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REGENERATIVE TOURISM: A PATHWAY TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the potential of regenerative tourism as a sustainable development pathway for Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Renowned for its rich cultural heritage, diverse natural landscapes, and complex post-conflict socio-economic context, BiH has seen tourism emerge as a vital economic sector, contributing approximately 10–11% of GDP and 12% of total employment prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent growth in tourist arrivals and overnight stays underscores the sector's importance for national development. Regenerative tourism represents a paradigm shift beyond conventional and sustainable models, emphasizing ecosystem restoration, community empowerment, and socio-economic resilience while enhancing BiH's tourism products and experiences.

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining a desk review and qualitative content analysis of key tourism strategies from both BiH entities with a survey of 46 stakeholders, including tourism professionals, hospitality providers, local authorities, NGOs, and academics. The conceptual framework, grounded in regenerative tourism and development literature, centers on five design dimensions: place-based orientation, systems thinking, ethical stewardship and regenerative action, collaborative governance, and transformative learning. Strategic documents were evaluated against these dimensions, and survey data were analyzed descriptively to assess stakeholders' knowledge, attitudes, and readiness for regenerative tourism.

Findings indicate that while entity-level tourism strategies incorporate sustainability, inclusiveness, and competitiveness—focusing on product development, destination marketing, and human resource capacity—they lack explicit regenerative goals such as ecosystem restoration, net-positive impact, and transformative learning. Stakeholders exhibit moderate conceptual awareness but limited training, experience, and collaboration mechanisms to implement regenerative practices. The study contributes to academic and policy debates by situating regenerative tourism within BiH's post-conflict development context, highlighting key opportunities and challenges, and providing strategic recommendations for policymakers and practitioners. Ultimately, regenerative tourism emerges as a transformative pathway for BiH to enhance environmental restoration, social cohesion, and economic resilience while positioning itself as a competitive and responsible destination in the global market.

Keywords: regenerative tourism, sustainability, governance, tourism policy, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

JEL classification: Z30, Z32, Z38, Q56

1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is increasingly recognized by government institutions and local entrepreneurs for its potential to become one of the key drivers of economic growth and territorial development. With its unique geographic position, diverse natural landscapes, and rich cultural heritage, BiH has the potential to serve as an attractive tourist destination that must be carefully developed to ensure

environmental, cultural, and social sustainability. In recent years, a shift toward sustainable tourism practices in BiH has become evident in multiple initiatives and strategic approaches, including entity and canton-level tourism strategies that emphasize sustainability principles and impact minimization. These strategies embed sustainable tourism concepts, such as environmental protection, community involvement, and resource efficiency, yet remain heterogeneous, as they are adopted at different governance levels and with varying degrees of coordination. Moreover, they tend to emphasize sustainability rather than regeneration, focusing on reducing negative impacts rather than actively restoring and enhancing socio-ecological systems.

Emerging global and local challenges related to environmental degradation, social inequality, cultural erosion, and climate change (Daly, 1996; Jackson, 2009; Meadows et al., 1972; Raworth, 2017) require a paradigm shift toward regenerative tourism—a holistic and proactive approach that prioritizes restoration, renewal, and system flourishing. Over the last decade, a growing body of research has examined theoretical, methodological, and empirical aspects of regenerative approaches to tourism and development (Bellato et al., 2022; Dredge, 2022; Fullerton, 2015; Wahl, 2016).

This paper aims to explore the existing literature on regenerative tourism and provide a roadmap for transforming BiH's tourism development from a sustainability-oriented model to a regenerative one. Specifically, the research asks: To what extent do current tourism strategies and stakeholder perceptions in BiH reflect regenerative tourism principles, and what opportunities and challenges exist for transitioning from sustainability to regeneration?

The paper is organized as follows. In the first section of the paper, a literature review on the shift from sustainability to regeneration is explored. The second section of the paper provides an overview of conceptual framework on regenerative tourism, focusing on defining regenerative tourism and regenerative dimensions. The third section of paper discusses the methodology for data collection and analysis, following the chapter on data analysis and discussion. The final section includes conclusions and recommendations for future strategic tourism development

2. SHIFTING FROM SUSTAINABILITY TO REGENERATION IN TOURISM - SUCCINCT LITERATURE REVIEW

The transition from traditional to regenerative economics represents a paradigmatic shift in how societies conceptualize and pursue (economic) development. Traditional economic models, grounded in logics and linear production–consumption patterns (take-make-dispose concept), have prioritized growth and efficiency often at the expense of ecological integrity and social equity (Jackson, 2009; Daly, 1996). In response to the environmental degradation and systemic inequalities that these traditional models have produced, sustainable economics and sustainable development emerged, emphasizing the reduction of negative impacts and the pursuit of balance between economic progress and ecological limits (Meadows et al., 1972; Raworth, 2017).

However, sustainability alone has been insufficient to address cumulative ecological damage and systemic fragility (Elkington, 2018). Regenerative economics moves beyond the goal of maintaining systems to actively restoring and renewing the natural and social foundations upon which economies depend (Fullerton, 2015; Wahl, 2016). From this perspective, economic activity is embedded within living systems, and the objective is not merely to minimize harm but to generate net-positive outcomes for ecosystems and communities (Capra & Luisi, 2014). This conceptual evolution provides the theoretical foundation for reimagining sustainability practices in sectors such as tourism through a regenerative lens that aspires to heal, enrich, and revitalize both places and people.

The evolution from sustainable to regenerative tourism reflects this broader theoretical and ethical transformation in how tourism relates to social–ecological systems. Sustainable tourism has long sought to minimize negative environmental and social impacts and has been aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Butler, 1999; Saarinen, 2006). Yet, it often remains focused on maintaining existing conditions rather than reversing degradation or enabling systemic renewal. Critics argue that sustainability discourse in tourism has been largely anthropocentric and managerial, emphasizing efficiency, competitive advantage, and continuity of business operations rather than ecological and community flourishing (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018).

Regenerative tourism emerges as an alternative paradigm that draws on regenerative economics, systems thinking, and relational worldviews to position tourism as a restorative and co-creative process that actively contributes to the health and vitality of destinations (Fullerton, 2015; Wahl, 2016). It emphasizes reciprocity, resilience, and the integration of local and Indigenous knowledge in tourism design and management (Ateljevic, 2020; Bellato et al., 2022; Sheldon, 2021). Rather than viewing destinations as resources to be sustained for future use, regenerative tourism conceptualizes them as living systems capable of continuous evolution and regeneration through the active participation of visitors, communities, and ecosystems (Cave & Dredge, 2020; Duxbury et al., 2021). In this paradigm, tourists are participants who actively contribute, with the goal not only to benefit from the destination but to leave it better than it was before their arrival.

Three main approaches have been proposed to conceptualize the relationship between sustainable and regenerative tourism: The Complementary and overlapping approach is the first approach. This perspective views regenerative and sustainable tourism as closely related concepts, often discussed side by side (Husamoglu et al., 2025; Inversini et al., 2023). Regenerative tourism is seen as extending sustainability by overcoming inherent limitations of the “do no harm” paradigm.

The Transcendence approach is the second approach. Here, regenerative tourism is interpreted as going beyond sustainable tourism. While sustainability aims to minimize harm (“do less damage”), regeneration aims to restore, renew, and enhance the social, cultural, and ecological systems influenced by tourism (Çakar & Uzut, 2020; Dredge, 2022; Duxbury et al., 2021; Ateljevic & Sheldon, 2022; Gerke et al., 2023).

Finally, the Evolutionary successor approach is the third approach. In this view, regenerative tourism is considered an evolutionary step forward from sustainable tourism, sharing foundational values but emphasizing proactive restoration and co-creation over maintenance and harm minimization (Becken & Kaur, 2022; Luong et al., 2023). Regenerative tourism builds on sustainability principles but aspires to leave destinations better than they were found, offering experiences that restore rather than consume resources. In this paper, we adopt the evolutionary successor approach, conceptualizing regenerative tourism as an enhanced and more ambitious form of sustainable tourism that seeks net-positive socio-ecological outcomes.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK(S) AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF REGENERATIVE TOURISM'S FOUNDATIONS

The emergence of regenerative tourism represents a paradigmatic shift in how tourism is conceptualized, practiced, and governed. Moving beyond the sustainability paradigm, regenerative tourism reframes tourism as a restorative and co-evolutionary process that enhances the capacity of places, communities, and ecosystems to flourish. The concept builds on regenerative development and living systems theory, aligning with Indigenous and holistic epistemologies that view humans as integral components of the natural world rather than separate exploiters of it (Bellato, Frantzeskaki & Nygaard, 2022).

Although a single accepted definition of regenerative tourism has yet to be established, various scholars have proposed working definitions that reflect differing conceptual approaches. Table 1 synthesizes several widely cited definitions of regenerative tourism and highlights their core themes, such as human–nature integration, reciprocity, net-positive impact, and living systems thinking (Cave & Dredge, 2020; Dredge, 2022; Duxbury et al., 2021; Owen, 2007; Sheldon, 2021).

Table 1. Definitions of Regenerative Tourism in Academic Literature

Author(s) / Year	Exact or Closely Paraphrased Definition	Conceptual Emphasis
Owen (2007), p. 180	Regenerative tourism involves actively and thoughtfully interacting with a place to generate a constructive influence, recognizing humans as an integral part of the natural world and linking environmental concerns with socio-political action. <i>“Regenerative tourism lies in a more critical engagement with place in the design of ecotourism facilities”</i>	Human–nature integration; early ecotourism design focus
Duxbury et al. (2021), p. 3	“Regenerative tourism goes beyond sustainable tourism to focus on “giving back” and contributing to the proactive regeneration of communities, cultures, heritage, places, landscapes, and so forth.”	Beyond sustainability; restoration and reciprocity
Cave & Dredge (2020)	Defined as <i>ensuring travel and tourism reinvest in people, places, and nature, supporting the long-term renewal and flourishing of social-ecological systems</i> , thereby promoting <i>social, physical, and mindful wellbeing</i> .	Flourishing systems; holistic wellbeing
Dreage, D. (2022), p 271	Regenerative tourism is defined as an approach that ensures travel and tourism reinvest in people, places, and nature, supporting long-term renewal and flourishing of social-ecological systems, requiring a mindset shift from individualism to collective thinking and from scientific management to a holistic, adaptive approach. <i>„Regenerative tourism, at its simplest, seeks to ensure travel and tourism reinvest in people, places and nature and that it supports the long-term renewal and flourishing of our social-ecological systems.”</i>	Flourishing systems; holistic wellbeing
Bellato, Frantzeskaki & Nygaard (2022), p.9.	<i>“Regenerative tourism is a transformational approach that aims to fulfil the potential of tourism places to flourish and create net positive effects through increasing the regenerative capacity of human societies and ecosystems. Derived from the ecological worldview, it weaves Indigenous and Western science perspectives and knowledges. Tourism systems are regarded as inseparable from nature and obligated to respect Earth’s principles and laws. In addition, regenerative tourism approaches evolve and vary across places over the long term, thereby harmonising practices with the regeneration of nested living systems.”</i>	Transformational paradigm; living systems thinking
Bellato, Frantzeskaki & Nygaard (2024),p.1	Regenerative tourism is a transformational approach to healing relationships between tourism, places, and communities, with potential to support regenerative development of social-ecological systems, but often dominated by extractive approaches.	Transformational paradigm; living systems thinking

Source: Authors' research

Drawing on this literature, Bellato et al. (2022) propose a conceptual framework for regenerative tourism that consists of five design dimensions with integration of seven practice principles. Table 2 illustrates the relationship between design dimensions, linked practice principles, and the types of outcomes envisioned for regenerative tourism.

Table 2: Conceptual Relationship between Dimensions, Principles, and Outcomes of Regenerative Tourism

Design Dimension What?	Linked Practice Principles How?	How the Dimension Informs the Principle(s) Why?
1. Place-Based Orientation: recognizing that regeneration begins with understanding the unique ecological, cultural, and social identities of places	1. Acting from Place-Based Awareness	Encourages deep understanding of place and relational engagement with its community and ecosystems. This means preserving and promoting authentic local culture, gastronomy, and tradition
2. Systems Thinking: positioning tourism as part of interconnected living systems rather than as isolated industry activity	2. Working with Living Systems; 6. Adapting Contextually and Iteratively	Promotes awareness of feedback loops, interdependence, and the need for adaptive, holistic approaches to regeneration. Such as encouraging the planting of trees, cleaning the environment, preserving biological diversity
3. Ethical Stewardship: emphasizing reciprocal relationships between hosts, visitors, and non-human entities	3. Practicing Reciprocity and Care; 7. Striving for Flourishing and Net-Positive Impact	Guides ethical and restorative action ensuring tourism gives back more than it takes, aiming for long-term flourishing. Therefore, this includes encouraging local production, reducing waste and recycling.
4. Collaborative Governance fostering co-creation among diverse stakeholders	4. Co-Creating Collaboratively; 3. Practicing Reciprocity and Care	Promotes shared decision-making, activities, and co-ownership of regenerative outcomes. Involving local residents in decision - making and benefits from tourism is crucial.
5. Transformative Learning cultivating awareness and consciousness that enables regenerative mindsets	5. Engaging in Transformative Learning and Reflexivity; 6. Adapting Contextually and Iteratively	Encourages learning-by-doing, reflexivity, and mindset shifts necessary for regenerative practice and adaptation. Possible activities of walking, cycling tours around the city, tourists participating in environmental or social projects.

Source: Adapted from Bellato et al. (2022)

These dimensions capture what regeneration means in theory and how it can be interpreted within tourism systems. Subsequent work has extended this framework to different contexts, including urban rivers, destination-level planning, and regenerative hospitality (Bellato et al., 2024; Iddawala & Lee, 2025; Inversini et al., 2023; Luong et al., 2023; Dredge, 2022).

In this study, the five design dimensions and associated practice principles serve as both (a) a diagnostic lens for analyzing tourism development strategies in BiH and (b) a structural framework for the survey instrument used to assess stakeholder perceptions. This dual application bridges theoretical understanding and empirical assessment, enabling us to evaluate how regeneration is understood and operationalized in a specific fragmented governance context, such as BiH.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Design

A mixed-methods research design was employed to assess the potential for transitioning toward regenerative tourism in BiH. The research integrates qualitative content analysis of strategic tourism documents with quantitative survey data collected from key tourism stakeholders. This design allows for the combination of conceptual and policy-level insights with empirical evidence on stakeholder knowledge, attitudes, and perceived readiness.

4.2. Document Analysis

The desk research focused on key strategic documents on tourism development in BiH, specifically the Federation of BiH Tourism Development Strategy (2022–2027) and the Republika Srpska Tourism Development Strategy (2021–2027). These documents represent the primary policy frameworks guiding tourism development at the entity level.

A qualitative content analysis was undertaken to examine the extent to which these strategies reflect regenerative tourism principles, using the five design dimensions developed by Bellato et al. (2022).

4.3. Survey Design and Sampling

The quantitative component consisted of a survey designed to capture stakeholders' knowledge of regenerative tourism and their perceptions across the five dimensions of the conceptual framework. The questionnaire was developed based on the literature on regenerative tourism (e.g., Bellato et al., 2022; Dredge, 2022; Luong et al., 2023) and adapted to the BiH context. It was pre-tested with a small group of tourism experts and practitioners to ensure clarity and relevance.

The final survey included 30 closed-ended items structured into sections on knowledge of regenerative tourism, place-based orientation, systems thinking, collaborative governance and regenerative action, transformative learning, and ethical stewardship/experience of place. Each statement was rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). A short demographic section collected information about respondents' stakeholder type, age, gender, education, and location.

A snowball sampling technique was used to reach respondents involved in tourism planning, management, and promotion, including tourism professionals, hospitality operators, representatives of local authorities, NGOs, community associations, and academics. In total, 46 respondents completed the survey. Given the non-probabilistic nature of the sample, findings are interpreted as exploratory and indicative rather than statistically generalizable.

4.4. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) to identify general patterns. Where appropriate, items corresponding to each conceptual dimension were aggregated into composite scores to provide an overview of stakeholders' perceptions of place-based orientation, systems thinking, collaborative governance and regenerative action, transformative learning, and ethical stewardship/experience of place. The results from the survey were triangulated with the findings from the strategic document analysis to develop an integrated understanding of the readiness and capacity of BiH's tourism sector to adopt regenerative tourism principles.

Table 3: Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents

Sociodemographic characteristics		Frequency	Percent (%)
Type of stakeholder	NGO	4	8,7
	Academia	6	13,04
	Student	8	17,39
	Tour operator	6	13,04
	Hospitality operator	3	6,52
	Local community	19	41,3
	Total	46	100
Age group	18-25	16	34,8
	26-35	9	19,6
	36-45	13	28,3
	46-60	7	15,2
	60+	1	2,2
	Total	46	100
Gender	Male	15	32,6
	Female	31	67,4
	Total	46	100
Education	PhD	7	15,2
	Master degree	7	15,2
	Bachelor	29	63
	Higher education	1	2,2
	Secondary school	2	4,3
	Total	46	100

Source: *Authors' research*

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Analysis of the Strategic Context for Tourism Development in BiH

The analysis of the Federation of BiH Tourism Development Strategy (2022–2027) and the Republika Srpska Tourism Development Strategy (2021–2027) indicates that both documents strongly emphasize sustainable tourism, product diversification, destination marketing, workforce development, and digital transformation. Sustainability, gender equality, accessibility, and community involvement are articulated as guiding principles of tourism development.

Both strategies explicitly recognize the diversity of regional identities (e.g., Herzegovina, Una-Sana, Sarajevo, Tuzla) and core natural assets such as national parks, rivers, and spa resources. They highlight ecotourism, adventure tourism, rural tourism, and local gastronomy as priority products, which demonstrates awareness of the intrinsic value of local landscapes and communities. However, while authenticity and locality are emphasized, place-based elements are predominantly framed as market differentiators and competitiveness assets, rather than as vehicles for ecological regeneration or socio-cultural renewal. Thus, the place-based dimension is partially addressed but lacks explicit regenerative objectives such as ecosystem restoration or community-led conservation consistent with regenerative frameworks (Bellato et al., 2022; Duxbury et al., 2021).

Both strategies show weak-to-moderate systems thinking. They acknowledge linkages between tourism, agriculture, the environment, and local economies and align tourism development with sustainable resource management and broader development goals. Nevertheless, the primary focus remains on economic indicators and institutional reforms. Ecological interdependencies, cumulative impacts, and systemic resilience receive

relatively less attention than would be expected in a fully regenerative approach (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Wahl, 2016).

Ethical principles are implicit in commitments to sustainable and inclusive growth, gender equality, and accessibility for persons with disabilities. References to environmental protection and international ethical codes (e.g., the UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism) suggest a degree of ethical orientation. Yet, neither strategy fully embeds reciprocal ethics as a regenerative value system or provides explicit guidance for net-positive environmental and social outcomes. Regenerative action—such as deliberate ecosystem restoration, circularity, or net-positive impact—is not a central organizing principle, echoing critiques that sustainability strategies often remain within a “do less harm” paradigm (Elkington, 2018; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018).

The Federation strategy demonstrates relatively strong alignment with collaborative governance principles, having been developed through an inclusive process involving public, private, and academic stakeholders. This is consistent with regenerative tourism’s emphasis on co-creation and shared stewardship (Cave & Dredge, 2020; Bellato et al., 2022). The Republika Srpska strategy also includes stakeholder consultations but appears more centralized, with less emphasis on institutionalized, long-term participatory mechanisms and co-management structures.

Both strategies emphasize human capacity-building and training in tourism, but primarily in relation to skill enhancement, competitiveness, and workforce quality. They pay limited attention to transformative learning, such as fostering ecological literacy, systemic awareness, emotional intelligence, and reflexive practice among tourism actors, which are central to regenerative approaches (Bellato et al., 2022; Sheldon, 2021).

Overall, the strategic context in BiH reflects a trajectory toward sustainable tourism rather than a fully regenerative model. Strategies focus on participatory planning, destination management, and resource efficiency but fall short of embracing restorative and co-evolutionary principles at the heart of regenerative tourism.

5.2. Analysis of Perceptions on Regenerative Tourism Development in BiH

The survey data offer insights into how stakeholders perceive regenerative tourism and its dimensions in practice. Results indicate a moderate level of conceptual awareness of regenerative tourism. Many respondents report familiarity with the concept and an understanding of how it differs from sustainable tourism, and they recognize its potential benefits for local communities. However, relatively few respondents report having received training or guidance on regenerative tourism practices, and only a minority feel confident explaining regenerative tourism to colleagues or stakeholders. This suggests that while regenerative tourism is emerging in discourse, it has not yet been mainstreamed into professional practice or formal education, mirroring broader observations in the literature (Becken & Kaur, 2022; Luong et al., 2023).

Table 4: Respondents' knowledge of regenerative tourism

Dimensions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.
I am familiar with the concept of regenerative tourism.	8,7	15,22	23,91	30,43	21,74	46	3,41	1,24
I understand the difference between sustainable and regenerative tourism.	13,04	10,87	15,22	41,3	19,57	46	3,43	1,29
I am aware of the benefits regenerative tourism can bring to local communities.	10,87	6,52	21,74	36,96	23,91	46	3,57	1,24
I have received training or guidance on regenerative tourism practices.	26,09	39,13	19,57	8,7	6,52	46	2,30	1,15
I am confident in explaining regenerative tourism to colleagues or stakeholders.	17,39	19,57	26,09	28,26	8,7	46	2,91	1,24

Source: Author’s research

The survey data show participants’ familiarity and confidence regarding the regenerative tourism concept and principles. Overall, the results reveal moderate conceptual awareness but low levels of practical training and applied confidence.

The respondents believe that tourism development is place-oriented (see table below). The respondents agree that local tourism planning takes into consideration the cultural and ecological specifics of the local places (76%), tourism promotes cultural heritage (82,61%), improves the well-being of local communities (80,43%),

and that visitors are meaningfully interacting with local places and tradition (82,61%). On the other hand, opinion on the inclusion of local stakeholders in tourism planning is rather divided, where more than 50% of respondents are either neutral or do not agreeing with the statement that local stakeholders are included in tourism planning.

Table 5: Respondents' perception of place-based orientation in tourism planning and management

Dimensions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.
Tourism planning in my area considers local cultural and ecological characteristics.	4,35	2,17	17,39	54,35	21,74	46	3,87	0,93
Local tourism activities promote the preservation of cultural heritage.	0	4,35	13,04	60,87	21,74	46	4,00	0,73
Tourism development prioritizes the well-being of local communities.	2,17	2,17	15,22	50	30,43	46	4,04	0,87
Visitors are encouraged to interact meaningfully with local places and traditions.	2,17	6,52	8,7	58,7	23,91	46	3,96	0,89
Local stakeholders are actively involved in tourism planning decisions.	2,17	26,09	26,09	45,65	0	46	3,15	0,89

Source: Author's research

With respect to system thinking integration in tourism development, respondents provide some evidence of cross-sectoral integration and system thinking in linking tourism with the local ecosystem (see table below), key performance indicators remain economic, with less attention to ecosystem health or social wellbeing.

Table 6: Respondents' perception on system thinking integration in tourism planning and management

Dimensions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.
Tourism initiatives in my area consider environmental, social, and economic impacts together.	0	19,57	26,09	43,48	10,87	46	3,46	0,94
There is collaboration between tourism businesses and environmental organizations.	0	17,39	45,65	34,78	2,17	46	3,22	0,76
Tourism planning acknowledges the interdependence of human and natural systems.	0	17,39	21,74	54,35	6,52	46	3,50	0,86
Decisions about tourism take long-term ecological sustainability into account.	2,17	23,91	30,43	41,3	2,17	46	3,17	0,90
Stakeholders actively monitor and adapt tourism practices based on ecosystem health.	6,52	21,74	45,65	26,09	0	46	2,91	0,86

Source: Author's research

The ethical stewardship dimension assesses how tourism experiences embody values of respect, reciprocity, and mutual benefit between visitors, local communities, and the natural environment. The responses suggest a moderately strong ethical orientation in tourism experiences, though with room for deeper integration of ecological and cultural reflection (see table below).

Table 7: Respondents' perception of ethical stewardship

Dimensions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.
Tourism experiences in my area foster a strong connection between visitors and the local environment.	0	8,7	26,1	50	15,2	46	3,72	0,83
Tourism encourages meaningful interactions between visitors and local communities.	0	4,7	20,9	55,8	18,6	43	3,88	0,76
Visitors are guided to slow down and immerse themselves in local culture and nature.	2,2	8,9	44,4	26,7	17,8	45	3,49	0,97
Tourism experiences emphasize the unique identity of each destination.	4,3	4,3	17,4	52,2	21,7	46	3,83	0,97
Tourism helps visitors understand the ecological and social systems of the destination.	4,3	15,2	17,4	47,8	15,2	46	3,54	1,07

Source: Author's research

Over 65% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that tourism in their area strengthens the connection between visitors and the environment, with only 8.7% disagreeing. This result reflects solid awareness of environmental engagement, indicating that many tourism activities successfully encourage visitors to appreciate and interact with nature. Respondents also largely agreed that tourism experiences promote connection with the local environment (mean = 3.72, SD = 0.83, with 65% agreement) and support social engagement, reflecting alignment with regenerative tourism principles of reciprocity and place-based awareness. However, lower scores regarding opportunities for visitors to slow down and immerse themselves in local life (mean = 3.49, SD = 0.97) and to understand the ecological and social systems of destinations (mean = 3.54, SD = 1.07) indicate that these practices are not yet widespread or systematically embedded. Overall, while ethical awareness and community connection are recognized strengths, deeper integration of experiential learning and ecological interpretation is needed to advance from sustainable to fully regenerative tourism practice.

The analysis of the collaborative governance dimension reveals that tourism in the assessed destinations demonstrates a moderate level of collaborative and regenerative engagement, with tourism initiatives increasingly oriented toward generating positive socio-environmental outcomes (see the table below).

Table 8: Respondents' perception on collaborative governance and regenerative actions in tourism

Dimensions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.
Tourism projects actively restore or enhance natural and cultural resources.	2,2	17,4	37	43,5	0	46	3,22	0,81
Tourism initiatives in my area contribute to the regeneration of local ecosystems.	4,3	15,2	50	28,3	2,2	46	3,09	0,84
Businesses implement practices that reduce waste, reuse resources, and recycle materials.	6,5	32,6	37	21,7	2,2	46	2,80	0,93
Tourism encourages practices that support local food systems and livelihoods.	4,3	21,7	21,7	43,5	8,7	46	3,30	1,05
Tourism projects are designed to generate net-positive impacts for the environment and community.	15,2	0	32,6	45,7	6,5	46	3,43	0,83

Source: Author's research

Respondents showed the highest agreement with items reflecting community-oriented and net-positive tourism practices (mean = 3.43, SD = 0.83, with 52% agreement) and support for local food systems and livelihoods (mean = 3.30, SD = 1.05, with 52% agreement), suggesting a growing awareness of tourism's role in strengthening local economies and contributing to community well-being. Moderate scores related to the restoration of natural and cultural resources (mean = 3.22, SD = 0.81) and the regeneration of local ecosystems (mean = 3.09, SD = 0.84) indicate that while collaborative intentions exist, practical implementation of regenerative actions remains limited. The lowest mean value, reflecting circular economy practices such as waste reduction and resource reuse (mean = 2.80, SD = 0.93), highlights a significant gap in business-level environmental responsibility. Overall, the findings suggest that although collaborative governance structures and awareness of regenerative objectives are emerging, deeper integration of cross-sector partnerships, community co-management, and resource circularity is required to advance tourism governance from a sustainable to a fully regenerative model.

The analysis of the transformative learning dimension reveals that tourism in the assessed destinations demonstrates a moderate level of learning orientation, with some evidence of openness to new approaches but limited structured opportunities for education and knowledge exchange (see table below).

Table 9: Respondents' perception on transformative learning

Dimensions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.
Tourism businesses provide learning opportunities for staff about sustainability and regeneration.	4,3	23,9	47,8	19,6	4,3	46	2,96	0,89
Visitors are educated about the environmental and social impacts of tourism.	6,5	21,7	39,1	28,3	4,3	46	3,02	0,98
Tourism activities encourage reflection on personal and community responsibility toward nature.	8,7	10,9	26,1	45,7	8,7	46	3,35	1,08
There are programs to share regenerative knowledge among tourism stakeholders.	8,7	23,9	39,1	28,3	0	46	2,87	0,93
Stakeholders are open to learning new approaches to improve tourism's social and ecological outcomes.	2,2	10,9	34,8	43,5	8,7	46	3,46	0,89

Source: Author's research

Respondents expressed the highest agreement with statements reflecting stakeholder openness to learning and innovation (mean = 3.46, SD = 0.89, with 52% agreement) and the encouragement of reflection on personal and community responsibility toward nature (mean = 3.35, SD = 1.08, with 54% agreement), indicating an emerging awareness of the need for mindset transformation within the tourism sector. Moderate results were observed for the education of visitors about the environmental and social impacts of tourism (mean = 3.02, SD = 0.98, with 33% agreement) and for the provision of learning opportunities for staff related to sustainability and regeneration (mean = 2.96, SD = 0.89, with 24% agreement), suggesting that capacity-building remains underdeveloped and largely ad hoc. The lowest score was recorded for the existence of programs to share regenerative knowledge among tourism stakeholders (mean = 2.87, SD = 0.93, with 28% agreement), reflecting a clear gap in institutionalized learning systems and collaborative knowledge networks. Overall, the results indicate that while individual openness and awareness are present, transformative learning is not yet systematically embedded in tourism practice, highlighting the need for structured education, inter-stakeholder learning platforms, and the integration of regenerative principles into professional training and visitor experiences.

Taken together, these results illustrate that tourism development in BiH, while increasingly sustainable, remains short of being regenerative. Strategies are still oriented toward economic growth, marketing, and infrastructure improvement, rather than toward restoring the ecological and social vitality of places.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper investigates the transformative potential of regenerative tourism as a next step beyond traditional sustainable tourism for BiH. While current tourism strategies in BiH emphasize sustainability, inclusiveness, and economic growth, they largely lack explicit focus on regenerative principles of net-positive impact creation or systemic thinking. The analysis of entity-level tourism strategies shows that BiH's tourism policies emphasize sustainability, inclusiveness, product diversification, and competitiveness, and partially integrate place-based, participatory, and ethical principles. However, they lack explicit commitments to regenerative objectives such as net-positive impact, ecosystem restoration, and transformative learning.

Empirical findings reveal moderate stakeholder awareness of regenerative tourism concepts and limited practical application and collaborative governance mechanisms. Advancing regenerative tourism in BiH requires embedding ecological and cultural knowledge locally, shifting from impact minimization toward net-positive effects. The regeneration mindset must be cultivated through education and capacity-building that promotes reflexivity, empathy, and interdependence among all tourism actors.

This study makes several key contributions to the literature on regenerative tourism and sustainable development. First, it contextualizes regenerative tourism within a post-conflict and fragmented governance environment, illustrating how the legacies of conflict and decentralization continue to shape tourism development in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). This contextualization highlights the importance of adaptive governance and participatory processes in achieving regenerative outcomes in complex socio-political landscapes. Second, the study empirically operationalizes a regenerative tourism framework based on Bellato et al. (2022) in a new regional setting, providing empirical insights into how regenerative dimensions align—or fail to align—with existing strategic discourse and stakeholder perceptions. By applying this framework to BiH, the research extends the theoretical reach of regenerative tourism to post-socialist, transitional economies where structural constraints and fragmented institutional systems pose unique challenges. Finally, the study develops a set of context-specific recommendations designed to bridge sustainability and regeneration. These recommendations are aimed at policymakers, destination managers, and community organizations seeking to advance tourism practices that simultaneously promote economic vitality, ecological restoration, and social wellbeing.

To advance regenerative tourism in BiH, several strategic actions are proposed. First, regeneration should be explicitly integrated into future tourism strategies at both entity and canton levels. Such revisions should include clear regenerative objectives that emphasize ecosystem restoration, cultural heritage renewal, and net-positive socio-ecological outcomes. Second, strengthening collaborative and inclusive governance is essential. Building upon existing participatory mechanisms, multi-stakeholder platforms should be institutionalized to co-create tourism visions, projects, and monitoring systems in alignment with regenerative governance principles (Cave & Dredge, 2020; Hartman & Heslinga, 2023). Third, regenerative indicators and monitoring frameworks should be developed to complement traditional economic metrics. These indicators should capture ecological health, social cohesion, and cultural vitality, reflecting regenerative and doughnut-economy perspectives (Raworth, 2017; Hartman & Heslinga, 2023). Fourth, investment in capacity-building and transformative learning is critical. Training programs for tourism professionals, local authorities, and community organizations should incorporate regenerative concepts, systems thinking, and participatory design, while tourism and hospitality education should embed experiential learning approaches that foster ecological and social awareness (Sheldon, 2021; Wahl, 2016). Finally, policies and support mechanisms should encourage the development of regenerative products and experiences. Such initiatives could include environmental stewardship projects, community festivals, and slow travel experiences that engage visitors in place-based learning and restoration efforts. Collectively, these strategic actions can help position BiH as a leader in regenerative tourism within the Western Balkans region.

This study is exploratory and based on a small, non-probability sample of stakeholders, which limits the generalizability of its findings. Additionally, the document analysis was confined to entity-level tourism strategies, excluding canton and municipal plans that might offer further insights into local implementation of

regenerative principles. Future research should expand on this work by conducting larger-scale surveys, in-depth qualitative case studies of regenerative initiatives, and comparative analyses involving other post-conflict or post-socialist destinations. Longitudinal research could also be valuable in tracing how regenerative discourse and practice evolve over time within BiH's tourism sector. Despite these limitations, the findings underscore that regenerative tourism offers a promising framework for aligning economic development with environmental restoration and social cohesion. By embedding regenerative principles in tourism governance, planning, and experience design, Bosnia and Herzegovina can move beyond sustainability toward a tourism model that actively contributes to the flourishing of people, places, and ecosystems.

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