



City of Helsinki regenerative tourism action plan 2025-2027

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Action Plan 2025–2027

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Background

Climate change, biodiversity loss, and the impacts of tourism on the well-being of local communities are pushing the tourism industry to seek increasingly sustainable and impactful ways of operating in a changing world. New perspectives are needed, ones that not only mitigate harm but actively build value for both local communities and the environment. Regenerative tourism provides a path in which tourism becomes a tool for positive change.

The City of Helsinki's strategy guides the development of tourism towards a sustainable and smart city. As stated in the city strategy: "An attractive city also attracts tourists. We are developing Helsinki into the world's most sustainable and smart travel destination." This strategic goal is made concrete in the Helsinki Tourism and Events Programme 2022–2026, which includes the goal that "Helsinki is an internationally recognized sustainability forerunner and problem solver in the tourism and events sectors." The programme also notes that "the well-being of Helsinki residents must be the foundation of all development," emphasizing the importance of local communities in sustainable tourism and event development.

These objectives form a solid foundation for preparing Helsinki's Regenerative Tourism Action Plan. They guide concrete actions aimed at developing tourism in a responsible and long-term way, to benefit both residents and visitors, support local communities, and promote environmental well-being.

A new city strategy for Helsinki will be drawn up at the beginning of the next council term, along with a new tourism and events programme, which will be implemented in the latter half of 2026. This Regenerative Tourism Action Plan will provide content for that new programme.

The preparation of Helsinki's Regenerative Tourism Action Plan began in March 2025 in the City's Tourism and Destination Services unit. To collect background information and build deeper understanding, discussions were held with domestic and international experts on regenerative tourism. Participants included researchers, entrepreneurs, and tourism developers at both regional and national levels.

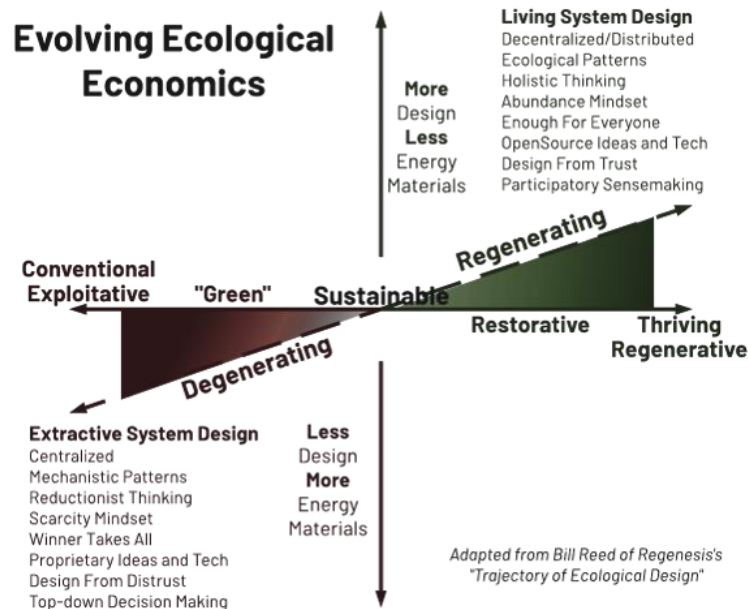
Discussions with other city departments and units began in spring 2025. The Volunteering Unit and Helsinki Partners have already been involved in the preparation, and the dialogue will continue with other departments as the process progresses.

In addition, the expertise of the Tourism and Destination Services unit and the members of the "Sustainability Drivers" theme group of the Helsinki Makers network has been utilized. Knowledge was gathered through shared discussions, participation in events such as seminars and webinars, and review of relevant articles and publications. This preparatory phase formed the basis for the goals and content priorities of the action plan. The plan itself has been reviewed and guided by Elke Dens, a regenerative tourism expert from the international consultancy Place Generations.

Regenerative Tourism

Regenerative development has gained increasing attention in recent years, particularly in the fields of agriculture, tourism, design, and the built environment. Regenerative development is seen as a broader and more holistic approach than sustainable development — and as the next step beyond sustainability.

Regenerative economy, in turn, is an approach to the future economy based on the principles of regenerative development. Achieving a regenerative economy requires regenerative business practices. A regenerative economy operates on principles that promote the systemic health and vitality of living systems. The aim is for the economy to support the well-being of society as a whole in the long term—enhancing both the health of nature and people. Regenerative development includes the idea of looking at the whole and ensuring that benefits are shared equitably (Figure 1). In the tourism sector, regenerative development is referred to as regenerative tourism.



(Figure 1. Elke Dens 2025)

In regenerative tourism, the focus shifts from merely minimizing the negative impacts of tourism to actively enhancing the ecological, social, and cultural well-being of destinations. Regenerative tourism can also be seen as a form of transformative travel. While transformative travel emphasizes the internal journey of the traveler — changes in mindset, values, or behavior — regenerative tourism focuses on the destination itself. It also differs from sustainable tourism, which aims to minimize negative impacts, ideally to net zero. Regenerative tourism goes further: its goal is to generate a net-positive impact, meaning the destination is left in better condition than before the visit.

The central question in regenerative tourism is: What can tourism give to the destination so that both people and the environment can thrive? While achieving fully net-positive tourism may be challenging, regenerative tourism offers a realistic way for businesses to promote the well-being of destinations. This can be implemented, for example, by developing tourism products that include regenerative elements and support local nature and communities.

The term "regenerative tourism" is multifaceted and still unfamiliar to many. There are nearly as many definitions as there are definers, so it is essential to clearly define what regenerative tourism means specifically for Helsinki and to communicate its principles in a clear and understandable way. Communication aimed at businesses and tourists benefits from concrete examples, stories, and content that illustrate how tourism can promote the well-being of destinations and communities. Effective communication increases awareness and transparency, encourages participation, and

builds trust between stakeholders. At the heart of regenerative tourism is the idea of learning, interaction, and reciprocity among stakeholders.

In a recent publication, the European Travel Commission (ETC) and the Global Destination Sustainability Movement (GDS Movement) state that destination management organizations (DMOs) have a responsibility to act as pioneers and leaders in the transformation of the industry. DMOs should promote the adoption of regenerative practices across the sector, communicate progress transparently, and demonstrate change through measurable outcomes. Regenerative tourism is a component of a resilient and future-ready visitor economy.

Areas of Regenerative Tourism

Nature has long served as a source of recreation and well-being, but it is not an inexhaustible resource. In regenerative tourism, nature is viewed primarily as a partner, not merely as a resource. Improving the state of nature is also seen as a way to enhance human well-being.

From a cultural perspective, regenerative tourism seeks to cherish and enliven local culture — its stories, traditions, and customs. Culture is seen as a living part of a place's identity and spirit, and it is treated with appreciation.

From the community's perspective, the aim of regenerative tourism is to strengthen the well-being of local communities and to create meaningful value for city residents and local businesses, not just for visitors. The community-oriented perspective of regenerative tourism can be realized through supporting small entrepreneurship, volunteering, community events, cultural activities, and community-based projects.

In Finland, the development of regenerative tourism is currently most advanced in rural destinations. However, its influence is already visible to some extent in the restaurant and accommodation sectors as well as in various communities.

Observations from Stakeholders and Tourists

Among stakeholders, regenerative tourism is seen as a new direction for tourism. Its positive and concrete impacts on both the environment and communities are emphasized. At the heart of regenerative thinking is a shift in mindset. Tourism is no longer merely about minimizing harm but about creating a net-positive footprint that enhances the well-being of both nature and people. In stakeholder discussions, regenerative tourism emerged as being built on two levels: a broad ideological change and concrete, practical measures.

The role of compensation in regenerative tourism is considered challenging, and it is seen as a separate activity that requires precise and transparent implementation. In terms of communication, the emphasis should be on highlighting the joy and meaningfulness that tourism can bring, instead of using a guilt-inducing tone. This approach is believed to foster a genuine connection between travelers and the destination, including its challenges.

In the urban context, stakeholders highlight the importance of volunteerism and multicultural participation, especially when working with non-Finnish-speaking populations. Community-led environmental clean-ups and the revitalization of cultural practices and traditions are cited as concrete ways to implement regenerative tourism. Nature is seen as a partner whose well-being

must be actively invested in. When measuring tourism’s impact, the benefits provided by nature — such as perceived well-being and happiness — are also considered. There is a desire to understand how these benefits can be valued as part of tourism’s overall contribution.

Challenges identified include the need to increase awareness and provide education for tourism operators, especially at the leadership level. Long-term commitment is also required to genuinely reassess tourism’s impacts and to develop services with a regenerative approach. Regenerative tourism is viewed as a transformative force in the industry, capable of creating meaning, joy, and well-being for visitors, locals, and the environment alike.

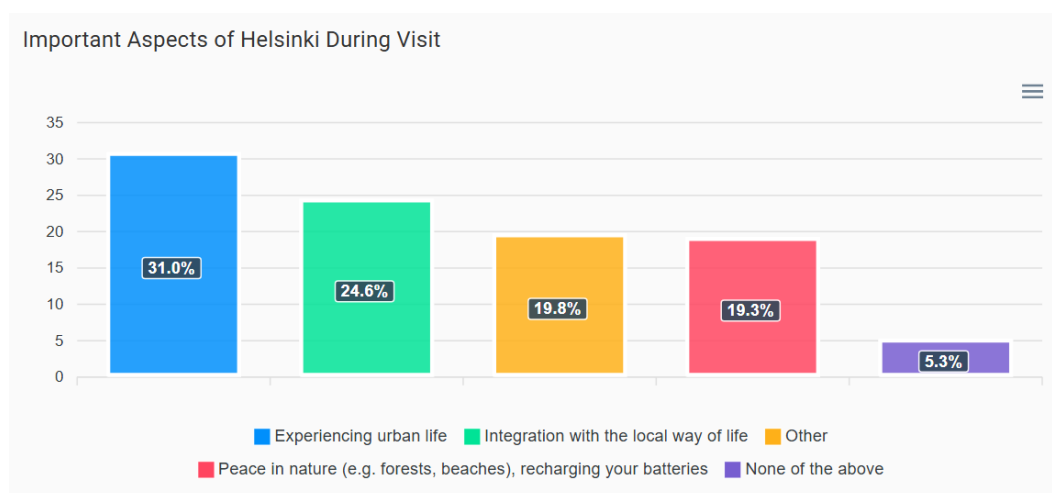


Figure 2. Datalokki Destination Insights, Helsinki Visitor Experience Survey 2024

Insights from tourists were gathered from the Helsinki Visitor Experience Survey 2024 (Figure 2).

The results indicate that travelers particularly value urban experiences during their visit to Helsinki. They also appreciate connecting with the local way of life and the tranquility of nature.

Regenerative Tourism in Helsinki

Helsinki is a forerunner in sustainable tourism, and regenerative tourism offers the city an opportunity to become an even more vibrant and attractive travel destination. Regenerative tourism can promote the well-being of local communities, restore and renew nature and the urban environment, and create new business opportunities for companies through the development of regenerative tourism products. The city has the potential to develop regenerative tourism in a meaningful way by engaging local stakeholders and leveraging the resources of various city departments and other partners. In regenerative tourism, ambition means developing the best possible practices for the destination itself — not competing with other destinations.

Regenerative tourism is often seen as the next step beyond sustainable tourism. Although the city is already a leader in sustainability, it is not yet a “finished product” from the perspective of sustainable tourism. Helsinki is advancing both sustainable and regenerative tourism simultaneously. Therefore, it is important to establish clear guidelines for promoting regenerative tourism in the coming years. The goal of this action plan is to define what regenerative tourism means in Helsinki, what kind of actions are targeted in the coming years, and how the impact of these

actions will be measured. The plan will be further supplemented as needed once the new Tourism and Events Programme is completed in 2026.

The City of Helsinki has already observed growing interest in regenerative tourism services and opportunities over the past few years. This interest has surfaced, for example, in tourism advisory services and within the Culture and Leisure Division, where international visitors have expressed interest in volunteering opportunities. In Helsinki and the broader capital region, there are already a few operators offering products that align with the principles of regenerative tourism, but the number of such offerings is still small.

Developing regenerative tourism requires broad collaboration among various actors. To create effective and regenerative tourism products, it is important to involve not only tourism businesses but also different city departments and third-sector organizations such as charities. Such multidisciplinary collaboration makes it possible to create tourism services that support the well-being of both local communities and the environment. A shared vision for developing regenerative tourism is essential to set a clear direction and establish indicators to measure progress.

Vision for Regenerative Tourism in Helsinki 2030:

In Helsinki, tourism generates good for the whole city — its people, culture, and nature. While visiting the city, tourists have the opportunity to make Helsinki a better place than it was before.

Helsinki's goal is for regenerative tourism to create well-being in multiple ways:

- **For Urban Helsinki:** Regenerative tourism enriches the city by generating new services that highlight local culture, skills, and ways of life, making the city more appealing to both residents and visitors. Culture, design, architecture, and history are central.
- **For Residents:** Regenerative tourism services emphasize the appreciation, not just the commercialization of local culture, skills, and lifestyles. Tourism benefits locals in many ways and offers opportunities for them to participate in regenerative experiences.
- **For Nature:** Regenerative tourism in Helsinki focuses especially on the restoration and renewal of marine nature, while also considering the urban natural environment. It offers visitors the chance to participate in environmental restoration and stewardship.
- **For Travelers:** Visitors are not passive spectators but active participants who learn, become inspired, and take new perspectives and experiences home with them.
- **For Business:** Regenerative tourism opens up new business opportunities by bringing regenerative elements into existing products and services, as well as through entirely new services, partnerships, and target audiences.

The development of regenerative tourism leverages a regenerative and participatory approach centered on design, innovation, creativity, openness, and active engagement. The City of Helsinki, the tourism sector, stakeholders, and visitors work together transparently. Development is driven by data, and its results are open and accessible to all.

Action Plan

The Regenerative Tourism Action Plan is divided into two levels. The first level includes short-term concrete actions that enable the development of regenerative tourism to get started. The second level aims for a broader impact. The plan will be further refined as more is learned through practical work and collaboration within the developing network for regenerative tourism.

The goal of Level 1 is to initiate practical activities, while Level 2 focuses on finding broader solutions and greater impact beyond individual regenerative tourism services. The actions under both levels will be launched in parallel and there is no prioritization between them.

Level 1: Developing the Supply and Visibility of Regenerative Tourism Products

Tourism businesses and other service providers represent the majority of Helsinki's tourism sector. To develop regenerative tourism, a group of enthusiastic and committed pioneer companies is needed to build regenerative tourism services and products and to raise awareness of the theme. Regenerative tourism products support Helsinki's goal to become the world's most sustainable destination while also considering residents' satisfaction with tourism. At their best, regenerative services bring joy to both visitors and locals and help renew the urban environment and nature.

Measures to inspire and support tourism companies in the productization, marketing, and sales of regenerative tourism products:

- Define what regenerative tourism means for Helsinki. This was carried out during the preparation of this action plan and is presented in this plan.
- Organize webinars and trainings on regenerative tourism for members of the "Helsingin tekijät" (Makers of Helsinki) business network, with the aim of sharing knowledge, offering guidance, and encouraging participants to explore regenerative possibilities for their business.
- Assemble a group of companies from the Makers of Helsinki network and other stakeholders, also from outside tourism, interested in developing and productizing regenerative tourism.
- The productization and sales path for regenerative tourism:
 - Organize a regenerative tourism coaching program for the company group and stakeholders.
 - Collect tourism products from the company group for evaluation by an international expert in regenerative tourism, to help shape them into both regenerative and commercially viable products.
 - Further develop the previously coached products into finalized tourism offerings in collaboration with the company group and with expert support.
 - Utilize customer segmentation developed by Helsinki Partners.
 - Define the recommended channels where regenerative tourism products should be listed, such as Visit Finland's DataHub, digital sales platforms, and tour operators.

Marketing and communication measures to support regenerative tourism:

- Communicate about regenerative tourism in a structured way and update materials as understanding deepens.
- Add regenerative tourism content to the MyHelsinki.fi website (in cooperation with Helsinki Partners, 2025–2026).
- Showcase regenerative tourism products during familiarization visits for media and tour operators (2026).
- Implement marketing actions that include regenerative products, e.g. newsletters for tour operators, tactical campaigns via OTAs (in cooperation with Helsinki Partners, 2026).
- Share lessons from the first regenerative initiatives within the network, for example at the Tourism Seminar, webinars, Makers of Helsinki morning coffees and meetings (2026).
- Repeat and refine the productization, marketing, and sales process (2026–2027).

Level 2: Building a Broader Regenerative Ecosystem and Promoting Opportunities

This section seeks greater regenerative impact by bringing together a wide range of stakeholders. The aim is to identify and develop genuinely impactful initiatives that ensure new kinds of opportunities for the tourism sector in the future.

Measures:

- Involve various city departments in ideating regenerative tourism services (e.g., the Volunteering Unit) (2025).
- Identify third-sector organizations, such as charities, to collaborate with tourism operators in advancing regenerative activities (2025).
- Integrate regenerative tourism into the new Tourism and Events Programme for Helsinki to ensure sufficient resourcing for the initiative.
- Facilitate interaction between networks outside tourism and tourism actors (joint workshop from a regenerative perspective) with the goal of creating broader and more impactful regenerative solutions (2026–2027).
- Identify, utilize, and pilot various digital platforms and solutions to enable the sharing and dissemination of regenerative opportunities to different parties.
- Explore opportunities for wide-ranging collaboration across Finland and internationally with the goal of launching a broader regenerative initiative for the Baltic Sea. Examine different models and possibilities.
- Identify potential partnerships with projects and working groups aligned with regenerative tourism (e.g., the Climate Neutral Destinations project).
- Share the lessons from Helsinki's regenerative tourism actions with interested parties both nationally and internationally, thereby promoting the expansion of regenerative tourism and collaboration, and increasing overall impact.

Legacy Impact of Meetings and Congresses

So-called “Legacy work” related to meetings and congresses has been underway in Helsinki for a long time. The goal is to ensure that B2B events leave a positive legacy or lasting impact on the host destination. Helsinki Partners has played a key role in promoting Legacy efforts, as it often serves as the first point of contact when attracting meetings, especially congresses, to the city.

Measures:

- Helsinki actively supports the Legacy work of meeting and congress organizers by offering regenerative tourism services and other opportunities to event organizers, and by communicating different Legacy-related needs and opportunities to the business community.
- Legacy opportunities are actively utilized in the sales of meetings and congresses, serving as incentives for proposals.
- Develop models that enable congress and meeting organizers and participating experts to share their knowledge with local companies, students, and research institutions.
- The project “Congresses and Business Events as Engines of Innovation and Sustainability in the Helsinki Capital Region” promotes Legacy-related initiatives in cooperation with the cities of Espoo and Vantaa. The project continues through 2026.

It is important to note that the event organization or organizer is responsible for the overall structure of the event and for proposing their own Legacy opportunities. The role of Helsinki Partners is to highlight and offer Helsinki-specific opportunities to event organizers and to adapt the organizer’s ideas to suit the local context.

Measuring the Development of Regenerative Tourism

Demonstrating the impact of regenerative tourism measures and monitoring the progress of the action plan requires jointly defined indicators.

It is essential to evaluate how Helsinki is evolving and renewing both as a city and as a visitor destination. Information is gathered from both local residents and tourists. Existing metrics and processes will be utilized in the assessment, such as the biennial resident survey and the annual visitor survey. These same indicators are already widely used in monitoring the overall development of tourism in Helsinki, and regenerative tourism will be incorporated into this framework.

In addition, the number of participating companies and other stakeholders, as well as the number of regenerative products, will be measured. When developing indicators, the focus in regenerative tourism is not on quantity but on impact. Even a single new collaboration or service that significantly benefits local nature, people, or the urban environment can be highly valuable.

Measuring the Impact of Regenerative Tourism:

- Residents' attitudes toward tourism remain positive or improve as tourism grows.
→ Tracked via the results of the Helsinki Tourism Resident Survey conducted by the Tourism Foundation and the City of Helsinki’s Tourism and Destination Services unit.

- Tourists' experiences of Helsinki remain at the same level or improve, even as tourism grows.
 → Monitored through results from the Helsinki Visitor Experience Survey, focusing on the following questions:
 “Which of the following are important to you during your trip to Helsinki: sustainable and responsible tourism, tranquility and recharging, integration with local lifestyle, experiencing city life.”

| OTHER INDICATORS | GOAL |
|--|---|
| Number of companies and other actors involved in regenerative tourism actions | 2025: 5 companies, 1 other player 2026: 10 companies, 3 other players 2027: 20 companies, 5 other players |
| Cross sector regenerative partnerships | 2025: 1 2026: 3 2027: 5+ |
| Regenerative tourism products on the market | 2025: 5 products 2026: 15 products 2027: 30 products |

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