



# A new agenda: regenerative business events in Denmark



## A new agenda: regenerative business events in Denmark

October 2023

Published by: MeetDenmark

Editorial by: Anders Hvid and Nikolaj Møller

Layout: StudioFrost

### Picture credits:

VISITDENMARK.COM: Front cover top right: Kim Wyon; front cover bottom left and page 16, pages 10 + 34: Martin Heiberg; front cover bottom right and page 27: Thomas Høyrup Christensen; Pages 9 + 13: Daniel Villadsen; Page 18: Michael Fiukowski and Sarah Moritz; Page 19: Robin Skjoldborg; Page 21: Frame & Work; Pages 22 + 31: Niclas Jessen; Page 25: @et\_nyt\_kapitel; Page 26: Jacob Lisbygd; Page 28: Mitch Wiesinger.

UNSPLASH.COM: Front cover top left + page 17: Elifin Realty; page 5: Adrien Hobbs; Page 6: Dylan Gillis; Page 8: Charles Deluvio; Page 11: Febiyan; Page 20: Jessie McCall; Page 23: Tumsime Timmo; Page 24: Javier Rincon; Page 30: Admiratio; Page 32: Oliver Paaske; Page 33: Adonyi Gabor.

HAVMØLLEN AND KASPER PALSNOV: Pages 3, 15 & 29.



## DareDisrupt



The analysis has been funded by the Danish Board of Business Development.

# Table of contents

Summary	4
Project Core Insights	4
Driving change through events - the regenerative approach to business events	5
Project background and methods	6
Acknowledgements	9
What are regenerative business events?	11
Model describing regenerative business events	14
The business event and the visitor	15
The organisation	19
Resources	21
The ecosystem	23
Regenerative leadership and change	29
Potentials	30
The first steps	33



# Summary

## A New Perspective for the Danish business event industry

Regenerative business and meeting tourism is a new industry perspective that aims to realise a greater societal and environmental potential for the benefit of business visitors, employees, local communities, and nature. The regenerative perspective represents a mindset change. It views companies as part of networks of life-affirming relationships that understand how to promote the collective potential of the network. The ambition is to enrich people, nature, and the many relationships that are crucial to the wellbeing of the local community and the company's business affairs.

The regenerative paradigm should not be equated with sustainability. Sustainability efforts focus primarily on the company, aiming to reduce negative environmental and social consequence without compromising economic growth. Regenerative business events view this work in a broader perspective which draws in business guests, suppliers, local communities, and local nature. In this way, the regenerative paradigm also encompasses sustainability efforts.

This report has been developed through interview with regenerative paradigm experts, Danish business event companies, and Danish Destination Management Organisations (DMOs). It aims to translate the regenerative paradigm into an industry perspective that makes starting new efforts easy and attractive.

The project introduces a model for describing and understanding the key focal points of regenerative business events: the meeting and the business visitor, the organisation, resources, and the ecosystem. These are not separate parts but interwoven systems that hold the potential to create rich, life-affirming ecosystems for the benefit of all.

## Project Core Insights

At present, sustainability is a key priority for many companies in the sector.<sup>1</sup> For those curious about the regenerative paradigm, despite some overlap, it is crucial to understand their differences. Achieving full sustainability is not a prerequisite for starting regenerative work, and becoming regenerative does not amount to following sustainability principles. Companies that want to realise the prospects of being regenerative can start the journey today – and indeed, many already are applying regenerative principles.

The responsibility for regenerative efforts lies with the company, whether it is a hotel, venue, or some other type of business event place; it is not the responsibility of the customer. It is the company's connection to the local ecosystem – and its deep understanding of the history, culture, and nature surrounding this place – that is the foundation for regenerative value creation. Business event companies can serve both as convener and catalyst for new collaborations among different stakeholders.

When business event companies focus on nurturing their local ecosystems, they make their venues attractive for business visitors. In this way, the regenerative paradigm builds in a circular, rather than a linear, business model.

Another important difference concerns the process of change and the concept of value creation. The regenerative paradigm sees all actors as mutually dependent on each other and their collective ecosystem. Positive change in that system, e.g. within the company, has a positive impact on others, such as business event attendees and local nature. Therefore, regenerative changes are often win-win-win solutions which benefit multiple stakeholders and the ecosystem as a whole.

This report aims to make the regenerative paradigm applicable. To that end, it contains concrete models, several case studies and examples for inspiration.

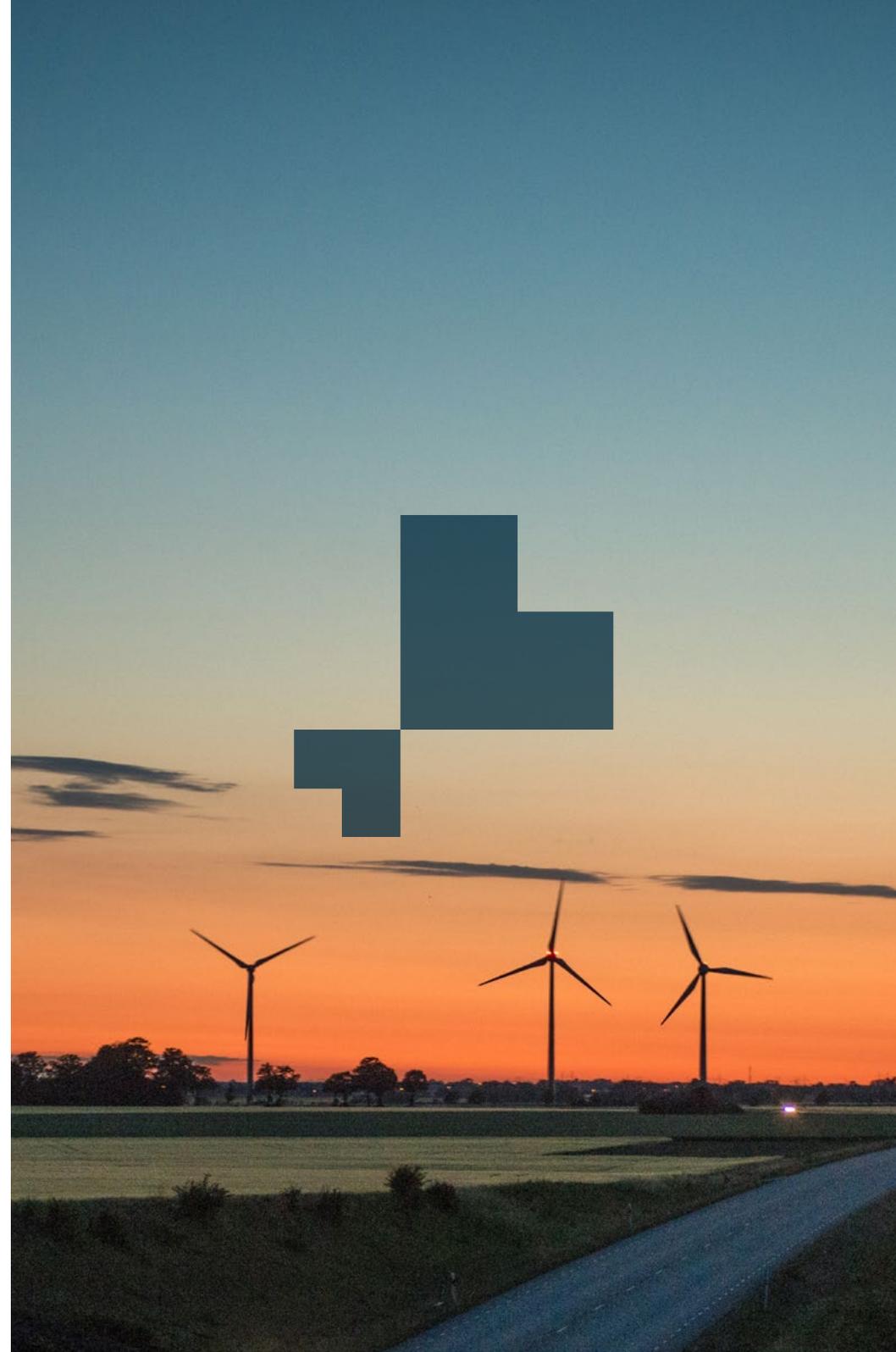
<sup>1</sup> Analysis of national and international attitudes towards and work with sustainability in business and meeting tourism. Kvistgaard+HIRD for MeetDenmark. 2021

# Driving change through events - the regenerative approach to business events

The world needs change. Our current behavior is detrimental to the planet's ecosystems and our own well-being. Digital event spaces might save resources from travel or venue costs, but it cannot recreate the fragile, trust-begetting, and meaningful encounter between people - the ones required to create new narratives, behaviours, and innovative solutions. Without event companies, no change. The business event industry holds a key to solving our greatest challenge - to make room and create experiences that help us reconnect with nature, with ourselves, and with each other.

Few industries interface so broadly with so many people who moreover are outside their usual settings and may be prompted to try new alternatives, such as food or meeting formats. With this as the starting point, business event companies are key drivers of the necessary change that our society must go through.

Simply put, regeneration is about creating a positive impact - contributing positively to the development of the world around us. In the business event industry, meeting participants are often the focal point, as is creating activities with a positive impact. This analysis argues that responsibility for being regenerative naturally lies with companies, and only is a task for meeting participants within limits. Being regenerative is a circular process, where the company, its employees, and its local ecosystem collaborate to achieve common interests that create growth and well-being. If well executed, such a process will automatically have a positive effect on any event participants.



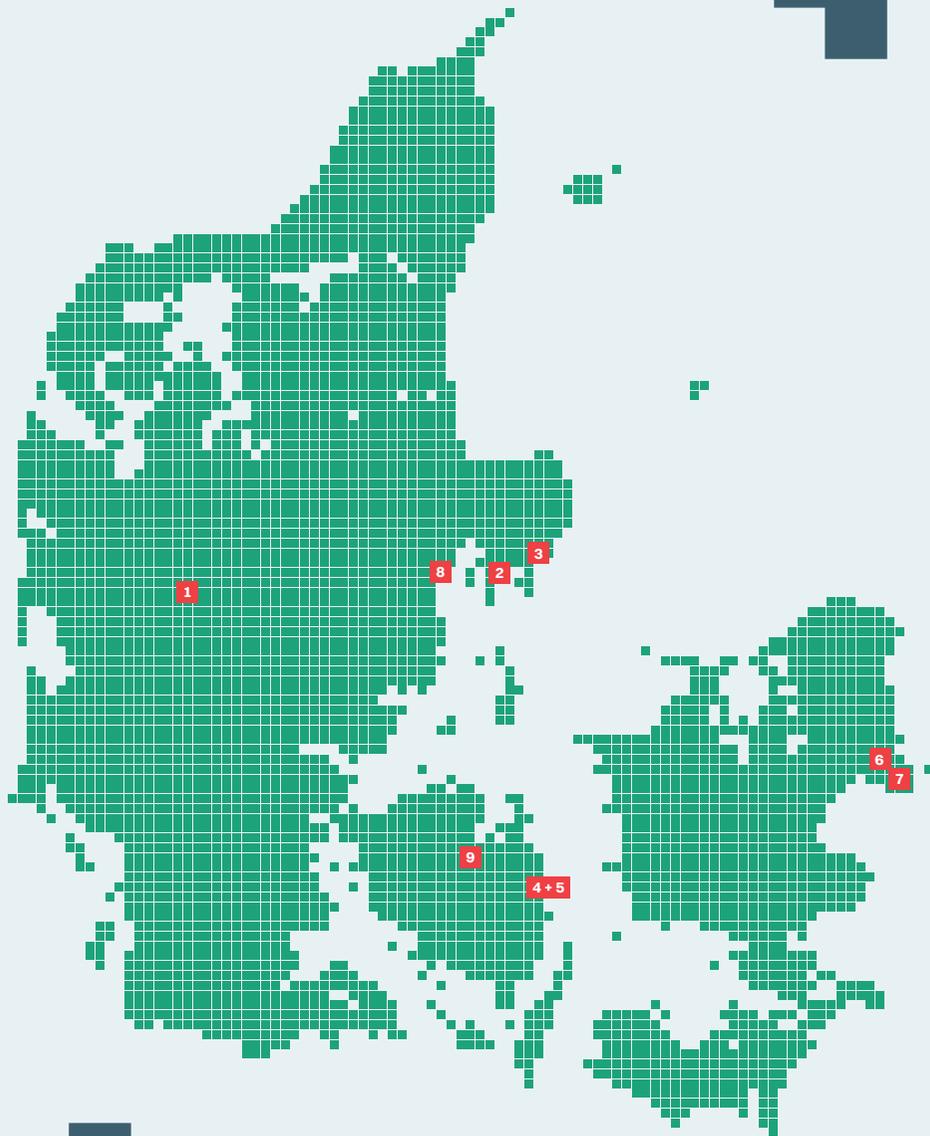
# Project background and methods

This background report is part of an ambition to create a foundation for regenerative business and meeting tourism in Denmark. Through research and dialogue with leading experts, the project seeks to translate a necessary agenda with great potential among Danish business event companies, DMOs, and their many subcontractors.

For the business events industry, the regenerative paradigm is a new way of thinking that is just emerging. With this work, we aim to create a foundation for understanding the concept and its potential. We have refrained from describing idyllic utopias and unattainable visions; instead, we have sought to create an understanding of regenerative business events that resonates also with the reality and experiences of companies, considering their existing work with visitor experiences, sustainability, inclusion of nature, and local suppliers.

Although the word 'regenerative' is new to the industry, many activities that take place today that might be described as 'regenerative.' To gather insights about the efforts of companies, we used semi-structured qualitative interviews that focused on the present and prior experiences of companies. Subsequently, we have translated and analysed insights gained during interviews by using concepts that are part of the regenerative paradigm.





We conducted in-depth research with companies, experts, and DMOs.

- 7 companies varying by type, region, size, and location:
  - Hotel Eyde in Herning (Hotel) <sup>1</sup>
  - Naturcenter Karpenhøj in Djursland (Venue) <sup>2</sup>
  - Havmøllen in Ebeltoft (Venue) <sup>3</sup>
  - Hotel Nyborg Strand in Nyborg (Hotel) <sup>4</sup>
  - Sinatur Storebælt in Nyborg (Hotel) <sup>5</sup>
  - Bella Center in Amager (Venue) <sup>6</sup>
  - CAP Partner in Copenhagen (Organizer) <sup>7</sup>
- 5 experts within the regenerative paradigm, at both national and international levels:
  - Anna Pollock, *regenerative tourism expert*
  - Laura Storm, *regenerative leadership expert*
  - Mads Damkjær, *designer and concept developer focusing on regenerative solutions*
  - Märtha Rehnberg, *partner in DareDisrupt, former member of the Danish government 'green growth' panel, and technology expert*
  - Michelle Holliday, *regenerative tourism expert*
- 2 Destination Management Organisations (DMOs):
  - VisitAarhus <sup>8</sup>
  - Destination Fyn <sup>9</sup>

#### THREE TYPES OF COMPANIES WERE SELECTED:

**Hotels** which offer event, meeting, workshop, and other spaces for business guests, possibly with accommodation and facilities for larger events.

**Venues** which offer facilities and support for larger events such as conferences, congresses, and fairs.

**Organizers** which organize and execute larger conferences and congresses, sometimes also smaller curated business events and trips.



Besides this report, an accompanying website presents the conclusions, case studies, and tools of the project.

→ Find the website here: [www.regenerativemoeder.dk](http://www.regenerativemoeder.dk)

The project was commissioned by MeetDenmark and carried out by DareDisrupt.

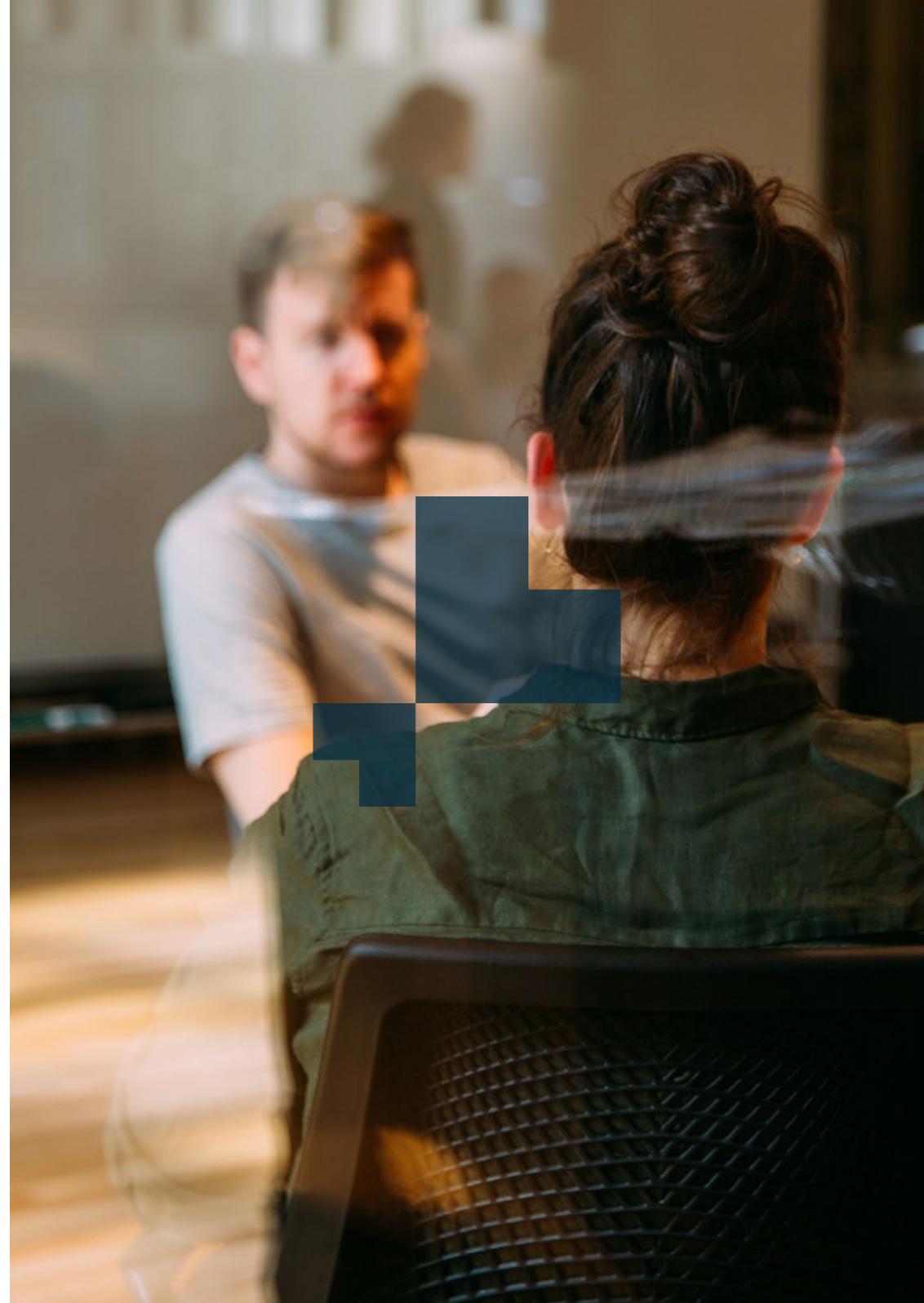
## MeetDenmark

MeetDenmark is the Danish development organisation for business tourism. MeetDenmark's purpose is to develop and promote Danish business tourism.

The members of MeetDenmark are the Ministry of Business Industry and Financial Affairs and the four largest business tourism destinations in Denmark: Destination Fyn, Destination Nord, VisitAarhus and Wonderful Copenhagen.

## DareDisrupt

DareDisrupt is a consultancy and think tank located in Copenhagen. DareDisrupt helps companies understand the future paradigm shifts stemming from technological development and the green transition. By making a complex, changeable futures malleable, DareDisrupt helps clients elevate and realize their future potential and ambitions, especially with regards to the green transition and the regenerative agenda.





# Acknowledgements

This report has been developed through dialogue and with the support of numerous individuals. We would like to extend our thanks to all those who have contributed to the project. A special thanks is due to our respondents from business event companies as well as DMOs countrywide who took time out of busy schedules to share their insights and experience. Further, we are grateful for the contributions of the five experts who helped translate an at times complex subject matter so it became applicable for the business event industry. Finally, a special heartfelt thanks goes out to the project advisory group, whose time, ears, and wise thoughts have been invaluable to the project:

- Christian R. M. Dragin-Jensen, *Associate Professor, Erhvervsakademi SydVest*
- Grete Højgaard, *Director, MESSE C*
- Kirsten Rudbeck, *Business Events Director, Destination Fyn*
- Louise H. Gliese, *Director, Sinatur Storebælt*
- Louise S. Nielsen, *Project Coordinator, Aalborg Kongres & Kultur Center*

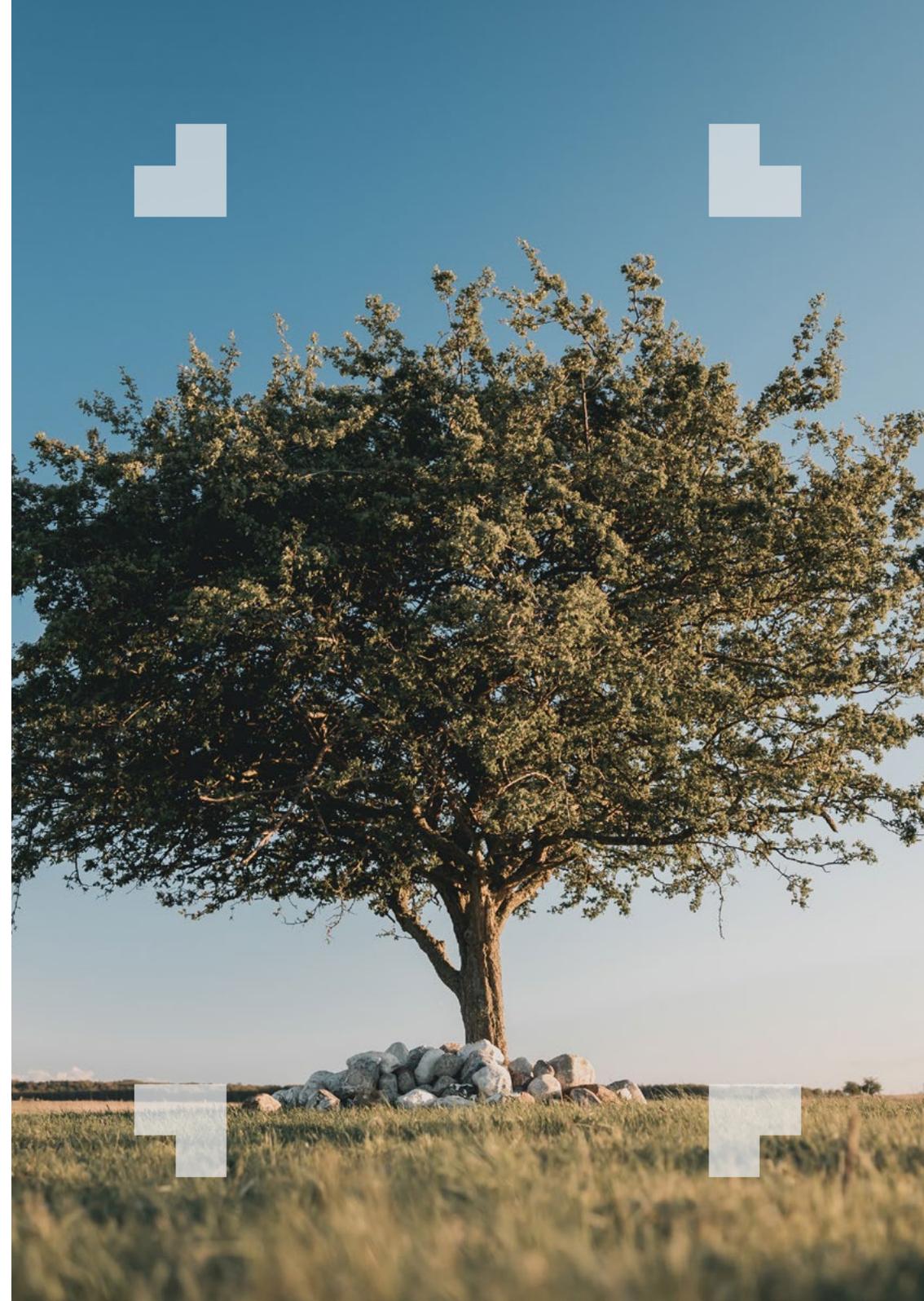


# What are regenerative business events?

Before defining regenerative business events, we need to first understand the regenerative paradigm. Unlike sustainability, an activity which largely aims to minimize harmful effects of our current behaviours, being regenerative represents a new way of thinking and acting. A paradigm shift can be difficult to understand, as it challenges the beliefs, methods, and values that underlie many of our current principles and assumptions about business events.

The regenerative paradigm is nothing new. Its fundamental principles are drawn from the 3.8 billion years of nature's history and is often found in the stories, cultures, and philosophies of indigenous peoples. However, to benefit the industry, it needs a translation for our present times, one that recognises a global world governed by a particular economic system and technological dependencies. A world seeking to reduce complexity so we might understand and control it. By contrast, the regenerative paradigm recognizes the complexity and interdependence of things. We cannot separate living systems as we can take apart machines. Similarly, a company cannot be viewed apart from its ecosystem.

Living in the regenerative paradigm means recognizing complex and interdependent systems, and to let go of the thought that outcomes can be controlled and managed.





## INSIGHT 1:

# Regeneration is not merely a continuation of sustainability.

Often, the regenerative paradigm is portrayed as a linear continuation of sustainability. This either gives rise to the misconception that if we work with sustainability long enough, we eventually become regenerative; or that we must hold off doing regenerative work until our sustainability goals are met. Both are incorrect.

Among the interviewed companies, we found numerous examples containing the seeds of regenerative action and thought – often referred to by other names or values, such as ‘social responsibility,’ ‘decency,’ and ‘sustainability.’

A powerful aspect of the regenerative paradigm is its far-reaching resonance: from the HR manager to the chef, cleaning staff, and the company director. The principles of nature are life-affirming; those taking part in regenerative processes experience them as enriching and meaningful – perhaps especially those who have previously felt that meaning was lacking.

Several frameworks aim to define the regenerative paradigm. A commonly used one is John Fullerton’s eight principles for a regenerative economy.<sup>1</sup> Here translated liberally:

1. Life-affirming relationships among people, organisations, and nature.
2. A diverse value concept that extends beyond the monetary.
3. Continuous development - the ability to always adapt to changing circumstances is key to success.
4. Legitimate participation in a system where everyone is mutually dependent on each other and the overall state of the system. Everyone has the right to contribute in their unique way.
5. Everyone is unique and therefore requires unique solutions, which respect local conditions (of nature, culture, history, institutions, etc.).
6. An abundance mindset that actively includes diversity (diversity) to develop new, unique solutions to entrenched problems for mutual benefit.
7. Circular principles and radical transparency, where one person’s waste is another one’s resources, and transparency ensures a fair distribution of benefits.
8. Always in balance, always in motion - the system will always be changing, and the change itself is a prerequisite for balance, just as is the case when cycling.

---

<sup>1</sup> [capitalinstitute.org/8-principles-regenerative-economy](https://capitalinstitute.org/8-principles-regenerative-economy)

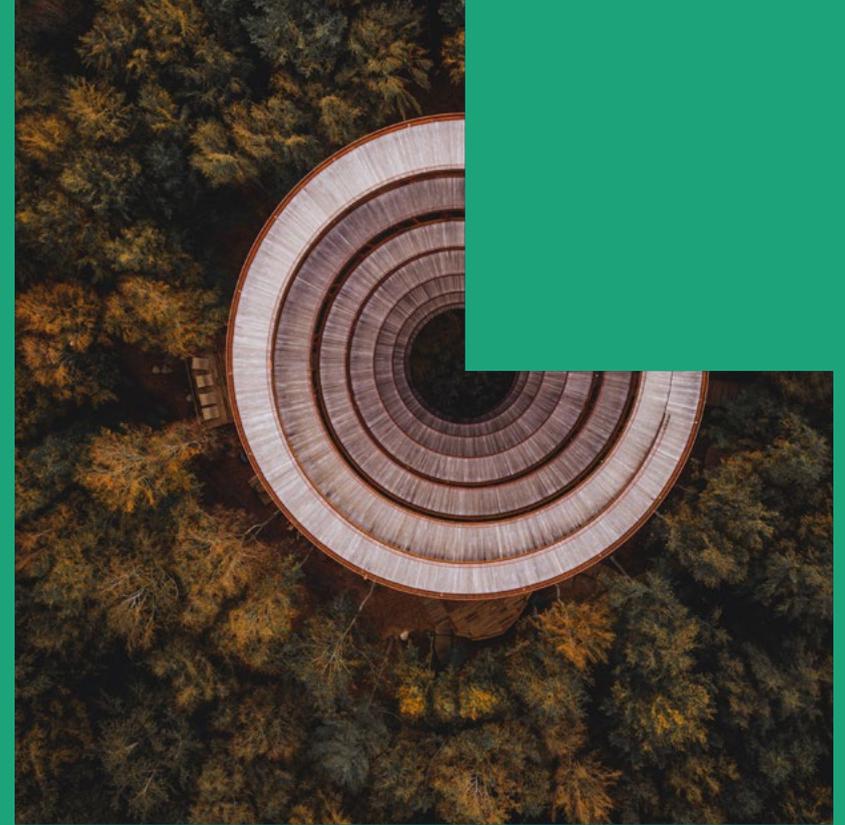
A final essential premise of the regenerative paradigm is systems thinking. This is indirectly evident from Fullerton's principles, but is worth emphasising: We cannot analyse a company's potentials by looking at the company alone. The company is itself a system (of rich interplay between employees, values, culture, workflows, etc.), just as it is part of a larger system of suppliers, local stakeholders, and natural ecosystems in which it is situated. This understanding of the world as systems within systems - embedded systems - is crucial as we aim to create regenerative change.

### **Defining regenerative business events**

Understanding and incorporating regenerative principles is not straightforward. Each location and industry must translate, understand, and apply the principles relative to their unique starting point.

This means there is no one definitive definition of regenerative business events - the places and actors are too varied. The statement on the right side, however, seeks to capture essential elements of what it means to be a business events company that strives to be regenerative.

What matters is viewing business event with a holistic perspective, where humans and nature evolve together and mutually benefit each other. The regenerative business events company can be a role model and pioneer for the regenerative paradigm in its ecosystem. Realizing regenerative synergies requires collaboration with suppliers and local communities, whose collective wisdom and shared understanding of the potential of the ecosystem can help realise it fully.



**→ Fundamentally, regenerative business events is about:**

**The business event company working with suppliers and local communities, driven by a goal to nurture the unique, life-affirming potential in its ecosystem which is formed of people, organisations, and nature.**

# Understanding business events as ecosystem catalysts

As mentioned, the regenerative paradigm is based on systems thinking. Therefore, the following analysis of the potential of regenerative business events has developed its own model, which similarly is based on a system. The four parts of the system should never be seen as independent but are instead embedded and mutually dependent systems.

📍 **The business event and 👤 visitor** are the core of business events. It is here that transactions take place, and here the opportunity to create transformative experiences exists.

🏢 **The organisation** consists of the frameworks and people that make up the company. The history they represent, the culture, and the structure.

🔄 **Resources** cover the inputs the organisation requires and the outputs it creates as part of its activities.

🌐 **The ecosystem** is where the company operates. It includes both suppliers, partners, and other stakeholders who influence the location and its well-being. For this reason, local nature is a key ecosystem actor.

In what follows, we will use the model to describe how business event companies and actors can be regenerative.





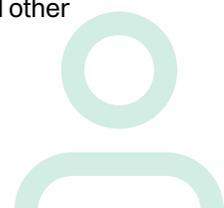
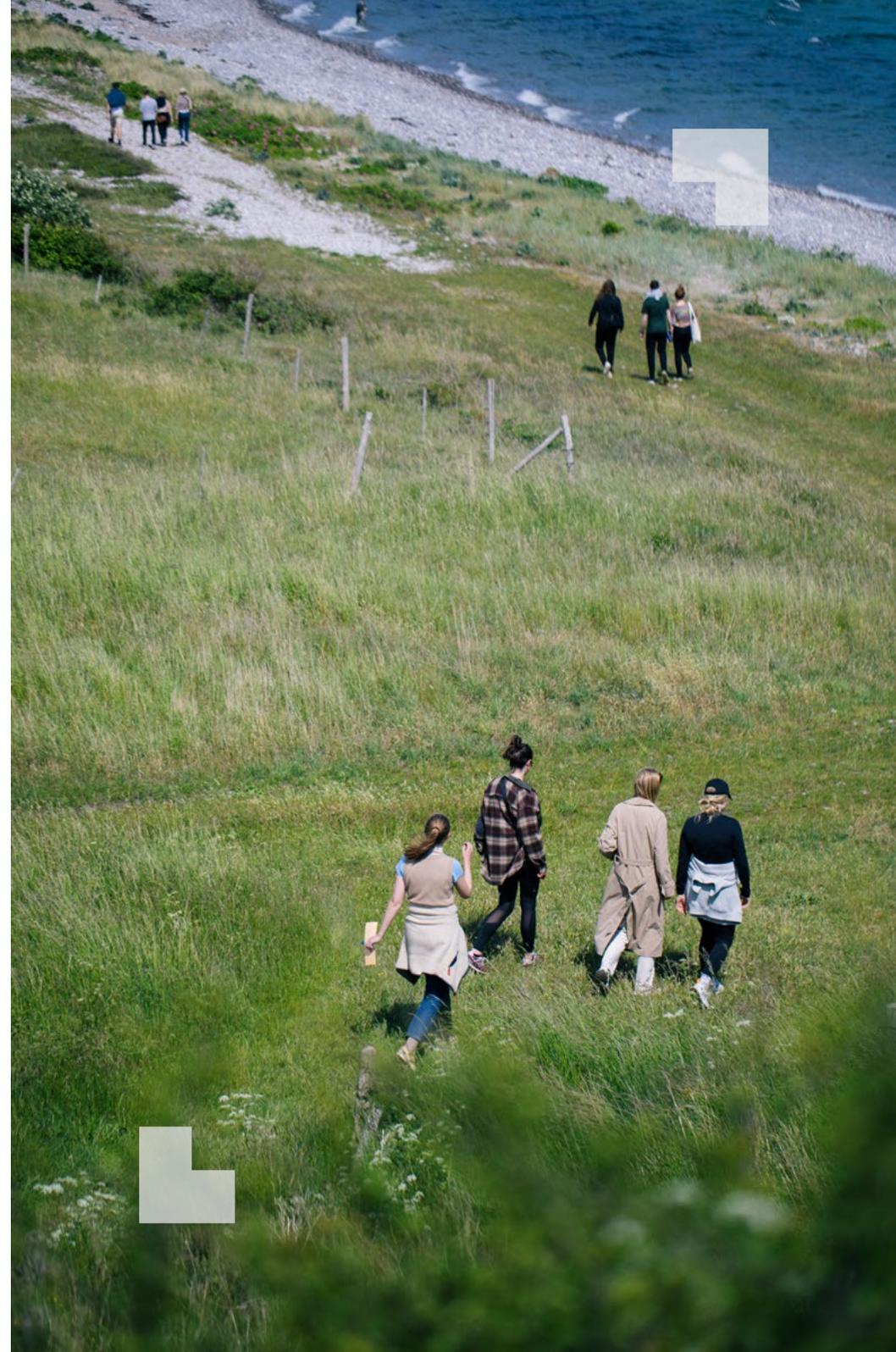
# The business event and the visitor

The meeting between visitors and the company is central to business events. A desire to make events as good as possible is what drives the company; thus, this relationship is the core of the model.

Our expert interviews and company analysis clearly show unlocking the great potential of the regenerative mindset requires shifting our focus away from business visitor activities and towards the company and the ecosystem. Being regenerative is the responsibility of the company and its potential ecosystem contributions extend far beyond those of its visitors.

A regenerative approach to meetings between the company and event attendees can be seen in several ways.

1. Business visitors are regenerated during their stay with the company, which offers activities, catering, etc., with positive effects on visitor well-being. These can be direct (a walk) or indirect (green plants in the meeting room).
2. Business visitors are inspired to adopt new behaviour with positive impacts extending beyond their stay, e.g., good food containing less meat.
3. Business visitors participate in activities which positively impact the local ecosystem. This can occur through participation in existing local projects within, e.g., nature restoration or by contributing knowledge and innovation to solve local problems.
4. The presence of the business visitor and the supply of economic resources into the company enable company operations and work to increase employee well-being, support local business, and other activities that develop its local ecosystem.





Through our interviews with actors from the business events industry, we were often met by the view that regenerative events involves the business visitors actively contributing to local projects beyond the primary purpose of the stay - i.e., point 3 on the list. As the list shows, this is just one of many ways that business visitor activities can support regeneration.

Another key insight concerns point 1 on the list - the regeneration of visitors and the role of the company with regards to event activities. As described, companies can influence events in direct and indirect ways. We here outline two levels for companies intervening in events:

**LEVEL 1**  
**Passive intervention**  
- green plants, pictures of nature, marked hiking trails, etc.

**LEVEL 2**  
**Active intervention**  
- morning meditation, facilitated walks, outdoors cooking, etc.

Several interviewed companies attempt to offer visitors activities which play an active part in their events (level 2), with the aim of improving their experience by means of nature, movement, and reflection.

Experiences concerning this type of intervention are mixed. Many guests view events as a space free from influence where they, e.g., do not someone to intervene with their desire to eat meat. In interviews, several companies mentioned frequent misalignment in expectations between the person booking an event and the larger group of visitors. This suggests companies do not have access to the right stakeholders and decision-makers in the booking process. Booking is often done by someone from the customer's organisation who lack managerial responsibility; conversely, sales staff in companies are not always equipped to advise about this part of the visitor experience.

Several companies also seek to influence the visitors passively (level 1). For example, CAP Partner supplements congress participants a map of nearby natural areas and city walks, while Hotel Sinatur Storebælt has numerous pictures of nature on its premises.

Active intervention success (level 2) will require work on two fronts. First, alignment of expectations around the company's product is needed - shifting from a perception of it 'just' providing an event setting to an explicit desire for the company to positively influence the program and visitor experience with regenerative activities. Next, the company must develop competencies to engage in dialogue, planning, and facilitation such that regenerative activities are communicated and implemented successfully. While this requires both time and new competencies, there is much value to be gained from passive, visible intervention (level 1). This type does not require a change in visitors behavior and can thus be controlled by the company. An obvious opportunity is to introduce more nature into company premises. See Insight 2 on the next page.





## INSIGHT 2:

# Nature enhances regenerative visitor experiences

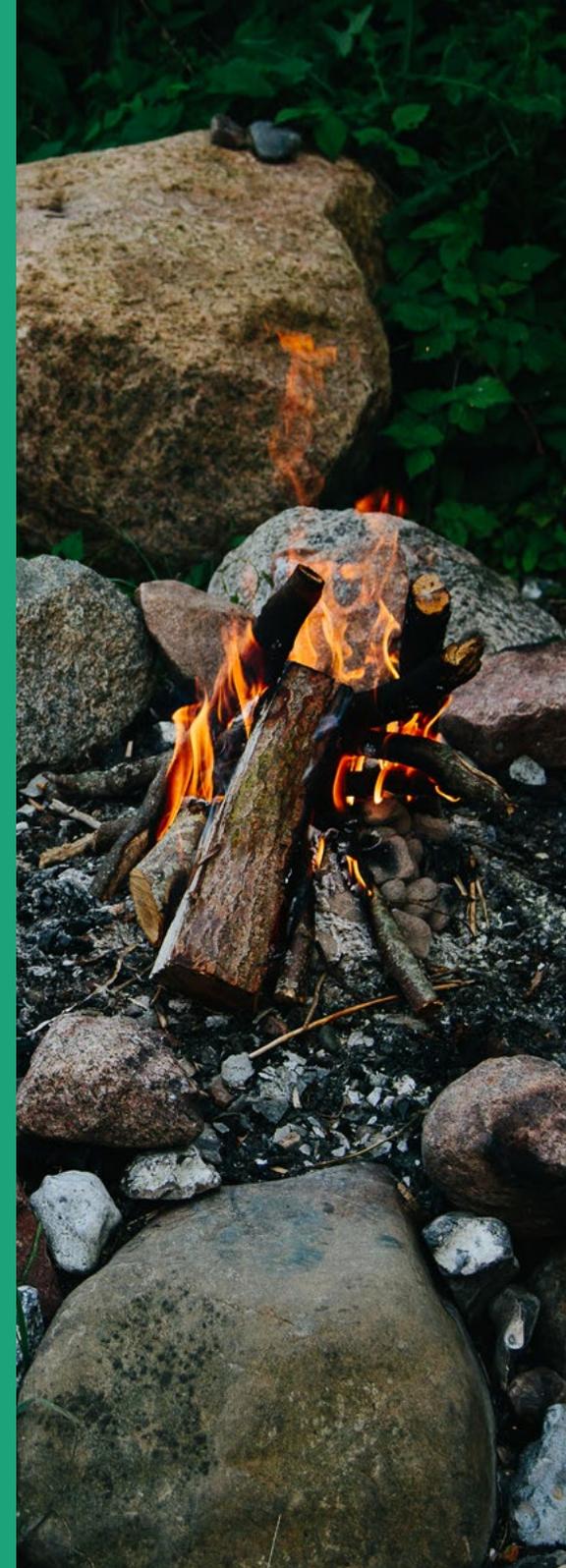
Nature has a special influence on us. Research shows<sup>1</sup> that nature has positive and profound effects on humans; e.g., our stress hormone production decreases when we are in contact with nature, and our ability to think creatively increases after a walk. In fact, we do not even need to be in nature to experience its effects: even a picture of nature creates the same (albeit smaller) effect. Experiments also show that nature helps us heal faster from illness and that elderly people feel better when they are given the task of caring for a plant.

Not all companies are located in nature and can incorporate forests, coastal paths, or herb gardens into their event offerings. Nonetheless, everyone can take advantage of the benefits nature in meeting rooms, hotel rooms, and day-to-day life in general. A typical challenge is our tendency to think of nature as a separate place that offers a breathing room. But nature and its elements can be subtly built into business events and conference facilities. The hotel chain Guldsmøden, located in the heart of Copenhagen, has had nature grow right into the visitor experience; even their Vesterbro hotel has a nature-filled inner courtyard that exudes life and invites creative thinking, tranquillity, and deep conversation.

When nature becomes the backdrop for business events, the ability of visitors to create connections, think long-term, and make better and more sustainable decisions improves. Company opportunities vary, but everyone can join in – whether through plants, pictures of nature, outdoor walks, or the sound of running water in select spots. Naturcenter Karpenhøj, located in scenic surroundings with fantastic views in Djursland, encourage visitors to take meetings outdoors by providing sheepskin blankets that keep visitors warm outside.

*“Post COVID-19, there is increased focus on events and conference value creation. There is more emphasis on visitor work/life balance and well-being than before. Here, nature has something unique to offer, with walking tours, foraging trips, or paddleboarding being the new ‘Friday bar.’ Many manors and events places close to nature and water have tried to accommodate this in their offerings.”* – Kirsten Rudbeck, Business Events Director Destination Fyn

<sup>1</sup> A walk in nature can diminish stress and anxiety levels. José A. Morales García 2023 on website Videnskab.dk  
A Review of the Benefits of Nature Experiences: More Than Meets the Eye. Lara S. Franco et al. 2017 i Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health



# The organisation

The organisation includes the employees, values, culture, history, and facilities of the company. The employees are particularly important, as they express and uphold the values and culture of the company.

The regenerative paradigm sees organisations as living organisms whose well-being must be understood in relation to their ecosystems. Company well-being depends on ecosystem well-being – and similarly, employee well-being is crucial for company well-being. This makes it clear why value creation must extend beyond the bottom line of the organisation: Both employees and the external environment contribute to the foundation for an organisation and business that flourishes and thrives in the long term.

Regenerative agriculture focuses on creating fertile soil because it is essential for the well-being of plants, animals, and insects. For business events, employees are what soil is to agriculture. Well-functioning employees enrich both business visitors, each other, and the ecosystem around the organisation. In many ways, employees are the core of a regenerative event place: through their values and local ecosystem stewardship, they bridge the core of the ecosystem and the experiences of visitors.

These employees include the waiter who proudly presents and explains how restaurant dishes are made from local products. It is the receptionist who knows regular business visitors by their first name and makes them feel at home. Or the helpful, trustworthy facilitator who creates space for event participants self-reflection. Employees bring the uniqueness of a place to life and contribute to making an event company unique.





The companies we interviewed generally placed great emphasis on ensuring employee well-being through collective agreements, courses, flexible working arrangements (as far as practically possible), various optional schemes, etc. As shown by Sinatur Storebælt, Nyborg Strand, Hotel Eyde, and Havmøllen, an independent and trusting decision-making culture is important for empowering employees to solve problems, suggest good ideas, and meet strategic goals. For example, at Nyborg Strand, a waiter thought of cutting down the hedges in front of the restaurant and creating a terrace; the terrace was named after the waiter and shows how employees also contribute to shaping Nyborg Strand.

Engaged and empowered employees are inventive resources who, on their own initiative, contribute to company growth and development.

Diversity is also a key part of the regenerative paradigm. That is, the ability of companies to attract employees with different backgrounds and to work on solutions across the disciplines found amongst the organisation staff.

In the regenerative paradigm, companies define employee contributions to a lesser extent. The employee is invited to seek to optimize the potential of the organisation through their unique contribution. Cf. the section on regenerative leadership and change on page 29.



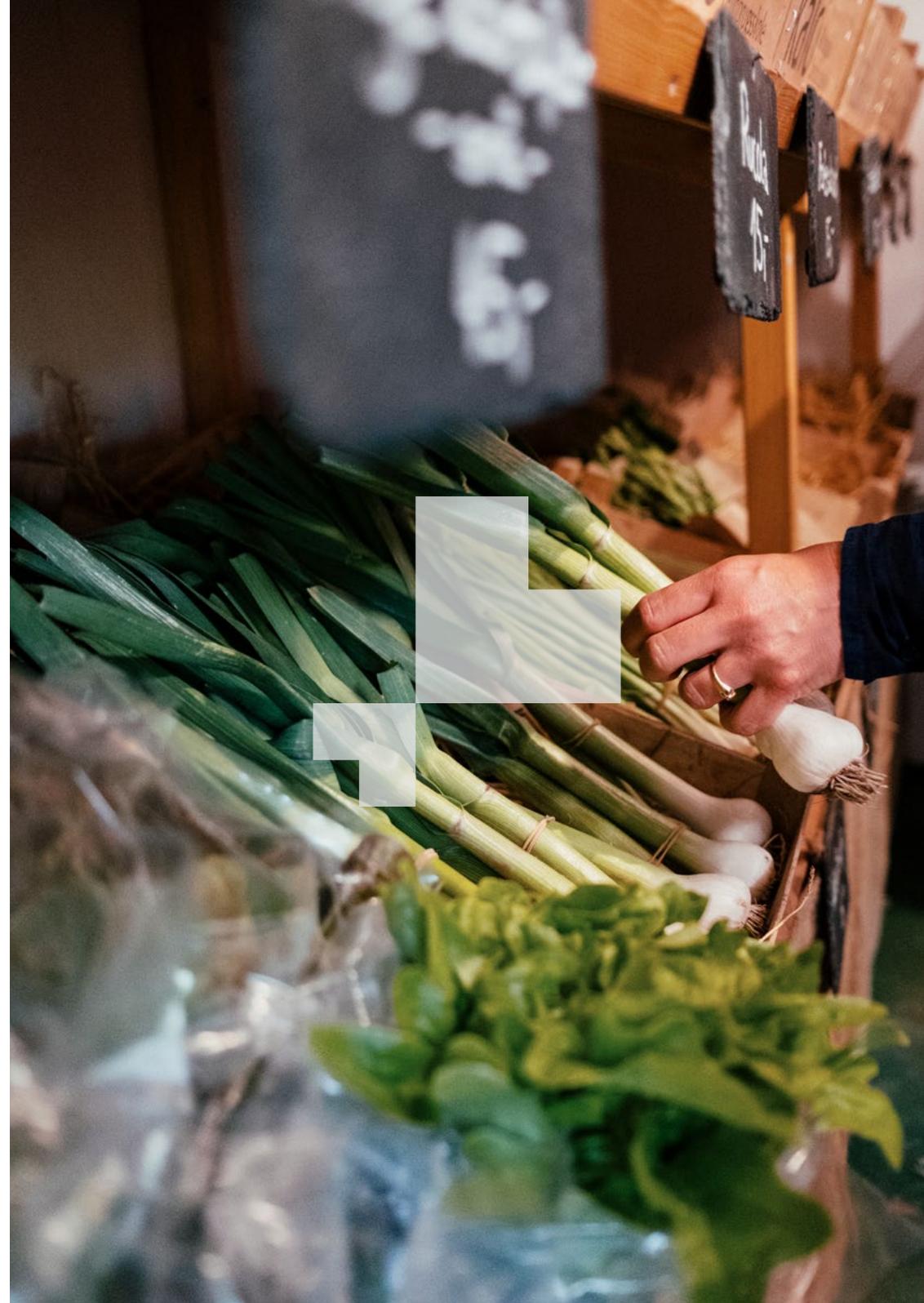
# Resources

Resources include materials from the biosphere (e.g., compost and solar energy) and technosphere (e.g., human-made tools, materials). For business event companies, this typically covers food and beverages, furniture, building materials, energy, water, etc.

Theoretically, the task is simple: Analyze all company inputs - and make sure these are recycled materials, energy from renewable sources, and sustainably produced food - whilst recycling all company outputs. Inspiration for this comes from nature, where waste or garbage does not exist: Everything is decomposed and recycled in an eternal cycle.

This part of the regenerative paradigm is the one that most resembles existing sustainability efforts. It also stands out as being tangible and easier to measure. Therefore, this is the focus of many certifications, e.g. Green Key. An important observation from our research is that certifications play a central role in getting started, setting direction, and creating transparency in each company. However, this work is equally very resource-intensive and can get in the way of a more fundamental transformation of the company.

To minimize waste and optimize resource use, companies may source furniture, uniforms, etc., made from sustainable materials, but they might also view old furniture, uniforms, etc., as resources for others to use. For example, Sinatur Storebælt's kitchen uniforms are made from old sheets that have been sewn and thus 'upcycled', while Nyborg Strand recycled their old furniture from hotel rooms by distributing it to a Bosnian organization.





As previously noted, local ecosystems play a special role for companies. That also makes it interesting to examine sourcing and recycling practices. These are an opportunity to support the local economy, reduce transport emissions, and strengthen company relationships with the surrounding community.

Here, our research uncovered a dilemma between somewhat rigid certifications and regenerative use of resources. For example, Sinatur Storebælt purchases apples from a small, local orchard which grows its apples without pesticides, but is too small to obtain an organic certification in practice. Sinatur cannot count this as organic sourcing, which interferes with their efforts to achieve organic certifications. A similar dilemma occurs when a company has, so to speak, outgrown its local ecosystem - it has become too large. For example, Bella Center, with its thousands of conference guests, cannot buy raw materials locally: they would then consume all local raw materials in their local ecosystem on Amager, to the detriment of the rest of the ecosystem.

A notable by-product of local sourcing, also found in our research, is that it can be used to support a regenerative work culture that involves and motivates employees. Thus, both Hotel Eyde and Sinatur Storebælt shared how employees supported their local sourcing efforts by picking up fresh eggs, etc., whenever their path to work happened to pass through a supplier in the local area.



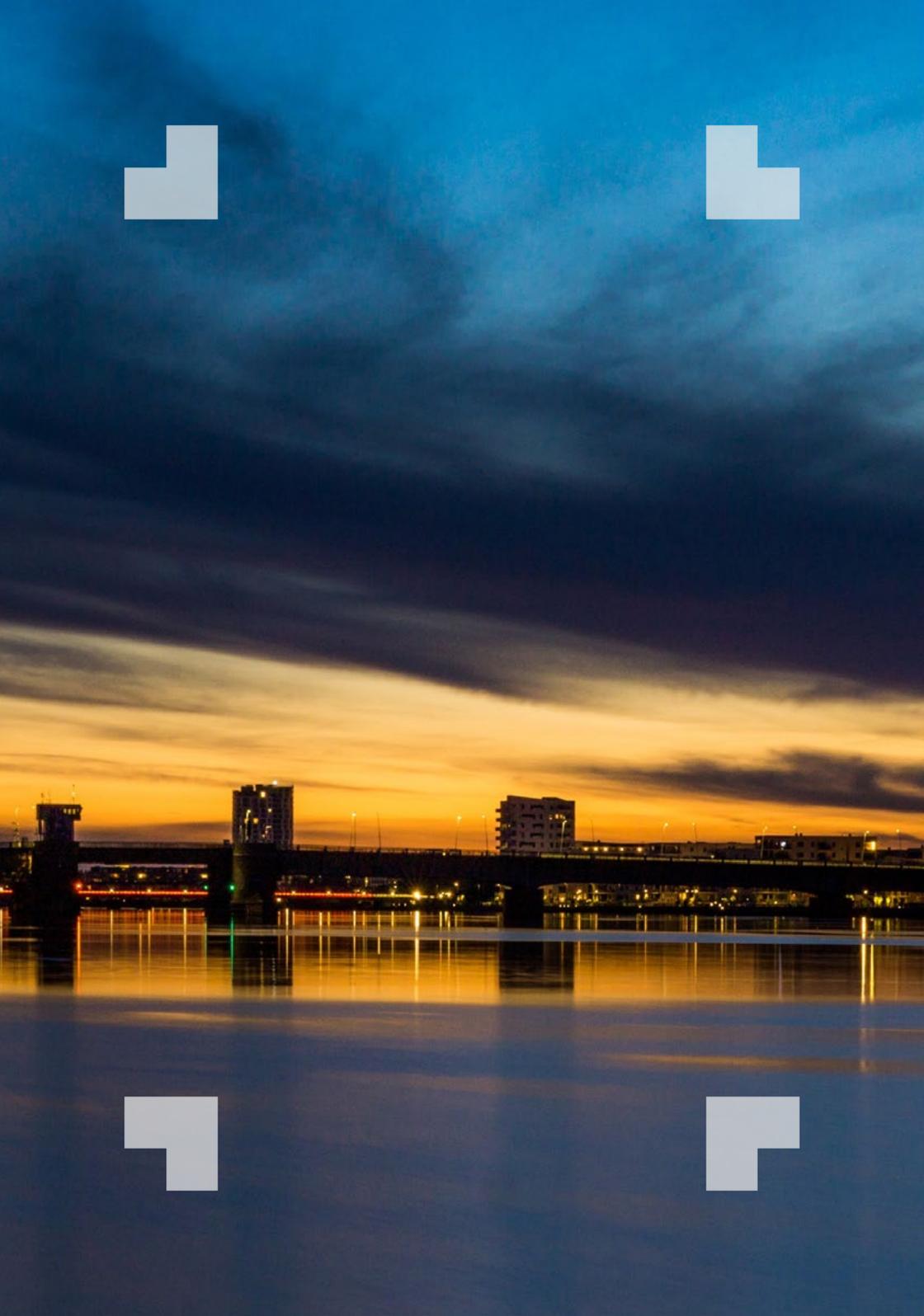
# The ecosystem

Regenerative business events are about the local ecosystem. The regenerative business event company is rooted in a unique place, whether that concerns a local community, a natural area, or an area rich in history and culture. For Karpenhøj, it is Syddjursland and surrounding areas. For Eyde Hotel it is Herning and its surroundings. For Bella Center, its starting point is both Ørestad and Greater Copenhagen.

A regenerative events company is driven by a (possibly unspoken) vision to recognise and nurture the unique potential of the local area by working with those who live there – suppliers, local communities, and business visitors. It needs emphasising that the well-being of a local area is closely connected to the company. Whenever a local area thrives, it is, all other things equal, more attractive to conduct business here. If Syddjursland and Mols Bjerge National Park are attractive, more guests will visit Karpenhøj; if Herning city is attractive for fairs and conferences, there will be more overnight stays at Hotel Eyde; and if Copenhagen is known as a safe, lively city, Bella Center can attract international conferences more easily.

Both Karpenhøj, Hotel Eyde, and Bella Center benefit from their local ecosystems. It makes sense that they also actively contribute to the thriving and development of these, so that they themselves can evolve in turn. Genuine dedication to a local area is often evidenced by company values and an authentic core story told to business visitors, employees, and the surrounding community. Such a core story is found, for example, at older hotels like Hotel Eyde and Nyborg Strand. In their respective cities, they are 'the city hotel' which plays a significant role in special events and as local community gathering point.





Maintaining this role is an ongoing effort; for example, Hotel Eyde Director Martin Lemvig wants to deepen local community connection by offering premises free of charge to local scout groups. Similarly, Havmøllen in Djursland has made local community, culture, and nature the backbone of its mission, and is enlivening local resident life by organising festivals, community dinners, and cultural activities.

Although deep community connection and active ecosystem efforts are essential for the regenerative events place, this narrative does not necessarily need to feature prominently in the visitor experience. Often, the role of an event company is best evidenced through a “show, don’t tell” approach and in personal communication at appropriate moments, e.g. when employees talk to business visitors, when visitors experience locally sourced products or when they see that local residents and local associations also use company spaces.

Venues such as the Bella Center, conference organizers such as CAP Partner, or the Danish DMOs help create large events for thousands of business attendees. Here, the local ecosystem is not physically delimited but is instead a series of geographically dispersed actors. In this case, regenerative business events does not require Bella Center aspiring to send its thousands of conference attendees out into the nature of Amager Fælled. That would not be regenerative. Instead, they can seek to incorporate local business and cultural life, linking these with international events and their attendees. A closer link might contribute to new, transnational collaborations, ideas exchange, profiling local solutions, etc. This is precisely how Messe C in Fredericia attracts international fairs and to develop these fairs in ways that are relevant for their ecosystem. When visiting Messe C in Fredericia, visitors join an ‘Energy-Crawl’ together with Experience Fredericia – a tour of local renewable energy producers. Other fair and congress centers can similarly include or highlight relevant local initiatives and ecosystems. They can create an authentic narrative about the local community they aim to serve, and involve their voices in dialogue about

how their venue and spaces can meaningfully contribute to promoting the needs and interests of the ecosystem.

Havmøllen clearly exemplifies a regenerative business events company and a circular approach (cf. Insight 3, next page). They view business visitors as a valuable source who nourish their overall mission to work for nature, culture, and the local community. Although the main goal is to nurture a place and local community, satisfied guests and a healthy business are also important. Yet these goals are secondary and a by-product of creating an attractive, welcoming place which houses life-affirming activities, employees, and other actors.

Havmøllen knows well that not all visitors appreciate the unique features of their place. However, for most visitors, the experience of being part of a place with such a strong narrative rubs off, creating a positive experience.

### **The role of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs)**

The Danish DMOs play a key role in developing Danish business and meeting tourism towards regeneration. Working with local ecosystems at a regional level is paradigmatically what DMOs do, which makes them a central resource for companies. For example, Visit Aarhus, with its 'A Great Place'<sup>1</sup> strategy, aims to further tourism in balance with nature, culture, and not least the lives of approx. 853,000 citizens who live in the Aarhus region. A good place to live is a good place to visit, and a strong tourism economy conversely makes the Aarhus region a better place to live - which exemplifies the thinking of a circular business model.

---

<sup>1</sup> Strategy: A Great Place. Visit Aarhus. 2023.





DMOs have a unique opportunity for coordinating and driving a regenerative effort and ensuring right conditions for local business event companies to thrive – e.g., by:

**Defining an authentic core narrative about the ecosystem:** DMOs particularly contribute a larger narrative about the region and its unique conditions, which local actors can borrow from and align with. As Destination Fyn writes in their strategy: “We focus on attracting events to Fyn that have a strong Funen DNA and support existing Funen narratives. We thus succeed when a given event manages to create visibility and attention around the host city’s characteristics and/or local cultural heritage.”<sup>2</sup>

**Promoting local, unique event experiences:** In Aarhus, for example, local, authentic experiences which do not normally form part of companies’ events offerings have been mapped to inspire customers to think differently about their events. This offers two advantages: Business visitors are inspired, and the local uniqueness becomes part of the business events product. The imperative to offer unique, local experiences – and thus also the commercial potential of the regenerative paradigm – is emphasized in a market analysis from Skift Meetings. The analysis gives insights into the most important trends within business and meeting tourism and points to an increase in demand for local, authentic experiences as part of events or conferences. The experiences should not be the generic tourist attractions, but instead involve the local community and give business visitors a sense of the place they are visiting.<sup>3</sup>

**Increasing the positive contribution from international congresses:** The large, international congresses that are won for Denmark each year also hold great potential for local ecosystems. World-leading experts who visit Denmark make an ideal opportunity for knowledge exchange, talent attraction, and to strengthen networks and relationships between delegates and Danish actors. In recent years, MeetDenmark and its four member DMOs have worked strategically to tie international congresses even closer to local areas so they leave a lasting, positive imprint on their respective locations. Known as legacy, this work is often driven and facilitated by the local DMO in close collaboration with the congress organiser and relevant local actors.

---

<sup>2</sup> Impressions with a positive imprint. Sustainability in tourism on Funen and the Islands towards 2030.” Destination Fyn 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Meetings Industry Trends to Watch in 2023. Skift Meetings 2023.



### INSIGHT 3:

From linear ————— to circular to network

A regenerative mindset does not solely aim to create successful meeting experiences for visitors. This is a shift from the adage that “the customer is always right,” and that service should be offered on visitor terms only. Events can attract resources that provide a means of living for the company, its employees, and the local ecosystem of which it is part. When employees and ecosystem thrive, the venue and the company become more attractive, and can attract ever-more business guests.

The regenerative paradigm no longer views business events as a linear production process, but rather as a circular process, where the company improves customer experiences by enhancing the well-being of its employees and its local ecosystem. The company understands its position in a network where everyone works with common interest for the overall well-being of the ecosystem.





# Regenerative leadership and change

It's vital to recognize that changes in a regenerative paradigm follow entirely different premises than those known to current change processes and management. Traditionally, corporate change starts with owners and management laying out a strategy which is then executed through specific, controlled activities aimed at achieving a predefined goal.

To create regenerative changes, we must approach things differently. We must acknowledge that reality is complex, that we cannot isolate our company from its external surroundings, and that we are not in a position of power to control all relevant actors. This leadership style has many names; in the regenerative paradigm, the leader is often described as a gardener. A gardener cannot decide that plants must grow; the gardener can only create conditions conducive to growth and wait for it to happen.

Similarly, as regenerative leaders, we must create the best possible conditions for growth. We need to enhance employee well-being and we must support the local ecosystem. We need to involve all relevant voices, and then we need to be patient. Regenerative changes appear like ripples in the water, as indirect effects that occur with time.

Sustainability work has used goal-setting as and measurement as central implementation tools. In the regenerative paradigm, we seek to let go of narrowly pursuing and controlling goals, as this often engenders behaviours and problem-solving that exclude active input and creative thinking on behalf of employees. To let go of management by goals, we need a shared narrative about where we are heading, and all participants must feel they can contribute meaningfully. If the narrative feels intuitively right and employees feel they can make meaningful contributions, the need for narrow goals and targets decreases.





## Potentials

As described in the introduction, business event companies have a particularly broad interface with people in situations where they are receptive to other ways of doing things, e.g. eating. Viewed thus, the greatest potential for green transition that the industry might make is that of influencing their many business visitors.

This, however, is not the only potential. The business events industry may harvest many further significant gains by working within a regenerative paradigm. A regenerative mindset will strengthen efforts towards sustainability, the local community surrounding the company, the business visitor meeting experience, and, not least, contribute to making the industry more attractive as a workplace.

This analysis has repeatedly emphasised that the regenerative paradigm departs from a systemic understanding of actors' mutual dependence, a diverse concept of value, and an abundance mindset. By the same token, the potential of regenerative companies is broadly realised insofar as their local ecosystems thrive and create self-reinforcing, positive effects.

Potentials are often achieved through synergies between actors and different, embedded systems. When we intervene to unlock a regenerative potential, we do not create simple cause-and-effect relationships, but cascading effects over time. This makes it more complex to realise such potentials, and even more difficult to control and measure. Regenerative changes start as small interventions aimed at creating positive, indirect effects over time.

Specifically, potentials typically follow a logic of so-called ‘win-win-wins’: these are actions, agreements, conditions, etc., which simultaneously benefit multiple actors, the whole ecosystem and nature. Simply put, local purchases from Havmøllen benefit small local producers and thus the local economy while minimizing transportation climate footprint. This is a win for local producers, who can sell more products. A win for the climate, as the emission of greenhouse gases is limited. And finally, a win for Havmøllen, which strengthens its narrative and thus part of its visitor offering.

By improving itself, others, and the surrounding ecosystem, the company contributes to a rich network with vitality and diverse opportunities for self-development. In our research, we found several examples of win-wins where actors collaborated and created mutual benefits for each other; the idea of creating a third win for the overall ecosystem we saw less frequently, probably since this way of thinking is unique to the regenerative mindset and philosophy.

#### WIN-WIN EXAMPLES:

**Nyborg Strand** actively invests in employees, e.g. by offering dental insurance, social capital training and psychological crisis management courses. This furthers well-being, satisfaction, and relevant competencies among employees, ultimately benefiting the hotel through reduced absenteeism and motivated employees.

**CAP Partner** helps clients achieve lower conference attendee prices by securing commercial sponsorship deals. This also opens conference doors for local students and others and increases the likelihood that the congress is a success. Meanwhile, the visibility benefits these sponsors.

**Havmøllen** makes extra food for local residents when they are making business event dinners. It benefits local families but also benefits Havmøllen in its efforts to become a local community gathering place.





#### **WIN-WIN-WIN EXAMPLES:**

**Hotel Eyde** sponsors Herning's ice hockey team as part of efforts to attract the Ice Hockey World Championship to the city. This benefits both the ice hockey club, overall tourism in Herning, and Hotel Eyde which receives visitors at the hotel during the World Championship.

**Karpenhøj Naturcenter** takes business visitors out to build brushwood fences that promote biodiversity. This benefits local nature, Karpenhøj, and business visitors who may then learn about local ecosystems.

**Karpenhøj Naturcenter** also assists Fuglsøcentret by offering team building and other corporate activities in scenic and inspiring environments. This brings guests to Karpenhøj, helps Fuglsøcentret offer business visitors a rich experience, and benefits the whole ecosystem for business events in Djursland. Karpenhøj also seeks to involve other local businesses such as local bicycle shops that rent out mountain bikes for larger business events.

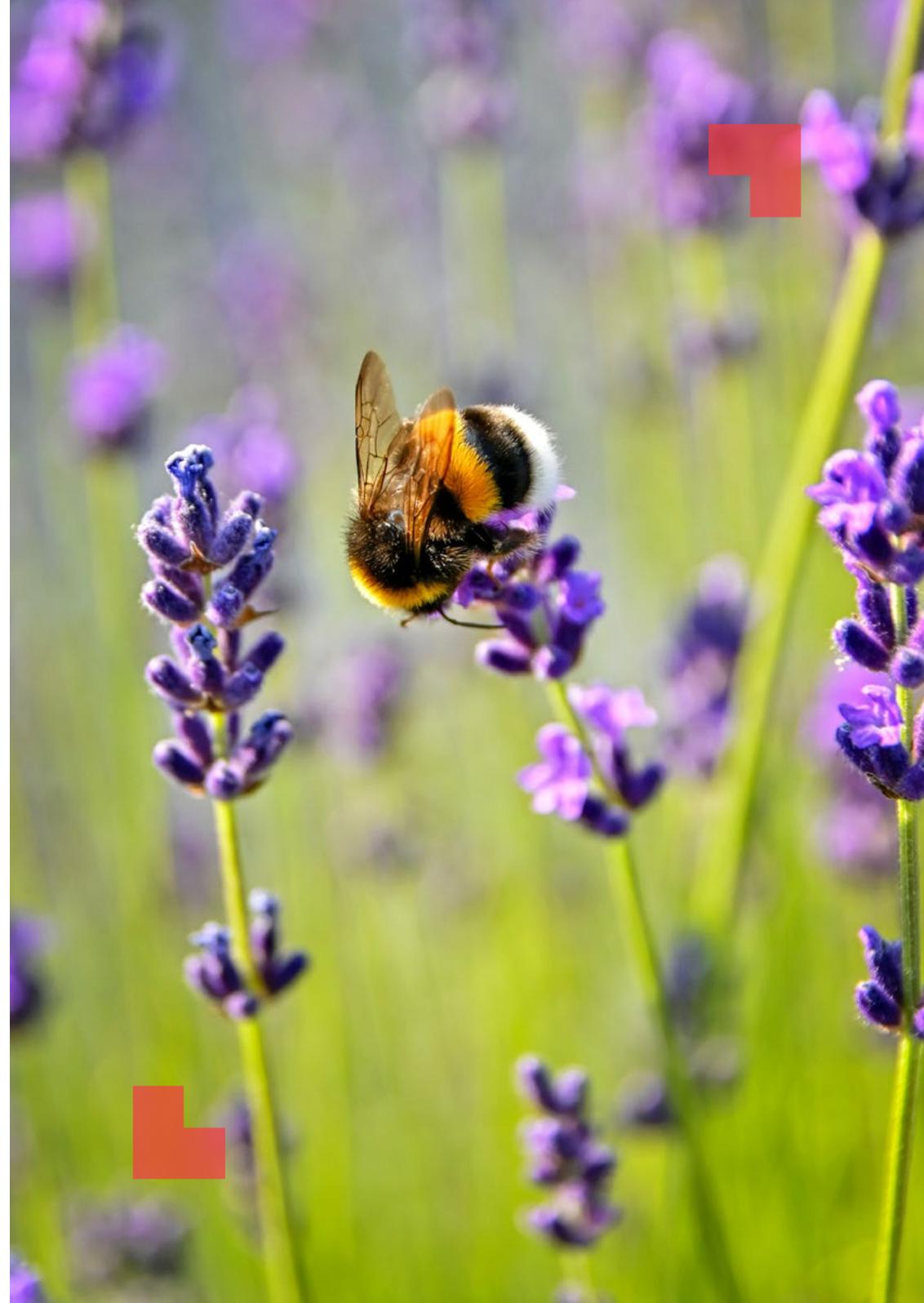
When a company has local roots, intimate knowledge of its local ecosystem, and understands the idea of win-win-win, it becomes easier to identify relevant potentials.

# The first steps

Imagine an apple tree in bloom. As they search for nectar, bees fertilize its flowers, which turn into apples and food for birds and people. Any apples that are not eaten fall to the ground in Autumn and become nourishment for worms, snails, beetles, and larvae, which transform the apples into nutrients for the soil, providing the means for the apple tree to grow and to stretch its branches even further in Spring.

This is regenerative power in its purest form - the same power that we here have sought to translate to be able to make it the heart of business events. Events that bring people together go far beyond simple business agendas: they are about food enjoyed; places for rest; and energy and experiences shared. The encounter between the business visitor and the company is a unique opportunity to influence the behaviours and mindsets of visitors.

In our conversations with companies and experts, we were repeatedly reminded of the power that business events companies have if they manage to make thousands of business events regeneratively meaningful. Business visitors are more than mere participants; they can become ambassadors for change. Their shared experiences offer a bridge to a deeper connection with each other, nature, and our collective future.





Every new journey starts with the first step. This is also the case for your journey to regenerate your company and your ecosystem. We hope that you have found inspiration in this report. To help you get started, we have created a website, which, besides containing some of the report's conclusions, also might inspire you through cases and concrete exercises to get started.

→ Read more here (site in Danish): [www.regenerativemoeder.dk](http://www.regenerativemoeder.dk)

Beyond inspiring action, the report should also contribute to initiating an important discussion in the industry about how the industry can create even more value by its presence. We hope that the report will be the starting point for a dialogue between the industry's various actors (DMOs, businesses, customers, etc.), making it easier to understand and talk about the regenerative paradigm.

Our economy - and thus also business and meeting tourism - is consuming the resources of nature at an unsustainable rate. A rate that has developed into a threat to our well-being. We have no choice but to become regenerative. It requires courage, and we will make mistakes, but we must try. Thank you for wanting to take part!