can connect and experience nature, contributing to its further conservation. Living like the community that has chosen to be in harmony with nature shows others how they can do the same. [Female, mid-40s]

Due to social and regional recognition, we now collaborate successfully with the public administration. We are also proud that the people's education about responsible tourism improved responsible actions in practice. [Male, mid-40s]

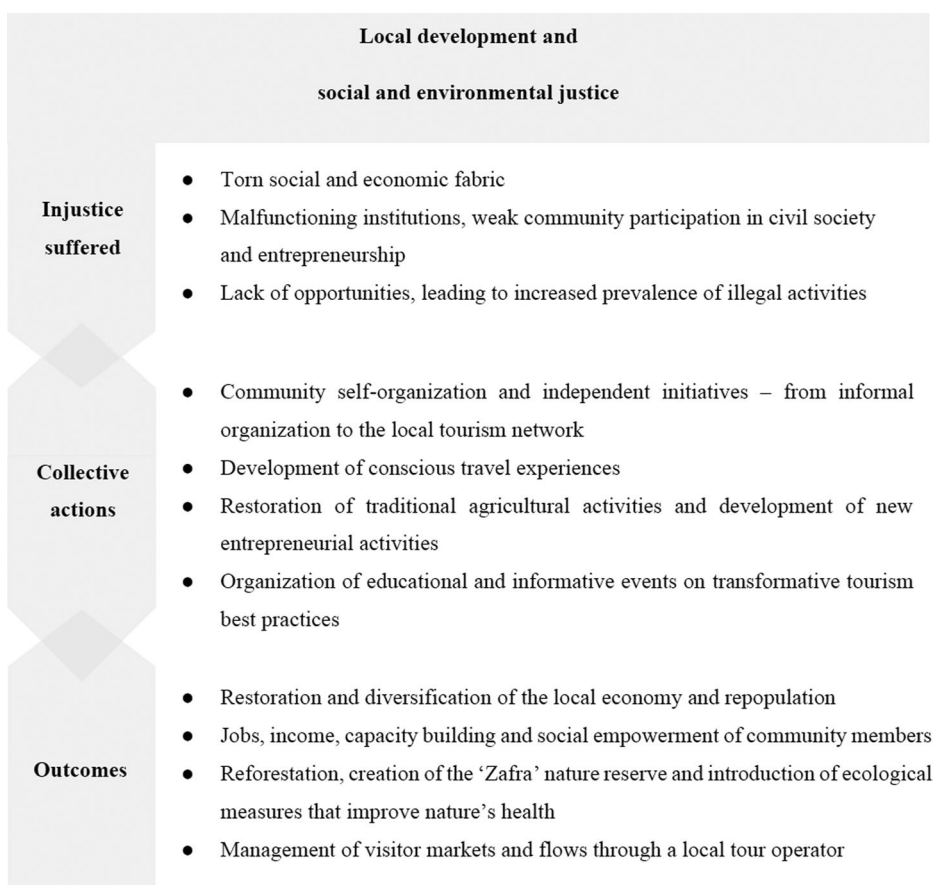


Figure 2. Pathways to local (tourism) development and justice in San Rafael (Colombia) (Source: Authors).

From Sacha Waysa’s reforestation plan to the ‘Huasquila ecotourism lodge’

Environmental degradation, mainly caused by the livestock industry, has broken the synergy between the Sacha Waysa Indigenous community and nature. It has threatened traditional activities, severely impacting the community’s economy, customs and heritage, leading to depopulation and disaster-like consequences (Mei-Singh et al., 2024). In the late 1990s, community was joined by a family who, having inherited a deforested area, had returned from Quito (Figure 3). Informed by mutual respect and a focus on ecosystem health, the collaboration aimed to transform the area’s negative environmental legacy, emphasising the equal role of Indigenous and non-Indigenous inhabitants in regenerating nature. Through a voluntary agreement, the two groups initiated a shared project to create collective well-being, as explained by a member of the returnee family:

The local Indigenous knowledge inspired our project, which is fully integrated with nature. We acknowledge the value of nature and treat partners, neighbours, providers, and visitors equally. I believe caring for others in our surroundings is a universal concept everyone can understand.
[Male, mid-40s]

The work on reforestation was tackled collectively, to ensure the equitable division of environmental benefits and cease further ecological degradation. Post-reforestation, the ‘Huasquila Ecolodge’ tourism project was established within a new (private) nature reserve. A joint decision was taken that the Indigenous community would lead the Ecolodge’s tourism initiative focused on environmental conservation, nature protection and economic and social empowerment. Indigenous women played vital roles in the initiative. A family member explains these decisions:

Tourism emerged as a mutually beneficial option to generate value and distribute the benefits equally. Our longstanding collaboration [with Indigenous people] instilled familiarity and trust. It was natural that they led the project due to their intimate knowledge of this place. [Male, mid-40s]

Sacha Waysa’s successful reforestation reconnected 200ha of reforested and protected secondary forest with the primary rainforest of the Amazon basin. The revitalised ecosystem welcomed back diverse plant and animal species, reviving centuries-old practices related to nature and – crucially – allowing for their transmission to younger generations. The Sacha Waysa community’s tourist services enhance human–nature

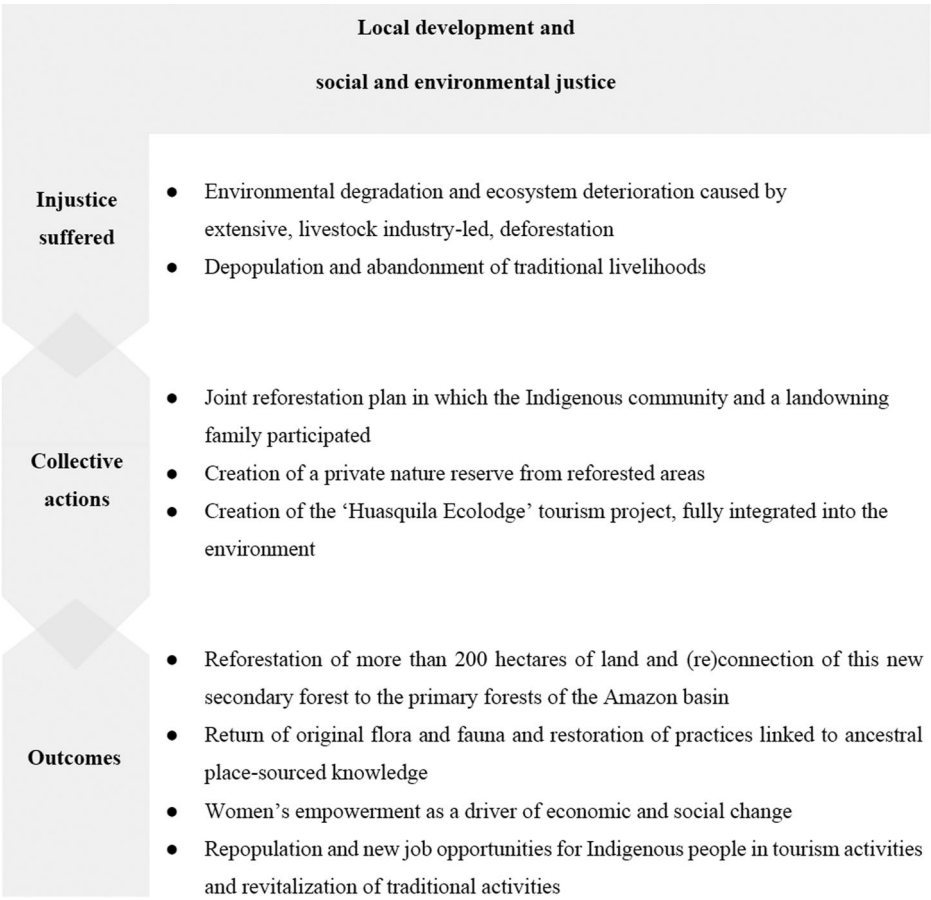


Figure 3. Pathways to local (tourism) development and justice in Sacha Waysa community (Ecuador) (Source: Authors).

synergies and place vitality. Tourism can be correlated with significant economic and social change, especially for women, traditionally excluded from economic activities. Newly empowered women became catalysts for community change, leading the design and management of tourism activities. A female community member states:

Tourism allowed us [women] to take responsibility for an activity we like and want to do. We could finally contribute economically to our families and be recognised and appreciated for that. [Female, late 30s]

Tourism has also generated new jobs for men, enabling them to stay in, or return to, the community instead of leaving home to look for work in the extractive industries. Repopulation and tourism-related work opportunities also catalysed complementary activities such as small-scale agriculture, fishing and artisanal handicrafts that have improved livelihoods overall. Sacha Waysa's success has inspired neighbouring communities to integrate tourism into their economies. However, not all new tourism initiatives prioritise ecosystem stewardship practices. As in San Rafael, inadequate transportation infrastructure restricts the movement of goods and people within the territory, impacting local activities. Enhancing tourism requires collaboration with non-tourism actors to improve transport, electricity, waste management and other essential services.

Discussion

The regional anthropo-bio imbalance (Caniglia et al., 2019; IGTR, 2020), power discrimination and past inequalities in San Rafael and Sacha Waysa reflect the binaries of the West and 'the rest' and the social versus the environmental (Kohn, 2013; Lee & Jamal, 2008), major areas of concern in tourism research and practice (Guia & Jamal, 2024). While analysing these issues in the living systems in the case study, our framework allowed us to explain why and how regenerative development and tourism principles can dissolve these binaries thereby fostering just and equitable place development and regeneration. Our findings, we believe, are a useful contribution to the debate on tourism development and justice. Responding to Pellow's (2019) call, the framework extends regenerative development concepts to the question of power discrimination against minorities and Indigenous people (Lee & Jamal, 2008; Scheyvens, 2002) and social and environmental injustice in diverse geographic areas (Marcuse et al., 2009; Scruggs et al., 2023) and proposes practices to tackle them.

The systemic shift evident in these rural communities reflects a regenerative development approach (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022) that differs from the conventional 'off the shelf' solutions (Dredge, 2022) towards which less transformative approaches (Becken and Kaur, 2021) or restoration efforts (Caniglia et al., 2019) are oriented. Place was situated at the centre of the framework (i.e. made its 'primary organising concept') (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Lee, et al., 2023), and actions for fundamental systemic transformation were conceived with direct reference to it (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022). Communities' reclamation of agency and more-than-human ethos reflect place-specific values, knowledge and environmental perspectives (Ren et al., 2023), enhancing the regenerative capacity of the complex living system in which they are embedded (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Lee, et al., 2023).

Shared decision-making and collective actions interlink different forms of capital (Caniglia et al., 2019) with actions against injustices (Lee & Jamal, 2008; Pellow, 2019) to induce holistic shifts. In San Rafael, social inequalities have prompted self-organisation and independent activity in harmony with nature, while simultaneously allowing nature to flourish. Likewise, in Sacha Waysa, new economic activities linked to the healing of the local ecosystem have empowered the community. This integrated perspective on justice can be linked to the exploration of ‘posthumanist ethics’ in tourism geography (Guia & Jamal, 2024, p. 8). Actions stemming from regenerative principles centre non-dualistic human–nature interactions, understood as key to overcoming ‘structural injustices, human exceptionalism and oppositional binary thinking’ (p. 8).

In the areas under investigation, tourism has created a new integrated system within the bioregional system (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022), linking place regeneration and justice. It has succeeded in tackling inequalities and developing equitable, healthy and just human–human and human–nature relationships by creating flows between hosts, guests, resources and the place itself (Pellow, 2019). In San Rafael, the transformational shift began with tourism (Ateljevic, 2020) which, as well as hosting guests, has enabled stewarding the place and is helping to preserve and evolve the area’s unique place culture (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022). Meaningful experiences (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Lee, et al., 2023) and conscious encounters (Dredge, 2022; Pollock, 2015) encourage a ‘greater good’ mentality and ‘other forms of capital besides financial capital’ (Sheldon, 2022, p. 203) supporting conviviality in a place instead of individual gains (Huijbens, 2023). Indigenous stewardship has been a key part of Sacha Waysa’s regeneration (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022), and the ‘Huasquila’ tourism project has revitalised the area and its economy (Dredge, 2022; Pollock, 2019). Weaving ethical discourses and fundamental aspects of justice into these approaches to tourism has led to a thriving bioregional system and catalysed a shift away from past unethical behaviours and injustice to the local community and environment (Caniglia et al., 2019).

Conclusion

Justice is an integral but still under-investigated topic in tourism research and practice. This study sheds light on the potential of the regenerative development paradigm to intertwine tourism and justice, addressing social and environmental inequalities and enduring power dynamics that privilege certain groups over others (Kohn, 2013; Tops and Lamers, 2024). It can also contribute to emerging discourses on justice and ethics that advocate for posthumanist ethics in tourism geography (Guia & Jamal, 2024) since regenerative development attempts to heal the rift between humans and nature in line with the posthumanist perspective. Acknowledging the agencies of humans and non-human others (Ren et al., 2023; Trisia et al., 2024) and ‘more-than-human entanglement’ (Huijbens, 2023, p.4) in decision-making practices highlights the complexity and uniqueness of each ecological living system (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022; Caniglia, 2019) to enable the creation of just and flourishing systems and tourist experiences. Valuing place-specific ‘ways of thinking, being and knowing’ (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015, p.4) is an aspect of a more inclusive and diverse understanding of tourism

geographies that recognises a wide range of perspectives, voices, cultural traditions and resources (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, & Nygaard, 2024; Pearson et al., 2024; Pellow, 2019).

In responding to the need for case studies (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Lee, et al., 2023) documenting regeneration processes, our empirical results from rural communities in Colombia and Ecuador carry implications for justice through regenerative tourism consistent with a holistic understanding of tourism geographies centring on place as an organising concept in the Anthropocene (Huijbens, 2023). First, justice *through* (regenerative) tourism and justice *for* (regenerative) tourism are intertwined. Regenerative development practices demonstrate that justice can be achieved and enhanced through regenerative tourism, laying new foundations rooted in a more-than-human agency (Ren et al., 2023). Second, since – as the regenerative mindset recognises (Dredge, 2022) – human beings are inseparable from nature, a regenerative development and tourism approach stemming from living systems thinking (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, Briceño Fiebig, et al., 2022) results in holistic changes that benefit the entire ecosystem (Bellato, Frantzeskaki, & Nygaard, 2024; Benne & Mang, 2016). Extensive field research is needed to test and develop our exploratory framework, strengthening its interpretative capacity in specific contexts. Cases should encompass geographic, social and environmental injustices across countries, places and communities in various development stages (Scruggs et al., 2023). In addition to rural community-led tourism systems facing economic challenges and marginalisation (Trisia et al., 2024), the research should investigate major tourist systems undergoing gentrification, touristification and environmental degradation. Case study design should involve regenerative practitioners, local communities, Indigenous people and tourism scholars, bridging theory and practice to build shared knowledge.

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