

Transitional Tourism

Rethinking Tourism
in an Age of Systemic Change

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Let's go!

1. Introduction

Sustainable Development Goals, Broad Prosperity (in Dutch, Brede Welvaart), Equitable Tourism, Circular Tourism, Degrowth, Regenerative Tourism, Destination Stewardship and Doughnut Economics. All these terms and concepts are commonly used by Destination-Management and Marketing Organisations (DMMOS), as well as by the travel industry when talking about tourism that focuses on greater sustainability and social resilience. But what do these terms actually mean? There are just so many of them. In many cases they are not clearly defined and they often overlap, or even relate to each other. It's hardly surprising then that there is much confusion about them, including how they can be used in practice. An added complication is that they can become buzzwords, or used in the 'real' world in ways that they were not initially intended for.

How can we prevent this happening to the concepts that are now being popularised? With this document, we aim to clarify the various terms used in discussions about tourism's transition. While we use 'Transitional Tourism' as an overarching concept, our goal is not to introduce another 'buzzword'. Instead, we encourage you to focus on the underlying processes driving this transition. Among the questions that we will answer are: What do the different concepts stand for? In what ways are they similar? What are the differences between them? To what extent, and in which ways, are they meant to contribute to a sustainability transition in tourism? How are they used in practice? And perhaps most importantly of all, how can we use the combined insights afforded by these approaches to facilitate a true transition in tourism? We'll take you through it step-by-step.

What did we do?

To be able to offer you the answers to these questions we dived deep into the existing literature and documents that are available on these concepts. Firstly, we combined insights from both academic articles and practitioner reports. Then, to gain an even deeper understanding of the specifics of each term, we complemented our outcomes with conversations that we held with fourteen experts on the different concepts. This has led to an overview of the various approaches from a mostly theoretical point of view and how they relate to one another. Furthermore, to see how the various approaches are translated into practice, we spoke to eleven practitioners from a range of cities in European countries (Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Spain), practitioners who are working in the field to implement these approaches. Finally, we combined all the information and insights into what we hope has become the coherent and digestible piece of work you are currently reading.



With this document our aim is to help you make greater sense of all the different terms being used to discuss the transition of tourism.

What to expect?

Although, to gain a complete understanding of what we are talking about, we recommend that you read the report in full, we can also appreciate that your interest might be restricted to specific elements or areas. Given that every reader will have different interests and background knowledge, we'll point you in the right direction on where to start your own navigation and exploration of this document.

Perhaps, for example, you would like to learn about all the ins and outs of the different approaches and how transitional they are? Or what it means to work on transitional tourism in the first place? If so, start with chapter two! This is where we mostly discuss what the different concepts stand for, in which ways they are similar, and how they differ. For each approach we also discuss the transitional elements that they contain. We also introduce the Three-Horizons framework to highlight how approaches are not necessarily 'better' or 'worse', but rather that they all have their own strengths and weaknesses and that they can play different roles to set in motion a transition of tourism in a specific context.

If you are already familiar with the different terms and are more interested about how they are actually applied in practice, jump straight to Chapter 3. That is where we talk about why destinations chose certain concepts, and the strategies they use to implement them. We also mention the challenges that are encountered in doing so, and how practical approaches can differ from the theoretical understanding. We also use the Three-Horizons framework to show how, on the whole, destinations currently engage with the transition of tourism.

If you are more curious about how to evaluate transitional forms of tourism, start at Chapter 4. Here is where we discuss one of the biggest challenges faced by destinations working on a transition in tourism: changing the goal of tourism and setting alternative KPIs that will facilitate a change in the tourism system.

But no matter which part of the report you want to focus on, we recommend that you do not skip our final chapter. This is where we provide a brief summary of the key findings and offer some reflections on what future steps we think are needed to jointly work towards a sustainability transition in tourism. We even borrow a few insights from beyond the tourism sector. Perhaps you are already working on one or more of these future steps, or maybe you feel that we have missed some. If so, do not hesitate to let us know! •



We spoke to eleven practitioners from a range of cities in European countries who are working in the field to implement new approaches.



2. Understanding transitional tourism

2.1. Why do we need a transition; the problem with sustainable tourism

To gain a better understanding of where the different conceptualisations of transitional tourism come from, it will be useful to first briefly discuss the way the sustainability agenda has been put into practice in tourism over the past four decades. The basis for sustainable tourism originated from the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) which, in 1987, described the principles of sustainable development explicitly for the first time in the publication 'Our Common Future'. This is often considered to be the starting point for integrating sustainability principles in tourism. Following the principles of the WCED, sustainable tourism initially emphasised the objectives of not doing any harm, minimising the negative effects of tourism, and maintaining this balanced state over an infinite period of time (i.e. meeting the needs of present and future generations) (Butler, 1993).

However, the way sustainable tourism is currently understood is, to a great extent, also based on the concept of the triple-bottom-line (i.e. people, planet, profit) defined by John Elkington in 1994. The goal of the triple-bottom-line was to stimulate deeper thought about the transformation of capitalism so that it leads to system change. Soon after its popularisation, however, the way in which the concept itself was defined also changed. Rather than being a radical conceptualisation to set in motion a transition in society, the concept was reinterpreted as a balancing act between people, planet and profit/prosperity. This interpretation then more-or-less became the basis of a reporting framework that takes into account social and environmental elements alongside financial performance, while not aiming to drastically change the prioritisation of ecological and social factors (Elkington, 2018).

In terms of tourism, this meant that sustainable tourism was seen as a trade-off between people, planet, and profit. It was deemed acceptable for the benefits of one (often profit) to outweigh the negative impacts on the others (planet and people) in achieving a balance. In practice, however, it meant that the emphasis lay mostly on limiting negative social and environmental impacts (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hardy et al., 2002; Geissdoerfer, 2017), this to increase profitability. The concept of sustainable tourism has thus long failed to sufficiently address the unsustainable nature of the current tourism system, along with the critical issues that must be addressed in achieving the kind of system change envisaged in the initial conceptualisation of sustainability.



For example, with regards to tourism-related mobility as it affects the climate crisis, academics have long argued that (long-haul) air travel must be drastically reduced if we are to ensure that tourism stays within global limits (Scott et al., 2010). However, in practice the industry has struggled to bridge the gap. Rather than trying to overcome the negative impacts of tourism by simply reducing air travel, the emphasis on achieving sustainable mobility has relied too heavily on technological solutions (such as energy efficiency) (Melissen & Koens, 2016). The same can be said of destinations struggling with high visitor pressure. Even in destinations that experienced overtourism prior to the Covid pandemic, reducing tourism growth was seen as impossible. Its implied goal was to achieve some sort of 'balance' by reducing the negative social and environmental impacts, while maintaining similar visitor numbers (Kuenen et al., 2023).

Looking back, it could be argued that, although developed with good intentions, the way sustainable tourism has been translated into practice—based on a growth-based paradigm and neoliberal capitalist thinking—has failed to hit the mark (Niewiadomski & Brouder, 2024; Rastegar, 2022). On reflection, it is disappointing that we have not seen the kind of sustainable future that was envisioned with 'Our Common Future', at least not in tourism. Despite technological advancements, numerous sustainability visions and strategies, and millions spent on research to make tourism more sustainable, unfortunately, tourism is still inherently unsustainable. The output of greenhouse gases due to tourism is higher than ever before and set to grow. And when it comes to destinations, the growth of tourism is accompanied by negative impacts both to the environment (waste, water shortages, damage to nature) and on a societal level (touristification, rising house prices, loss of cultural traditions, overtourism).

For these reasons, an increasingly large group of activists, politicians, academics and tourism professionals argue that we need systemic change. Only that, they insist, will ensure that the tourism ecosystem transitions to allow it to contribute to wider ecological and social sustainability, rather than the further depletion of natural and social resources (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010; Koens & Milano, 2024).

2.2. What is transitional tourism?

2.2.1 Defining transitional tourism

So, what does this transition to a new tourism system entail? It is important to clarify here what we mean when we talk about sustainable transition, or a systemic change in tourism. To do this, we make use of literature coming from the wider sustainability-transitions literature, that deals, for example, with sectors such as mobility and agriculture and healthcare, literature that is more developed than tourism literature (Magnusson et al., 2024). This literature highlights how the transition in tourism is not unique in itself. Rather, it is one of several societal transi-



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tions that all address different elements of society, and in different ways. Moreover, we can learn much from other transitions and the useful insights they provide. For example, a transition requires going beyond piecemeal interventions. It also needs to present technological ‘solutions’ and greater efficiency within the current system. It has to be clear on the importance of power and politics, including who benefits and who bears the costs, whilst also addressing the difficulties of coordination across geographical scales and system boundaries. Finally, it needs to take on board the requirements of end-users (professional stakeholder, tourists and residents), to convince them that the transition is necessary for tourism to become future proof. (Lamine and Marsden, 2023; Rajagopalan, et al., 2023; Van Nunen et al., 2011).

In addition, this literature all refers to a process in which one dominant and unsustainable worldview is replaced with a new one (Grin et al., 2010; Loorbach et al., 2017). This requires a mindset shift of all actors involved (policy makers, entrepreneurs, businesses, etc.). It goes beyond technological fixes and improvements in infrastructure by also focusing on systemic changes in governance systems, regulations, policies, market structures, consumption patterns and the way we view the world, all of which addresses the deeper underlying issues of sustainability, or lack thereof (Coenen et al., 2012; Geels, 2010; Köhler et al, 2019).

In essence, this is very similar to the original idea of sustainability that was introduced in ‘Our Common Future’. Applied to the tourism sector, a sustainability transition means that we abandon some of the more traditional approaches in tourism, which largely rely on economic growth, and migrate to a new system in which tourism and its contribution to destinations is seen from a different perspective (Rastegar, 2022; Niewadomski & Brouder, 2024).

It is important to note that in this section we look at an ideal-type approach to transitional tourism. As we will discuss later in the report, there are plenty of issues that may limit how this ideal-type can be implemented in practice. We recognise the risk of ‘transitional tourism’ becoming just another buzzword, and we urge you to avoid treating it as such. For us, it simply serves as a descriptor to encompass a range of transitional approaches. That said, it is useful to try to delineate what we mean by transitional tourism. As we were writing the report, we noticed in the literature that the concept of transitional tourism is sometimes used interchangeably with terms like transformative or transformational tourism that sound similar, but have a very different meaning.

To avoid possible confusion, we have therefore defined the concepts of transitional tourism and transformations/transformational tourism in the panel below (BOX 1), as well as two other terms that are often used in conversations about system changes in tourism. We hope that this helps you understand the difference between them, at least in the context of this report.



Transitional tourism is about systemic change; reshaping the socio-economic systems that underpin tourism toward sustainability and equity.

BOX 1. Transitional Tourism, transformative tourism, tourism in transformation. What's the deal?

Transitional tourism:

Referring to a sustainability transition in tourism that focuses on systemic changes on different levels, that change the socio-economic system (that tourism is part of) towards, for instance, postgrowth or regenerative tourism (Köhler et al., 2019; Niewadomski & Brouder, 2024; Rastegar, 2022).

Transformative or transformational tourism:

The idea that travel can fundamentally change individuals, influence their values, behaviours, and outlook on life through a tourism experience, either consciously sought (transformative),

or through unexpected experiences (transformational) (Reisinger, 2015)

Other terms that are often used in literature are **tourism in transition** and **tourism in transformation**. Both refer to the processes described above and allude to a systemic transition or transformation being in progress. Tourism in transformation is also sometimes used to describe the supply side of the tourism sector catering to transformational experiences. For the purpose of clarity, in this document we will use the term transitional tourism as defined above.



2.2.2 Elements of transitional tourism

To get a better understanding of what transitional tourism entails, we have described below some theoretical conceptualisations that underpin the different transitional approaches. It is important to note that not all approaches emphasise all of these elements, or even agree on the importance of some of them. However, they can be helpful in differentiating how these approaches relate to a transition of tourism.

Rethinking the role of economic growth

Perhaps the most defining aspect of all transitional approaches to tourism is that they challenge the strong focus on (economic) growth and profit maximisation, which forms an important element of the current tourism system. When tourism focuses too much on economic growth, it will eventually lead to over-extraction and unsustainable practices that threaten the (social) license to operate for tourism businesses. Instead, the starting point should be to operate tourism in such a way that it stays within the ecological limits of the planet, while meeting the social foundations for people's well-being. This does not imply the complete rejection of growth. On the contrary, many transitional approaches insist that (economic) growth can be desirable in certain places, and even necessary for destinations and organisations to thrive. However, rather than an implicit underlying assumption, it should be a deliberate choice that is based on the needs in a current setting. And it should never be seen as being interchangeable with the ecological and social aspects of sustainability, as has too often been the case with the Triple-P approach. In addition to rethinking growth and prioritising social and ecological sustainability, several other elements from the literature can form part of a transitional approach.

Tourism as a complex (and living) system

Tourism and destinations are best seen as complex systems. They bring together many different actors and sectors, all of which are linked through dynamic, non-linear relationships, and continuously shaped by the broader environments in which they exist (Baggio et al., 2010; Bramwell et al., 2017; Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004; Hartman, 2021; Niewiadomski & Brouder, 2024). Traditional sustainability approaches often focus sharply on tourism itself, by viewing it as an economic sector, for example. However, this fails to take into account possible connections with other sectors. In contrast, transitional approaches encourage us to think about tourism as part of wider social systems. This enables us to better understand the interdependencies and how they will help us build a more sustainable future for tourism.

Taking all this a step further, advocates of some transitional approaches argue that the tourism system should always be seen in relation to its natural environment. The idea here is that nature and human society are highly interlinked parts of the same system, and that we cannot achieve a sustainable future if we view them as separate (Amérigo et al., 2007; Bellato et al., 2022). In the literature, dif-

ferent streams have used various terms for this. Socio-ecological or social-ecological-systems, for example, (Heslinga et al., 2017; Lacitignola et al., 2007; Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2011), human-natural systems (Bramwell et al., 2017), or living systems (Bellato et al., 2022; Hussain, 2021; McKercher, 1999). These terms may differ in nuance, but essentially they all convey the same idea: that humanity and nature are deeply interconnected and form a dynamic, non-linear system. Tourism is not separate from this reality; it is an intrinsic part of our socio-ecological and economic systems. And because tourism relies so heavily on the quality of destinations, it is deeply embedded in these broader systems, which are interdependent and continuously shaping and influencing one another (Folke et al., 2010).

Inspired by an ecocentric worldview

Following on from the above, the dominant current conceptualisations of sustainable tourism (people, planet, profit) are based on the notion of (extended) anthropocentrism, a philosophical line of thinking that reasons that we humans are at the centre of existence. Extended anthropocentrism does, however, concede that human survival depends upon the well-being of other species and ecosystems, and therefore acknowledges our collective responsibility to preserve nature, use natural resources as efficiently as possible and protect cultural heritage (McShane, 2007 in Dwyer, 2017). It does not, however, address the intrinsic value of the natural world, which holds value in itself, and does merely exist to serve human lives and wellbeing, as is the case with ecocentrism (Dwyer, 2018; Washington & Maloney, 2020).

Ecocentrism enjoys a stronger focus in transitional approaches to tourism. It has a more forceful inclination to prioritise policies that promote ecological health and long-term sustainability, even if there is no economic benefit or if it comes at a cost (Kanwal, 2023). In tourism, this can include measures such as reducing flights to minimise environmental impacts, restricting access or closing off sensitive areas to preserve biodiversity, or even permanently cancelling all tourism activities in what are perceived as fragile ecosystems. In this case, nature is regarded as having intrinsic value, and limiting visitor experiences or accepting reduced economic returns is seen as justifiable (Pawary et al., 2022; Washington et al., 2017). At the same time, nature and nature-based practices are viewed as a source of inspiration to create new interventions and emergent solutions that might otherwise be missed with more anthropocentric perspectives. Aligned with this, often indigenous practices are looked at, to understand other ways in which human societies can engage with the natural environment (Guczalska, 2023; Randrup et al., 2020).

Place-based approach

A place-based approach is often central to transitional approaches, as it puts the needs and desires of people and the environment above that of purely economic growth. Place-based learning makes it possible to draw on the intrinsic and existing knowledge of people who are familiar with a place, including its history. It builds on approaches that focus on designing neighbourhoods around the needs

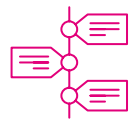


Nature and nature-based practices are viewed as a source of inspiration to create new interventions and emergent solutions.

of the people who live in them (Jacobs, 1961). To include the interests of ‘place’ and thus ensure that these also are included in the relevant tourism development, it is even possible to ask certain stakeholders to provide the ‘voice of nature’ or ‘future generations’. If we focus on the unique culture, society, and environment of a place, we can create change that both fits better and works better. The idea behind this is that it will make tourism more respectful of local nature, traditions and values, as well as respond to what the local communities actually need (Brondizio et al., 2021; Loeber and Kok, 2024). Some of these place-based approaches even refer to indigenous practices, thus providing powerful examples of living in harmony with nature and the land (Bellato et al., 2023; Bellato and Pollock 2025).

These models are difficult to directly apply in Europe in general, let alone across European cities and other busy tourism destinations. As an alternative, the concept of ‘ancestral knowledge’ is suggested, because it relates to knowledge, traditions, rituals and practices in a specific urban or natural environment that have been passed down from previous generations within communities (Gerritsma, 2025). But even then, it is still hugely challenging to appreciate what indigenous or ancestral knowledge actually entails, and how it can relate to and contribute to developing the more sustainable development of ‘modern’ tourism practices. And failure to address that challenge runs the risk of using such knowledge in a tokenistic way that may actually hinder a tourism transition. While there are certainly place-based approaches that come with a top-down perspective (such as legal requirements for local participation), there is also growing recognition of the greater value offered by a more authentic bottom-up-based consultation, participation, and co-creation. Engaging residents and other local stakeholders who frequently use and care for a place can develop tourism in a way that better aligns with local needs, desires and values. Such participatory processes can help build a shared understanding, foster support for initiatives and empower local communities. This will help ensure that development reflects community priorities and stimulates a sense of inclusivity, ownership, and responsibility.

The shift toward locally led approaches has been referred to in tourism as the ‘local turn’ in tourism. It highlights the increased attention being paid to the importance of localhood and the quality of local places, as well as the people that use them on a regular basis for tourism development (Higgins-Desbiolles & Chew Bigby, 2022). But on the flip side, unless someone takes ownership for implementing the outcomes, a bottom-up participatory approach runs the risk of being tokenistic and becoming a goal in itself, rather than a means to an end (Koens et al., 2024). What’s more, in our research we found that the participatory nature of place-based approaches tends to focus on the needs and wishes of the loudest minorities on issues relating to the here and now, as opposed to what is important for future generations and wider society. This issue highlights the dual-edged sword of participation: while it may result in stronger place-based approaches, it can also be counterproductive to wider societal transformations.



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Working towards action and the need to rethink how to ‘measure’ impact

All transitional perspectives in tourism either originate from practice or have been heavily influenced by practitioners. Consequently, nearly all seek to engage with and contribute to transforming tourism practice, even when they differ in the extent to which they provide concrete actions that can be applied in practice. Some of these reflect future-oriented visions of what tourism should look like, while others focus more on tangible outputs and taking current industry practices as a starting point (Sharpe et al., 2016).

The importance of engaging with practice can also be seen in the perceived need to rethink the ways in which we assess whether we are heading in the right direction. Despite the fact that we now have a much more diverse portfolio of ways to measure the impact of tourism practices, most current tools and methods still focus on measuring the performance or specific elements of tourism, rather than the system as a whole, with mostly quantitative indicators still being used (Berbekova et al, 2025; Miller and Torres-Delgado, 2023). Transitional perspectives would argue that these metrics are either inadequate or overly limited in capturing the full impact of tourism. Certain approaches suggest that we need to critically engage with the ways in which we measure the impact of tourism (qualitatively or quantitatively, holistically or broken into distinct elements). Others feel that we should use more holistic approaches that focus more on processes than outcome, or even question the whole concept of ‘measuring’. In the following section, the different concepts of transitional tourism are viewed in relation to the various elements that are described above. To give an indication of their respective focus, we discuss how they relate to all these elements. We acknowledge that our evaluations are, to an extent, contentious, because people will use and interpret the concepts in different ways. Even so, we would argue that it is useful to provide such an interpretation as it can help make an initial differentiation between the different concepts. If you are interested in delving deeper, we recommend that you turn to the ‘additional reading’ options at the end of each section.

BOX 2. Transitional Tourism, transformative tourism, tourism in transformation. What’s the deal?

					
Rethinking the role of economic growth	Tourism as a complex and living ecosystem	Inspired by an ecological worldview	Adopting a place-based approach	Co-development and co-creation	Working towards action

2.3. Different transitional approaches

Having set the baseline for what we mean by transitional approaches and what their most important elements are, below, we will discuss the different terms currently being used in tourism, and how each of them relates to the different levels of transitionality.

2.3.1. Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were developed by the United Nations as a set of objectives in striving for peace and prosperity for both people and planet. Totalling seventeen different goals, the official collective aims of the SDGs can be defined as: ‘sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all, alleviating poverty with efficiency improvements and reconciling the tension between growth and ecological sustainability’ (SDG Agenda 2023). This definition makes it clear that economic growth, be it sustainable, inclusive or green, remains a core element in the objective of the SDGs and is something that needs to be balanced with social and environmental impacts. As such, even though the concept may seek to contribute to the transition of tourism, the intention is to attain a fit within the current economic growth-based paradigm (Dwyer, 2023; Hickel & Kallis, 2019). Its potential for transition can therefore be considered less than that of some of the other concepts described in this report.

A critique on the SDGs is that they are unlikely to lead to a holistic approach because it is too easy for destinations to cherry pick only a few goals to contribute to. This detracts from the intended relationships and interdependencies between goals and leads to fragmented actions, rather than addressing broader (but related) issues. This is mostly attributable to destinations’ ability to cherry pick a few SDGs, without taking into account the whole spectrum of goals that could be contributed to and how they are related to one another and other sectors. If all goals were indeed to be taken into account, using the SDGs would more readily lead to a more holistic approach in tourism development. One of our interviewees actually said that ‘the core of sustainable development was defined decades ago, for example in the Brundtland reports and the Sustainable Development Goals.’

The SDG approach strives for economic growth, albeit sustainable. The premise of growth is not really challenged in this approach. By including all seventeen SDGs, we could argue that to a certain extent we are seeing tourism as a complex system in which multiple effects and relationships with other sectors are being addressed. At the same time, we found little evidence that the SDGs are being followed in a more holistic approach and that they integrate a complex and living-systems approach. The SDGs furthermore do not cater for a place-based approach where the needs of the destination are taken as a starting point and there is also little evidence of active community involvement. In terms of being action-orientated the SDGs do appear to work better.



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They are outlined in a relatively clear way, and have been taken up by numerous organisations and policymakers to instigate changes in tourism.

Additional Reading

- Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals - Journey to 2030: Report by UN Tourism regarding the SDGs and how to attain them in the context of tourism - https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/UNWTO_UNDP_Tourism%20and%20the%20SDGs.pdf
- Tourism for the SDGs: platform and toolkit developed by UN Tourism to discuss tourism and its relationships to the SDGs. - <https://tourism4sdgs.org/>
- Academic article reviewing several sustainable tourism indicators in relation to the sustainable development goals: Rasoolimanesh, S. M., Ramakrishna, S., Hall, C. M., Esfandiar, K., & Seyfi, S. (2023). A systematic scoping review of sustainable tourism indicators in relation to the sustainable development goals. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 31(7), 1497-1517. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1775621>



Broad Prosperity is often associated with balancing negative and positive aspects, making a positive societal impact and benefitting residents.

2.3.2. Broad Prosperity (Brede Welvaart)

Broad Prosperity, which loosely translates from the Dutch 'Brede Welvaart', is a concept used by the Dutch government and supported by its Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS). The official definition is 'Broad Prosperity concerns the quality of life here and now, and the extent to which this comes at the expense of the Broad Prosperity of later generations, or that of people elsewhere in the world'. It is based on the premise that there is more to prosperity than economic/material wealth; it must also include, for example, quality of life, health, and social cohesion. And this prosperity should not only be available for the current generation but also for future generations and communities elsewhere in the world.

The idea of Broad Prosperity is based on the SDGs and forms a measurable adaptation of economic, social, and ecological prosperity in a Dutch context (CBS, 2023). This concept has now been transferred to tourism, where Broad Prosperity is being incorporated into Dutch tourism strategies. It is often associated with balancing negative and positive aspects, making a positive societal impact and benefitting residents ('bewonersprofijt') (NBTC, 2022; NBTC, 2023).

In the Netherlands, the concept of Broad Prosperity has been introduced into tourism in several ways. For example, the Dutch approach of a conscious destination shares its underlying premise that tourism needs to focus on more than economic prosperity ('Bewuste Bestemming', CELTH, 2022). A Conscious Destination is one in which the tourism- and leisure-sector is striving for as positive an outcome as possible in social, ecological and economic spheres. It should lead to a high quality of life (residents), experience (visitors), and work (professionals). It could also be considered a practical guide to achieving high-value and balanced

tourism. The focus of the conscious destination approach is on making a positive impact.

Another, practice-oriented interpretation of Broad Prosperity in a Dutch context is the Destination in Balance ('Bestemming in Balans') approach. This was developed by the Netherlands Board of Tourism and Congresses (NBTC, 2022), together with CELTH. The aim of this approach is to manage tourism in such a way that the benefits for society and residents outweigh the costs, with a generous nod being made towards liveability and sustainability. It advocates that destinations should not be developed beyond their coping capacity.

The emphasis here lies on how to measure the positive and negative impacts of tourism. In terms of coping capacity, six categories have been identified: ecological, social, psychological, physical, economic, and political. For each of these categories, in terms of both impact and coping capacity, a set of indicators has been included to measure each of these criteria. The document serves as a starting point in assessing whether a given destination is in balance or not, which would translate to high-value tourism.

Broad Prosperity ('Brede Welvaart'), Conscious Destinations and the Destination in Balance approaches all prioritise ecological sustainability and community well-being. As such they strive to provide a more holistic perspective on tourism in the destination of tourism as a whole. At the same time, these approaches are mostly pragmatic in nature. They focus on better managing the current tourism ecosystem and guiding it towards one that provides greater net benefits, while certain underlying logics, such as continued growth, receive less attention. In addition, while the spill over effects of tourism to other areas are a common theme, the approach is mostly tourism-based. While the specific context and needs of the place are discussed, actions and interventions largely stay within the tourism domain and on the destination.

Additional Reading

- Broad Prosperity approach in tourism - short explanation in English (and more detailed document in Dutch): <https://www.celth.nl/en/nieuws/309/hoer-kun-je-brede-welvaart-verbeteren.html>
- NBTC vision 2030 (in Dutch) that builds on Broad Prosperity concepts www.nbtc.nl/nl/site/organisatie/wat-we-doen/perspectief-2030
- General explanation of Broad Prosperity concept: Puffers, K. (2024). Navigating the Narrow Road to Broad Prosperity—Social transition and our polder model. Tilburg University Press. <https://repository.tilburguniversity.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/ab8cf9f2-d4d7-426e-aff-c6a4e617ed11/content>



2.3.3. Equitable tourism

Equitable tourism is a fairly recent term. It was launched by the Travel Foundation in collaboration with several partners (The Travel Foundation, 2024) and is mostly based on what is already happening in practice in the tourism sector. It brings together existing insights and strategies from destinations, thereby giving guidance on creating a tourism system that more fairly distributes the benefits of tourism and provides more opportunities for people who have historically been excluded by tourism. The aim is to reduce inequality and empower marginalised groups. The idea behind equitable tourism is to move from volume (such as tourism numbers) to value (added value for society).

The focus of equitable tourism lies not so much on creating value but more on how that value is distributed across the community, paying specific attention to underserved and marginalised groups. By the same token it is not, by definition, about growth or degrowth, but about how that growth is distributed. In this way, equitable tourism contributes fairly to a community's needs and makes sure that the outcomes are shared equally across different community groups within the destination. Five areas of equitable tourism have been identified, namely: economic; environmental; cultural; spatial; and tourism-experience. All this makes tourism a means of achieving broader goals, rather than existing just for the sake of tourism. The focus here lies mostly on social-economic equity, but there are also spill over effects to other areas.

The community in a destination and the needs of that community are central in equitable tourism. Community involvement and multi-stakeholder participatory trajectories are therefore indispensable. In this context, the destination stewardship approach (which will be discussed later in this section) is also worth mentioning in the realisation of equitable tourism. At the same time, each destination can prioritise which equity aspect to focus on, so usually there will not yet be a coherent destination-level strategy or systemic approach.

According to one expert we spoke to, equitable tourism as a term has been developed because there seemed to be a lack of clarity about what it means to work on equity in the tourism sector. This means that in practice the concept equity could be applied in ways that do not do justice to, or even contradict certain underlying goals of equity. This could include only looking at how much money is spent with local entrepreneurs as a sign of equity, whereas these may provide worse pay and working conditions to their staff, or focusing disproportionately on quality tourists who are likely to spend more, at the cost of less economically wealthy visitors. By developing tourism in a more holistic and equitable way, the aim is to better address the full range of equity considerations.

The equitable tourism approach prioritises ecological and social elements. Rather than focusing on growth, the onus lies on the distribution of benefits (and growth). This can help open up the debate on power imbalances and the redistribution of



The community in a destination and the needs of that community are central in equitable tourism.

tourism benefits and burdens, thus ensuring that these are more equally shared. It adopts a mostly place-based approach with the relatively proactive involvement of the local community, and it provides a number of relatively concrete actionable strategies. But at the same time, it does not take an active stance on the renegotiation of growth in tourism as a whole. A systemic approach is largely absent in its current form, which mostly addresses individual aspects or elements of equity. However, the concept itself is still being actively developed. Looking ahead, a more coherent structure could be developed that integrates a more systemic approach to equitable tourism, one in which tourism is related to injustices and inequality in other parts of society too.

Additional Reading

- Creating an equitable destination - Travel foundation document that highlights the concept of equitable tourism - <https://www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk/equitable/>
- Framework for equitable tourism and stakeholder participation in Namibia: Murima, S. (2025). An Integrated Collaborative Framework for Equitable Tourism Stakeholder Participation in Namibia. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 630-637. <https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25aug470>
- Academic discussion of conceptualisation and application of equitable development: Akaabre, P. B., Chapple, K., & O'Connor, S. (2025). Equitable Development in Theory and Practice: Evolution, Definitions, Frameworks, and Tools. *Journal of Planning Literature*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08854122251350602>



Achieving broader goals

2.3.4. Circular tourism

Circular tourism applies the ideas of the circular economy to the tourism sector. The concept is vaguely defined and still relatively underdeveloped in tourism (Arzoumanidis et al., 2020). In the interviews, two distinct streams of circular tourism have been identified, with different approaches and understandings of each. The two streams are weak circular tourism and strong circular tourism, and the distinction between the two can be traced back to the discussion on weak or strong sustainability in general (see Simamindra & Rajaonarivo, 2024). Both identified types of circular tourism are described in the following paragraphs.

Weak circular tourism

The circular economy has been defined as: ‘an economic system that is based on business models which replace the “end-of-life” concept with reducing, alternatively reusing, recycling and recovering materials in production/distribution and consumption processes (...), with the aim of accomplishing sustainable development, which implies creating environmental quality, economic prosperity, and social equity, to the benefit of current and future generations’, (Kirchherr et al., 2017). The concept is mostly applied to the manufacturing sector, but it is slowly expanding its focus to include other sectors too, including tourism (Arzoumanidis et al., 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2020).

In the tourism literature, the circular economy is commonly linked to the construction of touristic infrastructure, energy and water consumption, reutilisation, and new use of materials (Rodriguez et al., 2020). In other words, it often follows a weak circular tourism approach. And while social equity is mentioned as one of the aspects of the circular economy, it remains limited to the generation of jobs and income. This gives the impression that the circular economy is mostly a matter of ecological sustainability and that it fails to fully incorporate social sustainability (Geissdoerfer et al. 2017).

Moreover, when it comes to hospitality, for example, weak circular tourism is deployed mostly as a cost-saving exercise within a growth-dominated framework (Sorin & Sivarajah, 2021). It is also seen as having the potential to solve environmental challenges, while opening up opportunities for business and economic growth (Rodriguez et al., 2020). Once again, this highlights how ideas surrounding weak circular tourism align with the growth-based paradigm.

Strong circular tourism

As a reaction to perceived shortcomings of previous conceptualisations, definitions of the circular economy have shifted towards being more restorative and regenerative, as well as being connected to ideas about degrowth and decoupling (CE4RT, n.d.; Ellen McArthur Foundation, n.d.). These ideas have also found their way into tourism, whereby several authors have reconceptualised the circular economy in tourism by taking a more holistic approach. For example, recently authors have questioned the growth-dependent paradigm in tourism and pro-

posed the circular economy in tourism as an alternative to growth (Manniche et al., 2017) and as being related to the degrowth discourse (Tomassini & Cavagnaro, 2022). At the same time, these authors argue that for the tourism sector to develop on the basis of circular economy principles, a systemic approach should be adopted (Einarson & Sorin, 2020; Manniche et al., 2017; Martino et al., 2024; Tomassini & Cavagnaro, 2022).

And despite ecological principles such as reducing consumption, energy use, and sharing resources still being at the core of the circular approach, in strong circular tourism the social sphere is more proactively included. This is achieved by also focusing on aspects such as creating flourishing, resilient, equitable, and inclusive communities; with good education and jobs, health and well-being, reduced inequality, and more democracy, inclusion, and social justice (Einarson & Sorin, 2020; Martino et al., 2024; Tomassini & Cavagnaro, 2022).

It is from that perspective that Einarson & Sorin (2020) defined the circular economy as: ‘a purposefully designed socio-economic system inspired by natural systems, regenerative of human and natural capital that works long term for all stakeholders’. Taking this as the starting point, and including the local community in tourism development, was considered to be an important element by some of our interviewees on this topic.

The experts we interviewed for this project all aligned themselves with the strong circular tourism perspective, yet they have diverging views on its meaning in practice. For some, circular tourism was seen as the precursor to more transitional forms of tourism, such as regenerative tourism, forming a more accessible starting point for destinations that are not so familiar with sustainability practices just yet. As one of them said:

‘Circular tourism incorporates regenerative principles but views them as an advanced stage. Regeneration focuses on restoring ecosystems and cultures, but requires groundwork in reducing consumption and sharing resources first. (...) For example, circular tourism might first implement waste-reduction programmes before moving on to ecosystem restoration, as many actors are “not ready” to jump straight into regeneration without this foundational work.’ (Mette Alborg Mosgaard)

Others saw circular tourism as a more radical approach in which degrowth plays an essential role, as an expert pointed out:



In strong circular tourism the social sphere is more proactively included. This is achieved by also focusing on aspects such as creating flourishing, resilient, equitable, and inclusive communities.

“Regenerative tourism to me is the more niche form of tourism. It takes some first steps, which is good, but it’s not happening at scale, and maybe it can not and should not scale... For example, you can aim at being regenerative by visiting Costa Rica, staying in eco-lodge, participating in waste removal activities, consuming local foods etc.. but you do fly there.. is that regenerative?” (Fabrice Sorin)

The differences in perspectives can, to an extent, be related to the scale people use when looking at tourism. Within a localised or place-based approach, tourism growth might (in some cases) create benefits for the local population and could contribute to regenerating nature. In such a situation circular tourism might fit into a regenerative approach. However, if we adopt a global approach in which the emphasis is on mobility and climate-related impacts, then circular tourism may be more suitable than regenerative tourism. Therefore, a potential strength of a circular approach may be its ability to combine place-based and wider mobility perspectives, although at the moment it is still unclear how we can achieve this.

To appreciate the extent to which circular tourism can be considered transitional, it will be necessary to make a distinction between weak and strong circular tourism. Weak circular tourism has few transitional elements. It is based on growth principles, it does not fully adopt a systemic approach, nor does it take an active place-based approach or involve the local community. However, looking at strong circular tourism, we see that more transitional elements are included. While circular tourism is predominately characterised by ecological sustainability, social elements are also included in strong circular tourism, as is a more systemic approach in which the question of growth is also addressed. To some extent it also includes a living-systems approach, although in its application principles the related ecological worldview is less explicit. Starting from places and their residents is not the core focus of this approach, but entrepreneurs are considered important enough to include. The circularity approach of reducing, recycling and reusing leads to rather concrete action points, however the social elements as well as the more regenerative and/or degrowth elements are still emerging are less actionable in its current form.

Additional Reading

- Conceptual framework for a circular economy approach to travel and tourism (strong circular tourism: <https://circulareconomy.europa.eu/platform/sites/default/files/circular-economy-in-travel-and-tourism.pdf>)
- Document by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe on circular tourism: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/CEP-SS_Sustainable_Tourism.IP_03.e.pdf
- Academic paper noting the distinction between weak and strong circular

approaches: Simamindra, R. S., & Rajaonarivo, L. (2024). A global analysis of circular economy initiatives: Weak or strong sustainability? *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 467, 142830. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2024.142830>

2.3.5. Degrowth in tourism

Degrowth refers to a process in which society moves away from a growth-based economic paradigm to one in which social well-being and ecological sustainability are at the core of the development model. It is officially defined as: ‘a planned reduction of energy and resource throughput designed to bring the economy back into balance with the living world in a way that reduces inequality and improves human well-being’ (Kallis, 2011; Latouche, 2004). Degrowth is underpinned by the ideology of ecocentrism, as human society and the rest of the living world are not seen as separate entities (Hickel, 2020).

The idea of degrowth was introduced in tourism for the first time over a decade ago by Hall (2009) and Higgins-Desbiolles (2010). It has recently been picked up by several other scholars as an important strategy for countering the unsustainable development of tourism (see, for example; Fletcher et al., 2019; Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019; Milano et al., 2019). The main principle of degrowth is that tourism-driven economic growth cannot be decoupled from its environmental and other negative impacts. This means, for example, that green growth is not a realistic solution (Murray et al., 2023). Proponents of degrowth in tourism therefore argue that a planned reduction of the resources used, and the waste produced by tourism activities, is necessary (Dwyer, 2023; Murray et al., 2023). However, while a more social aspect to degrowth in tourism, as related to equity, was also mentioned, it was not strongly present, as this excerpt from the existing literature illustrates:

‘Degrowth is not just about cutting numbers. It is also about redistributing economic benefits, restructuring social relations, and fostering democratic governance. Degrowth aims to create a more equitable model where wealth, resources, and opportunities are shared more fairly.’ (Robert Fletcher)

Furthermore, there is also a second approach to how degrowth can be applied in tourism, one that is more strongly linked to the issue of overtourism in cities and related to social aspects (Milano et al., 2019). From that perspective, degrowth in tourism from a more local perspective can also be understood as working towards de-touristification, de-commodification, and the downscaling of tourism in over-touristified destinations (Dwyer, 2023; Murray et al., 2023). This approach is more widely used as it assumes that limiting, or even reducing, tourist numbers is the only realistic way of achieving true sustainability, something that other

approaches choose not to explicitly mention. This does not imply that other approaches shy away from reducing tourism in certain places. In fact, with several approaches degrowth is a logical outcome for tourism in certain places, or in dealing with greenhouse-gas emissions related to tourism mobility and the wider environmental impact of the development of the tourism infrastructure. This is mentioned in a much more contextualised manner and often implicitly, compared to the degrowth in the tourism perspective.

Despite there being plenty of literature on degrowth in tourism, and translating it into practice could be relatively straightforward (reduce tourism numbers, for example), actual strategies that adopt a degrowth approach are barely found in practice. It is acknowledged that this is related to political backgrounds and the embeddedness of society in a capitalist economy:

‘The challenge lies in its political and economic feasibility. The idea of intentionally shrinking a profitable industry goes against the logic of capitalist economies and the political interests that sustain them. National and local governments depend on tourism revenue, and businesses have little incentive to support policies that limit their growth.’ (Robert Fletcher)



By placing the term ‘degrowth’ at its core, the degrowth in tourism perspective faces practical challenges, because it explicitly and vocally challenges the prevailing political and social climate that largely accepts continuous economic growth as being inevitable. Other transitional approaches, such as regenerative tourism or strong circular tourism, also question the logic of growth. However, the fact that they do this either implicitly or use a more positive framing, makes them more politically palatable. Consequently, degrowth has been argued to mostly serve the purpose of being a provocative conversation starter that invites people to rethink the role of growth, rather than a practical, implementable scenario in the current context.

‘It was more of an aspirational thing than a reality, more of a provocation, that if we really want sustainable tourism, then we need to be questioning growth (...) I think that is its main role.’ (Robert Fletcher)

The strongest transitional element that we have found within the degrowth perspective is its radically explicit approach on rethinking growth. Even though the ecological worldview is described in general degrowth sources, we have not found an explicit translation of this into the tourism sector. Additionally, to date, the degrowth-in-tourism perspective has only, to a limited extent, addressed how tourism degrowth would work in practice within a complex socio-ecological system. Degrowth takes a place-based approach when it asks if growth is needed at a specific destination, but actively including local communities seems less of a focal point of degrowth in tourism. While its concrete actions are clear enough, it will probably be a challenge to put the concept in practice within the current socio-political environment. Degrowth seems to be most suited for destinations struggling with overtourism and addressing tourism impact (related to mobility) on a global scale.

Additional Reading

- Short academic research discussing approaches to touristic degrowth and a future research agenda on the topic: Murray, I., Fletcher, R., Blázquez-Salom, M., Blanco-Romero, A., Cañada, E., & Sekulova, F. (2025). Tourism and degrowth. *Tourism Geographies*, 27(3-4), 547-557. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2023.2293956>
- Edited book on degrowth in tourism: Andriotis, K. (Ed.). (2018). *Degrowth in tourism: Conceptual, theoretical and philosophical issues*. <https://www.cabidigitallibrary.org/doi/epdf/10.1079/9781786392787.0000>
- Discussion of degrowth concept by Jason Hickel: Hickel, J. (2020). *Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World*. Penguin Random House.

2.3.6. Regenerative tourism

Regenerative tourism strongly embraces an ecological worldview and living systems approach. This means that tourism systems are considered inseparable from nature and the well-being of a place and its people (Bellato et al., 2022b; Cave & Dredge, 2020; Matunga et al., 2020). It is in this context that regenerative tourism often seeks to align itself with insights from indigenous wisdom, as well as historical insights from a place.

Regenerative tourism strives for a new tourism system in which developing tourism is not a goal in itself, but instead a means of achieving broader social and environmental goals (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). The aim is to transition into a system where it is the norm for tourism activities to create a net positive impact and a place is left better than it was before the visitor arrived, for example by restoring nature and community through tourism (Bellato et al., 2022b; Cave & Dredge, 2020; Dredge, 2022; Matunga et al., 2020). With that, regenerative thinking invites people to think about how tourism as a whole living system can contribute to the health and well-being of larger, socio-ecological systems. Tourism initiatives must contribute by making net positive effects to tourism's interconnected larger system, not just to tourism itself (Bellato & Pollock, 2025).

Regenerative tourism is mostly seen as a positive perspective that uses a more systemic approach based on complexity thinking:

'Regeneration is a deep and systemic approach that goes beyond sustainability. Regenerative practices are about creating a positive impact on places, people and ecosystems. (...) The broader, systems-thinking in tourism can enable deeper transformations (for every participant)...' (Elke Dens)

An important aspect of regenerative tourism development is the active involvement of the local community throughout all the different stages. This means that the local community should be involved from the start, able to voice concerns and desires related to tourism and having active ownership and responsibility in the development of the place in question (Dredge, 2022). While this certainly has potential benefits, as we mentioned earlier the participatory approaches can become tokenistic or short-sighted, focusing on the demands of vocal minorities rather than long-term or broader societal needs.

Place is seen as a central element in regenerative development and its needs and desires are seen as the foundation for future choices to be made and interventions to be designed (Bellato, 2024). Although regenerative tourism may work

from an ecocentric perspective in destinations, being a place-based approach, this perspective can struggle with issues relating to tourism mobility and wider ecological and climate impacts. Also, while the term regenerative tourism is increasingly popular among organisations and businesses, it does not always go hand-in-hand with the more all-encompassing regenerative tourism principles, as outlined in many of the theoretical texts and advocated by many thought leaders. As such, there is a real danger here of greenwashing.

While regenerative tourism does indeed challenge the growth-based and neoliberal principles, it is pragmatic with regards to seeking degrowth. In heavily visited places, degrowth may actually be needed (and the perspective then may be similar to degrowth). In other places tourism growth may be possible, as long as growth is viewed in a holistic socio-ecological way. Regenerative tourism has a strong place-based approach and places strong emphasis on actively including and contributing to the local community and natural wellbeing. However, it is unclear how regenerative tourism seeks to address possible issues with participation. Also, while adopting a complex and living-systems approach and an ecological worldview on a destination level, its place-based approach often does not address wider ecological issues related to global mobility and travel (flights, for example). Additionally, the models and frameworks used in regenerative tourism are focused strongly on what a systemic change could be and how to achieve it. Currently, there appears to be less focus on assessing whether we are actually moving towards a regenerative future, be it through indicators or other qualitative means. While regenerative tourism often focuses on creating inspiring future visions, practical strategies and meaningful ways of evaluating progress remain underdeveloped when compared to some of the other approaches. In its current form, regenerative tourism is still mostly focused on creating an ideal future vision that can serve as an inspiration. However, more concrete strategies and indicators that can be linked to that, still need to be developed.

Additional Reading

- Practical implementation of regenerative tourism by Flanders Tourism: https://issuu.com/toerismevlaanderen/docs/reisen_naar_morgen_januari_2021_english_-_v3-cover
- Practice oriented academic approach to urban regenerative tourism: Gerritsma, R. (2025). Activating a regenerative urban tourism approach: Practices and interventions via a lab setting in Amsterdam North. Inholland University of Applied Sciences. <https://www.ensut.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2025/02/Boekje-regenerative-urban-tourism-v5-gecomprimeerd.pdf>
- Academic State-of-the-art article on regenerative tourism: Bellato, L., & Pollock, A. (2025). Regenerative tourism: A state-of-the-art review. *Tourism Geographies*, 27(3-4), 558-567. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2023.2294366>



Regenerative tourism has a strong place-based approach and places strong emphasis on actively including and contributing to the local community and natural wellbeing.



2.3.7. Destination stewardship

Destination stewardship is not a well-developed concept within the tourism literature. That said, it has received quite some attention from practitioners in the field, especially from DMMOs and governments based in the United States and Canada (see for example Lake Tahoe, Colorado, Tourism Jasper, and Ottawa Tourism). It is often associated with regenerative tourism because it advocates a place-based approach and the active involvement of the local community. Destination Stewardship has been defined as ‘an approach that balances and meets the needs of a destination and its communities and operates with legitimacy and consent under a participatory governance model’ (Travel Foundation, 2021). It requires a clear mandate, good knowledge and data, and the identification of mutual interests and priorities, particularly between the public and private sectors. A core aspect of the destination-stewardship approach is the involvement of local stakeholders. Together, local communities, governmental institutions, NGOs, and private industry partners jointly take responsibility for the destination and act as ‘stewards’. Through a multi-stakeholder approach, they aim to maintain the cultural, environmental, economic, and aesthetic value of the destination (GSTC, 2023).

The destination-stewardship approach is viewed as being complementary to regenerative tourism. Both view tourism ‘not as a goal, but as a means of value creation in making better places for visitors, residents, communities, and businesses, in line with regenerative thinking’ (The Travel Foundation, 2021). Rather than being a specific ideology in itself, destination stewardship can be considered a tool for instilling community involvement and achieving public-private-community collaboration. The approach is often, but not exclusively, used in combination with regenerative approaches. In this context, it can be viewed as a stepping stone towards a greater transition, as opposed to being transitional in its own right.

‘Destination stewardship and regenerative tourism complement each other because there is real overlap. What is at the core of both approaches is that they are holistic and participatory. Where destination stewardship adds particular value is in helping a place to prioritise. There are always many impacts and possible interventions, so it provides a practical roadmap for deciding what to tackle first, and for understanding how and where regenerative approaches can best be applied.’ (Rebecca Armstrong)

As to the extent that we can consider the destination-stewardship approach to be transitional, it depends on the way it is applied and to what extent it is combined or aligned with other concepts. The only transitional element that is inherent to the destination-stewardship approach is its strong focus on place-based development and community involvement. Other elements, such as renegotiating growth or degrowth, adopting systems thinking or an ecological worldview are not necessarily present, although they can be integrated in a project if combined with an approach that provides a deeper transitional vision. The focus of destination stewards lies mainly with socio-economic aspects, although more environmental aspects can be incorporated. Its strength lies in its focus on relatively concrete steps towards change, so it is extremely action-oriented. In a way, one could argue that destination stewardship is not a transitional perspective in its own right. Rather, it is a means to clarify thinking about governance and collaboration processes that can support other transitional perspectives.

Additional Reading

- Report on Destination Stewardship for destinations: <https://researchhub.wttc.org/product/towards-destination-stewardship>
- Website of destination stewardship centre; which publishes a monthly destination stewardship newsletter/report: <https://destinationcenter.org/destination-stewardship-report/>
- Destination Stewardship starting kit by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council: <https://www.gstc.org/introducing-the-gstc-destination>

Focus on concrete steps



2.3.8. Doughnut economics

Doughnut economics, developed by Raworth (2017), is an alternative economic model that is considered to be part of regenerative economics (Bellato et al., 2022; Cave & Dredge, 2020). It has been argued that it could be used to facilitate the transition to an alternative and regenerative system in tourism (Sheldon, 2021).

The most important premise of the doughnut-economics model is that a neoliberal and growth-driven economy is replaced with a focus on social well-being and ecological sustainability represented by 21 sustainability aspects that are positioned in either the social foundation or the ecological ceiling. One of the main ideas of the doughnut-economics model is that a balance is struck between prosperity and the climate, instead of focusing primarily on economic growth. The model shows that if a society wants to be sustainable, it should not fall short in the social foundation and at the same time should not exceed the ecological ceiling. Between these two boundaries lies the safe and just space for humanity (Raworth, 2017). The doughnut economy is considered a compass for society to move into this space, stimulating a way of thinking that includes regenerative and distributive dynamics (Raworth, 2017). With doughnut economics, economic importance coincides with social sustainability (as factor income and work) and is therefore seen in this model as a means and not as an end in itself. The doughnut model is, in part, based on the SDGs, but is complemented by other factors, as well as a regenerative ideology. What this means is that the doughnut-economics model, in line with degrowth and regenerative thinking, does not support ideas such as green-, or inclusive-growth (Raworth, 2017). However, compared to degrowth, there is much less emphasis on the need to degrow. Instead, it considers growth to be a poor indicator of progress and advocates for other measures (Kallis et al., 2025).

There is still little literature on doughnut economics and tourism (with the exception of Hartman & Heslinga, 2022, and Nieuwland, 2024). However, several authors have put it forward as a valuable model to be applied to the tourism sector in relation to degrowth and regenerative tourism (Bellato et al., 2022; Cave & Dredge, 2020; Hutchison et al., 2021; Sheldon, 2021; Torkington et al., 2020). This has been confirmed during interviews with many of the theoretical experts and some of the practitioners. With its 21 sustainability aspects being translated to tourism, the doughnut model can provide a concrete visualisation of sustainability in the tourism industry, in which ecological and social actors are prioritised over economic growth.

‘The doughnut-economics model is highly applicable by offering accessible visuals and frameworks to balance ecological and social boundaries.’ (Tina O’Dwyer)



The doughnut-economics model considers growth to be a poor indicator of progress and advocates for other measures.

Rather than being a goal in itself, tourism growth (or degrowth) is a means of achieving other goals. In this respect the doughnut-economics model can be used as a tool to facilitate change towards degrowth and regenerative tourism on a local level (i.e. destinations) and could holistically bring together elements of the SDGs, equitability, circularity, degrowth, and regeneration.

“In the context of postgrowth thinking, doughnut economics can be very useful (...) at least for macroeconomics, for destinations it can be very useful. I am surprised that nobody has applied it, specifically for tourism, at the destination level as such.” (Fabrice Sorin)

Doughnut Economics challenges us to rethink growth and the limits of growth. That said, it is quite agnostic about whether the economy should grow or degrow—depending on context and which social and ecological goals are to be achieved with it, and as long as the tourism impact stays within the planetary boundaries. What it does do, however, is take a complex system approach, integrating spill-over effects and relations between other sectors, with a living-systems approach and specific ecological worldview being less strongly represented. Furthermore, while doughnut economics take a place-based approach, active community involvement is not an explicit element. It seems very suitable to apply at the destination level as a whole and developing strategies and measurable indicators seems more feasible, with the doughnut already being divided into 21 sustainability elements.

Additional Reading

- Doughnut economics book by Kate Raworth: Raworth, K. (2017). Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist. Chelsea Green Publishing.
- Practitioner focused approach to Doughnut economics and tourism development: <https://www.earth-changers.com/purpose/measure-impact-4-rethink-tourism-development-doughnut-economics/>
- Alternative application of Doughnut Economics thinking in tourism <https://www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Vail-Optimal-Value-Framework-Report-1.pdf> (February 10, 2026).
- Academic article on doughnut economics applied to tourism: Nieuwland, S. (2024). Urban tourism transitions: Doughnut economics applied to sustainable tourism development. *Tourism Geographies*, 26(2), 255–273. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2023.2290009>

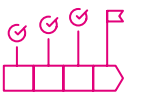
2.4 Understanding transitional approaches: shared values and key differences

2.4.1 Clarifying differences and similarities

Having discussed the individual descriptions of the different transitional approaches, we can now compare and contrast the similarities and differences between them. We can observe certain fundamental values that unite these transitional approaches. And while each approach has, of course, its own focus, they all share four core values that set them apart from more conventional tourism-development models.

1. Firstly, all these approaches see tourism as being connected to wider environmental and social systems. Instead of treating tourism as its own isolated economic sector, they recognise that it has a strong impact on, or is even intertwined with, the wider socio-ecological system.
2. A second underlying value is that practically all of them challenge the excessive dominance of economic growth, although some do this to a greater or lesser extent. Approaches like the SDGs and Broad Prosperity are open to growth as an important element of tourism, but seek to balance it with other priorities. Others, including degrowth and regenerative tourism, outrightly reject the idea that growth should be the main goal. Either way, they agree that tourism currently focuses too heavily on growing visitor numbers and revenue.
3. The transitional approaches also share a commitment to fairness as they they want the benefits of tourism to also reach people who have been left out or harmed by traditional development. Rather than assuming benefits will naturally trickle down, they actively work to address inequality.
4. Finally, the approaches are sceptical about the value of purely technological solutions for tourism’s social and environmental problems. Rather than relying solely on efficiency improvements, they argue that fundamental behavioural changes are also required. This perspective makes them inherently critical of concepts like green growth or inclusive growth.

There are some differences though in the focal point of the approaches. Regenerative tourism, destination stewardship, equitable tourism, and strong circular tourism are deeply rooted in place-based methodologies. Rather than seeking universally applicable solutions, they begin with local histories, contexts, and needs before developing interventions that are specifically tailored to particular places. By grounding themselves in a local context, they can provide more nuanced and contextually appropriate development strategies. Other approaches are less fundamentally tied to place-based thinking. This means they might place less emphasis on the specifics of a place, which can make them more suitable in dealing with the more abstract global impacts of tourism, such as mobility patterns and climate-change contributions. Next we move to table 2.1, in which we compare three strengths and three weaknesses of all perspectives. For the sake of clarity, we have also included the Triple-P (People, Planet, Profit) conceptualisation of sustainability in this table.



We can observe certain fundamental values that unite the transitional approaches.

CHAPTER 2

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Triple-P (Sustainable Tourism)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widely understood • Encourages multi-dimensional reporting (people, planet, profit) • Fits with existing management systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Danger of profit dominating other dimensions • Unlikely to move away from growth incentives • Risk of greenwashing
SDGs in Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global legitimacy • Provides options for more holistic perspective • Comprehensive set of indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth can stay an implicit goal (such as green- or inclusive-growth) • Very broad, so tempting to only focus on a small number of SDGs • Limited structural reform
Broad Prosperity (Brede Welvaart)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reframes wellbeing beyond GDP to include social and environmental quality • Supports cross-sector policy alignment • Invites experimentation with new metrics for success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translation towards actionable policy can be difficult • Implementation is hindered, due to difficulty of cross-departmental cooperation in practice • Complexity of wellbeing indicators are difficult to operationalise
Equitable Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puts fairness, equity and human rights at the centre of tourism agenda • Can empower communities by focusing on building local agency • Emphasis on justice can enrich sustainability debates by asking who benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of agreed definition creates conceptual unclarity, while it is difficult to measure equity outcomes like fairness, dignity, inclusion • Explicit redistribution of power and profits is institutionally difficult • Environmental issues are considered but may be seen as a secondary effect of injustice and not a focal point in its own right
Weak Circular Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to implement in current system • Can align with efficiency and cost savings • Often fits with existing certification schemes and provides measurable KPIs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technocratic focus on efficiency and decoupling impacts can legitimise continued growth • Limited attention to changing system with regards to social justice and redistribution • Can be difficult to implement in fragmented tourism value chains
Strong Circular Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on system change through closed loops and sufficiency • Emphasis on local needs includes possibilities for new business models • Better aligned with ecological limits than weak circular approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires deep redesign of value chains that requires coordination and investment • Disruptive to current system, may lead to political resistance • Equal distribution and measurement of social benefits may require special attention

Degrowth Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicitly challenges growth logic • Helps open up discussions on limiting tourism numbers and impacts through direct action • Emphasises distributional justice and reframes prosperity to wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politically and socially contentious, also because of explicit name • Strong system change required, with unclear transition pathway • Can risk economic viability, unless accompanied by redistributive and social measures
Regenerative Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive message and attractive narrative, while having deep system-change goals • Emphasis on place-based regeneration and improving places can help initiate innovative new local pathways • Resonating with local (indigenous) history and place can mobilise community engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptual ambiguity makes it easy to dilute into greenwashing or continuation of 'business as usual' • Requirement of deep community and ecological knowledge may be too complicated in practice • 'Scaling' of regenerative outcomes in large or heavily visited destinations and non-place based issues like aviation may be challenging to address
Destination Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on governance, and long-term place integrity provides better understanding of political-system logic • Can put questions regarding equity and community voices on the table • Often contains adaptable and actionable management plans and monitoring frameworks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of becoming a consultative tool for use in current system, rather than leading to transition • Can be difficult to maintain leadership, political buy-in and institutional coordination • May struggle to address larger structural issues relating to tourism (such as aviation)
Doughnut Economics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong conceptual framework linking social foundations and ecological ceilings • Redefines prosperity in operational terms in a way that is relatable for existing stakeholders • Makes need for cross-sectoral alignment visually clear, which can help attract policy traction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual simplicity risks transition becoming seen as technical exercise rather than contested social process • Can be difficult to apply in a fragmented multi-stakeholder tourism environment • Data intensiveness can make it difficult to apply in practice, particularly for social elements that may be difficult to quantify

Table 2.1
Comparison of three strengths and three weaknesses of all perspectives

This table highlights some strengths and weaknesses of the different approaches. In doing so, it also shows that different approaches focus on different parts of social and environmental sustainability.

For example, when addressing social issues, equitable tourism focuses on justice, redistribution, and confronting power imbalances within tourism. In contrast, regenerative tourism prioritises enhancing benefits through place-based healing by revitalising communities, ecosystems, and traditions, also by using insights from indigenous knowledge. Doughnut economics and Broad Prosperity seek to reframe sustainability to better integrate social (and environmental) impacts into what it means to be successful, among other ways by new indicators and engaging a range of stakeholders.

To a certain extent, the SDGs seek to do the same, albeit that this approach stays much closer to conventional trends and indicators. Strong circular tourism strives for greater social benefits by developing new stimulating local sufficiency and entrepreneurship, thus providing new opportunities for engaging with tourism (also for people who do not work in tourism itself). Degrowth in tourism directly challenges the growth paradigm that underpins modern tourism and in this way seeks to create local ecosystems that are based on principles of sufficiency that improve the local quality of life. Destination Stewardship is less an ideological framework than a practical governance model. It relies more on collaborative decision-making and it advocates creating structures for equity—such as multi-stakeholder councils that ensure that marginalised voices are heard.

When it comes to environmental sustainability, circular tourism is more explicitly ecologically oriented. Weak circular tourism focuses on efficiency gains, such as waste reduction and recycling, while strong circular tourism adopts a systemic stance by linking sufficiency, ecological limits and new governance and business models. Doughnut economics place the ecological aspect in the context of planetary boundaries, using a model that balances environmental ceilings with social foundations. Broad Prosperity also seeks to provide a holistic framing of environmental aspects, albeit one that stays more aligned to the current system rather than leaning towards wider system change. The SDGs are even more rooted in the current growth paradigm and largely treat environmental protection as something to balance with economic expansion.

Other approaches, on the other hand, explicitly aim to move beyond mitigation and embed tourism within a logic of living systems. Although equitable tourism primarily focuses on social justice, it also acknowledges environmental concerns. It notes, for example, that marginalised environments benefit cleaner and healthier environments, but that they often have less access to them than other groups. Finally, degrowth again challenges the idea that environmental damage can be decoupled from growth, and calls for the reduction of tourism’s material and energy footprint. As discussed earlier, destination stewardship is not so much a

full transitional perspective in its own right as a practical model that could fit with different transitional perspectives. In the case of ecological issues, it largely deals with this by incorporating environmental concerns through participatory governance and management practices.

2.4.2 Mapping transitional approaches

Since transitional approaches often share common foundations but differ in perspective, we have created a visual representation that plots them along two key dimensions (figure 2.1). The first of these deals with whether they mostly want to balance economic growth with other elements of sustainability or challenge the whole current conceptualisation of (economic) growth as being at the heart of tourism. It is important to note here that this does not mean that they reject economic growth as such. In fact, they very much welcome growth as long as it contributes to greater prosperity, and wellbeing. What they do oppose, however, is a hegemony of GDP growth as an organising principle of society, instead providing alternative perspectives on how we could reconceptualise growth to improve places and the wellbeing of people. The second dimension deals with the extent to which they focus on changes within the tourism system or whether a more holistic, systemic approach is taken. Of course, to a greater or lesser extent, all approaches accept that tourism activities take place in the context of a broader system, with some allowing much more emphasis on it.

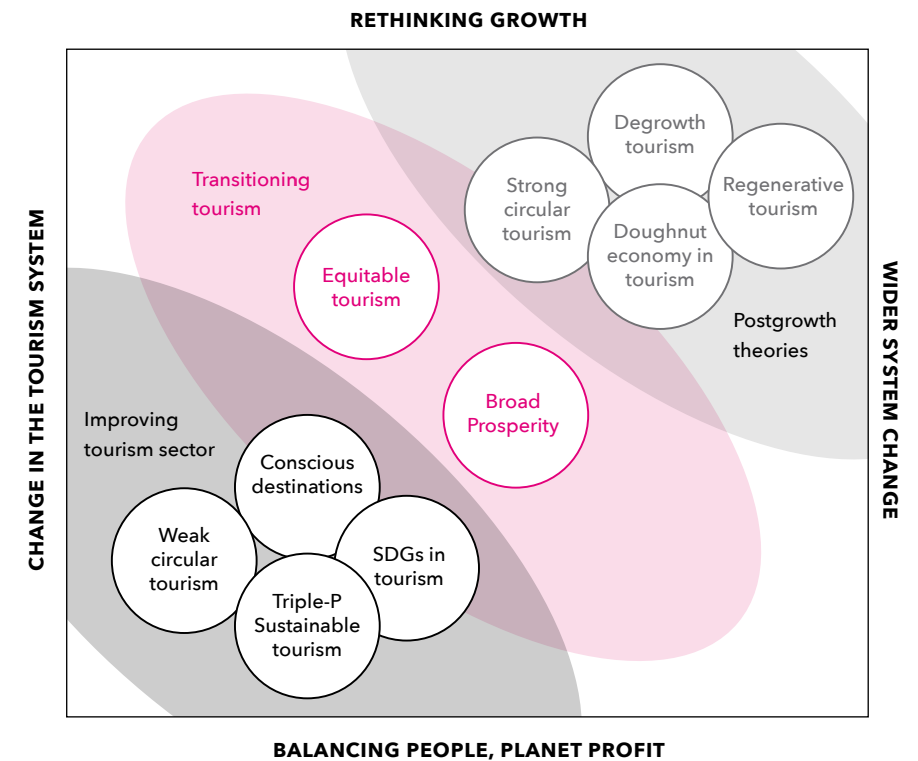


Figure 2.1: The emerging landscape of transitional tourism approaches


Some approaches, explicitly aim to move beyond mitigation and embed tourism within a logic of living systems.

While transitional approaches in tourism often share foundational principles, such as prioritising equity, ecological integrity, and community well-being, they differ in their strategies and ambitions.

When it comes to economic growth, doughnut economics takes a pragmatic transitional stance on growth. It does so by reframing success in terms of meeting human needs within planetary boundaries, thus challenging a growth-centric tourism model by asking for whom and what cost we should grow. Strong circular tourism similarly challenges the growth paradigm by advocating for sufficiency and closed-loop systems, with an emphasis on staying within ecological limits. As such, it challenges the pursuit of endless expansion, even though it is less explicit on social aspects. Meanwhile, regenerative tourism takes a place-based approach and shifts the focus from growth to restoration, in so doing reframing tourism as a means of healing ecosystems and communities. All these approaches question the logic of growth and gravitate towards a positive pathway for change. In contrast, degrowth tourism also challenges growth, but it explicitly calls for a reduction in tourism's scale to align with social and ecological thresholds. Equitable tourism takes somewhat of a middle position when it comes to growth. It does not reject growth altogether; instead, it challenges growth-driven models that perpetuate inequality and how economic gains are shared. In contrast, Broad Prosperity and the SDGs attempt to integrate sustainability goals within a growth-oriented framework, seeking to make growth more inclusive and less harmful. Contrast this with weak circular tourism, which focuses on increasing efficiency by reducing, reusing and recycling resources, but without challenging the underlying logic of economic growth.

Looking at the second dimension, we again see that doughnut economics, degrowth tourism, regenerative tourism and strong circular tourism conspire together to emphasise the need for a systemic view. Among other ways, they do so by advocating the redesign of value chains and business models, and looking for ways to integrate tourism into broader socio-ecological systems. Equitable tourism and Broad Prosperity, meanwhile, tend to focus more narrowly on changes within the tourism system. The former targets inequalities and power dynamics within the sector, as it aims to redistribute benefits and decision-making power, making less effort to address tourism's broader socio-economic impacts. The latter, on the other hand, might facilitate systemic change when combined with other approaches, but in itself it does not do so explicitly. Instead, it concentrates on improving governance and stakeholder engagement within tourism. The SDGs, and weak circular tourism also lean towards reforms within the tourism system. The SDGs seek to balance sustainability goals within existing economic structures, while weak circular tourism focuses on incremental gains, without addressing broader systemic issues.

By plotting these approaches along these dimensions, figure 2.1 highlights the possible trade-offs between pragmatism and radicalism, and between incremen-



tal reform and systemic reinvention. While doughnut economics, strong circular tourism, and degrowth tourism push for transformative change, equitable tourism, regenerative tourism, and destination stewardship offer pathways that bridge sector-specific reforms with broader systemic shifts. Meanwhile, Broad Prosperity, the SDGs, and weak circular tourism remain more firmly rooted in the existing paradigm, prioritising balance and efficiency over fundamental transformation. Understanding these positions clarifies what the approaches offer, and where they may best benefit the transition of tourism.

While more radical transitions may appear inherently superior, we should be cautious about making judgments. These approaches often face significant practical challenges in that they tend to be relatively abstract and open to multiple interpretations. The resulting ambiguity can lead stakeholders to dismiss them outright as pipe dreams, refusing to engage further, as has actually occurred with degrowth tourism. Alternatively, they risk becoming and remaining nothing more than utopian visions of what tourism could become. Take regenerative tourism, for example, which has gained significant traction among tourism stakeholders. There is no disputing its highly appealing perspective of tourism as a living system that focuses on regeneration, strengthening places, bringing people together, and respecting local history and needs. However, embedding this perspective within a society that remains highly individualistic, siloed, and profit-driven can prove extraordinarily challenging. It is akin to expecting a casual runner to complete a marathon overnight. In practice, this perspective risks dilution (as seen with the triple-bottom-line approach to tourism) or even co-optation by the very systems it seeks to transform, thus enabling the perpetuation of business-as-usual (Taveras-Dalmau et al., 2025; Versloot, 2025). In such cases, less radical but more implementable approaches may ultimately prove more successful.

Another potential weakness of approaches that advocate deeper change is the risk of paradigm blindness. Because these approaches are fundamentally different and propose more sweeping transformations, their advocates may come to view their paradigm as the only valid solution. This is particularly likely when these advocates form echo chambers, whether online or offline, predominantly referencing each other's work or that of a select group of thought leaders, but with insufficient critical reflection. Such insularity can lead them to dismiss or overlook the legitimacy of alternative perspectives (Edelsky, 1990; Versloot, 2025). This tendency is most pronounced among thought leaders and experts.

For example, an approach like regenerative tourism may currently seem highly appealing to many tourism stakeholders. Indeed, it is hard to disagree with its positive framing of tourism as a living system, in which the emphasis is on regeneration and making places better, through togetherness and in a way that is a better fit with local history and needs. However, putting this perspective into practice in a society that is still highly individualistic, sectoral and profit-driven is incredibly difficult. So difficult, in fact, that in practice this vision is being diluted (as is the

case with the Triple-P approach to tourism), or even co-opted by the very systems they seek to transform to perpetuate business-as-usual (Taveras-Dalmau et al., 2025; Versloot, 2025). In such cases, less radical but more implementable approaches may ultimately achieve greater success.

2.4.3 A Three-Horizons approach to transitional perspectives

To better understand how a tourism transition may unfold in practice, we need to not only learn more about different approaches, but also better appreciate how they can bring about a transition. The Three-Horizons framework (figure 2.2) helps us connect current realities to future possibilities, showing how the decline of old systems relates to the emergence of new ones (Sharpe et al., 2016). In this way, it provides a basic roadmap for navigating tourism's transition towards sustainability.

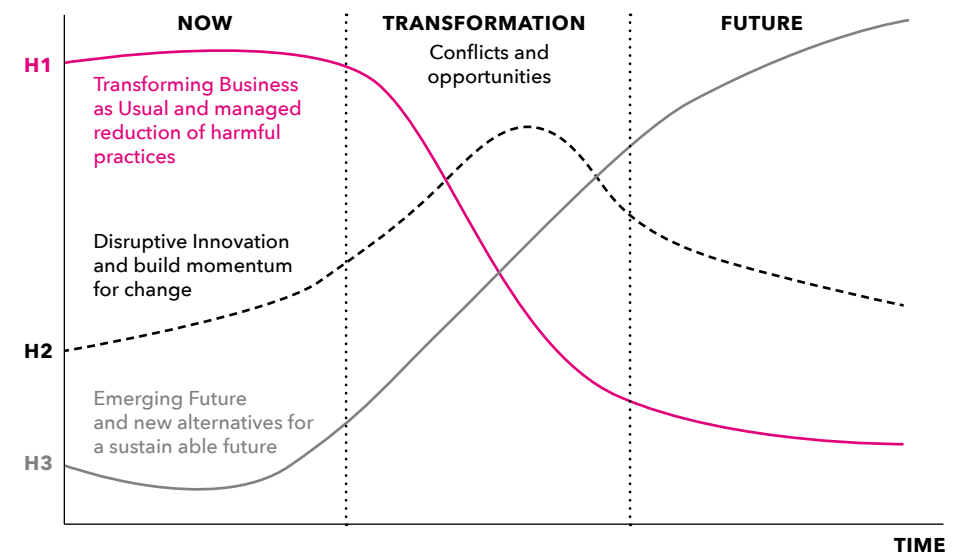


Figure 2.2: The Three-Horizons framework in the context of tourism transitions (adapted from: Sharpe et al., 2016)

- HORIZON (H)1**
 - Triple-bottom line approach to sustainable tourism
 - The Sustainable Development Goals applied to tourism
 - Weak circular tourism
 - Conscious destinations
- HORIZON (H)2**
 - Equitable tourism
 - Broad Prosperity
- HORIZON (H)3**
 - Degrowth tourism
 - Strong circular tourism
 - Regenerative tourism
 - Doughnut economics in tourism

The Three-Horizons framework divides the transition journey into three overlapping phases. The first horizon represents today's dominant system, with its established practices, regulations, and business models. The second horizon captures the experimental middle ground, where new ideas compete, collaborate, and sometimes clash with existing approaches. The third horizon envisions a fundamentally different system, one that is sustainable and future-proof. Rather than following neatly one after the other, these horizons overlap and interact, creating the messy reality that destinations experience when trying to shift towards more sustainable tourism. The old system does not simply fade away, and the new one does not appear fully formed. Both processes require deliberate effort, strategic choices, and the courage to question what has always been done.

When we map the transitional tourism approaches discussed in this report onto this framework, clear patterns emerge. In the *first horizon*, we find approaches that are primarily focused on improving how tourism currently operates, rather than fundamentally reimagining it. The triple bottom-line approach to sustainable tourism, the SDGs applied to tourism, weak circular tourism, and conscious destinations all belong here. These approaches work within the existing growth-oriented paradigm, seeking to better balance economic benefits with social and environmental concerns. They ask how tourism can become less harmful and more beneficial, without explicitly questioning whether tourism's fundamental logic needs to change. While this might sound limiting, these approaches serve an important purpose. They represent what most tourism businesses and destinations can realistically implement today, given the current political structures, stakeholder expectations, and organisational capacities. In this way, they help to kick-start the conversation on the broader impact of tourism and begin building the awareness and skills needed for deeper change (Hebinck et al., 2022).

At the opposite end, in the *third horizon*, we see approaches that fundamentally rethink tourism's role and purpose. Degrowth tourism, strong circular tourism, regenerative tourism, and doughnut economics in tourism all challenge the assumption that tourism should continuously grow. These approaches envisage tourism futures that look genuinely different from today. Regenerative tourism and degrowth tourism excel at painting compelling visions of what could be. They inspire people to think beyond incremental improvements and imagine a form of tourism that proactively heals, rather than just harms. Their strength lies in their ability to shift mindsets and open up new possibilities. However, as discussed elsewhere in this report, they can be difficult to operationalise, particularly within the current socio-economic context of tourism (Lazurko and Keys, 2022).

The gap between current reality and these radical visions can feel unbridgeable, particularly when facing short-term political pressures and stakeholder resistance. This constitutes a risk that they may lead to ambitious visions and discussions about the future of better tourism, without instigating change in practice. It could even lead to current practices simply being 'rebranded' or 'reframed', thus allow-

ing 'business-as-usual' to perpetuate. This risk can also be observed with strong circular tourism and doughnut economics. Although these do provide more tangible connections to current economic structures and measurement frameworks (such as closing resource loops and mapping out how to stay within planetary boundaries). At the same time, the changes they suggest may still be a bridge too far for stakeholders. What is more, these approaches are more technical and might therefore be seen as less inspiring by certain stakeholders, particularly as the main concepts have been developed outside tourism and very little has been written about how they could work in a tourism context.

The *second horizon* alludes to the period during which the old system is being phased out and the new one builds up momentum. This creates an awkward period where both systems coexist, often in tension with one another. Bridging approaches help navigate this tension by speaking languages that both worlds understand. They allow stakeholders still operating in the first horizon to take meaningful steps towards the third, without demanding that they immediately abandon everything that is familiar to them. Of the approaches in our research, equitable tourism and Broad Prosperity are the best fit in this phase. Equitable tourism pushes beyond the first-horizon approaches by fundamentally questioning who benefits from tourism growth and whether growth serves justice. While it largely works within the current tourism system, its focus on equity asks uncomfortable questions about whose growth in prosperity matters, and who gets to decide about the direction to be taken by tourism. Broad Prosperity expands what counts as prosperity beyond economic metrics to include quality of life, health, and social cohesion, yet it stops short of the radical rethinking found in third-horizon approaches. It stretches the first horizon without breaking it. Interestingly, later on in the second horizon strong circular economy and doughnut approaches may also serve as valuable bridging approaches, depending on how they are operationalised in a tourism context.

Understanding the positions of the different dynamics helps us appreciate that achieving a transition in tourism is not about choosing the 'best' approach; it is about understanding how different approaches contribute to movement across horizons.

2.4.4 Towards practice

While this chapter has outlined the theoretical foundations of transition in tourism and introduced several transitional approaches, it has offered only limited guidance on how they can be applied in practice. And let us be clear about this: the overriding purpose of these approaches is to drive real-world change.

We therefore need to shift the focus from theoretical value to practical implementation, including the challenges that arise when putting theory into practice. Without paying sufficient attention to this step, these 'transitional' approaches risk being adapted, to fit the current system rather than transforming it. This would



Achieving a transition in tourism is not about choosing the 'best' approach; it is about understanding how different approaches contribute to movement across horizons.

CHAPTER 2

mirror what has happened in the context of sustainable development and sustainable tourism, which were popularised through the triple-bottom-line approach that stripped away much of their transformational potential. We must therefore be careful not to treat the approaches themselves as the goal. They are not inherently transitional, only transitional insofar as they contribute to the process of transitioning tourism towards sustainability. It is the process they represent that matters, not the terminology or framework.

To ensure that these approaches contribute to meaningful change, we need to answer some critical questions. For example, how can we translate these ideas into effective policy and business practices? How can we overcome systemic constraints and the resistance of powerful actors who are invested in the status quo?

To what extent can these approaches be adapted to different socio-political contexts, from liberal democracies to more autocratic regimes? How can we navigate political tensions and volatile political environments? And how can we engage communities beyond the usual stakeholders, and foster the new mindsets and perspectives that will be required for genuine transformation?

In the next chapter, we will address some of these questions by exploring what happens when these approaches encounter the messy realities and complexities of real-world implementation.

Engage communities





3. Application of concepts in practice

In this chapter we will look at: how transitional approaches are chosen by the destinations in our sample; the extent to which these really are transitional; the challenges that need to be overcome; and the different ways in which transitional approaches are implemented in the real world.

We will do so on the basis of conversations with practitioners who have, to a greater or lesser extent, worked on implementing a particular transitional perspective. Some of these attempts were successful, while in other cases change proved more difficult to set in motion. Additionally, we will ask how and why certain approaches were chosen in practice, and this will be our starting point.

3.1. How transitional approaches are chosen

With a few exceptions, the choice of a certain transitional approach does not appear to stem from a deliberate preference for a particular ideology, or the approach best deemed suited to address the specific challenges of that context. Instead, the decision to adopt one approach over another at destination level depends on which term or approach is most familiar or accepted in the local context—whether among residents, stakeholders, or political actors—or on what is most widely recognised internationally (such as the frequently cited SDGs). As such, rather than the specific content of the approach in question, the choice largely seems to be based on gaining acceptance from the various stakeholder groups.

In certain destinations, existing strategies are already in place, and a term is simply selected to loosely align with those strategies, even when ‘theoretically’ the term represents a different train of thought. In other cases, we see examples where multiple concepts are used interchangeably (such as SDGs, degrowth, doughnut economics), depending on the urgency and challenges at hand. In theory, this may be a useful means of working towards a greater level of transition, given that the different approaches do have different qualities. However, in practice it does not appear to be part of a coherent long-term strategy. Instead, the concepts tend to be applied reactively to address immediate problems, and different approaches are used by different organisations, or even within organisations in a destination. On the one hand, adopting a ‘pragmatic’ attitude in selecting an approach can be seen as helping with the uptake and implementation of a new idea. It can take a long time for a relatively unknown term to gain acceptance, let

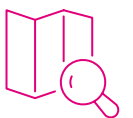
alone to get stakeholders with limited time and resources involved with the specific nuances and sometimes more ‘radical’ elements of a new approach. Indeed, the difficulty in getting stakeholders on board and seeing the need to make a transition was mentioned by interviewees as a core obstacle to a transition, until the direct negative consequences of tourism become very visible (such as overtourism). On the other hand, a lack of clarity with regard to the chosen approach can lead to some of the core principles of more transitional approaches being diluted or altered. One example of this is the use of concepts like ‘green growth’ or ‘sustainable growth’ to describe practices that, while not necessarily transitional, are useful in a certain political or social context. As such, the lack of knowledge, time, and resources among stakeholders, as well as political pressure, can lead to what can best be described as ‘transition-washing’. This is when transitional approaches are overstated or falsely claimed to be in use, thus masking the reality of what is actually happening.

3.2. First signs of a shift

Despite these challenges, there are emerging signs of a meaningful, long-term shift that may be leading to transition. Destinations are beginning to move away from traditional, growth-focused tourism models. It is now widely acknowledged that tourism is about more than just economic benefits. The negative impacts—particularly on residents’ quality of life, such as overcrowding and nuisance—are increasingly being acknowledged. At the same time, tourism is also being seen as a potential contributor to positive outcomes, such as urban liveliness and improved public facilities, transport and amenities.

In short, there is a growing understanding that tourism impacts extend beyond economic gains, and that tourism can play a key role in enhancing broader well-being. This shift is reflected in the rising attention being paid to residents’ well-being, with locals increasingly included as stakeholders in the development of tourism. However, the extent of their involvement varies. In most cases, resident participation is limited to occasional or regular surveys. In some destinations, though, more active engagement methods are being adopted, such as focus groups and appreciative inquiry interviews (as in Mechelen). Berlin experimented with a citizen council with district representatives, but this is no longer active. The idea is that working on specific themes with a more open format may be a more efficient way to engage citizens.

visitBerlin gives ideas, asks questions, but they can also get information from visitBerlin or give official statements. The citizens become part of the development of tourism.’ (Nina Zantout)



There is a growing understanding that tourism impacts extend beyond economic gains, and that tourism can play a key role in enhancing broader well-being.

While these new ways of engaging with residents are promising, they are not without challenges. Key issues include questions regarding who should represent residents, and how to increase participation without overtasking local communities.

We have also observed a shift in how growth is perceived, and how it is often no longer considered the sole priority. That said, the idea of growth has not been completely abandoned, and we see little to no signs of actual post-growth approaches—in only two cases were the premise and desirability of growth itself questioned. Instead, the conditions for growth are being renegotiated and balanced with resident interests. In the destinations we looked at, this was often framed as sustainable growth, good growth, valuable growth, or green growth.

'Giving substance to sustainable growth is our main task. Politicians indicate that tourism may grow, but in the right way, it must be good for the visitors, but also good for the residents. And that should not be left to the market.' (anonymous interviewee)

Notwithstanding that an overemphasis on economic growth is increasingly being questioned, there remains a disparity between goals and practical implementation. Concrete strategies often stay conventional, regardless of the chosen approach. While theoretical distinctions between regenerative tourism, degrowth, or sustainable growth are articulated on paper, in practice these nuances frequently dissolve into similar, incremental measures. This suggests that, despite the adoption of transitional language, the underlying paradigms governing tourism development remain largely unchanged. The result appears to be the perpetuation of traditional frameworks.

Most strategies focus on addressing immediate social challenges, particularly those related to overcrowding and the nuisance experienced by local residents. The most commonly observed approaches in our sample include efforts to distribute tourism more evenly across urban areas and initiatives aimed at attracting so-called 'high-quality' tourists, i.e. visitors who stay longer, spend more per capita, and go to a wider range of places throughout the destination. A common strategy that demonstrates how tourism can contribute to broader welfare issues is the use of tourism revenue, for example, as a form of tax or investment in social projects. In some cases, destinations implement visitor discount cards where a portion of the proceeds or an additional fee is earmarked for projects that benefit low-income residents, such as subsidies, free tickets, or discounted access to local attractions. Not only does this approach have the potential of creating a more equitable destination because it benefits residents of a destination, it is also cited as one of the easier strategies to adopt because fewer people will oppose it:

'Raising tourism taxes to 12.5 percent and raising a lot of money is not what I call a big success. You can do it easily with the majority of the city council because everybody wants it and is OK with it.' (anonymous interviewee)

While these measures can help to reduce visitor pressure in tourist hotspots, and might even support the local economy and residents, we consider them to be relatively conventional. Rather than questioning its basic premise, they primarily seek to optimise the existing tourism model. They rely on economic reasoning based on maximising visitor spending and extending stays, as opposed to addressing the root causes of unsustainable tourism growth. An important issue raised by interviewees is the lack of indicators or consistent framework to help 'measure' soft values, like community well-being, social equity, or ecological resilience. Many of these aspects are also influenced by factors outside the tourism sector, which often fall outside the scope of tourism stakeholders. To address this, stakeholders are actively exploring new ways of measuring tourism and alternative KPIs that better reflect lived experiences. To adopt a more systemic approach, some destinations have started collaborating with partners outside the tourism sector.

Regarding ecological strategies, we find that stakeholders mostly focus on supply-side interventions. This includes encouraging or supporting hotels, attractions, and other tourism service providers to adopt more sustainable operational practices. Some DMMOs have developed their own sustainability criteria, that partners must meet to qualify for official promotion or network membership. And while these initiatives represent important progress in 'greening up' the tourism offering, they are somewhat limited in scope. They focus almost exclusively on improving the sustainability of individual businesses. They fail to address systemic issues that extend beyond the immediate control of tourism stakeholders, such as the carbon footprint associated with travel to and inside the destination, the pressure on natural areas and green spaces, and the long-term ecological carrying capacity of the region.

In response to tourism pressures, one destination has actually adopted degrowth strategies. Its local government has implemented policies that will reduce the number of hotels and Airbnb apartments, aiming primarily to decrease visitor numbers and alleviate pressure on the housing market. Another degrowth measure involves limiting or completely banning river cruises and tour buses in city centres. These interventions serve a dual purpose: they reduce visitor numbers and they cut the carbon footprint, air pollution, and energy use associated with cruise arrivals. But these seem to be more a knee-jerk reaction to the direct pressures of overtourism, or broader political developments (such as new European



Degrowth strategies can reduce visitor numbers and they cut the carbon footprint.

legislation and possibilities). They are not part of a more coherent and long-term strategy that integrates all elements of transitional approaches and that is based on place-specific development needs.

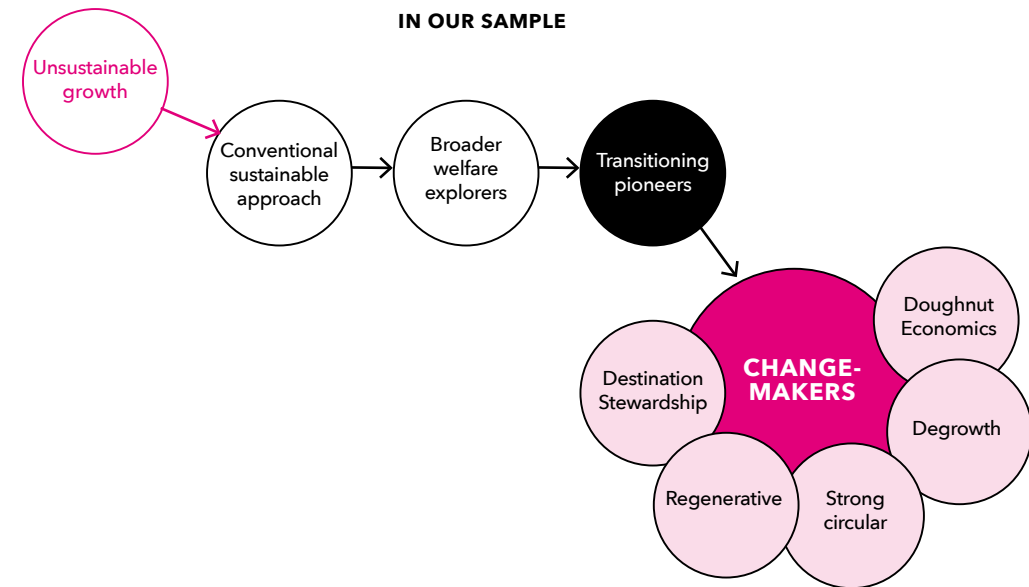
In a nutshell then, despite there being no shortage of goodwill, the ambition to transition to a new approach in tourism has been limited by a continued reliance on familiar solutions and the absence of the systemic integration of transitional principles. A key challenge restricting the uptake of transitional approaches is how to measure non-financial impact. It is just not clear enough what indicators to use, particularly for 'opaquer' benefits like wellbeing or quality of life. Current KPIs are underdeveloped and local data is scarce.

A second challenge is a lack of stakeholder engagement. This is due to knowledge gaps about transitional approaches, political (short-term) pressures, and even limited stakeholder interest through a shortage of the necessary resources, including funding, time and expertise. All this is exacerbated by the fact that transitional approaches are likely to disrupt the current system, thereby creating even more resistance. Finally there are the issues of fragmentation hindering effective collaboration between DMMOs, municipalities and stakeholders and the lack of supportive legislation and regulations to better govern tourism. Typically, there is limited political long-term vision in this area, which makes long-term transitional approaches difficult to implement.

3.3. Which transitional approaches are used in practice?

Even though nearly all destinations are struggling with the full, practical, implementation of a transitional approach, all our interviewees said that, to a greater or lesser extent, they are trying to change tourism to make it more sustainable and contribute more to residents' and local stakeholders' quality of life. To get a better understanding of the ways in which destinations are engaging with the transition of tourism, we have used the experiences from the destinations we looked at to provide a classification of transitional approaches in practice. The destinations that we looked at, mostly still use relatively conventional strategies that are based on growth-incentives, with only some taking small steps to move beyond that. This means that none of the destinations' approaches align with the approaches in figure 2.1, which place a strong emphasis on the full rethinking of (economic) growth as a core element of the tourism ecosystem.

Figure 3.1 provides a schematic representation of the different ways in which destinations engage with the transition of tourism. The categories used here are slightly different from Figure 2.1. As we described earlier, destinations do not necessarily follow a single approach. Rather, they combine elements of different approaches. As such, we have chosen not to align individual destinations to individual approaches. Instead, we have provided a practice-oriented framework to help stakeholders determine where they best see themselves.



0. Unsustainable growth

In this category we find destinations that fully focus on growth but do not consider the impact on the environment or the liveability of the destination. While these are not present in our sample, they are mentioned here for comparison purposes.

1. Conventional sustainability approach

In this group we find the more conventional approaches that are largely growth and tourism-oriented, and that integrate some sustainability aspects in the strategy. Residents are not consulted or involved in decision-making processes, which largely happen top-down. Also positioned in this category are the people-planet-profit approaches, as well as destination-in-balance approaches. This is because they seek to find the limits of growth before people, planet, and profit can be compromised. The outcome of tourism is considered to be a trade-off of these three elements.

2. Broad welfare explorers

In this category, we find destinations that take initial steps towards exploring the broader contribution made by tourism to the destination, besides making economic contributions. Negative and positive impacts on the social and ecological level are acknowledged and key terms that are included are 'using tourism as a means' and 'contributing to Broad Prosperity'. Residents are sometimes consulted through surveys, but it remains a challenge on how to best approach this. Growth is no longer considered to be the priority and ways are sought to measure beyond bed nights and visitor spendings. Intentions here do not always translate to concrete actions and KPIs, often reverting to more traditional economic thinking and it remains a challenge to further integrate ecological and/or social goals into tourism development.

Figure 3.1: Different ways to engage with the transition of tourism

3. Transitioning pioneers

These destinations have adopted strategies that include characteristics of post-growth or degrowth approaches where the premise of growth is challenged. Regenerative elements, like proactively including residents and/or entrepreneurs in tourism development and contributing to the place through tourism, are addressed. Finding the best way to develop concrete KPIs that link to these approaches and finding adequate data for this remains a challenge. Even though these destinations include elements of more transitional tourism approaches, none of them adopt a truly place-based approach where the needs of place and its community are taken as the starting point. A more holistic and integrated approach to place development that addresses long-term needs, remains largely absent. The reasoning still starts from tourism and how to manage that with little relation to wider urban systems.

4. Changemakers

Based on findings from our interviews with experts, we see that fully transitional approaches, as discussed in chapter two, are absent in the destinations featured in our interviews. A fully transitional approach would see destinations rethink the role of tourism and tourism growth. Here, tourism is not treated as an isolated economic sector but as an integral part of society, embedded within broader urban systems. Destinations would begin by asking questions like: What does this place truly need, and can tourism contribute meaningfully to that?

Rather than adopting transitional concepts opportunistically, destinations would select and embed the most relevant frameworks (such as degrowth, circular, regenerative or even something else) based on their unique context and long-term goals. Or it could even be the case that tourism is recognised as not being the best option and that different development pathways are more appropriate. And when tourism is developed, it would look at the destination and its tourism as a complex, living system in which residents, stakeholders, and sectors interact and aim to create benefits that extend beyond tourism itself. This would also include context-specific means of measuring success and governance systems that appreciate the needs of the different stakeholders and users of the destination, as will be discussed further in Chapter 4).

The destination characterisations can be mapped onto the Three-Horizons framework (see Figure 3.2). This mapping shows that even the most advanced destinations are still in the early stages of transition. But this is only to be expected, given that systemic transitions are inherently long-term processes, and that the tourism system as a whole continues to operate much as it always has. However, this suggests that we need to keep working on ‘bridging’ approaches that correspond with the phase in which the destination currently finds itself, and how these approaches can be practically applied in urban settings. This is at least as impor-

Rather than adopting transitional concepts opportunistically, destinations would select and embed the most relevant frameworks based on their unique context and long-term goals.

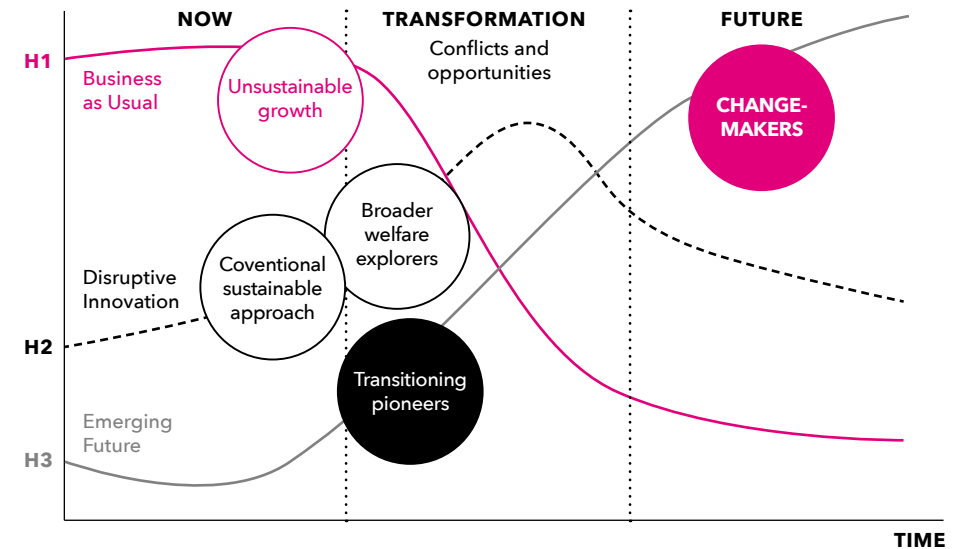


Figure 3.2: Engagement with the transition of tourism related to Three-Horizons Framework

tant, if not even more so than some of the theoretical visions and perspectives of what could be deemed fully transitional tourism. Several potential bridging approaches have already been identified, and it is likely that others either already exist or will be developed in the near future. We support the ongoing development of these bridging strategies, as well as efforts to enable other approaches to connect more effectively with bridging initiatives. This will enable them to develop their own bridging pathways, or to adapt H3-focused approaches, so that they can relate more closely to current or bridging practices. The goal is to make it easier for stakeholders to engage with these approaches in practical terms, thus encouraging them to play a more active bridging role.



Systemic transitions are long-term processes



4. Changing the goal of tourism; setting different KPIs

A key issue holding back a transitional approach, according to participants, is the lack of clear key performance indicators or success metrics to guide destinations when assessing whether tourism is achieving its transitional goals. In this chapter, we will therefore explore how new ways of evaluating how tourism success might be developed, starting from the premise that rethinks growth and positions tourism as an integral part of society. The idea is that by starting from this perspective it will be possible to move beyond the output-focused indicators currently in use, those that are commonly based on one form of growth or another.

4.1. The challenge to move away from traditional KPIs

Our research found no evidence of destinations that have fully revised their key performance indicators (KPIs) to integrate comprehensive sustainability indicators for evaluating tourism success. Participants frequently noted the absence of indicators capable of capturing the complexity of social sustainability or the perceived quality of natural environments. It was also repeatedly mentioned that destination management organisations (DMMOs) rely on municipalities to set KPIs, which often remain ‘traditional and quantitative’. These indicators typically continue to focus on metrics such as the number of visitors attracted, conferences secured, media coverage generated, and jobs created through business attraction.

Nonetheless, we observed initial steps had been taken by some DMMOs and municipalities to monitor aspects beyond visitor numbers and spending, particularly in the social domain. The most commonly tracked indicators related to urban crowding and the spatial and temporal distribution of tourists across the destination. In certain cases, this was supplemented by data on where tourism revenue is being spent and whether it benefits local initiatives. Additionally, some destinations measured resident satisfaction with tourism primarily through regular surveys, while others tracked employment trends within the tourism sector. But when it came to ecological indicators, very few destinations actively incorporated them into their monitoring processes. One exception was Valencia, which has developed indicators to estimate visitors’ carbon footprint. Flanders had the ambition

to assess the material footprint of tourism operations, but this proved too complicated and not all data was available. Currently, it was only possible to measure the CO₂ equivalence of transport emissions.

The academic literature suggests a range of sustainability indicators that could be used to assess broader impacts, including biodiversity, soil quality, recycling rates, availability of green space, carbon emissions, and public transport accessibility. Social indicators might evaluate housing quality, job creation, safety, cultural activities, local facilities, liveability, and equitable economic distribution. However, measurable and widely accepted indicators for these areas remain elusive. While there is substantial research on carrying capacity and acceptable levels of change, the studies tend to focus narrowly on issues such as congestion, crowding, resource depletion, and pollution thresholds. They rarely adopt a holistic approach that integrates multiple sustainability indicators at the destination level or consider the potential positive contributions made by tourism.

To align with transitional approaches and incorporate indicators that assess positive impacts, valuable guidance is provided by frameworks such as post-growth, doughnut economics, strong circular tourism, and regenerative tourism. These frameworks encompass metrics such as the restoration of natural habitats, improvements in water quality, and progress toward carbon neutrality. However, for less tangible but equally important outcomes—such as the revitalisation of traditional cultures, the empowerment of local communities, and the enhancement of well-being for both visitors and residents (Dredge, 2024; Simmons & Hussain, 2024)—we found no evidence of such indicators being applied in our sample. Additionally, the literature offers no concrete methods for measuring or mapping out these impacts.

4.2. Changing tourism measurement

What needs to change for the effective development of transitional tourism must also be reflected in how KPIs are set and how the impact of tourism is measured. Based on theories of transitional tourism, complexity thinking, and regenerative development, as well as expert interviews, we have identified two key elements for measuring the impact of tourism: a place-based approach and systems thinking. We have also explored new ways of measuring so that we can further integrate these elements into the monitoring process.

1. Place-based approaches vs. global impact

In our sample, several destinations mentioned that they are beginning to expand their indicators to include social and ecological sustainability. In doing so, they mostly look at existing standards, such as the SDGs, the Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS) and the World Tourism Organisation (WTO). However, it cannot be overstressed that indicators need to be context dependent, and that these global indicators do not always align with local realities.

KPIs

What needs to change for the effective development of transitional tourism must also be reflected in how KPIs are set and how the impact of tourism is measured.

A critical aspect of measuring transitional tourism is therefore the inclusion of place-based indicators (instead of using only global ones) in which the local context is integrated. Tailored metrics and assessment methodologies are needed to address the specific needs of a place and its people (Dredge, 2024; Kreb & Zwaal, 2024; Gibbons et al., 2019). These indicators should be grounded in local knowledge, and therefore local communities should be, at least to some extent, included in their development (Dredge, 2024; Gibbons et al., 2019; Kreb & Zwaal, 2024; Loconto & Hatanaka, 2018; Olafsdottir, 2021; Pollock, 2019). Participatory appraisal techniques, such as community mapping and focus-group discussions, could turn out useful here, as they can facilitate the active involvement of local stakeholders. In this way they could help to capture local perceptions of tourism and its impacts and amplify local voices from the community (Bellato et al., 2023; Della Lucia et al., 2017; Olafsdottir, 2021).

A potential pitfall of using a localised and context-dependent way of measuring is the risk of losing sight of the wider impacts related to tourism that go beyond the urban scale. This is particularly evident for approaches that are already heavily place-based, such as regenerative tourism. For example, when assessing tourism-related carbon emissions, should only activities within the destination be considered, or should emissions from travel to the destination also be taken into account? While these may not directly contribute to the carbon footprint of the destination, they do have broader national or global implications. Therefore, alongside a place-based approach, it is essential to also consider impacts on wider socio-ecological systems.

2. Systems thinking and integrating a living-systems perspective

Currently, the evaluation of tourism is not only largely based on visitor numbers and/or income; there is also a tendency to focus primarily on individual organisations or the sector as a whole. While some systemic-level indicators—such as perceptions of, or sentiments toward tourism—are occasionally measured, this is rarely done in an integrated manner. As a result, the impact on the destination as a whole is often overlooked, as is the broader impact of tourism beyond the destination itself. And this relatively narrow focus fails to account for the wider context, leading to a fragmented and mechanistic approach to assessing impact (Dredge, 2024; Gibbons et al., 2019; Olafsdottir, 2021; Kallis et al., 2025).

This approach contradicts how ecosystems function. Sustainability indicators should instead reflect the living-systems elements of a destination, incorporating the intrinsic relationships between ecological and social factors and how they interact across different levels of a system (Gibbons et al., 2019). It is therefore essential to examine impacts and relationships between different systems, as well as the effects on wider interconnected systems that extend beyond the boundaries of the tourism sector. To achieve this, a complex socio-ecological or living-systems perspective must be integrated into tourism measurement (Gibbons et al., 2019; Olafsdottir, 2021; Schianetz & Kavanagh, 2008).



Sustainability indicators should reflect the living-systems elements of a destination, incorporating the intrinsic relationships between ecological and social factors and how they interact across different levels of a system.

A key challenge highlighted in our interviews is how to measure the wider destination-level impacts that are not directly tied to the tourism system. For example, it is not always possible to attribute resource use—such as public space, energy, water, or waste management—to specific groups, as xxx notes:

‘We need to differentiate between residents, permanent or temporary, and visitors. You have to differentiate to understand which activity is using which resources, you know, public space, energy, water, waste management, etcetera.’ (Jaume Mata)

It cannot be denied that tourism departments at municipalities and DMMOs have limited influence over destination-wide KPIs, as these call for strong collaboration with different governmental departments and other sectors. This would also involve moving beyond the need to distinguish between the impacts of travellers and residents, instead adopting a more holistic view of destination development. The systems perspective discussed above still primarily focuses on the destination, which means it struggles to fully account for tourism-related transport impacts—particularly those associated with travel to and from the destination. While the added complexity of integrating these impacts into a destination-based framework would certainly be challenging, especially given that existing models are often quantitative with clearly defined metrics, this challenge also presents an opportunity. Existing research in mobility studies and tourism carbon accounting (Liu et al., 2025; Peeters et al., 2023) already offers established methodologies that could complement and enhance more destination-focused systemic frameworks, such as those we propose.

4.3. Reflexive monitoring as a new means of ‘measuring’

4.3.1 Moving beyond current measuring techniques

Moving beyond simple quantitative indicators

Sustainability indicators in tourism can be broadly categorised into simple and complex indicators (Torres-Delgado & Saarinen, 2017). Simple indicators rely on objective, quantitative data. Their purpose is to simplify the reality so that comparisons can be made (Olafsdottir, 2021). However, quantitative indicators alone are not enough to capture the nuanced complexities of tourism destinations. This is why complex indicators are needed, indicators that are subjective and that focus on the complexity of the local context, and include impact and causality between different stakeholders and sectors and systems. Unlike simple indicators, complex indicators capture the interdependencies between stakeholders, sectors, and systems, making them eminently suitable for evaluating the impacts of transition-

al-tourism approaches. These indicators often combine both quantitative and qualitative data. This facilitates a more nuanced assessment of intangible yet critical outcomes, such as community well-being, perceived impacts, and lived experiences. By accounting for contextual relationships and subjective perspectives, they provide a more comprehensive understanding of how transitional tourism initiatives affect people and places (Dredge, 2024; Gibbons et al., 2019; Kallis et al., 2025). And by combining quantitative and qualitative data, these indicators provide a deeper, context-specific understanding of tourism's role in a destination (Olafsdottir, 2021). As one of our expert interviewees put it:

'Instead of just asking "how will we measure it?", we can ask the bigger question of "how will we know?" For example, we may know the project is fully regenerative when the river is swimmable or drinkable again. This will certainly include quantitative measures, but it also holds more complexity and meaning than metrics alone.' (Michelle Holliday)

Nearly all the experts and practitioners we spoke to emphasised the importance of qualitative indicators, even when operationalising them remains a challenge. How, for instance, do we measure concepts like 'good growth' (Rotterdam Partners) or 'progress, change, or transformation' (Visit Mechelen)?

Measuring systems, relationships, and change over time

A second recurrent theme is the need to integrate the evaluation of patterns and relationships between systems and sectors when measuring tourism impact. This means considering whole systems, rather than just isolated metrics (Bateson, 2017; Dredge, 2024; Gibbons et al., 2019). Additionally, many of the experts we interviewed, as well as much of the literature we consulted, point out the need to measure not only static conditions at certain points in time, but also progress, change, and evolving relationships over time (Gibbons et al., 2019; Simmons & Hussain, 2024).

This requires more qualitative and innovative methods. Interestingly, several practitioners in our sample acknowledged that not everything can or should be measured, and that progress itself may be more important than rigid metrics:

'Not everything can be put into Excel tables. Change is hard to measure. Maybe you are always transforming.' (Els van Zele)

'We always feel the need to first measure and define everything, while in fact you already know intuitively which steps lead to sustainability.' (Bart Neuts)

'Not everything has to be measured, action is sometimes more important. (...) I don't think you need a KPI for everything.' (Nina Zantout)

Warm data: complexity-informed process approach to measurement

An example of a process approach that may help to address complexity in measuring and setting KPIs, is the concept of warm data, developed by Nora Bateson (Bateson, 2017). Warm data examines the relationships between information and context, allowing for the study of phenomena within their multiple contexts. It argues that complex systems like tourism, cannot be studied in isolation. Instead, they need to include relational interdependence and contextual understanding, much like living systems.

The outcome of this approach is information that goes beyond the limits of statistical data (cold data). Analysing systems without such a holistic perspective often results in decontextualised information, as it is pulled out of context and studied in isolation. This approach frequently fails to do justice to the complexity of the system, potentially leading to misinformed actions that may worsen rather than improve the situation (Bateson, 2017). Currently, we have not found concrete applications of warm data in the tourism sector. However, we believe it presents an interesting avenue for exploring how this way of measuring could add value when examining sustainability processes in tourist destinations.

4.3.2 Using reflexive monitoring to empower collective action

Transforming systems and mindsets towards sustainability is not an easy task, as it happens across many levels of society (for example, ecological, economic, political). In such contexts, projects benefit from monitoring processes that foster reflexivity throughout. Reflexive monitoring (van Mierloo et al., 2010) was originally developed in regenerative farming and calls for collaboration among diverse actors (such as farmers, conservationists, local government, and water authorities) to achieve meaningful progress.

This approach empowers collective action (Lupini et al., 2024) and is particularly effective for projects aimed at sustainable place-based or sectoral development (Lupini et al., 2024; van Mierloo et al., 2010).

Rather than being an external oversight activity, reflexive monitoring is integral to the change process itself. It clarifies the responsibilities and accountability of interdependent stakeholders that are committed to shared goals (Smit et al., 2024). At its core, reflexive monitoring is a cyclical learning process, distinguished from traditional approaches by its emphasis on continuous dialogue and shared sense-making (Arkesteijn et al., 2015). It embeds monitoring directly into the change process, creating feedback loops that enable stakeholders to interpret data collectively, challenge assumptions, and adapt strategies in real time (Regeer et al., 2016). This integration is particularly valuable in complex multi-stakeholder environments, where no single actor has complete control or overview of the transformation process, such as tourism destinations attempting to navigate sustainability transitions (Padt et al., 2014).

The methodology involves regular reflexive sessions, or ‘mirror meetings’, in which stakeholders examine both quantitative indicators (cold data, such as tourism statistics, environmental metrics, and economic figures) and qualitative insights (warm data, including perceived challenges, relationship dynamics, and emerging opportunities) (van Mierloo et al., 2010; Regeer et al., 2016). By synthesising these perspectives, reflexive monitoring transcends mere outcome tracking by illuminating the underlying dynamics, power structures, and systemic patterns that influence progress toward sustainability (Arkesteijn et al., 2015). This dual focus helps participants to ask themselves: ‘are we reaching our targets?’, ‘are we working together effectively?’, and ‘are our strategies and partnerships still appropriate, given what we’re learning?’.

A key strength of reflexive monitoring is its systematic integration of collaborative reflection throughout the process. This enables real-time adaptation and strategic alignment (Smit et al., 2024). By combining cold and warm data, stakeholders can collectively assess progress, reprioritise objectives, and reallocate resources. Unlike conventional monitoring, this method demands transparency regarding individual and collective efforts, projects, and partnerships aimed at achieving shared goals. In tourism, such transparency can reveal critical interdependencies—for instance, how hotel sustainability initiatives depend on local waste management systems, or how destination marketing influences visitor behaviour and resident well-being (Dredge, 2006).

By making these connections explicit, reflexive monitoring helps transform fragmented individual efforts into coordinated collective action (Padt et al., 2014). In that sense, it facilitates structural change without requiring an exact pathway or endpoint (van Mierloo et al., 2010). This is particularly useful for sustainability transitions in tourism, where outcomes are often uncertain.

4.4 Integrating inner reflection in reflexive monitoring worldviews

The shift toward reflexive monitoring represents a significant departure from traditional measurement approaches in tourism. However, for reflexive monitoring to achieve its transitional potential, it must address not only external processes and outcomes but also the inner capacities of the stakeholders involved. Aspects such as values, worldviews, beliefs, and associated emotional, relational, and cognitive capacities are considered fundamental for systems change (Wamsler & Bristow, 2022). Yet they are hardly considered when discussing sustainability transitions in tourism (Taveras-Dalmau, 2024). Changes in worldviews and beliefs can support transformation from the inside out (Ives et al., 2023; Woiwode et al., 2021).

This recognition directly complements reflexive monitoring, which creates the structure for collective reflection through mirror meetings and warm-data collection. However, it can only be truly effective if participants possess the inner capacities to engage with these processes (Arkesteijn et al., 2015). Stakeholders may intellectually understand sustainability principles, yet struggle to shift away from growth-oriented paradigms because of deeply embedded mental models (Dredge, 2022; Wamsler et al., 2021). Integrating frameworks for inner development into reflexive monitoring processes can strengthen their effectiveness. Two increasingly popular complementary perspectives on this matter are the Inner Development Goals and Theory U.

The Inner Development Goals (IDG) were born from the recognition that, while vast knowledge exists around sustainable development, collective progress has been slow because we lack the inner capacities to deal with complex issues (Inner Development Goals, n.d). The IDG framework uses five key dimensions: Being (self-awareness, resilience, presence), Thinking (critical thinking, complexity awareness), Relating (empathy, connection), Collaborating (communication, trust-building), and Acting (courage, creativity, perseverance) (Schüle, 2021). These dimensions directly support the competencies required for effective participation in reflexive monitoring processes. For example, they help us conduct open conversations about progress and failures and help build the interpersonal trust necessary for the transparency that reflexive monitoring demands (Regeer et al., 2016). In tourism-destination contexts—where power asymmetries between large corporations and small businesses, or between tourism actors and local communities often create barriers to honest dialogue—these inner capacities become essential prerequisites for genuine collaborative monitoring (Dredge, 2006).

Theory U addresses individual leadership and focuses on deepening personal awareness and the means to collectively co-create to achieve system change. It is built on the dual premise that a transition starts with individual people who need to let go of old patterns and mental models so they can come up with new ideas, and that they need to engage with others to achieve deeper system change (Scharmer, 2009).



A key strength of reflexive monitoring is its systematic integration of collaborative reflection throughout the process.

This approach aligns with reflexive monitoring's focus on understanding system dynamics rather than only tracking indicators (van Mierloo et al., 2010). One of the greatest strengths of Theory U is that it addresses, head-on, the interpersonal challenges and conflicts that often act as barriers to change when trying to develop future possibilities and practices. Rather than seeing tensions and resistance as problems, Theory U notes that the resulting friction creates space for deeper collaboration and developing a shared vision. In tourism, where stakeholders often have conflicting interests, the ability to collaboratively innovate and come up with new paradigms is key (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Scharmer, 2009). It is a skill that can be measured with reflexive monitoring.

In practice, tourism destinations that engage in reflexive monitoring could integrate these approaches in several ways. Stakeholders could, for example, undergo IDG assessments to identify capacity gaps and design targeted development programmes. Mirror meetings could incorporate Theory U principles, structuring sessions to move through the U-process, rather than simply reviewing data, etc.

Such integration acknowledges that measuring progress toward sustainability transitions requires not just new indicators or monitoring structures, but fundamentally new ways of working together. It recognises that the 'how' of monitoring is as important as 'what' is being monitored. By cultivating inner capacities and implementing reflexive monitoring processes, tourism destinations could create the conditions, not just to track their transitional journey, but to genuinely navigate it with wisdom, courage, and collective creativity.

New ways of working together





5. Conclusions and recommendations

In this report we have explored different transitional tourism approaches, examining both their theoretical foundations and practical applications. Through literature review, expert interviews, and conversations with academics, thought leaders and practitioners across European destinations and cities, we have sought to clarify what the different transitional concepts mean, how they relate to one another, and, crucially, how they can and are being implemented in practice.

In this final chapter, we will present our key findings and offer recommendations for moving forward.

For a quick initial overview, we have summarised and listed our key findings below.

BOX 3. Key findings

- **The need for transition beyond current conceptualisations of sustainable tourism:** Traditional sustainability approaches, those based on the triple-bottom-line and a growth-based paradigm, have not delivered a tourism transition that is in line with the vision of 'Our Common Future'. Despite decades of sustainability strategies and technological improvements, the environmental footprint of tourism is still growing and social pressures on destinations are intensifying. This means that there is an urgent need for the type of transitional approaches that will fundamentally rethink tourism's role and purpose, rather than merely optimising the existing system.
- **Core elements of transitional tourism:** The six most important elements we have found in transitional tourism approaches are: rethinking the role of economic growth; understanding tourism as part of complex, living socio-ecological systems; adopting an ecocentric worldview that recognises nature's intrinsic value; implementing place-based approaches that are grounded in the local context; embracing co-creation and meaningful community participation; and developing actionable strategies with the appropriate means of assessment.

- **Diversity of transitional approaches:** We have discussed a range of transitional approaches. Of these, no single approach is universally superior; each has its own strengths and limitations, depending on context, scale, and implementation challenges. It must be assessed which approach fits best with the local context in question. Some approaches will be more closely aligned with, and thus a better fit with, current tourism practices (such as SDGs, Broad Prosperity, equitable tourism, weak circular tourism), while others will advocate a complete rethink of tourism (such as strong circular economy, degrowth, regenerative tourism, and doughnut economics). This means they may have more transitional potential, but are more difficult to implement.
- **The theory-practice gap:** In practice, the choice of a certain concept does not always seem to be a conscious decision based on its suitability for the local context. More often than not, it will be based on political interests or the probability of acceptance by stakeholders. While many destinations will articulate transitional ambitions, using terms like regenerative tourism or degrowth, their actual strategies will often remain relatively conventional and focus on visitor distribution, attracting 'quality tourists'. Moreover, their sustainability improvements will be marginal. A key issue here is the difficulty in convincing stakeholders that transitional approaches and proactive engagement are needed to make tourism future-proof, rather than waiting for the negative impacts of tourism (such as overtourism) before being spurred into action.
- **Signs of emerging shift:** A shift is happening where welfare is considered to entail more than just economic wellbeing, and tourism seen as a way of contributing to that. There is growing recognition that tourism must contribute to broader societal wellbeing, beyond economic metrics. Most destinations in our sample are part of the 'broader welfare explorers', and we found few examples of destinations that are fully integrating more transitional approaches. The premise of unlimited growth is being questioned, even if concrete degrowth strategies remain rare.
- **The measurement challenge:** Changing the goal of tourism based on the elements of transitional approaches while developing KPIs that fit those approaches, remains one of the biggest challenges for destinations. Current KPIs remain predominantly quantitative and growth-oriented (visitor numbers, spending, bed nights). Destinations are struggling to develop indicators that capture social sustainability, environmental regeneration, community wellbeing, and systemic change—precisely the outcomes that transitional approaches prioritise.
- **New ways of gauging progress:** To reflect the complex nature of tourism when measuring and setting KPIs, it is important that a place-based approach and systems thinking are integrated. And this calls for innovative ways of monitoring and assessment. Reflexive monitoring offers a potentially useful process-oriented approach, while frameworks such as the Inner Development Goals and Theory U provide interesting new pathways for gauging inner transformation and capacity development that are essential for achieving meaningful impact.

5.1 No single approach is superior; embracing strategic pluralism

Our findings underline an important insight: that there is no single transitional approach that can claim universal superiority. While it may be tempting to view concepts that seek more fundamental transitions as more advanced or more desirable, we suggest exercising caution when doing so. These approaches may promise deeper change, but they are accompanied by significant practical challenges. If they require changes that are too sweeping for stakeholders in the current system, they will likely be either rejected outright, diluted (thus losing their transformative values), or co-opted to perpetuate the existing system. The latter two contingencies are particularly likely when concepts are vaguely defined and leave room for different interpretations (Taveras-Dalmau et al., 2025).

Different approaches serve different purposes, and in practice rather than choosing just one practitioners will often combine multiple approaches. The question should not be: 'which approach is objectively best?'. Rather, it should be: 'which mix of approaches, well timed and properly scaled, can help take the next meaningful step, while not losing sight of the required fundamental transformation?'. For example, a destination that is just beginning to question unlimited growth might start with Broad Prosperity indicators. As awareness grows and political will strengthens, they might then move towards approaches that advocate greater system change. A destination facing immediate overtourism pressures might find Destination Stewardship invaluable in establishing participatory governance structures, while simultaneously drawing on degrowth principles to justify visitor limitation policies. A developing destination seeking to build tourism responsibly might benefit from regenerative tourism's place-based philosophy, combined with circular economy principles for resource management. A destination might also use SDG frameworks to maintain legitimacy with international bodies, apply destination stewardship to improve stakeholder collaboration, explore circular principles to reduce resource use, and adopt elements of regenerative thinking to inspire a longer-term vision.

Rather than creating confusion, or risking the dilution of the concepts, combining approaches can be a strategic way of navigating the transition journey, using different tools for different phases. The challenge here, of course, is ensuring that this combination remains strategic rather than opportunistic. The risk is that destinations are likely to cherry-pick comfortable elements from various approaches, while avoiding the difficult part of actually letting the old system decline. Supporting the rise of new approaches only works if we simultaneously enable the decline of incompatible old ones. We cannot regenerate destinations while continuously growing visitor numbers. And neither can we operate within planetary boundaries while expanding tourism infrastructure indefinitely. Rather than engaging in debates about which concepts are superior, we therefore recommend adopting what we term 'strategic pluralism': deliberately choosing and combining approaches according to the specific context, challenges, and timing. This kind of approach will require stakeholders to:

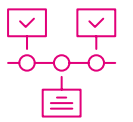
- understand the underlying principles and assumptions of the different approaches;
- honestly assess their destination's specific challenges and opportunities;
- recognise that different approaches may be appropriate at different stages of transition (as illustrated by the Three-Horizons framework in Chapter 2));
- remain flexible and reflexive, willing to adapt approaches as contexts change.

It may also be that a combination of approaches is best suited to a certain place or challenge. The Three-Horizons framework gives an indication of how approaches may work alongside each other to create a transition. Of course this is but one way of looking at how approaches complement each other. For future research, there is a clear need for more nuanced understandings of how different approaches can complement one another, when each is most suitable, and how to navigate tensions between ambitious transitional goals and practical realities.

We must also bear in mind that tourism transitions never occur in isolation, so discussions need to reflect social and political realities. It is fairly easy to set out a convincing argument for a certain approach, or present a series of best-practice examples where that approach has worked well. However, a success story elsewhere cannot simply be copied and pasted and thus replicated in a different place. Therefore, instead of claiming that one approach is 'objectively' better or worse, we suggest taking a more pragmatic view. This means that whatever approach we use, we should stay constantly reflective, be willing to question the methods we have chosen, and accept that different approaches suit different aims.

The focus should not be on the terminology or rigidly adhering to a particular approach. What matters most is creating processes that genuinely set a transition in motion. Nearly all the resulting frameworks, to a greater or lesser degree, will then try to initiate a shift towards a more sustainable and more just tourism system. Debating which approach is 'best' can actually be counterproductive and thus hinder progress more than it helps. What truly matters are the processes needed to achieve the intended transition, which will depend on the location and the specific part of the tourism ecosystem in question, including political opportunities and tensions.

Building on this, any transitional approach should, in theory, follow the local context as part of a coherent, long-term strategy. Challenges should be identified first, and only then should an approach be selected that can address them. Of course, we acknowledge that this is not always feasible within existing political landscapes. In some cases, it may be more realistic to first conduct additional research into gaining a better understanding of how particular approaches will or will not work in a given place, as well as how approaches should be applied in real-world settings. This can help develop a deeper understanding of the value each concept may offer in specific settings and, in turn, inform the political debate on which approach should be adopted for the transition of tourism.



What matters most is creating processes that genuinely set a transition in motion.

5.2. Acknowledging and navigating the role of politics and power relations

A critical finding from our research is that when it comes to which approaches are adopted and how they are implemented, political dynamics and power relationships are very important. However, these factors are often overlooked in discussions on tourism transitions. We feel strongly that, both in practice and in research, there is a need to better recognise and work with these political dynamics. Rather than viewing them as external constraints, we recommend that practitioners and researchers explicitly acknowledge them as fundamental aspects of a transition process and learn how to navigate them strategically.

We also found that the concept chosen by practitioners often depends on what is most likely to be politically acceptable, rather than based on what best fits the local context and issues. More radical approaches (like degrowth) are therefore often hampered by politics at different levels, locked in by growth-oriented policies with little room for alternatives (Kallis et al., 2025). Terms like ‘sustainable growth’ or ‘Broad Prosperity’ may gain traction because they align with existing political narratives, while potentially more appropriate but ostensibly radical approaches face resistance. Rather than viewing this as inherently problematic, we suggest acknowledging it as a reality that requires strategic navigation.

This not only holds true for the initial choice for a certain concept, but also for any changes in direction that are being taken. For example, one destination in our project moved from a more regenerative approach, that included mostly social elements of sustainability, towards a more circular approach, in which ecological aspects of sustainability were more prominent. This was at least in part due to pressure from European regulations. It demonstrated that not only do local politics steer the direction of tourism development, so too do national- and even European-level politics. Tourism transitions are constrained by multi-level governance frameworks that shape what is possible and what is politically viable. We recommend learning how to map these multi-level constraints and identify where pressure points for change exist at different scales.

The structural position of DMMOs presents particular challenges. What we found is that DMMOs are dependent on the local government and political climate for setting the KPIs, which are often relatively traditional and based on the growth of tourism. Even if a DMO is willing to challenge the idea of growth and ready to investigate prioritising ecological and social sustainability, in many cases its ability to do so is limited by its organisational structure which heavily depends on the financial support (and thus influence) of the local government. Additionally, because they cannot create policies or regulations that limit growth, for example, DMMOs often have limited influence in developing more radical strategies that can actively contribute to either social or ecological sustainability. This financial dependence creates a fundamental tension in that, while recognising the need for transformative change, DMMOs lack the autonomy and authority to pursue it.

Their mandates typically focus on tourism promotion rather than tourism transformation, and they operate without the regulatory powers needed to implement truly radical interventions. To an extent, if they are obliged to coordinate with other departments (such as planning or infrastructure) municipal tourism departments face similar constraints when pursuing transitional approaches. These other departments may simply not understand tourism, for example, or their priorities and performance metrics might still be growth-oriented.

To that end, it would be useful to take a closer look at the role each party involved (government, DMMO, entrepreneurs, tourism businesses, academics etc.) can play in the sustainability transition, taking into consideration what is feasible in the current political climate. Political constraints should not be viewed as insurmountable barriers, but as part of the system that needs to be transformed. A useful model in this respect could be the X-curve developed by Loorbach (2017).

This illustrates the different stages of a transition and the roles that accompany these stages, such as experimenting pioneers, connectors who speed up the process and stabilisers who institutionalise the new norm. To provide a clearer perspective of who can assume, and should be given certain responsibilities in the transition process, it would be illuminating to reflect on the different roles played by different parties within the tourism context. By identifying who can play which roles in current political contexts (experimenting pioneers, connecting accelerators, or stabilising institutionalisers), destinations can thus develop more realistic transition strategies. These will then work with, rather than against, political realities and help build strategic partnerships that compensate for organisational limitations. They will also recognise when system change requires advocacy for new governance structures, as opposed to working solely within existing ones. When it comes to measuring or appreciating progress, it will also be useful to bring together stakeholders that currently monitor tourism with stakeholders that look at the quality of life or experience of places and may not be aware of the impact that tourism has on these elements. This could be done, for example, in a local tourism knowledge centre, network, or observatory, places where knowledge is typically shared and more systemic perspectives of the impact of tourism can be experimented with.

The obtained insights will demonstrate that tourism transitions not only rely on what is politically possible or how organisations are structured, they also depend on whether the people involved can reflect, learn, and adapt as situations change. Reflexive monitoring supports it all by combining data with collective reflection, helping people respond to shifting relationships, power dynamics, and emerging developments. Strengthening inner capacities—such as self-awareness, empathy, and the ability to work constructively in complex situations—will ensure that those involved will be well equipped to engage meaningfully with transition processes and able to shape tourism transitions that are both politically realistic and genuinely transformative.

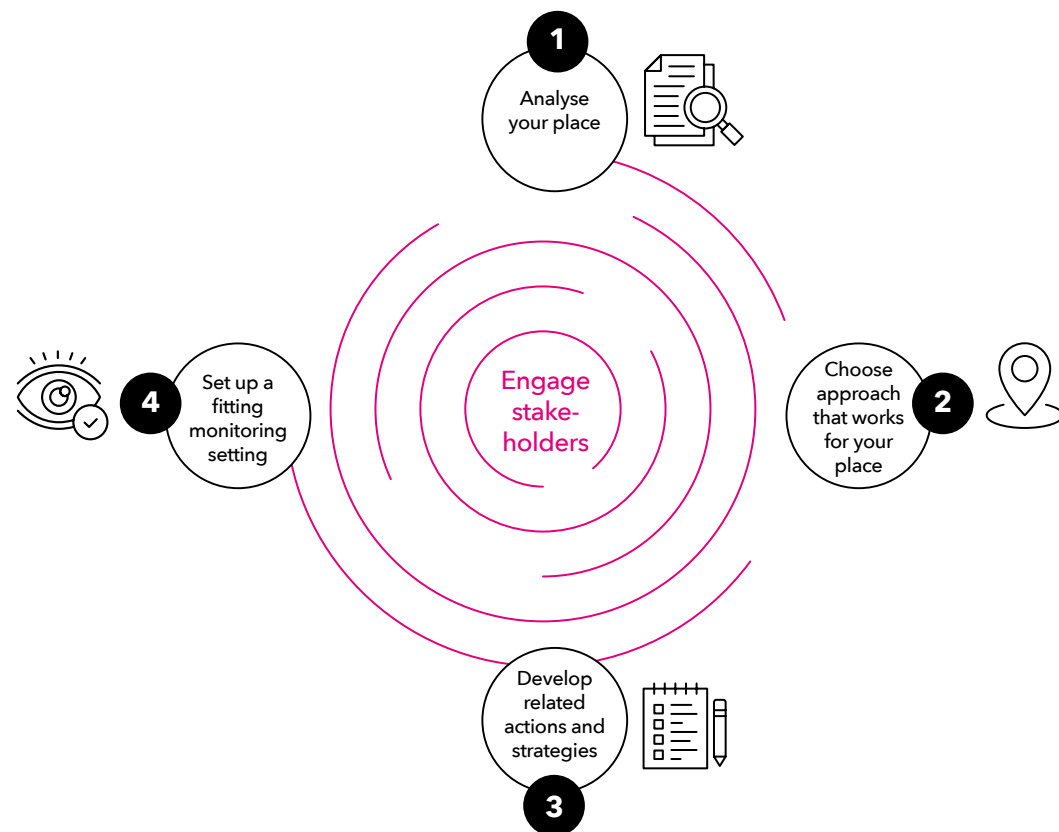


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5.3. Towards practice

In summarising our findings and recommendations, we suggest taking five practical steps to start working towards a more transitional form of tourism development (figure 5.1).

- **Analyse your place;** understand the local context, its challenges, needs, and aspirations.
- **Choose an approach that works;** select the principles and methods that best fit the local context.
- **Develop actions and strategies;** ensure they align with the chosen approach and principles. In doing so, always take into account political dynamics and abilities, as well as a willingness to take ownership
- **Set up a monitoring process;** design a system that matches the approach, supports reflection and adaptation and that also focuses on improving processes rather than only input-output KPIs.
- **Engage stakeholders throughout;** involve those affected in co-creation, learning, and evaluation processes. Also engage stakeholders that may not be aware that they are impacted by tourism.



We would also like to stress how important it is to actually start taking action. It is easy to get lost in the understanding of the different transitional approaches and their varying nuances. Differences certainly exist between transitional approaches, but we believe that it is more a matter of applying the right approach to the right context (such as overtourism, emerging destinations, addressing localised initiatives or tourism impact on a global scale). Adopting approaches that might be contradictory to one another should be avoided.

By the same token, by focusing too much on theoretical distinctions you run the risk of being mired down before implementation even begins. This would constitute a missed opportunity, especially since most transitional approaches share the common vision of questioning the priority of growth, and adopting a holistic, systemic approach to tourism development. In practice, the specific concept that is chosen is less important than consciously applying the underlying principles of transitional tourism.

Transitional approaches do not necessarily contradict existing sustainability efforts. What destinations are currently doing should not, by definition, be assumed to be 'wrong'. Rather, transitional approaches should be seen as being able to complement and build upon these initiatives and, in so doing, strengthen and broaden their impact. We hope this report helps clarify the approaches and that it provides a practical pathway to action.

Now, let's get to work, shall we?



Pathway to action



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Interviewees:
Rebecca Armstrong
Rebecca Armstrong
Chantal van Binsbergen
Ronald Besemer
Elke Dens
Xavier Font
Robert Fletcher
Stefan Hartman
Michelle Holliday
Jeroen Klijs
Doug Lansky
Patrick Loepe
Jaume Mata
Frans Melissen
Mette Alborg Mosgaard
Bernadett Papp
Bart Neuts
Tina O'Dwyer
Fabrice Sorin
Els van Zele
Egbert van der Zee
Ewout Versloot

Organisations and destinations:
Aalborg University
Breda University of Applied Sciences
Destinatie Nederland
E360 Alliance
ETOA
Municipality of Amsterdam
Municipality of Utrecht
NBTC
NHLStenden University of Applied Sciences
Rotterdam Partners
The Hague & Partners
The Tourism Space
Tourism Flanders
University of Surrey
Utrecht Marketing
Visit Berlin
Visit Mechelen
Visit Valencia
Wageningen University
Wonderful Copenhagen

* Some interviewees spoke on personal title or requested to remain anonymous.

About the authors:

Shirley Nieuwland is the founder of Paradise Found, a platform and consultancy that inspires both travellers and the tourism sector to reimagine tourism in new ways. She works as an independent researcher, writer, and advisor in the field of sustainable and regenerative tourism, with a focus on place and local communities as the primary starting points.



Ko Koens is a Professor of New Urban Tourism at Inholland University of Applied Sciences and a founding member of ENSUT. With over 20 years of experience in cities around the world, his work focuses on addressing tourism excesses, such as overtourism, and specifically on how to enable the transition of tourism towards greater sustainability by collaborating with stakeholders within and beyond tourism.



Luc van den Boogaart was consultant on sustainable tourism and economic development at Ginder. He currently works on sustainable tourism development in Madagascar. He holds a master's degree in economic geography and tourism from Radboud University.



Bert Smit is a senior consultant on sustainable destination development at Ginder. He obtained his PhD from the University of Surrey on participatory strategies for the co-design of sustainable destinations and was a researcher at BUAS and CELTH. Following his PhD research, he joined Ginder to contribute in practice to the development of tourism in the Netherlands and Flanders.



COLOPHON

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