

Regenerative Community Development

A systemic approach grounded in a deep understanding of “Place”



Regenerative design and development is a whole systems approach grounded in an understanding of ‘Place’ as a living system. It applies powerful frameworks and processes, built on ecological principles, to addresses complex socio-ecological urban challenges and economic development at scale. Developmental in essence, regenerative work aims at evolving the capacity and capabilities of all the stakeholders involved while creating relationships that leverage existing assets and generate value in the long-term. The approach taps the native genius and creativity of people by helping them reconnect to the uniqueness of place. The purpose is to unleash the potential inherent in a place and develop mutually-beneficial relationships that aim at raising the value produced while increasing the human, social, environmental, financial and produced capitals. This approach augments and integrates the efforts of planners, governing bodies, community organizers, business alliances, neighborhood activists, educators, and other stakeholders in the long-term health of a community.

The regenerative approach to community development begins with an uncovering of the ‘Story of Place’— a transformative change process that aims at developing a deep understanding of a community/neighborhood from a socio-ecological perspective. The outcome for the community is a deep sense of connection to the Place and greater understanding and alignment to the potential of design and development work and its contribution to the health and sustainability of the neighborhood. The Story of Place reveals opportunities for projects and initiatives that can stimulate the regeneration of the Place.

Regeneration versus Sustainability

While sustainability focuses on maintaining a steady state, or at the very least doing less damage to the environment, regeneration focuses on learning, innovation, and developing the means to continually increase the vitality, viability and evolution of a place by creating beneficial interrelationships that improve the resilience and ability of a community to adapt and survive in dynamic and challenging conditions.

Regenerative Principles

“Only living systems regenerate.”

The essence of regenerative work is to re-awaken the spirit and soul of ‘Place’ within a community, in a way that brings greater meaning to any endeavor, so that the community is able to fulfill its unique vocation over time.

Socio-Ecological Unity — All living entities in natural and human systems work as an integrated, conscious and evolving living system: the whole of life.

Place-Sourced Potential — A place is considered a living system having a unique essence and identity as well as aspirations. Regenerative work is grounded in a rich patterned understanding of place and in a vision of the value-adding role a place plays within its larger environment. All solutions should be tailored to the specific potential and needs of a neighborhood community.

Regenerative Capabilities — Regenerative development aims at creating self-reliant and self-sustaining communities that build mutually beneficial partnerships to keep innovating and evolving.

Value-Adding Processes — A community realizes its potential and fulfills its vocation when its activities are grounded into the identity of place and deliver on-going value to the whole system within which the community is embedded, thereby contributing to the development of a rich and healthy local economy.

Multiple Capitals — For each dollar invested, the regenerative design and development approach considers how to deliver value across five capitals: human, social, ecological, financial, and manufactured/produced.

The Regenerative Approach

- Engages the community and stakeholders in a participative and co-creative process of discovery and decision-making that promotes developmental learning.
- Builds on the unique and distinctive understanding of a Place and its potential and does not develop “one size fits all” solutions to problems.
- Develops place-based solutions to problems.
- Is holistic and systematically integrated.
- Is transformative and aims at facilitating the development of new behaviors that support systemic and long lasting change.

The Benefits of the Approach

Beyond increasing the vitality, viability and evolutionary capability of a place, the regenerative approach:

- Helps a community develop a shared identity grounded in the ‘spirit’ of a place.
- Increases community members’ engagement, ownership and stewardship.
- Uncovers points of leverage where interventions’ impact is maximized.
- Facilitates the development of integrated solutions and entrepreneurial ideas.
- Delivers a coherent place-based story, frameworks, principles and guidelines to guide the direction of projects and support fundraising.
- Assists in the identification of place-based metrics and indicators of well-being.
- Supports individual and institutional capacity development.

The regenerative approach was created by the Regenesi Group in Santa Fe, NM. To learn more visit: www.regenesigroup.com

Soma Integral Consulting collaborates with Regenesi to deliver regenerative services to communities in the world.

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