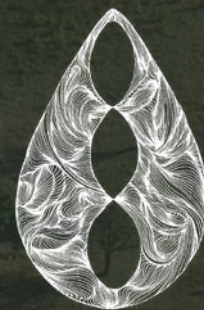


MED4REGEN Interreg Euro-Med, Online, 2/07/2026

CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS AS CATALYSTS OF REGENERATIVE TOURISM: FROM INTERPRETING HERITAGE TO CULTIVATING THE COMMONS OF PLACE



Dr. sc. Irena Ateljević

Terra Meera, Center for Regeneration and Human Potential, Bribir, Croatia



EU MISSION SOIL AMBASSADOR · KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Regeneration: When Sustainability Is No Longer Sustainable

One of Europe's leading voices on regenerative transformation - scholar, EU policy advisor, and social entrepreneur who left academia to prove regeneration works in practice.

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50+

Publications

8,000+

Citations

h-index 36

Google Scholar



THE GUIDING QUESTION

The MED4REGEN project invites us to explore a fundamental question:
How can museums and cultural organisations become catalysts for regenerative tourism
through hyperlocal, community-centred approaches across the Mediterranean?

A very timely question given the state of the world today...



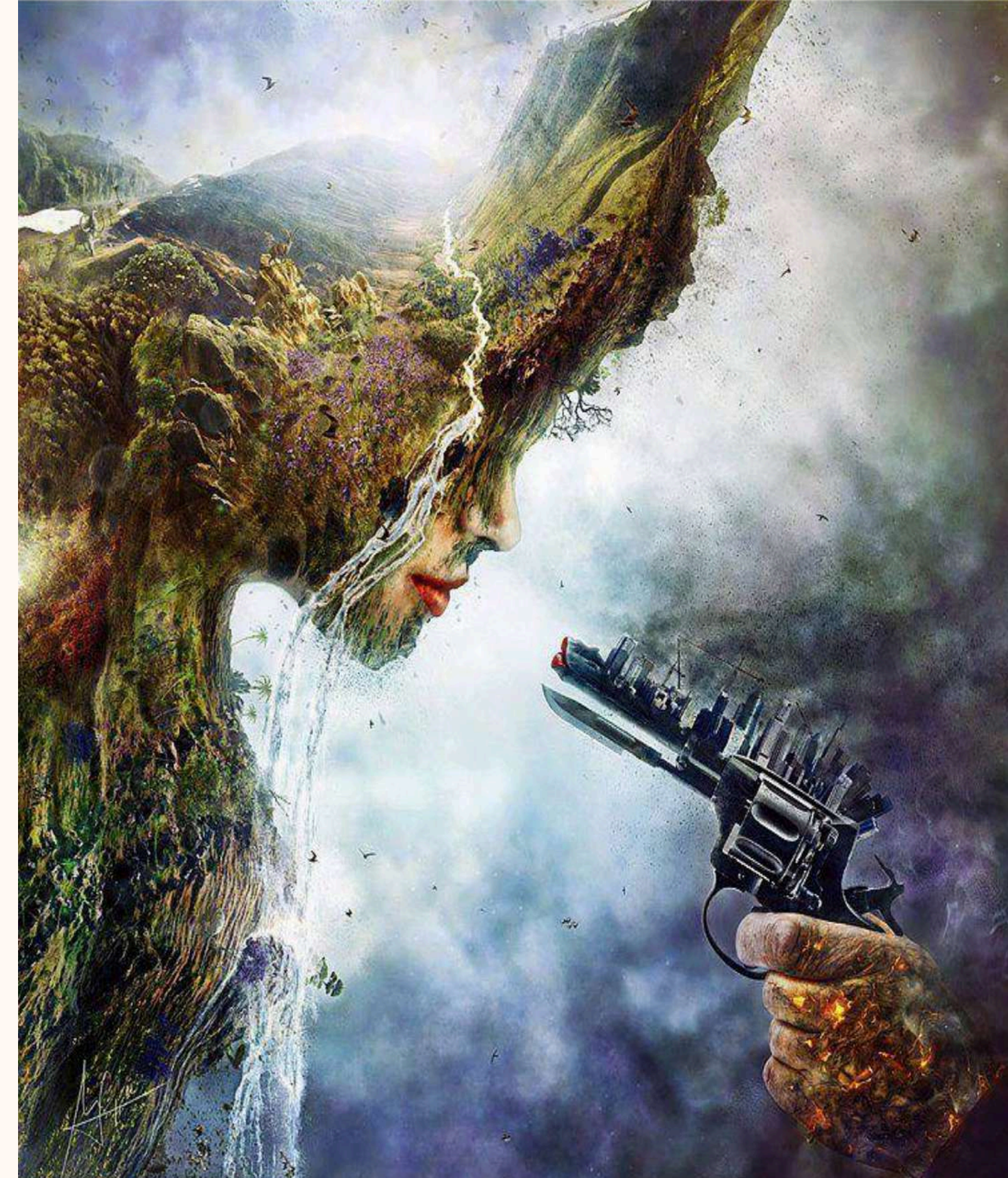
WE ARE NOT DOING VERY WELL

Climate, biodiversity, wars....

Democratic fragmentation, extreme social and environmental injustice....

Food insecurity, work insecurity, institutional distrust....

Public health, loneliness, loss of belonging.....



SOCIAL CRISIS

More than 1 billion people worldwide are living with a mental health condition (WHO, 2025).

Nearly half of people in OECD countries will experience a mental health problem during their lifetime. Depression and anxiety account for around 60% of diagnosed mental disorders (OECD Health Policy Studies, 2026).

We are facing **a crisis of relationships** - with self, others, nature, place, memory, land...

The gradual erosion of our capacity to relate....

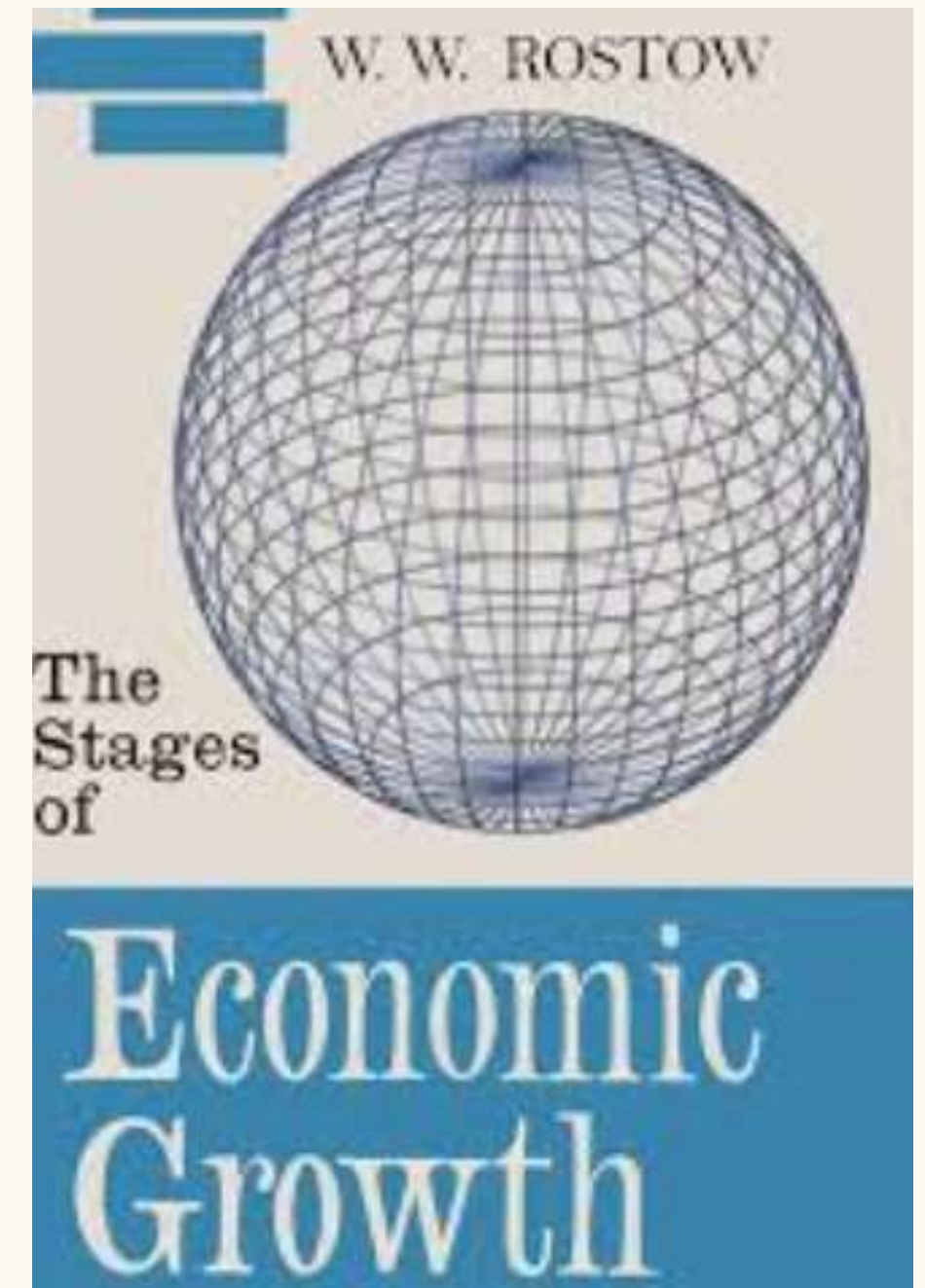
Image source: Artist Juan Genovés.



IS MASS-CONSUMPTION THE 'INEVITABLE' DESTINATION OF HUMAN PROGRESS?

Five stages of social growth – the traditional society, the preconditions for take-off, the take-off, the drive to maturity, and the age of high mass-consumption (Rostow, 1960)

"It is a central argument of this book that the sequence of economic development outlined here... **is not merely a description of what happened in the past, but is an analytical framework which can be applied to the future** — and that the road to modernization leads, in the end, to the kind of high mass-consumption society exemplified by the United States."





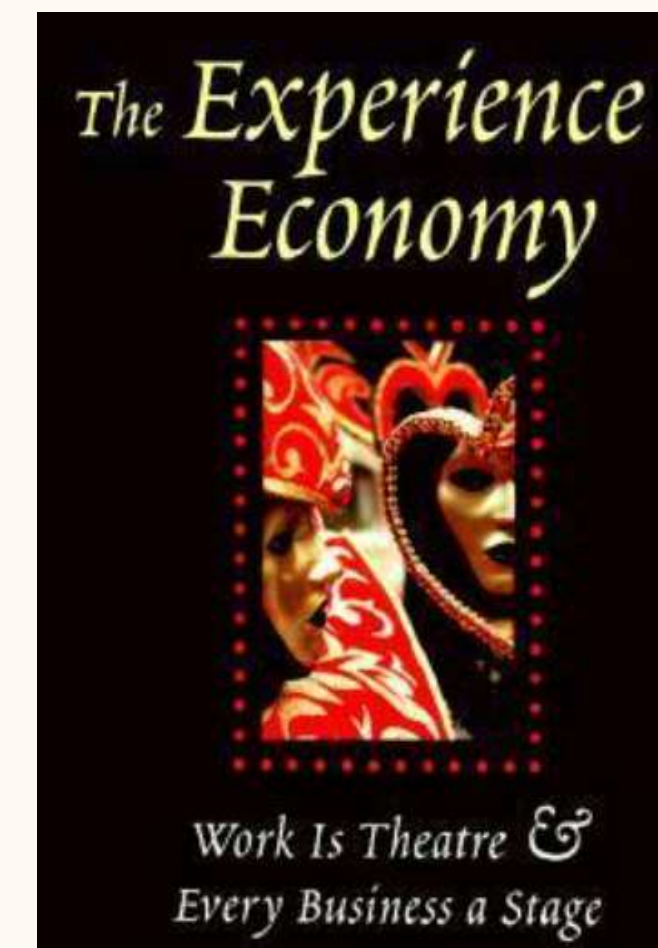
"Our exceptionally productive economy requires that we make consumption a way of life, that we turn buying and using goods into rituals, and that we seek spiritual and emotional fulfillment through consumption. We need things to be used up, burned out, worn out, replaced, and discarded — and all at an ever faster pace..."

Lebow, V. (1955). Price Competition in 1955. *Journal of Retailing*, Spring issue, 31(1).

A 'HUNGRY GHOST'

"The world has indeed become more intentionally experiential. Yet one point needs to be repeatedly emphasised: this all represents a fundamental shift in the very fabric of the global economy. Focusing on goods and services alone leads down the road of economic austerity. **Experiences are a distinct form of economic output, and as such hold the key to promoting economic prosperity**".

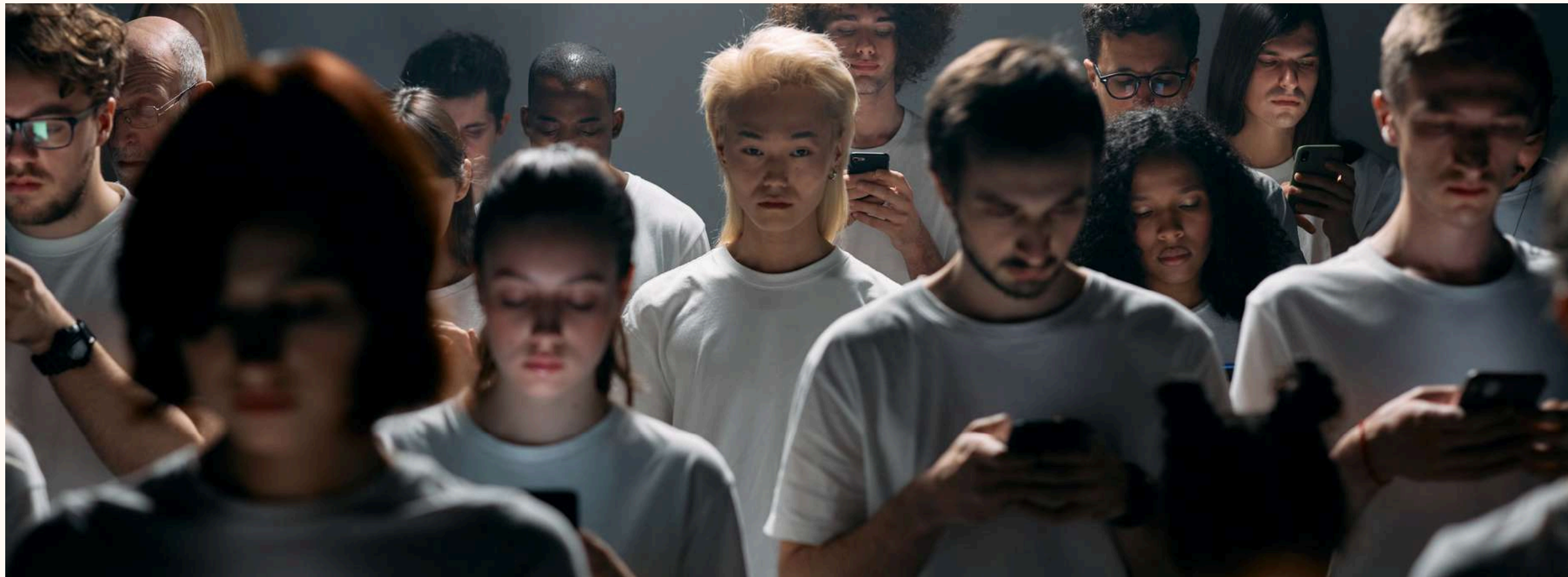
Pine and Gilmore (2013, p. 270), The experience economy: past, present and future. In Sundbo, J. and Sørensen, F., (Eds)., Handbook on the Experience Economy.



AI-FYING HUMANITY: ULTIMATE ALIENATION

'There seems to be a lot of anti-human energy around. Spotify's algorithm pushing AI rock bands. Vogue with its AI models. Netflix using AI for movies. All evidence of how the creative industries are fundamentally anti-creatives and want a world where the actual human talent is cut out the picture. A world of pure content and zero art. A world where capitalism serves only profits so a company like Duolingo can lay off its human creatives and feel that is just following the cost saving rules of business.

Well, I have a bit of power too. Not as much as them. But a little bit. So I am going to use my power to champion the power of being human at a time when it is needed' (Matt Haig, bestseller author).

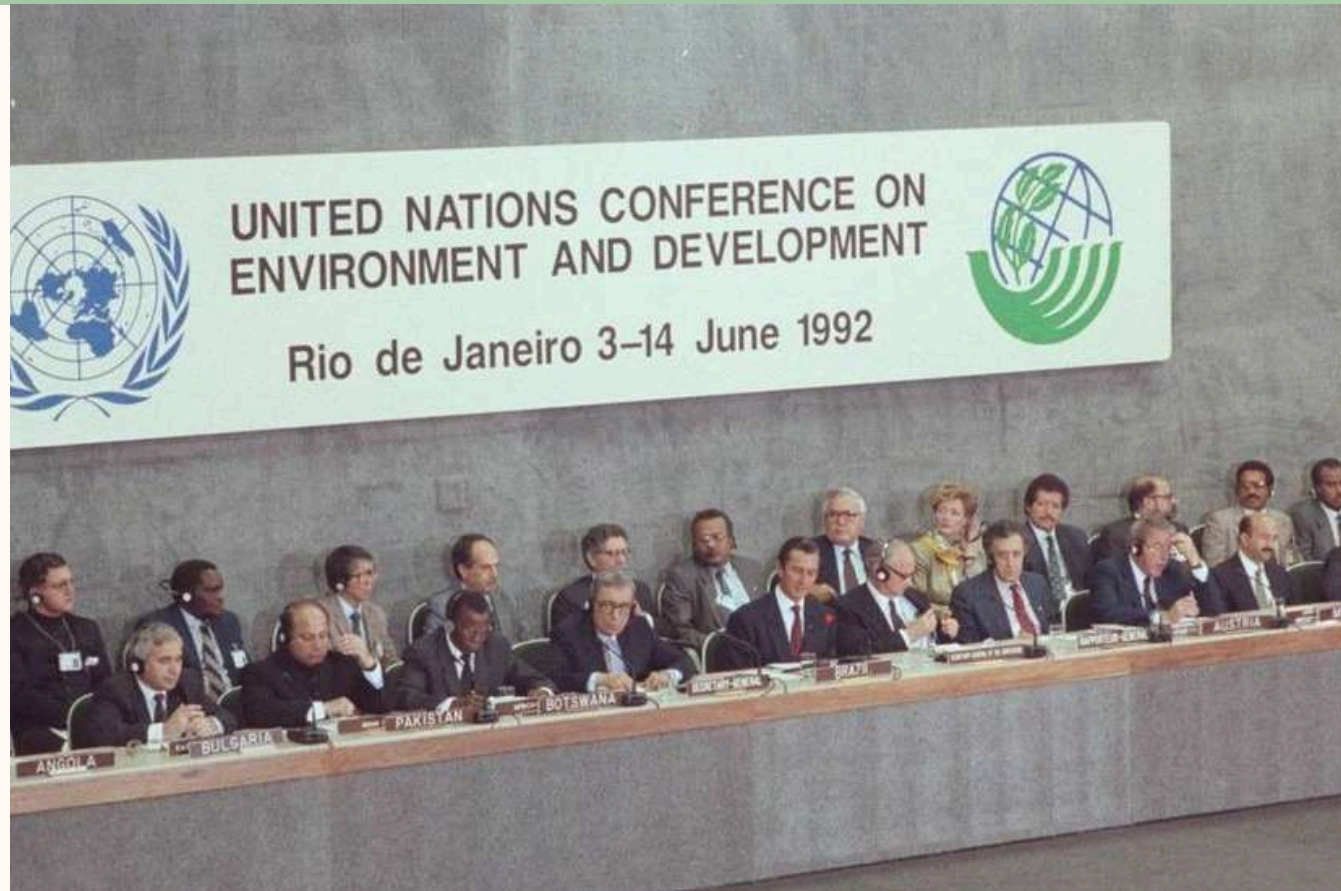


SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

- In 2024 around **733 million people** faced **hunger** =60% is in Africa;
- Plus about **2.3 billion people** experienced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2024 (State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report, 2025)
- The 38th annual Forbes (2024) list of the world's billionaires found a **record 2,781 billionaires with a combined net worth of \$14.2 trillion**. Two thirds of the list are richer compared to the previous year (e.g. Mark Zuckerberg, whose net worth increased by \$112.6 billion).
- In contrast – Croatia's GDP averaged \$45.51 billion from 1990 to 2024



DISCOURSE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



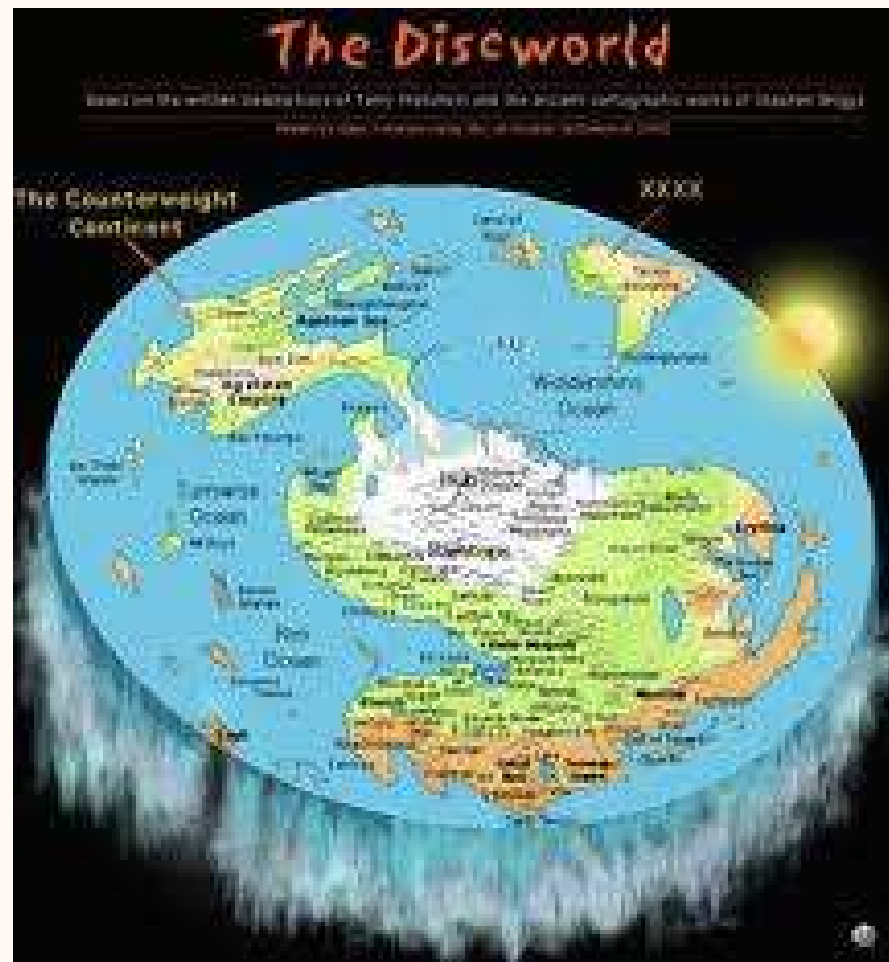
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



HOW DID WE GET HERE?



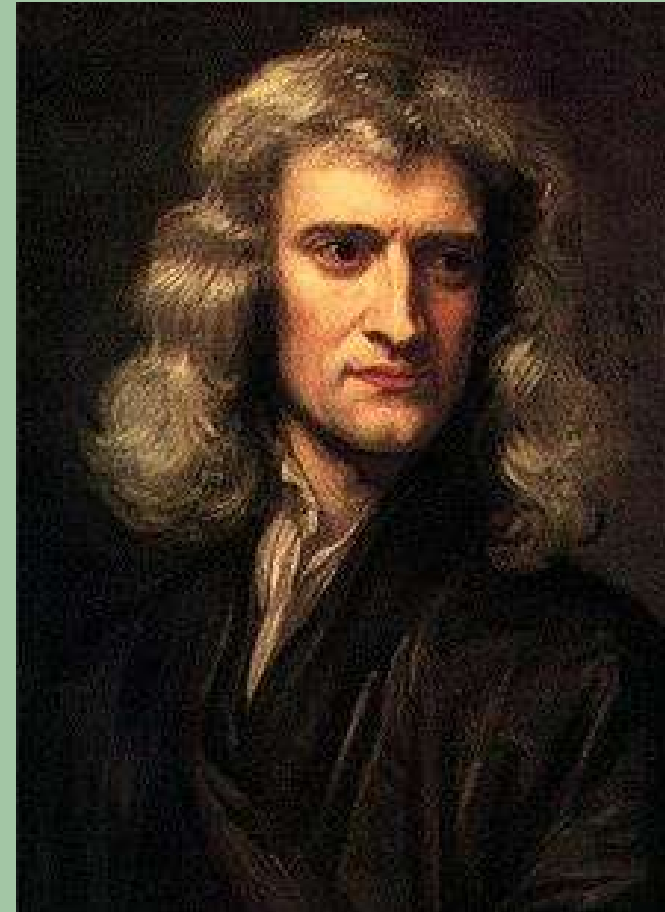
RENAISSANCE AND ENLIGHTENMENT IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE



SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION



Galileo Galilei
(1564-1642)



Isaac Newton,
*Philosophiæ Naturalis
Principia Mathematica*
(1687)
Mechanical view of the world

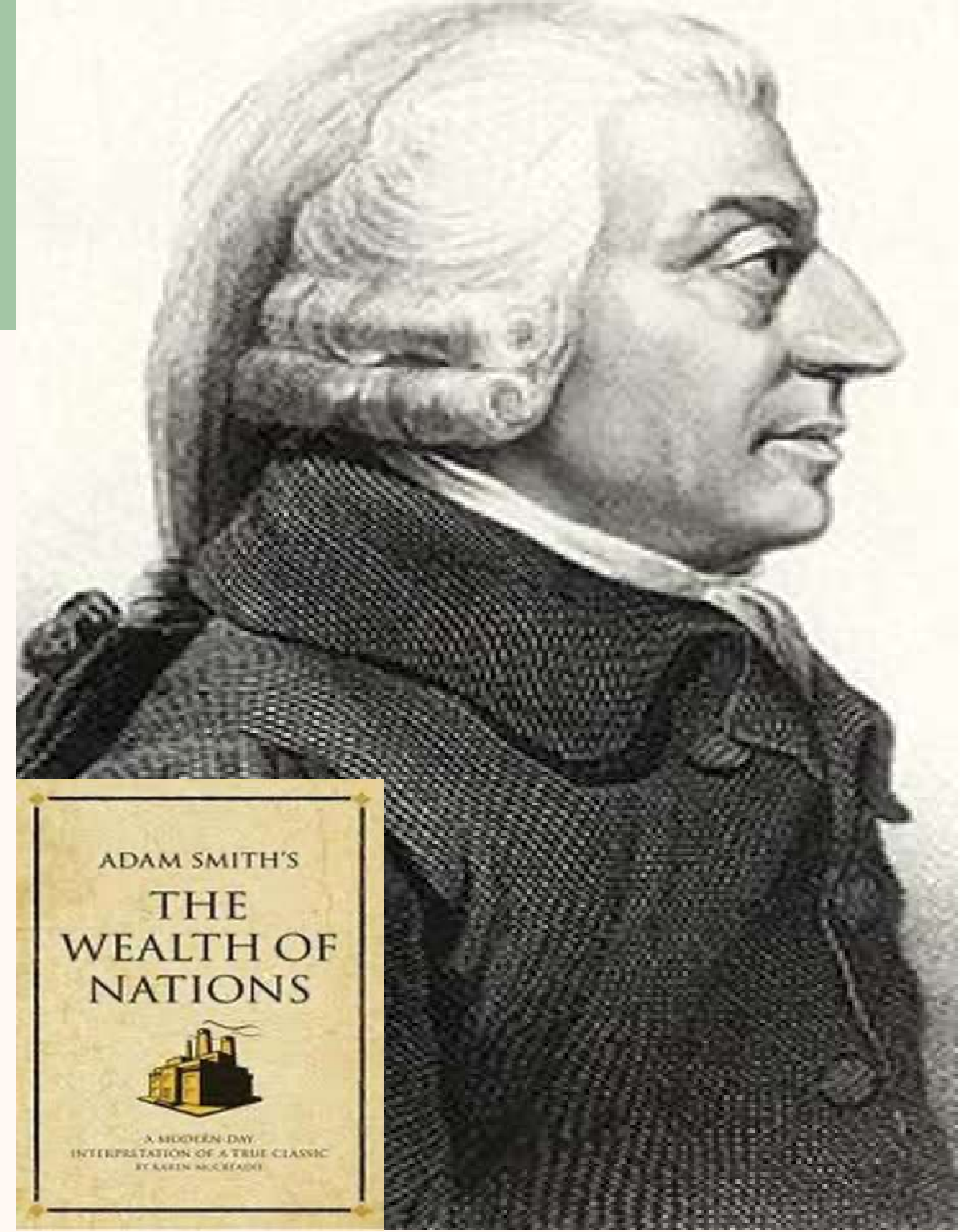


Sir Francis Bacon,
*Historia Naturalis et
Experimentalis* (1623)
SCIENTIFIC METHOD
Man must 'torture nature's
secrets from her to bring about
a more rational order'.

MODERN (UNCARING) ECONOMICS AND MARKET ECONOMY

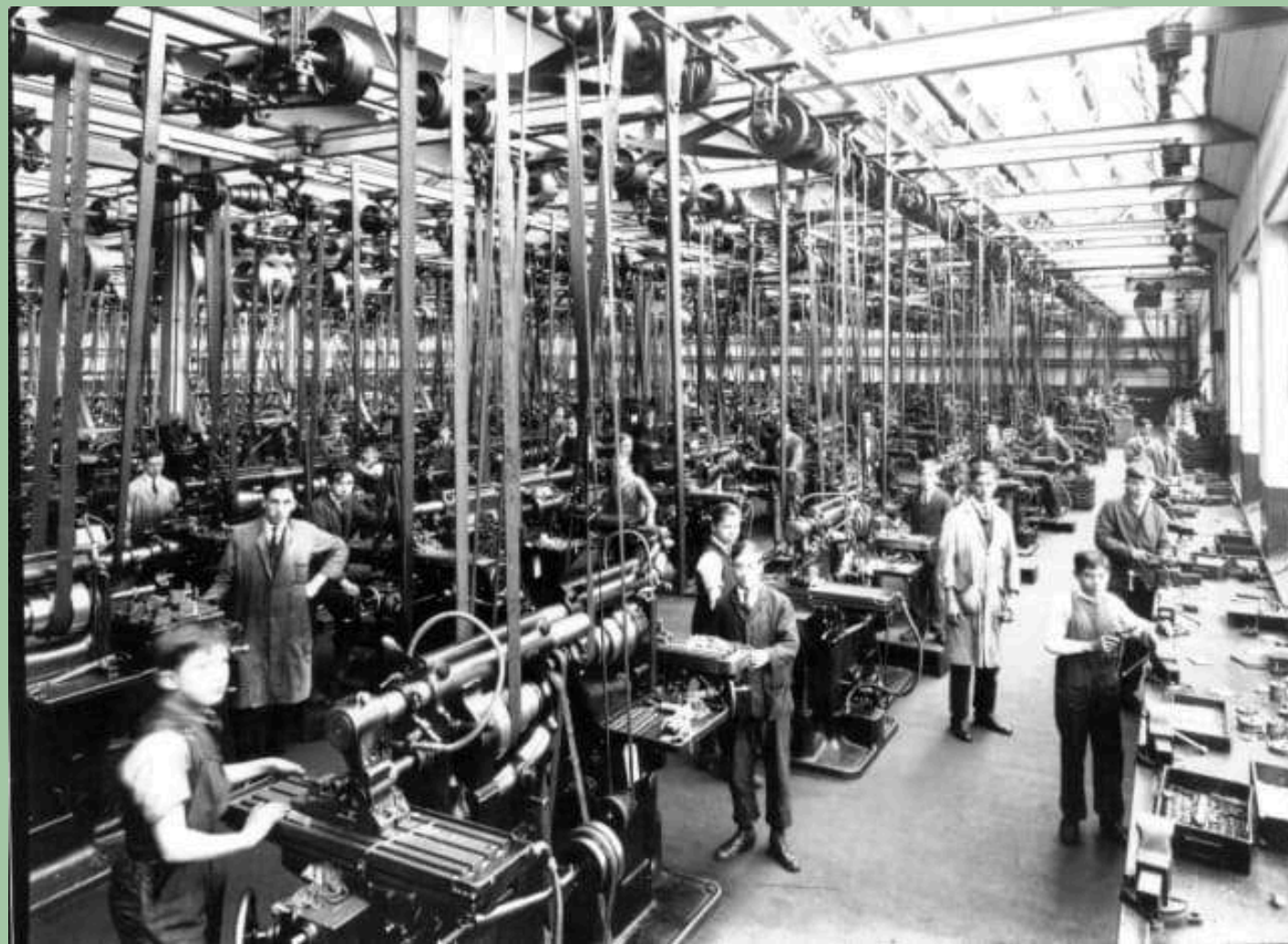
Adam Smith (1776) and his notion of 'INVISIBLE HAND'
and 'SELF INTERESTED INDIVIDUALS'

'It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.'

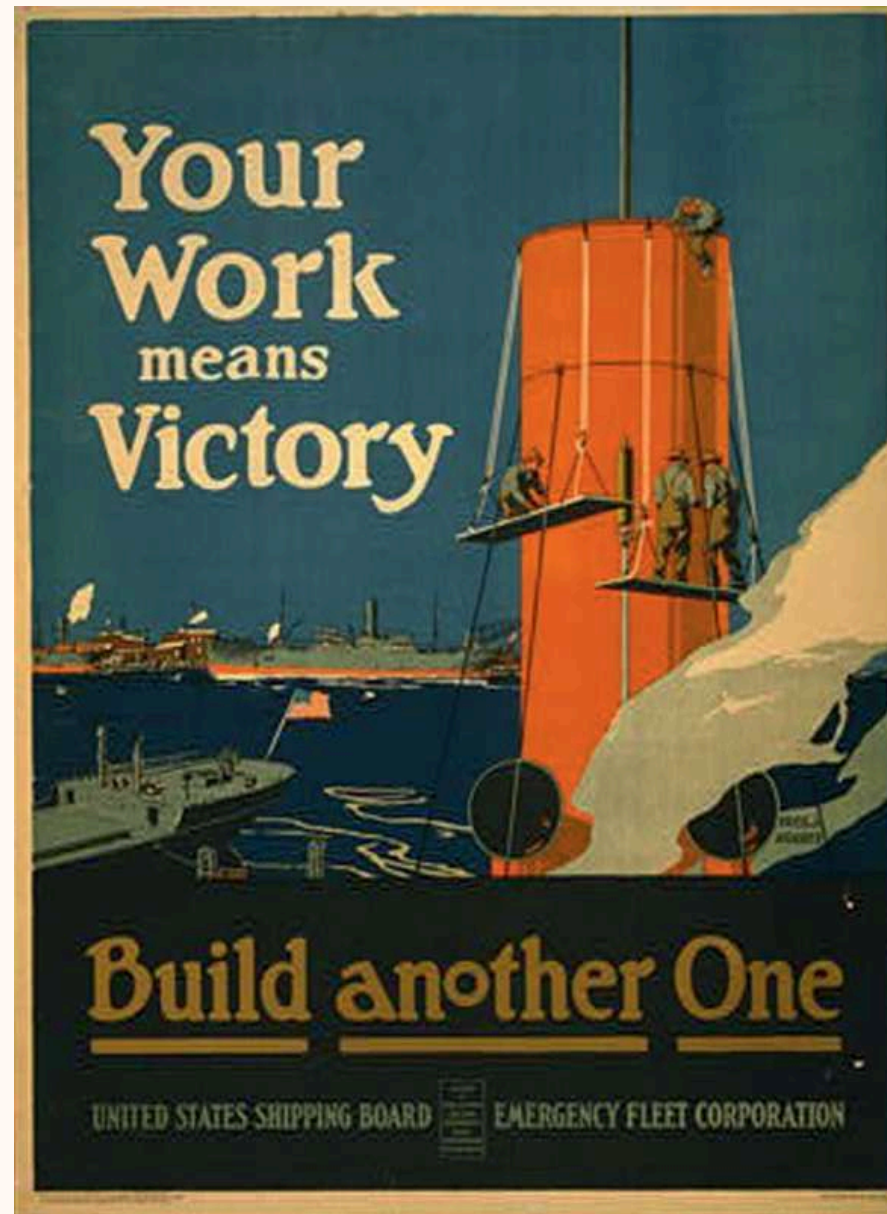




INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND MODERNITY: THE EUROCENTRIC THESIS OF PROGRESS



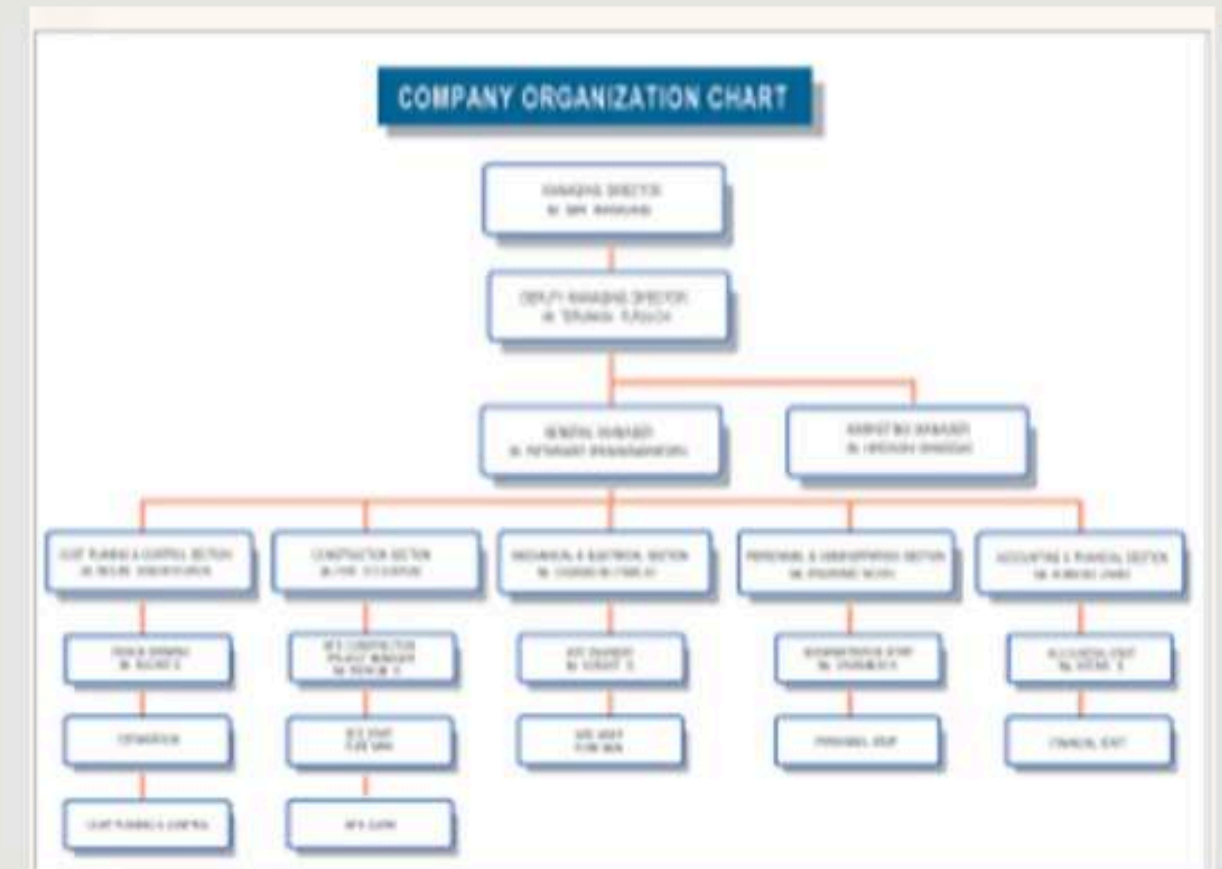
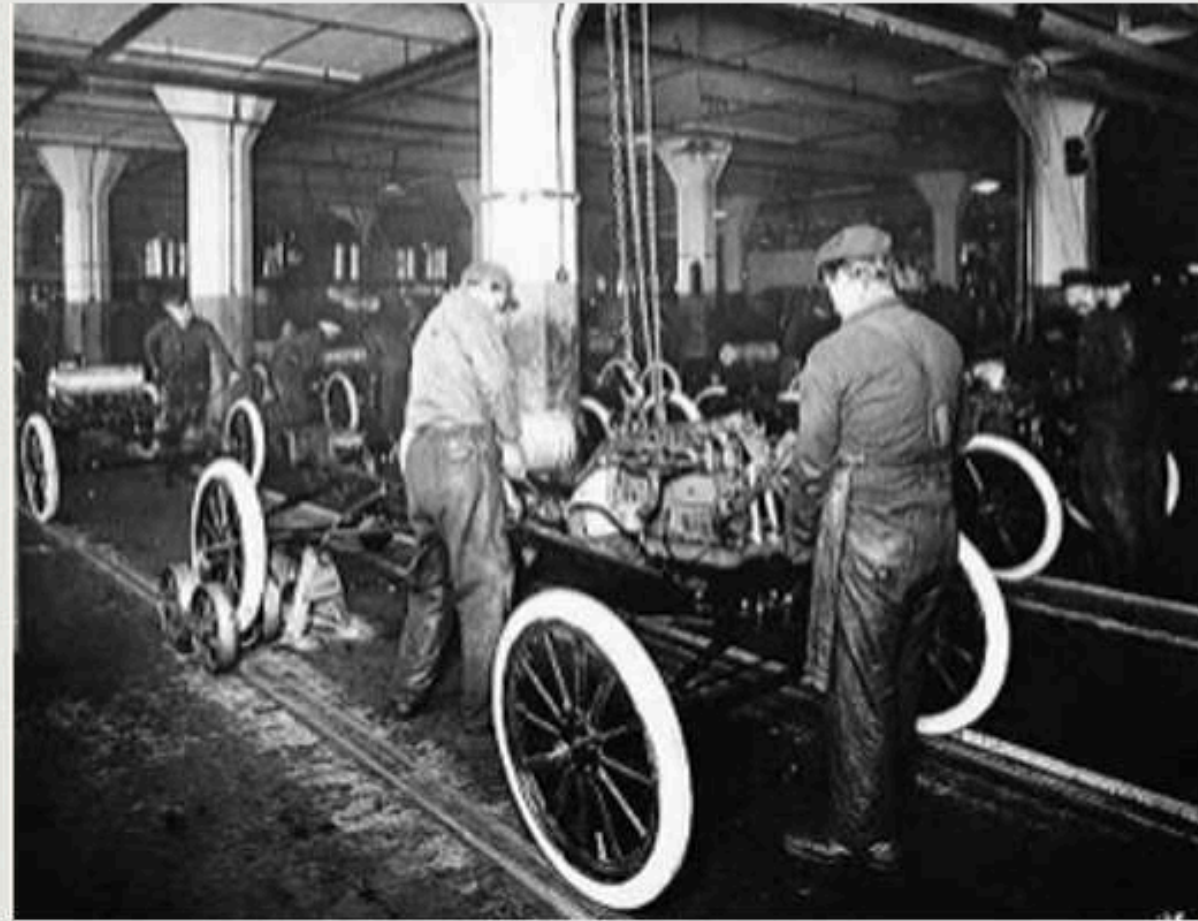
TOURISM AS AN INDUSTRY?



It borrowed its operating model from manufacturing

BASED ON
ASSEMBLY LINES &
NUMBERS OF
OUTPUTS

Focus: efficiency & productivity
- producing more for less





HOMOGENIZATION

Hotels

Resorts

Restaurants

Shopping malls

Services

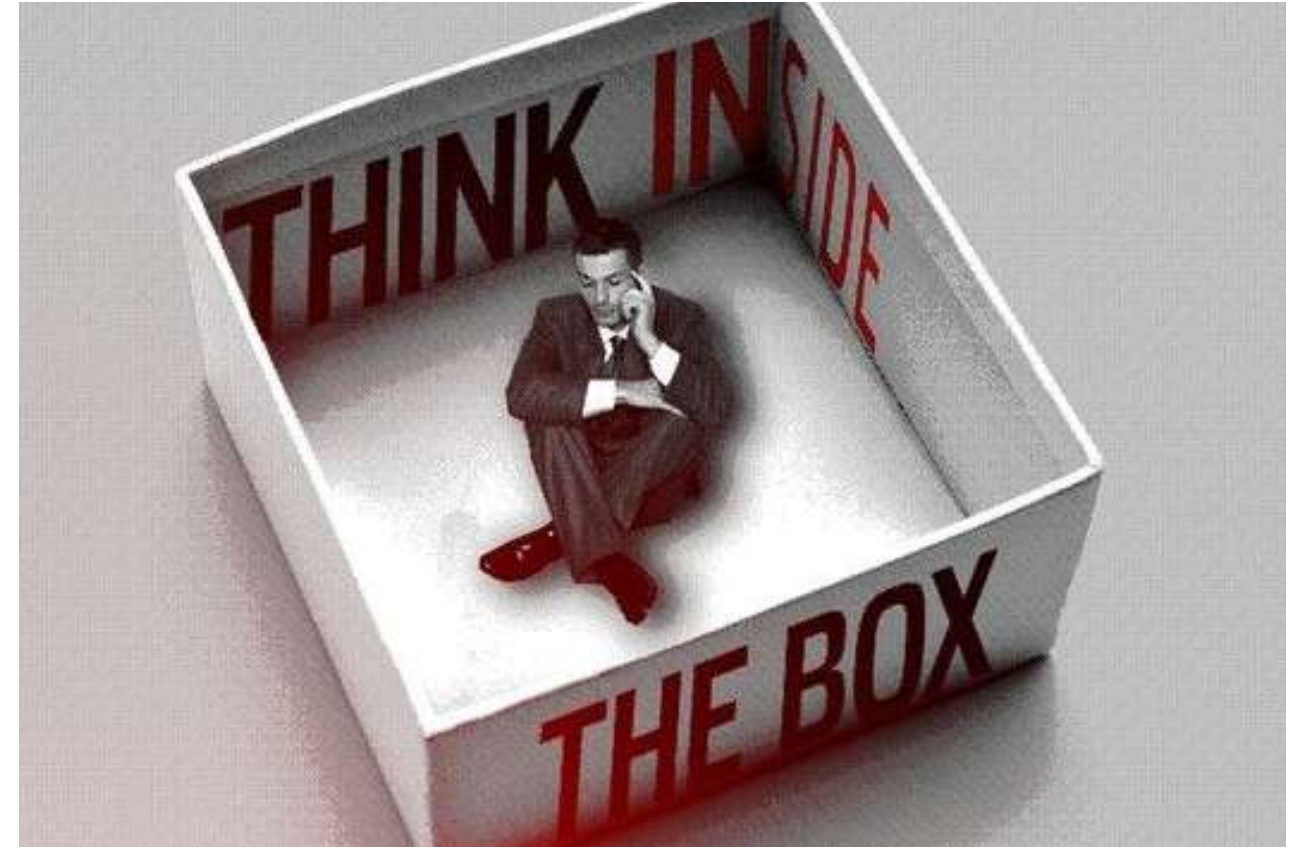


HOTEL BOX(ED) WAY OF THINKING



Key question:

Can we think outside the box when so many of our social concepts and assumptions are taken for granted?



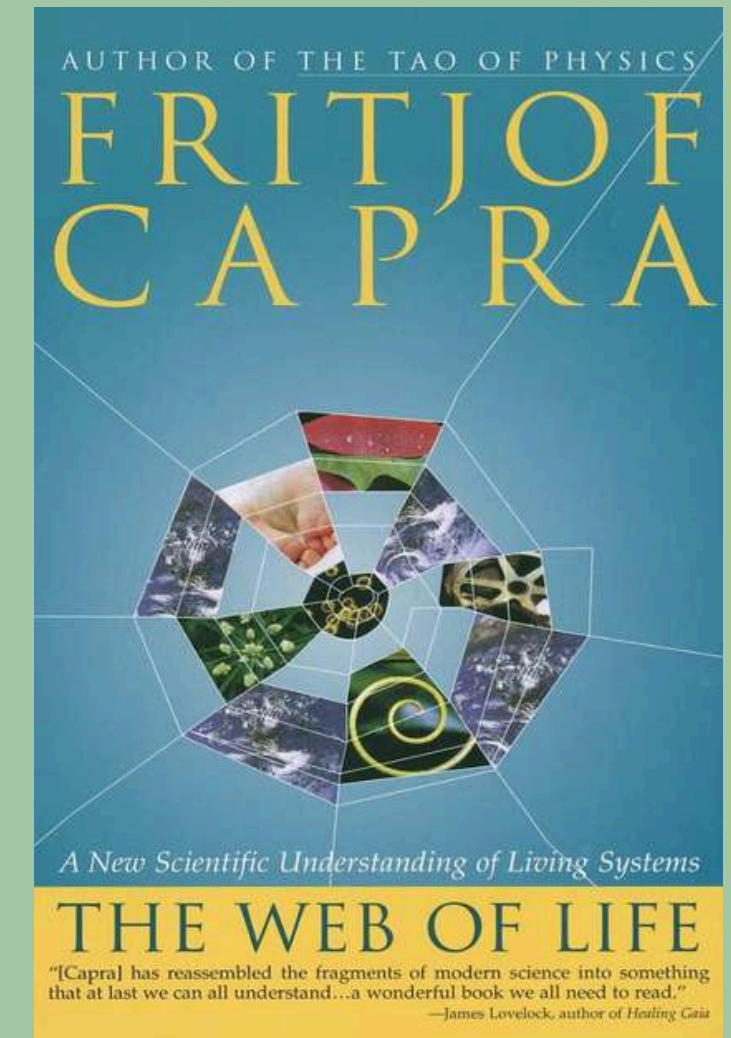
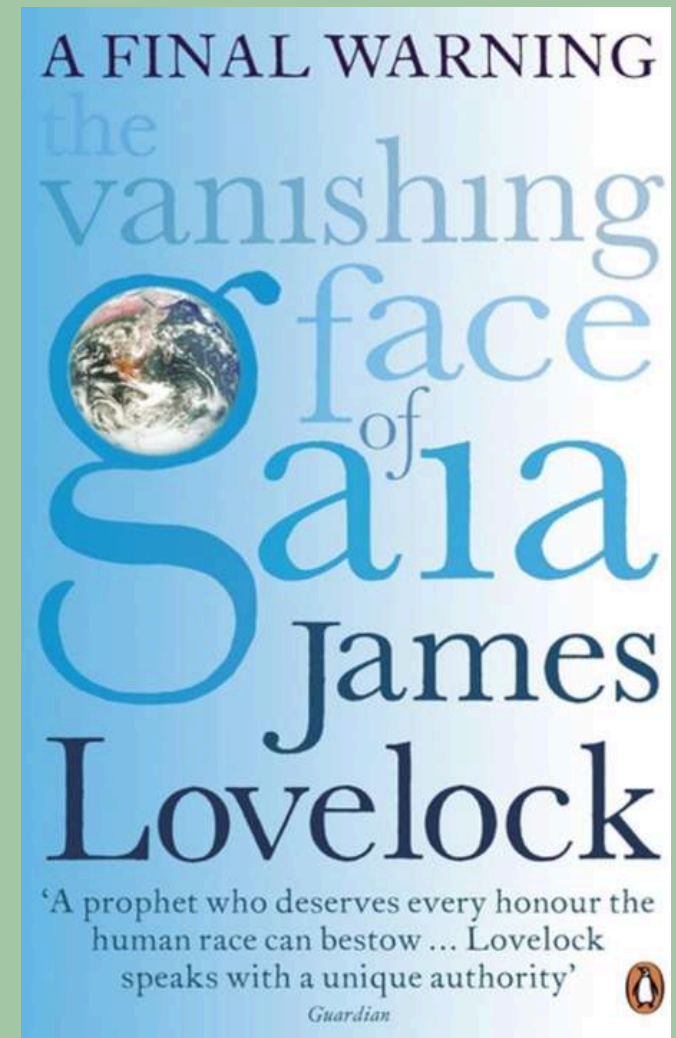
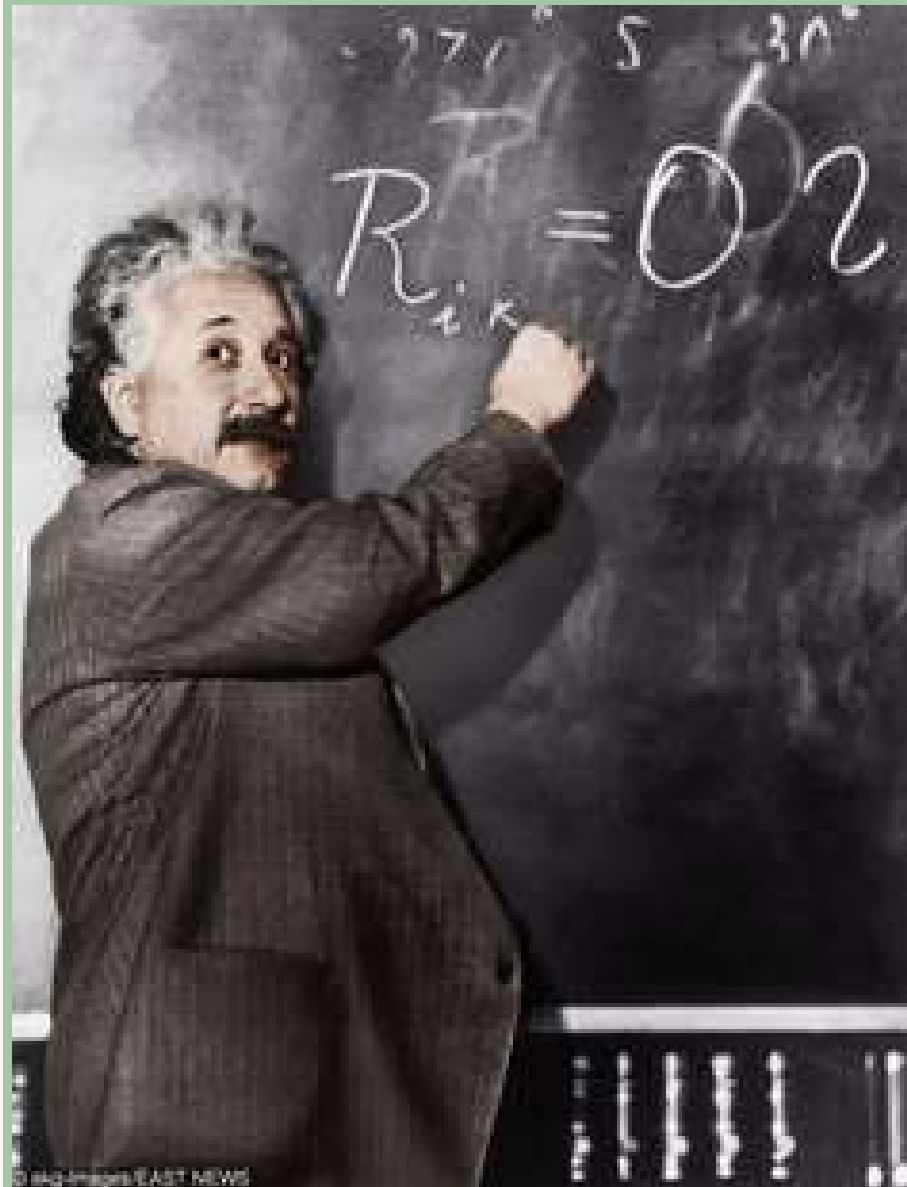
WE HAVE TO QUESTION OUR MIND-SETS

The significant problems we have - cannot be solved at the same level of thinking with which - we have created them.

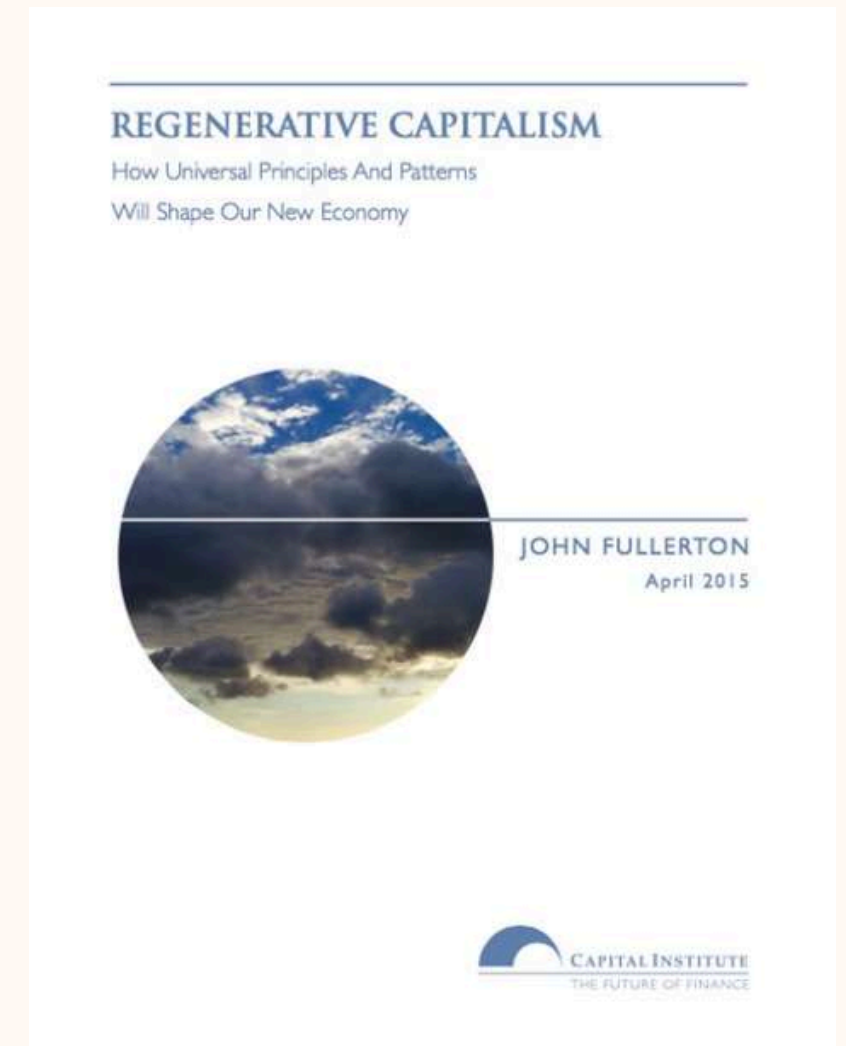
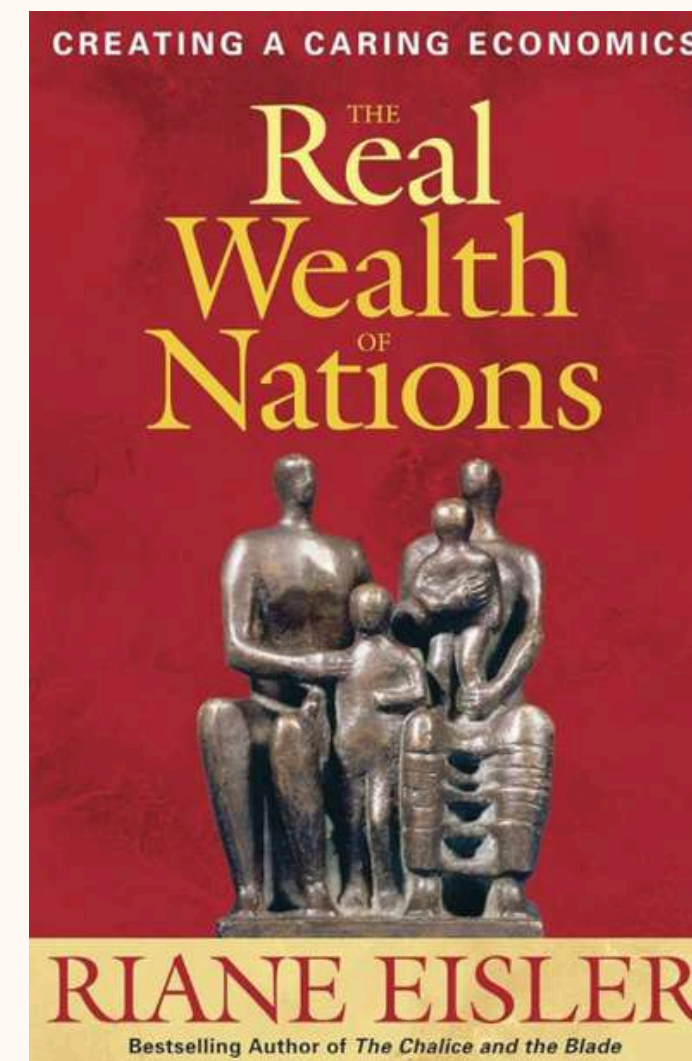
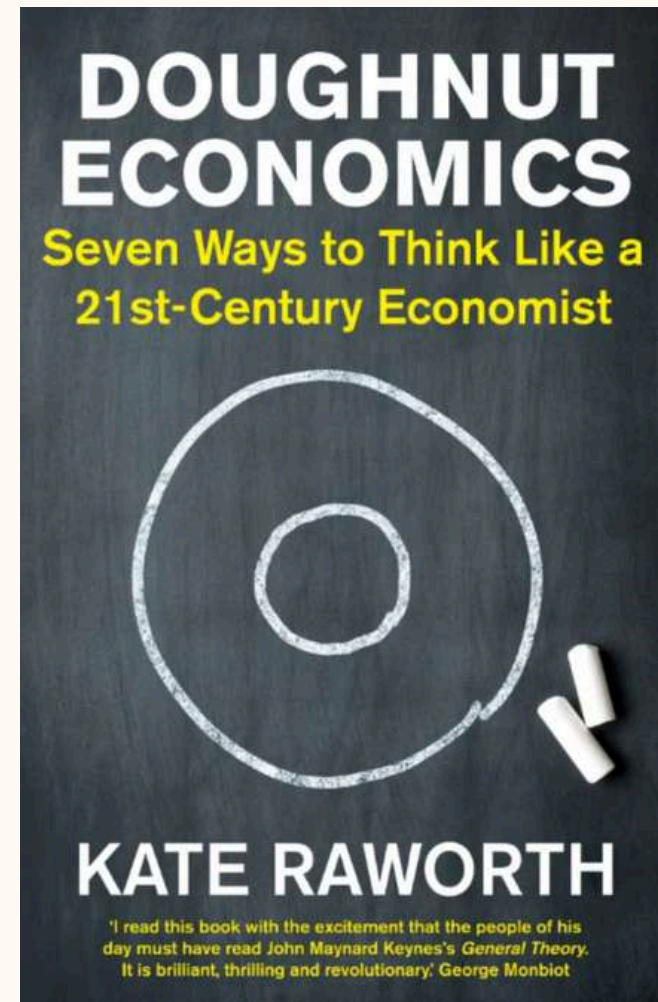
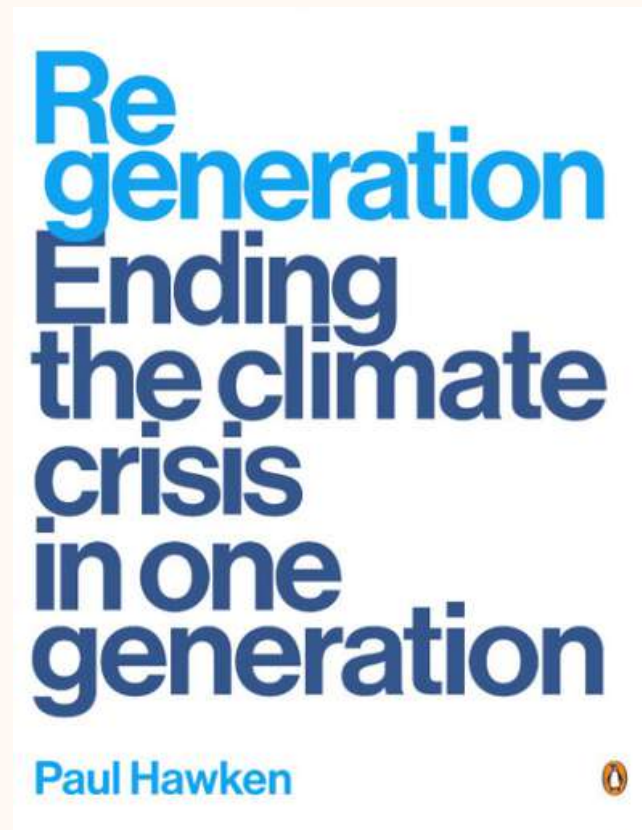
Albert Einstein



QUANTUM PHYSICS AND GEOPHYSIOLOGY



CARING (CIRCULAR) ECONOMY

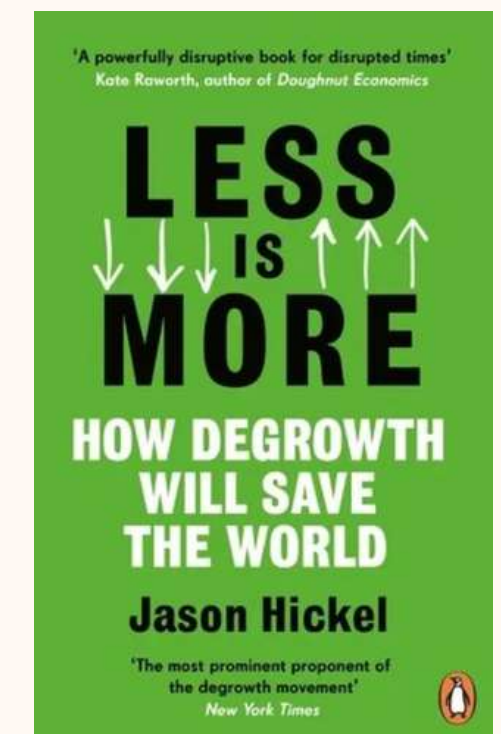


RE-CLAIMING OUR HUMANITY

“When capital has bumped up against limits to profit-growth in the past, it has found fixes in things like colonisation, structural adjustment programmes, wars, restrictive patent laws, nefarious debt instruments, land grabs, privatisation, and enclosing commons like water and seeds. Why would it be any different this time?

We need to evolve beyond the dogmas of capitalism to a new system that's fit for the twenty-first century. An economy that's more just, more caring, and more fun. An economy that will not only lift us out of our current crisis, but also restore our sense of connection to a world that's brimming with life.

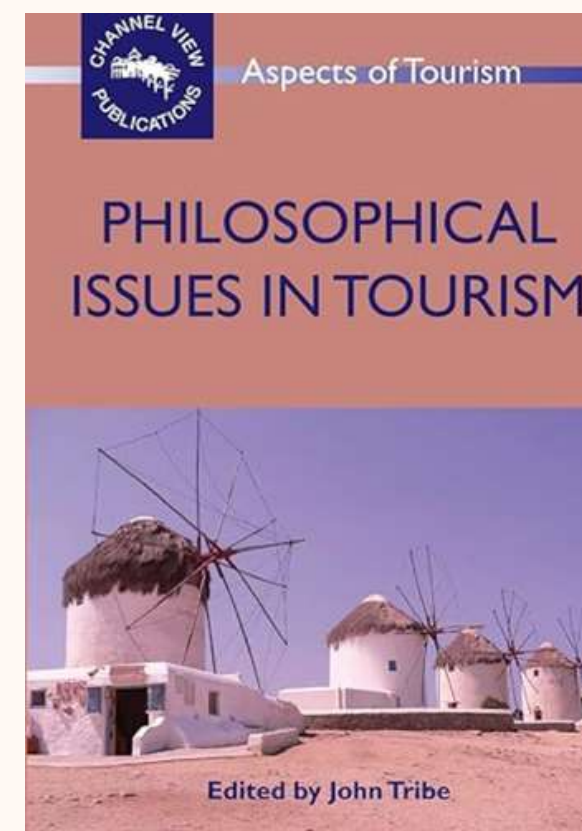
By taking less, we can become more.”



TRANSMODERNITY: REMAKING OUR (TOURISM) WORLD

"In these works I have engaged with a broad range of literature that provides us with many signals and evidence of **an emerging and significant paradigm shift in our human evolution.**

To describe this shift, different authors use a variety of terms, such as the transmodernity paradigm (Ghisi); the transmodern philosophy of political liberation (Dussel); the Hegelian dialectical triad of thesis, antithesis and synthesis (Magda); the reflective/living-systems paradigm (Elgin); partnership model of caring economics (Eisler); relational global consciousness and biosphere politics (Rifkin); love ethics (hooks); and the circularity paradigm of interdependence (Steinem)....the reason why we do not hear much about this movement is because it is not centralized and coordinated under a single unifying name." (Ateljevic, 2009: 295; 2013)



CIRCULAR PARADIGM



"If we imagine ourselves as circles, our goal is not to defeat others, but to become whole – to complete ourselves. Progress lies in the direction we have not yet taken... Progress is the ability to appreciate.

If we imagine work structures as circles, the goal becomes excellence and collaboration, not competition. Progress then becomes mutual support and connection.

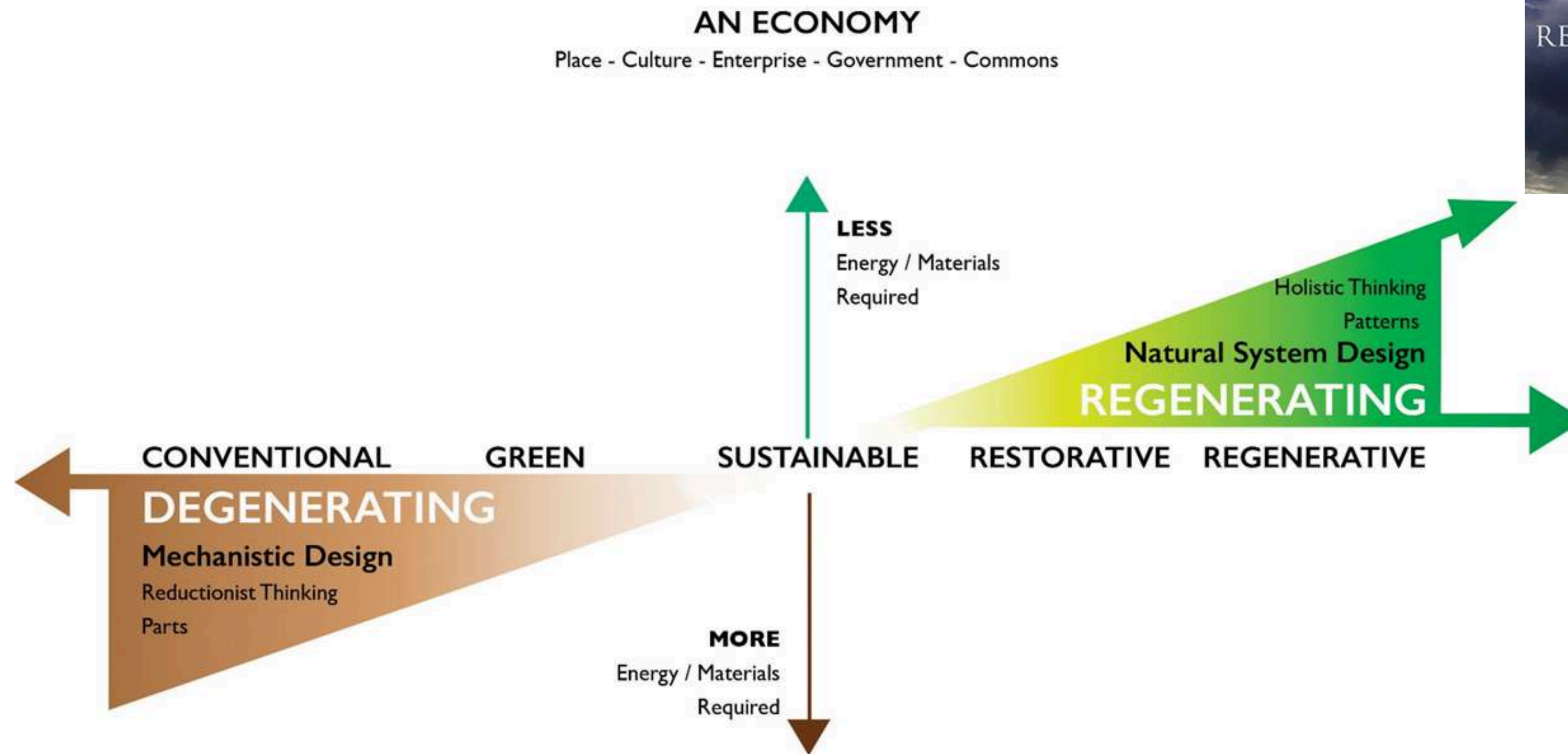
If we imagine nature as a circle, we too are part of its reciprocity. Progress means interdependence. If we respect nature and every living being as a microcosm of that nature, then we also respect the unique wonder of our own existence. And thus, we come full circle".

(Steinem, 1993:184)

REGENERATION RENAISSANCE



REGENERATIVE ECONOMY



Source: Fullerton, J. (2015) Regenerative Capitalism How Universal Patterns and Principles will Shape our New Economy, Capital Institute

WHAT IS REGENERATION?



<https://theregenerators.org>

TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF TOURISM

“

Once the grounds of the shared risk, vulnerability and interconnectedness of all humans occupying our Earth are acknowledged, the true dialogue with no patronising can be open. Or what Margaret Swain (2007) invokes in her hopes of critical cosmopolitanism for critical tourism studies that she ties into an idea of 'panhumanity' - combining a universalistic conception of human rights with cosmopolitan awareness of difference.

If the contemporary tourism phenomenon indicates the new step in development of human global consciousness, one can easily see the enormous political power of such shift in the public discourse of tourism.

Ateljevic, I. (2009). Transmodernity: Remaking our (tourism) world. In J. Tribe, (Ed.) *Philosophical Issues in Tourism*, pp. 278-300. Channel view publications.

”

TOURISM HELPING TO REGENERATE THE WORLD?

Designing Regenerative Cultures



Daniel Christian Wahl

I have to say, to my own surprise, that possibly the only industry with enough global reach and local trans-sectoral impact and power of influence to effect such an immense transition in a catalytic way is tourism.

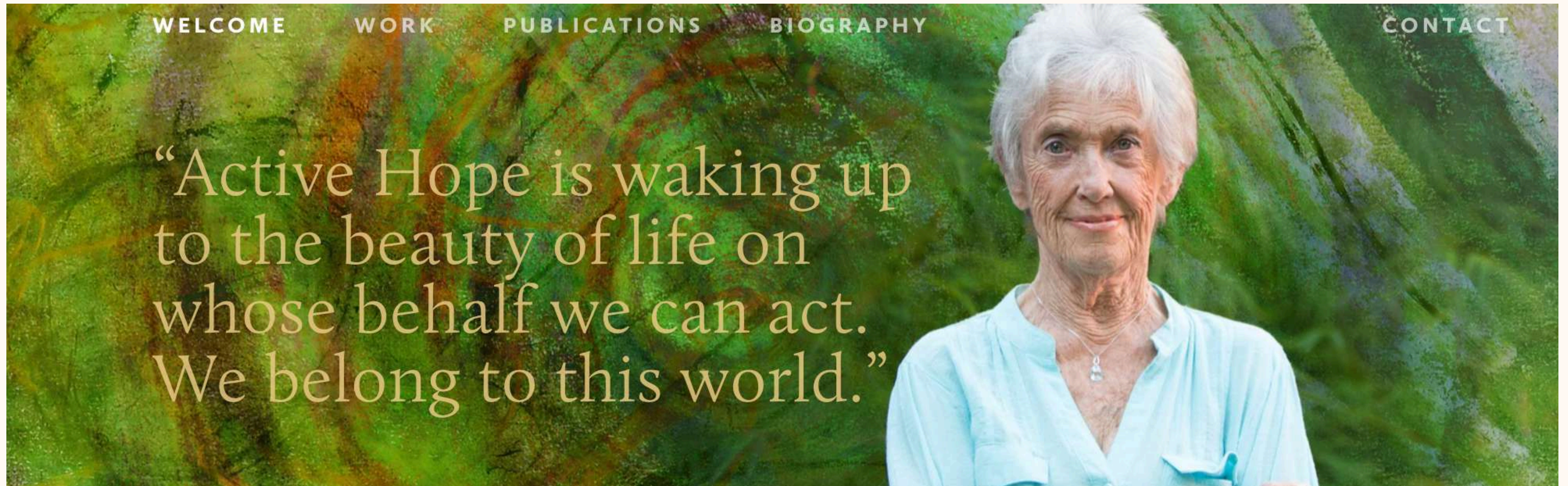
Wahl, D. C. (2019). Travel to tomorrow 1: how we travel will affect where we arrive. Medium.

HOW TO DO THAT?



Artist: Rene Magritte

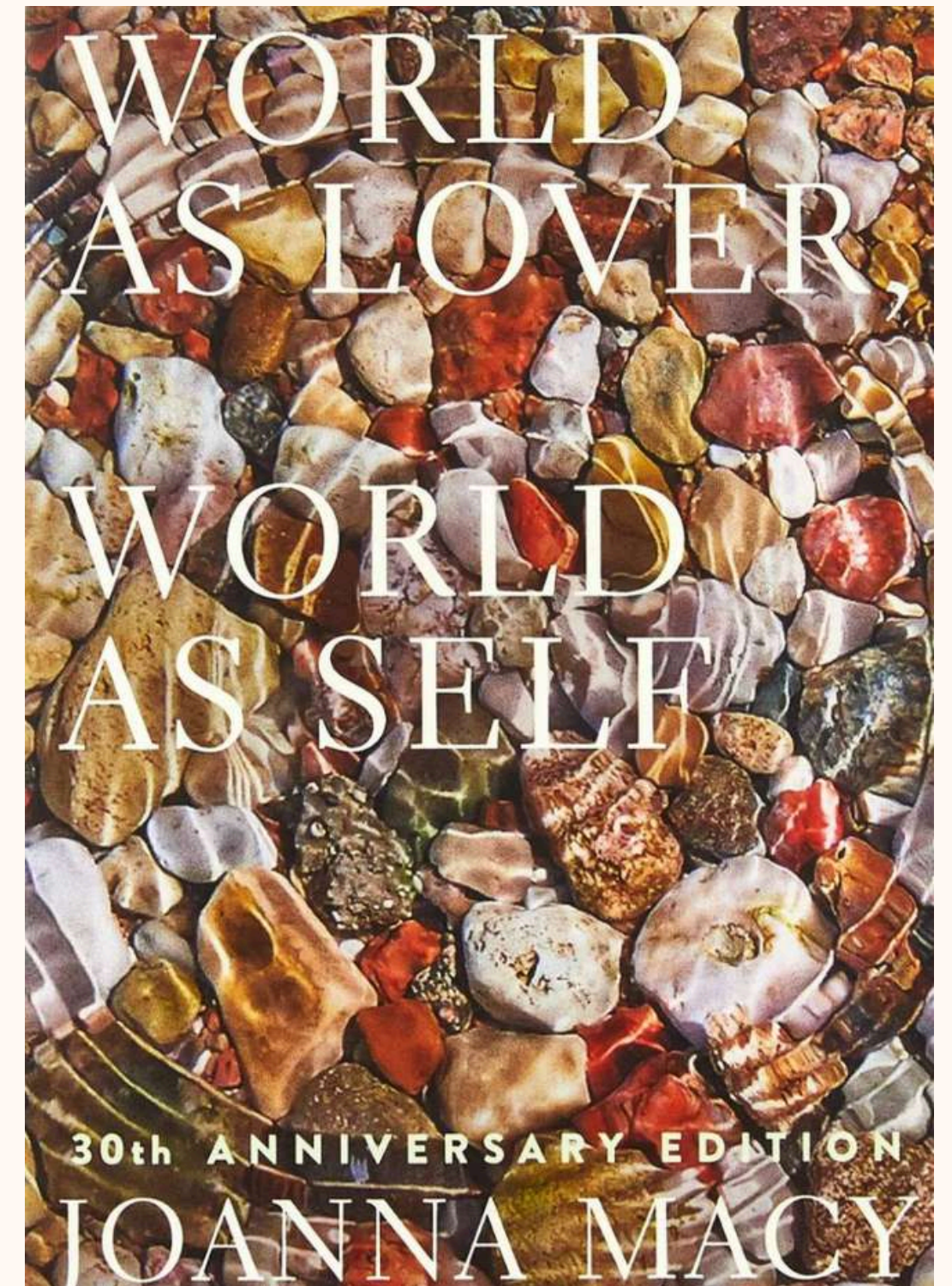
HOPE AS A PRACTICE ROOTED IN COURAGE AND IMAGINATION, NOT OPTIMISM.



GROUNDING OUR LIVES AND OUR WORK IN GRATITUDE

“We have received an inestimable gift. To be alive in this beautiful, self-organizing universe—to participate in the dance of life with senses to perceive it, lungs that breathe it, organs that draw nourishment from it—is a wonder beyond words.

It is an extraordinary privilege to be accorded a human life, with self-reflexive consciousness that brings awareness of our own actions and the ability to make choices. It lets us choose to take part in the healing of our world” (2021:12) .



THE FUTURE GROWS FROM DEEP ROOTS

'A society grows great when old people
plant trees in whose shade they shall
never sit.'

Greek Proverb



BACK TO MY OLIVE TREE

The olive tree was waiting for me.

As strength. As place. As patience.

From “talking the walk” to “walking the talk.”

.

My journey as a deep ecology worker and
social entrepreneur



FIRST STEP OF MY SOCIOPRENEURSHIP

VISION: Innovative, sustainable and transmodern island Murter



UNIVERSITY FOR OUR SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



SHE - SIBENIK HUB FOR ECOLOGY



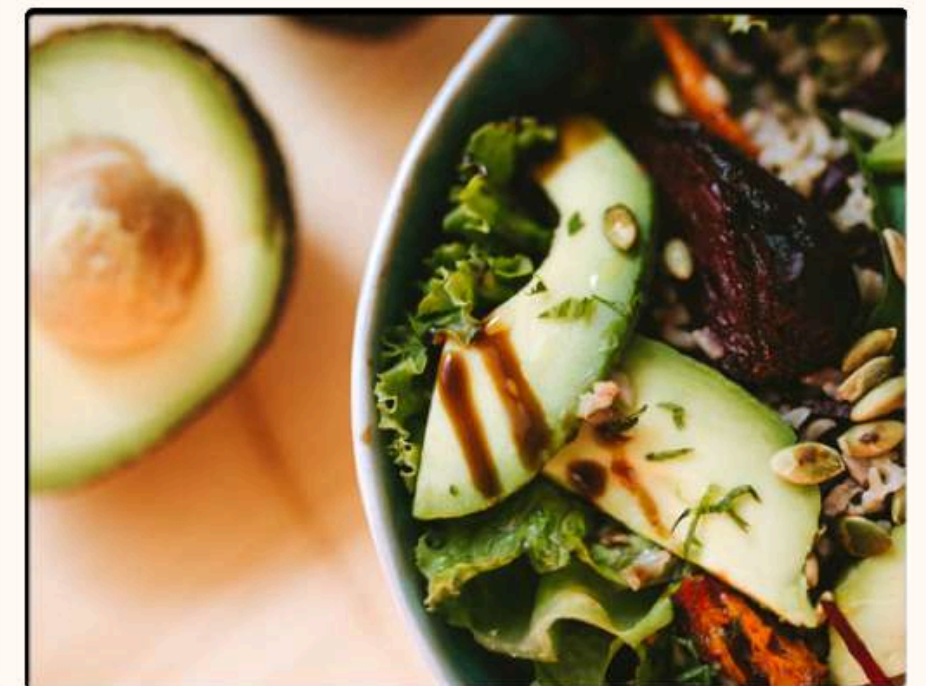
A PROTOTYPE OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE IN REGENERATIVE TOURISM

Value-driven, integral business -
connecting local, small scale, organic
farmers with hospitality sector

A multifunctional space for education and
raising ecological consciousness with
locals and visitors alike

Engaging local stakeholders in building the
place

Creating conscious enterprise that looks
after the well-being of employees, guests,
local community and the planet



TERRA MEERA - CENTER FOR REGENERATION AND HUMAN POTENTIAL



BRIBIRSKA GLAVICA - HERITAGE SITE



BE THE SEED OF CHANGE

Terra Meera aspires to regenerate her land; connect to local farmers and entrepreneurs in the region; bring life back to the community and become an exemplary of regenerative practice

During the pandemic planted 150 fruit trees

Regenerate Europe – international conferences

Ajmo Lokalno – digital platform to connect local farmers, chefs, restaurants and consumers
<https://ajmolokalno.hr/>

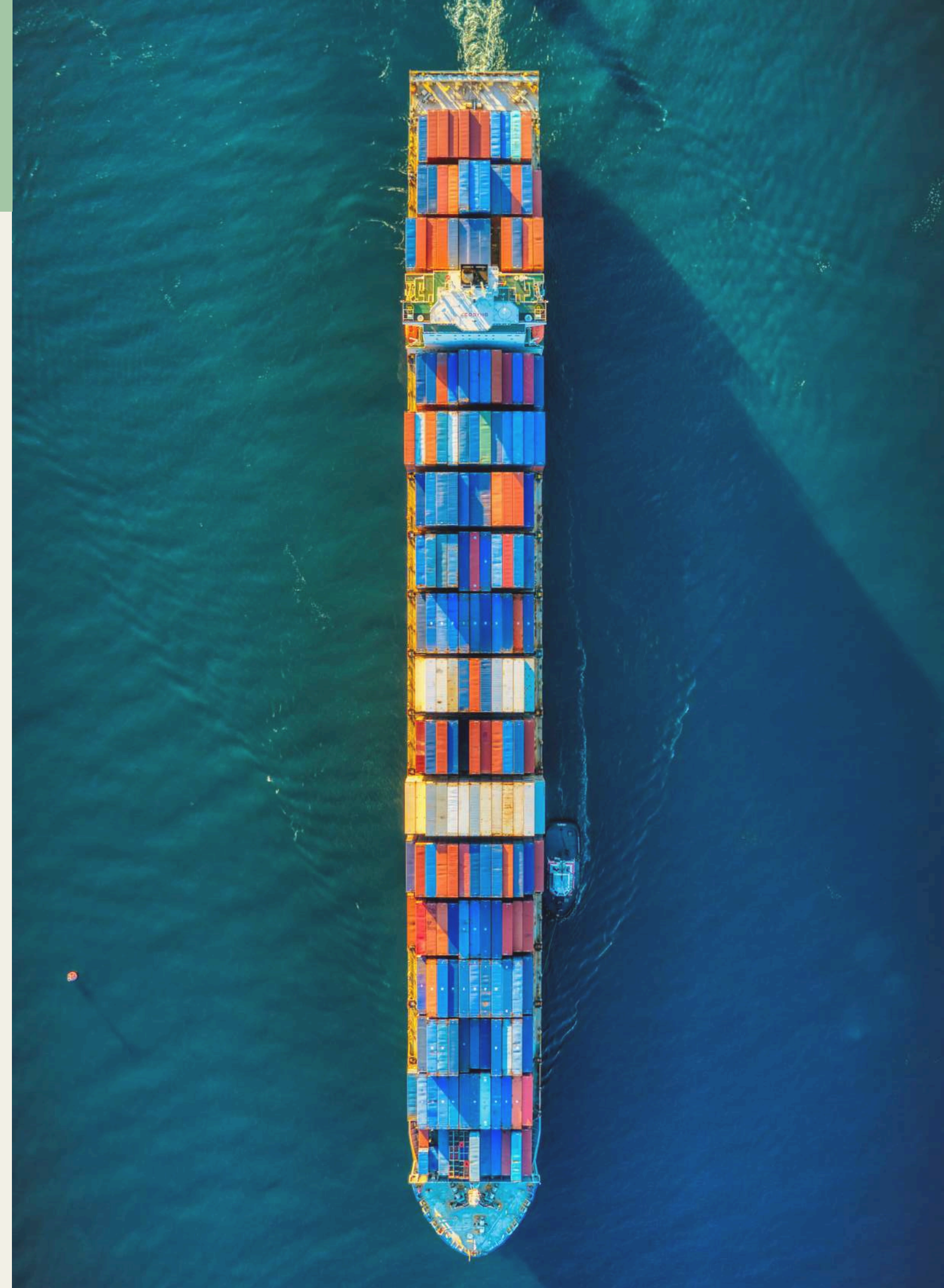


The Heart of the Garden

SYSTEMIC ISSUES

Food imports into Croatia have increased significantly since joining the European Union. While in 2013, Croatia imported food worth two billion euros, in 2024 imports increased to six billion, making us among the largest food importers in the EU.

Close to 90% of total food consumption in Croatia is imported (incl. food consumption by 21 million tourists that visited Croatia in 2024 (Ozimec, 2024)).



UNFAIR TRADE PRACTICES



Strong import competition from large retail chains and local intermediaries significantly reduces the bargaining power of producers.

By lowering purchase prices to the level of unprofitability, large chains and resellers put local producers in an unsustainable position on the market.

LET'S GO LOCAL!

[About](#)[Makers](#)[FAQ](#)[Log In](#)[Order](#)

Curated local gems from the land, sea and heart of Dalmatia, delivered.

Small-batch delicacies, cold-pressed olive oils, native wines, wild herb skincare, and artisanal crafts from small local producers of Šibenik-Knin county, Croatia. Delivered to your door in one, earth-friendly box.



Predstavljamo Ajmo Lokalno

Ajmo Lokalno



Ajmo Lokalno.

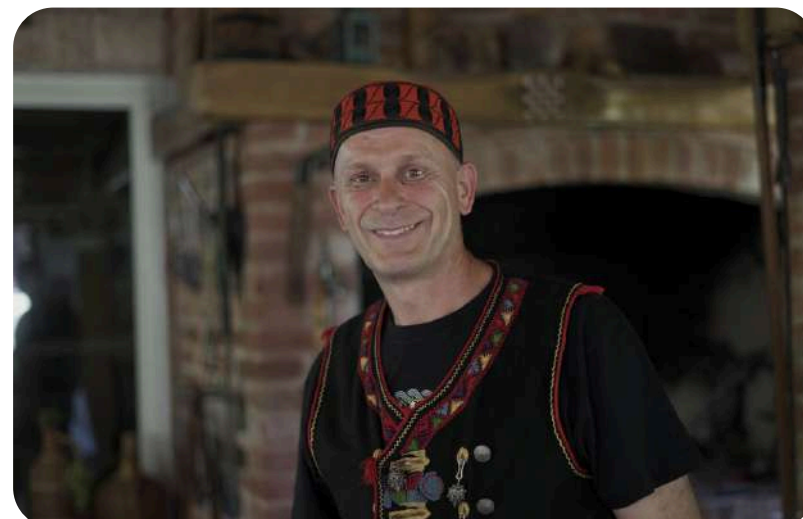


Watch on  YouTube

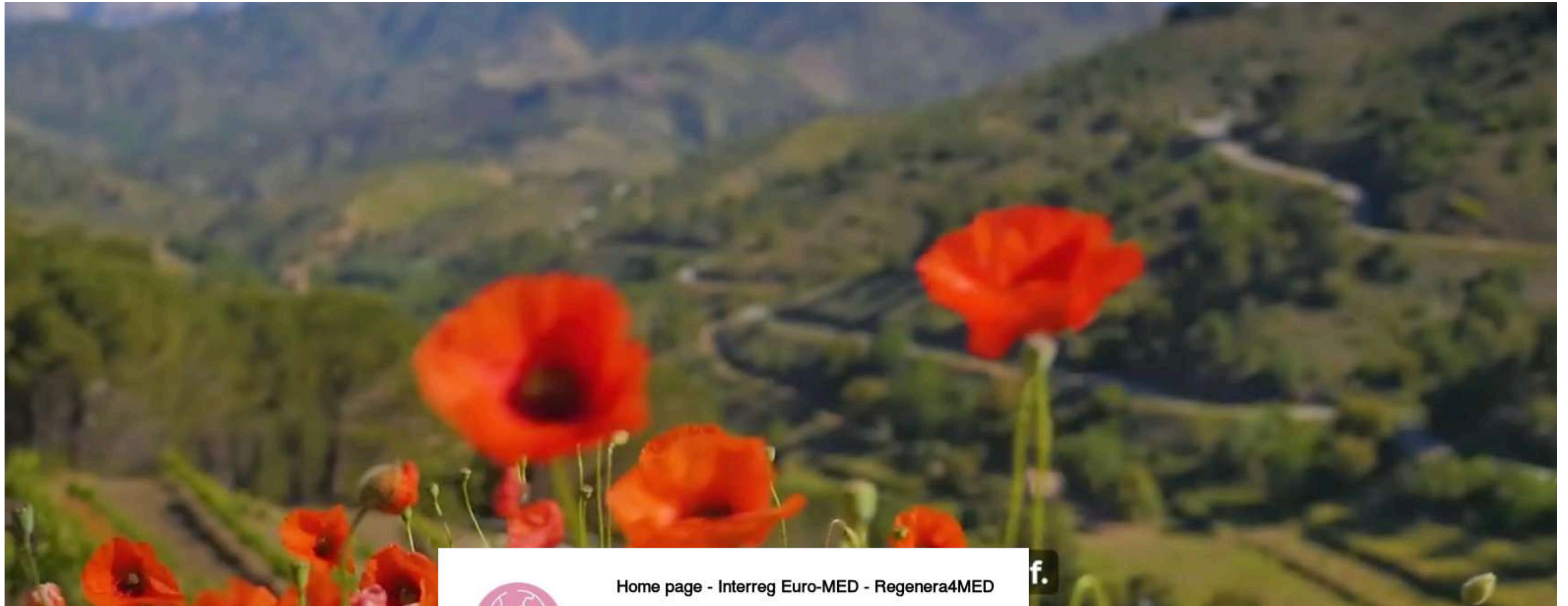


NOT JUST A FOOD PROJECT BUT A COMMONING PROJECT

Trust
Relationships
Reciprocity
Food sovereignty
Local agency



REGENERATE THE ISLAND OF HVAR, CROATIA



Home page - Interreg Euro-MED - Regenera4MED

MED GIAHS aims at the creation of a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) Sites network to...

● Interreg Euro-MED

f.

CO-CREATION OF VISION AND PURPOSE

The most important conclusion that emerged is that **tourism**:

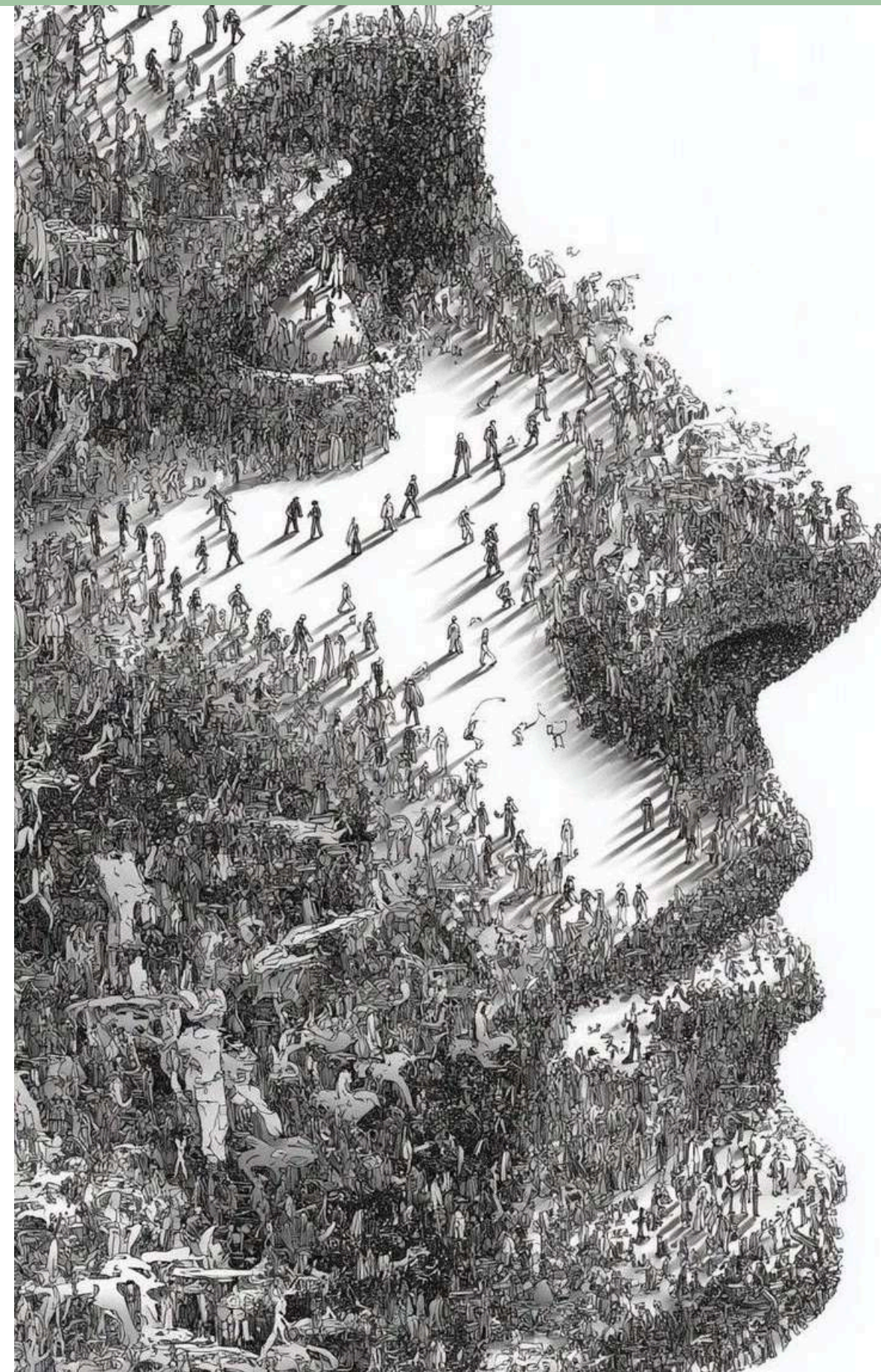
Shapes relationships between people

Changes people's relationship to space

Affects culture, economy and ecology simultaneously

In other words, tourism is not just an economic activity, but a system of relationships.

When these relationships are **healthy**, tourism can be **regenerative**. When they are damaged, it becomes **destructive** – regardless of financial indicators.



JOINT VISION AND PURPOSE

“Regenerative tourism in our community serves to raise awareness and empower the local community about the importance of Starogradosko Polje, agricultural regeneration and landscape preservation.

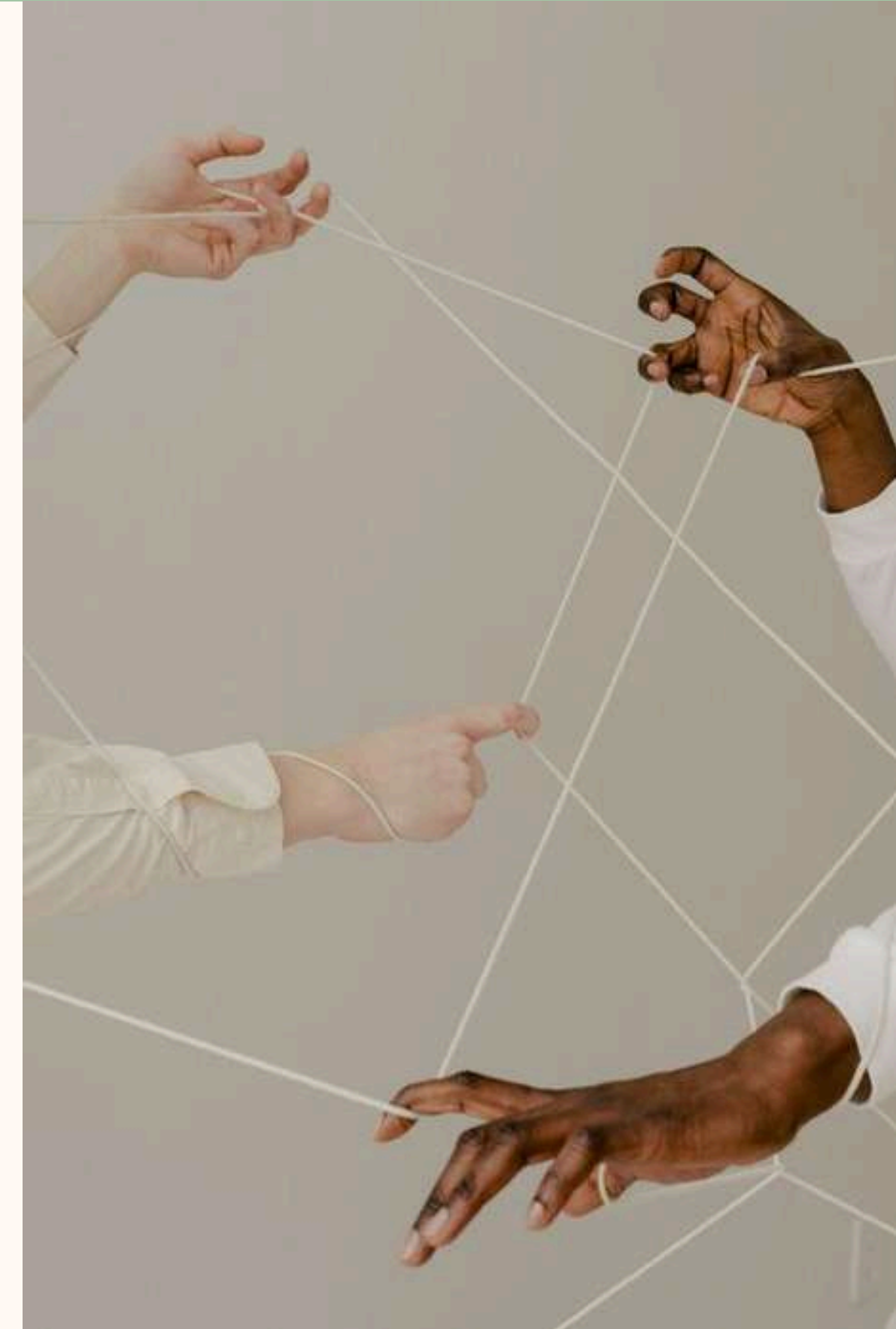
Tourism is an addition to life, not a way of life”.



FROM COMMONS TO COMMONING

Contemporary scholarship shifted attention from the commons as a resource to commoning as an ongoing social practice.

- David Bollier (2014) – the commons are 'less a noun than a verb'; commoning consists of everyday practices of cooperation, care, reciprocity, negotiation and shared responsibility.
- Silke Helfrich (2019) – commons are continually created through patterns of commoning; relationships matter more than ownership.
- Peter Linebaugh (2008) – highlights commoning as historical and cultural practice grounded in mutual aid, memory, celebration and collective responsibility.
- Major shift: from governing resources to **cultivating relationships**.



WHY CULTURE MATTERS?

Can we regenerate ecosystems without regenerating culture? Hardly.

Culture shapes:

food
land
identity
belonging
economy
places
stories.....

Cultural organisations become regenerative actors.



REGENERATION AND COMMONING

Commoning is a verb.

It is the ongoing practice of creating relationships, responsibilities, reciprocity and shared stewardship within living systems (web of life)

Regeneration is not itself the primary practice.

Commoning as **a relational practice** through which regenerative capacities emerge across tourism, food systems, cultural institutions, education and other domains of social life.



THE FEAR OF REGENWASHING?

Commoning is much harder to commodify.

Because commoning is not a product.

It is not a certification.

It is not a toolkit.

It is a way of relating.

And we know it and feel it when it's flourishing.



CULTURE AS RELATIONSHIP

Become a platform. Not simply a venue; **Build seasonal rhythms.**
Not isolated events.

Partner across the place. Food. Schools. Artists. Nature. Farmers.
Hospitality.

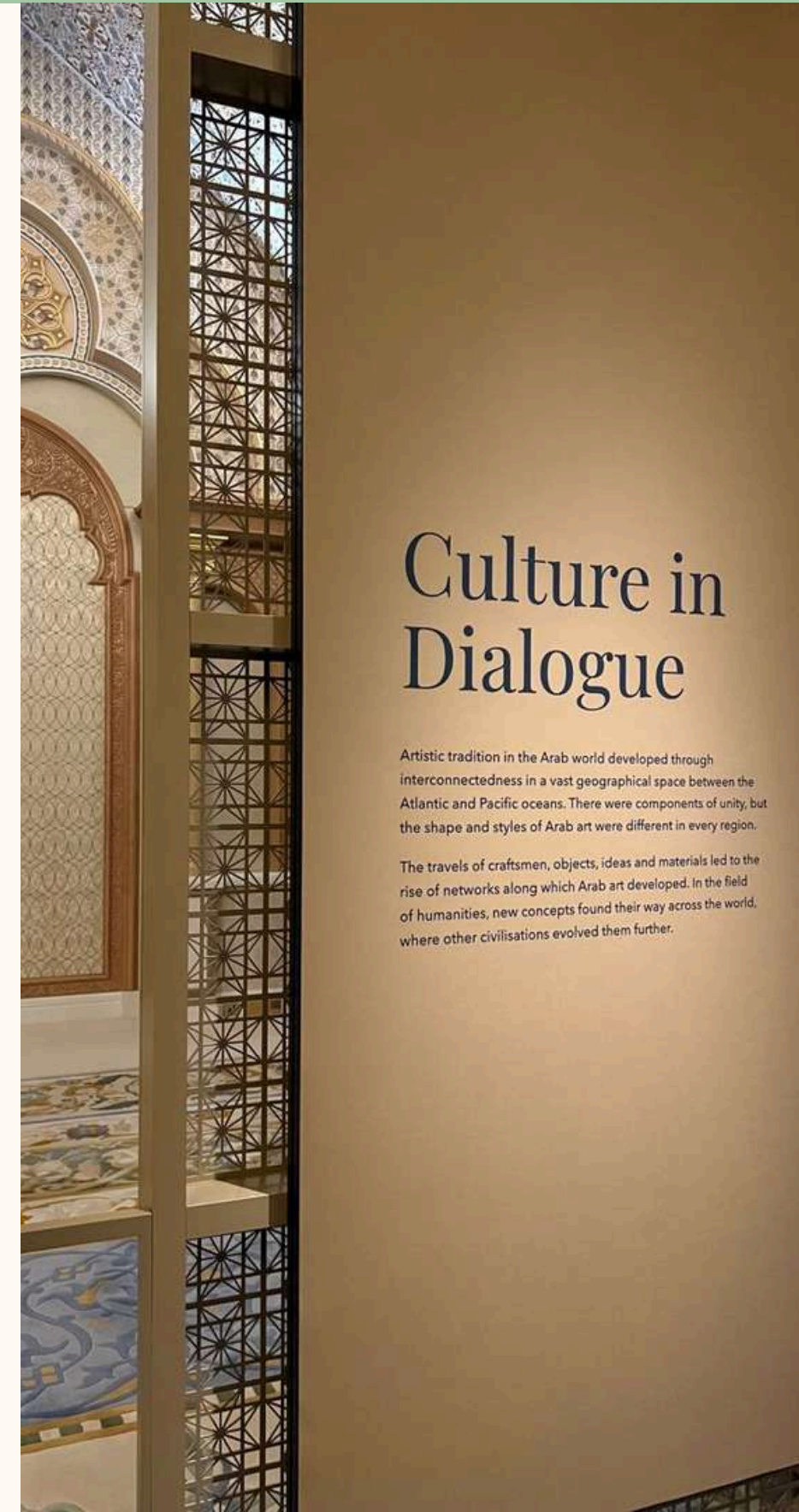
Create belonging.

"What conversation does our community need?"

"What celebration?"

"What encounter?"

"What memory?"



COMMONS - MUSEUM'S REGENERATIVE ROLE

Ecological commons - reconnect people with landscapes

Cultural commons - regenerate traditions and memory

Relational commons - rebuild trust and community

Regeneration does not ask us to freeze culture in time. It asks us to create the conditions in which culture can continue to evolve while remaining rooted in place.

What if museums became places where communities don't simply remember who they were—but imagine who they might become?



THE EVOLUTION OF MUSEUMS

Traditional Museum	Ecomuseum	Regenerative Cultural Institution
Objects	Territory	Living relationships
Collections	Heritage	Commons of place
Visitors	Community	Community + more-than-human ecosystems
Preservation	Participation	Regeneration
Interpretation	Stewardship	Co-evolution
Expert knowledge	Shared knowledge	Collective learning
Institution-centred	Place-centred	Living system-centred
Cultural asset	Living heritage	Regenerative capacity
Destination attraction	Community resource	Catalyst for place flourishing



BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE



Works with the local neighbourhood to understand its industrial history, social struggles, workers' movements, migration and everyday life. The former public bath where it is housed has become a civic space where exhibitions are co-created with local residents, artists and community groups.

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE



Home – Beamish, The Living Museum of the North

Beamish is a living, breathing museum, where history is experienced. Walk through historic streets and meet costumed engagers.

 Beamish Museum

Regenerative Museums



Research Project
by **Lucimara Letelier**

Introducing the "Regenerative Museums" web series, featuring interviews that explore the concept of regenerative museums and how regenerative development principles and frameworks apply to the museum sector.

The series is based on the research "Regenerative Museums: Reshaping the Museums' Role in Addressing Social and Environmental Collapse" by Lucimara Letelier from the University of Leicester in the UK.

"Regenerative Museums" encourages museums to embrace regenerative principles to adapt, mitigate, and build resilience in the face of climate and social collapse. Each video features an interview with a museum professional or

Regenerative Museums

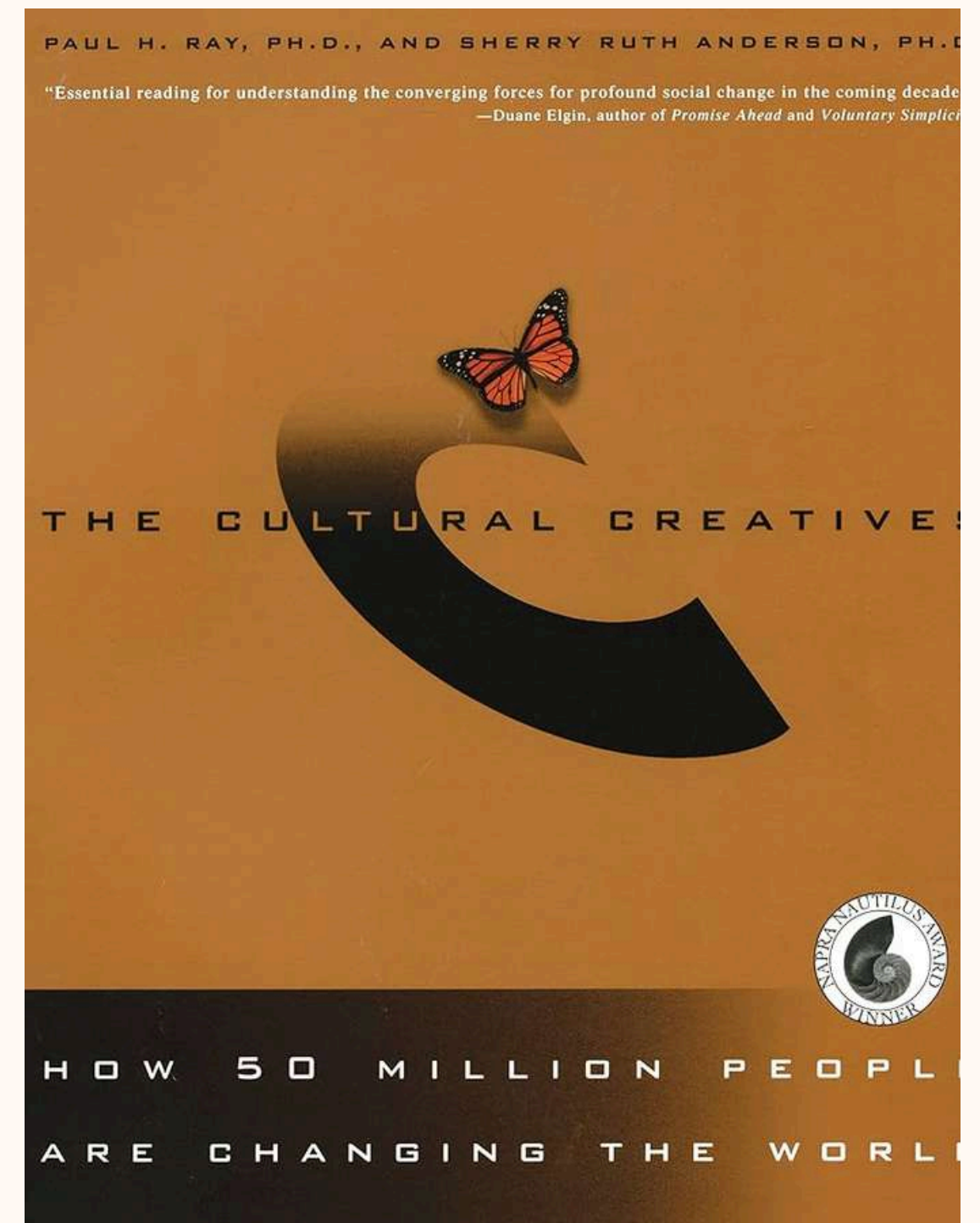
'Regenerative Museums: Reshaping the Museums' Role in Addressing Social and Environmental Collapse': A web series based on the Research by Lucimara Letelier (University of Leicester, UK).

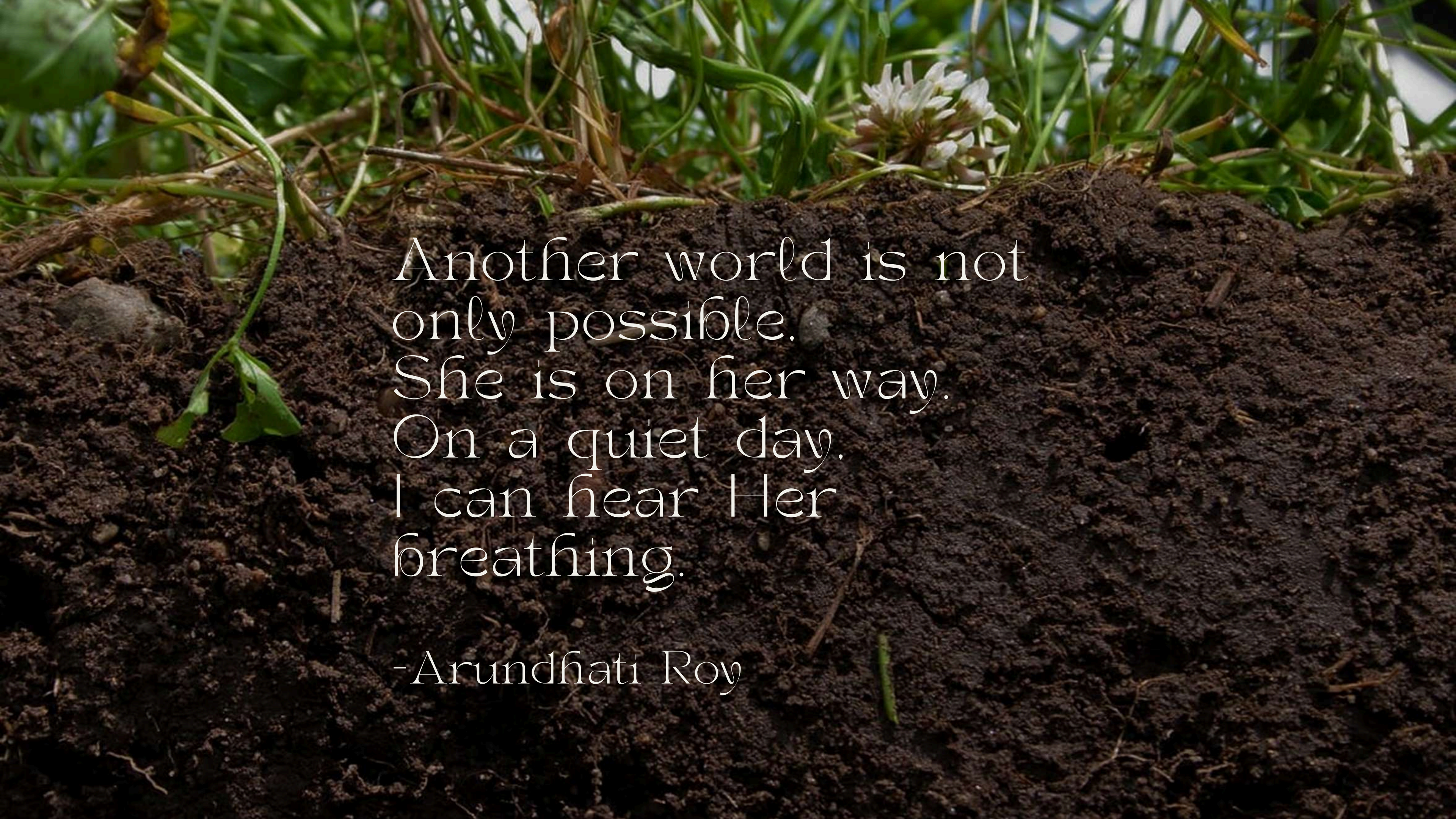
COURAGE AND PERSISTENCE

"Deeply knowing that the process of pioneering is never easy, we have one story that reminds us of how important it is to stay with your dreams and visions even when the fruits to our efforts appear to be faraway:

'An old woman in the Middle East planted a date tree and described the process: When you plant a date, you know you'll never eat from the date tree because it takes about eighty years to grow roots deep enough to go to the scarce water. The date tree gets so buffeted in that time by windstorms and droughts that for the most part, the tree looks like it's dying. If you didn't understand its process, you could easily cut it down. But if you understand the process, you can make the commitment. You have to have an image of what will happen. Once you do, it makes all the difference' (Ray and Anderson (2001, p.64)."

Ateljevic, I. (2014: 312:) De)colonizing my Academic Self: Manifesting a Dream of Transformative Education in Murter, Croatia.





Another world is not
only possible.
She is on her way.
On a quiet day,
I can hear Her
breathing.

-Arundhati Roy

THANK YOU

I am here for your questions and reflections!

See:

www.irenaateljevic.com

www.terrameera.com

www.regenerateeurope.org

www.en.ajmolokalno.hr

