



MED4REGEN

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Elaboration of the hyperlocal design framework.

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Executive summary

The document outlines the methodological framework for developing regenerative tourism actions through a hyperlocal approach, the result of focus groups and collective reflections among the project partners.

At the European level, regenerative tourism is understood as an evolution of sustainable tourism: not only reducing impacts, but creating net benefits for communities and ecosystems. The European Commission describes it as a practice that regenerates natural, social, and economic capital, preserving the authenticity of territories and improving the well-being of host communities.

The methodological core of the document is the hyperlocal approach, which proposes working on micro-territorial dynamics by enhancing heritage, traces, stories, actions, events, and imaginaries. This approach also introduces a temporal dimension, in which past, present, and future intertwine within a circular perspective of regeneration.

Four strategic areas for regenerative actions are identified: Repair (repair and regenerate), Reconnect (create authentic bonds), Re-engage (actively involve stakeholders), Redistribute (equitably distribute benefits). The research phase focuses on gathering tacit knowledge and local networks, while the planning phase guides design toward circular processes that return value to the community.

A central aspect is the joint involvement of SMEs and cultural centers: companies that already express social values are invited to become stewards of regenerative actions, within a framework that combines Corporate Social Responsibility and stewardship of the common good.

Finally, the document introduces a self-assessment tool based on six dimensions (Heritage, Traces, Stories, Actions, Events, Imaginary), which allows researchers, designers, and local actors to evaluate to what extent a project integrates the hyperlocal approach and the principles of regeneration.



1 Methodology

Within the MED4REGEN project, partners' actions were directed toward researching local foundations within a globalized phenomenon such as contemporary tourism. The need for such an approach was identified by following the European Union guidelines that emerged from preliminary research. While the European Commission has not issued a single formal definition of regenerative tourism in a dedicated policy statement, the concept has been described and endorsed across several official contexts, particularly in EU funding calls and policy documents. These sources consistently frame regenerative tourism as a step beyond sustainable tourism, emphasizing authenticity, community well-being, and net-positive impacts on destinations. For instance, a call for tourism SMEs under the Single Market Programme defines regenerative tourism experiences as those that “respect the authenticity of local tourism offerings while contributing to the well-being of host communities”¹. This description positions regenerative tourism as a practice that not only upholds local cultural heritage but also actively benefits host communities, thereby surpassing the conventional aim of mitigating negative impacts.

The European Commission also portrays regenerative tourism as an evolution of sustainability practices that actively improve destinations. An article on the Tourism Transition Pathway platform explains that many European actors are now adopting “a regenerative approach – one that extends sustainability by restoring what has been degraded, creating net-positive outcomes, and leaving places and communities stronger than before”². In this framing, regenerative tourism emphasizes producing a positive handprint through tourism activities: rebuilding ecosystems, revitalizing local cultures, and empowering communities. The Commission describes it as a “values-driven extension of sustainable tourism” whose aim is to “improve ecological health, cultural vitality, and social equity” by “building and revitalising natural, social and economic capital”³.

These elements highlight a consistent policy orientation: regenerative tourism retains the foundations of sustainability—such as reducing emissions and resource use—while explicitly adding restoration and community well-being as central goals. Moreover, regenerative tourism is positioned as drawing upon principles of circular economy, indigenous stewardship, and systems thinking, ensuring that tourism not only limits harm but leaves places and societies better off than before⁴. The Commission is gradually integrating regenerative tourism into its strategic frameworks. The forthcoming EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy, expected in 2026, is anticipated to “embed regeneration as a long-term goal across all Member States”⁵.

In practice, regenerative approaches are already being promoted through EU-funded initiatives that support activities such as ecosystem restoration, community-led planning, and the development of year-round tourism models that sustain local livelihoods.

¹ European Commission, Call for Proposals – Tourism SMEs support, Single Market Programme (2023).

² European Commission, Tourism Transition Pathway Platform (2024).

³ Ibidem.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ Ibidem.



Furthermore, the European Commission's innovation awards for tourism have begun recognizing pioneering destinations of sustainable and regenerative tourism, signalling that the policy emphasis is shifting from sustaining to regenerating destinations⁶. The communications and funding programmes consistently frame regenerative tourism as tourism that goes beyond sustainability to actively restore, enhance, and leave a positive legacy in destinations. It is understood as tourism that preserves cultural authenticity, improves the well-being of host communities, and regenerates natural and social capital. This evolving framing suggests a strategic policy direction where regenerative tourism becomes a cornerstone of Europe's approach to ensuring that tourism does not merely sustain but actively contributes to the thriving and resilience of destinations.

Despite the growing diffusion of the concept, the implementation of regenerative tourism faces numerous epistemological, practical, and political challenges. One of the main critical issues lies in the risk of trivialization of the term, which is often reduced to catchy slogans such as "*leaving a place better than you found it*" or "*giving more than you take.*" Such simplifications risk diluting the transformative potential of the regenerative paradigm, reducing it to a mere extension of sustainable tourism (Bellato & Pollock, 2023⁷). Another major challenge concerns the need to adopt a systemic and interdisciplinary perspective capable of overcoming the traditional disciplinary and institutional fragmentations that characterize tourism management. This requires the promotion of participatory processes integrating environmental, social, economic, and cultural policies within a long-term framework (Dredge, 2022). As Dredge observes, regeneration does not simply involve a change in practices but rather a transformation of mindsets and individual capacities, implying a shift from an "*I-centered*" to a "*we-oriented*" way of thinking—grounded in empathic, reflective, and collaborative competences. Added to this is the need for a decolonization of knowledge, since much of tourism literature remains anchored in Western, mechanistic epistemologies (Bellato & Pollock, 2023). Measuring regenerative impact also represents a major challenge, as regenerative processes—being primarily qualitative and relational—escape traditional quantitative performance indicators. Hence, there is a need to develop evaluation tools capable of including parameters such as ecosystem health, community wellbeing, and the quality of social relationships, alongside conventional economic metrics (Mang & Reed, 2012). Finally, the difficulty of reconciling regenerative goals with market logics persists. The risk of commercial co-optation of the concept through greenwashing practices is real, making it essential to strike a balance between economic profitability and authentic regeneration, oriented toward the creation of economic models that return value to places rather than extract it (Dredge, 2022).

Meanwhile, as governmental and policy institutions at both national and regional levels seek to define new policies to provide a solid basis and tools for tourism actors to establish

⁶ European Commission, EU Tourism Innovation Awards (2023).

⁷ Bellato, L., & Pollock, A. (2023). *Regenerative tourism: A state-of-the-art review*. *Tourism Geographies*, 27(3–4), 558–567. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2023.2294366>

Dredge, D. (2022). *Regenerative tourism: Transforming mindsets, systems and practices*. *Journal of Tourism Futures*, 8(3), 269–281.

Mang, P., & Reed, B. (2012). *Designing from place: A regenerative framework and methodology*. *Building Research & Information*, 40(1), 23–38.



new practices, it has become evident that regenerative tourism is tied to place-based⁸ planning and the specific needs of each region. On one hand, alternative pathways to mass and extractive tourism are emerging, aiming to establish new connections between visitors and residents through tourism experience models that actively leave a positive mark on the territory. On the other hand, the challenge was identified of providing an approach that could guide which specific solutions might be developed through a codified method.

From this need arose the identification of key terms for researching the values and resources to be recognized and transformed within territories. Likewise, in order to truly root interventions and local reflections, the need emerged to define the scale at which to research, problematize, and intervene within the perspective of regenerative tourism projects. The chosen scale was one that delves deeply into the social fabric, enabling the detection of grassroots phenomena and practices that can be enhanced—while preserving their identity—through collaboration with local cultural institutions. This scale of approaching the territory values the networks already surrounding institutions and creates a space for inquiry and action to foster synergies and new proposals.

1.1 Actors and stakeholders

The hyperlocal approach has been identified as a research path and a way of defining regenerative tourism actions for public and private cultural institutions that wish to pursue a new form of cultural programming with positive effects on their audiences. Stakeholders were envisioned both within their networks of local relationships and among the types of visitors, thereby creating a space of action to attract the interest of local businesses in becoming stewards of a regenerative action that produces a direct effect by connecting to what already exists in a territory.

Clearly, the hyperlocal approach is not specifically tied to this research context and can be transferred as a methodology to other actors wishing to undertake similar paths, always bearing in mind that tacit knowledge, collective memory, and the imaginaries of a place cannot become private assets but must always be returned to and connected with the communities that safeguard them. This clarification is considered fundamental to avoid preliminary research processes aimed at defining resources and possible regenerative actions turning into a site of appropriation or extraction of value from communities. Indeed, the hyperlocal investigation process does not automatically generate actions designed with the same approach, which instead must be an inherent component of the actions that follow the research.

1.2 Roots of the hyperlocal approach

The hyperlocal approach is understood across different industries and types of businesses as a process that focuses on understanding and designing services around the specific needs of people in a given place or situation. Instead of applying a one-size-fits-all service model, it draws on local networks and knowledge to implement national policies in ways that are sensitive to individual circumstances and local contexts, thereby improving outcomes. A hyperlocal strategy enables public services to achieve greater impact and

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deliver more value than the sum of their individual efforts. In this sense, it acts as a multiplier.

Among the different approaches this document is looking to the methodology from the product design course led by Prof. Raffaella Fagnoni in collaboration with Prof. Pietro Costa at Università Iuav di Venezia. Within their classes, they developed an action-oriented methodology for young designers to identify project opportunities aimed at creating products that can bring value to communities and to the people living in those places, such as activists, researchers, citizen collectives, and volunteer associations. Starting from a direct connection with the energies already present—especially in the city of Venice—it was possible to develop projects that have value both in their direct application and in their potential to serve as manifestos for future actions. In this sense, the projects were configured as circular, non-extractive processes that listen to the community and its needs for new solutions, new materials, new opportunities for sociality, and that give back to the community.

The concept of hyperlocal goes beyond the simple dimension of local understood in geographical, social, and economic terms. The combination of the prefix hyper with the term local expresses a continuous evolution of the relationship with proximity, adopting a dual perspective: on the one hand, the connection with tradition, territory, traces, and narratives; on the other, the possibilities of transformation that this proximity can offer, fueling the collective imagination and our future aspirations.⁹

The term local is often misinterpreted as referring solely to small-scale events or limited realities, overlooking broader contexts and systemic structures. In this discussion, however, the notion of locality is understood in a wider sense — as the result of multiple, interwoven layers of meaning and experience. The idea of Hyperlocal Design introduces a temporal dimension alongside the spatial one, expanding the traditional understanding of design's relationship with place.

Within a hyperlocal project, design actions and cyclical relationships are grounded in fragments, remnants, and traces that embody both individual and collective histories. These elements are reconnected through rituals and traditions that restore meaning to existence. Design thus “works with the past,” transforming it into a catalyst for innovation and renewal through projects that emerge from a specific context and delve into its stories. The traces uncovered in this process become opportunities for transformation, generating a continuous dialogue between past and future. A hyper-contextual project embraces the place in which it operates, weaving together past and present — what can be reimagined from what has been — linking “a probable future and an immutable past.” This interaction activates a cyclical, spiral movement that revisits actions and experiences in new ways, reshaped by time and collective attitudes.

Ultimately, these reflections integrate diverse dimensions into a synthesis that transcends binary oppositions such as local/global and tradition/innovation, revealing their

⁹ Translated into English from Italian original text published in the conference proceedings of *Design for Survival: Scenari, visioni, approcci del design per la sopravvivenza*. Conference, Università degli Studi di Ferrara, 2024. Original title: *Hyperlocal Design. Pratiche e azioni per la sopravvivenza ecologica nella Laguna di Venezia*. Authors: Raffaella Fagnoni rfagnoni@iuav.it, Pietro Costa pcosta@iuav.it, Mario Ciaramitaro, Serena De Mola, Carmelo Leonardi, Maria Manfroni, C. Mattia Priola.



interdependence and mutual influence. The local dimension, therefore, is not confined but expanded and extended, becoming a living field of exchange and regeneration.

By balancing the openness of globalization with the preservation of specificities, it does not deny the global dimension itself, but rather establishes new relationships with it, encouraging collaboration among communities and the sharing of knowledge and practices. A change of perspective on relationships with the world enables the generation of a new sense of place, understood not merely as a matter of scale, but as a matter of method.¹⁰

1.3 Hyperlocal approach for regenerative tourism

Bringing a design methodology into a broader process—one that is also open to institutions and people working outside the design framework—requires identifying its core values, research attitudes, and the position it asks to maintain both toward the subjects of observation and in the construction of regenerative tourism actions.

The hyperlocal approach presents itself as an innovative perspective for reading and transforming territories, going beyond a simple reference to the "local" understood in geographical or administrative terms. It is not a codified methodology, but rather a way of conceiving the project as a process that integrates resources, connections, materials, traditions, and narratives into a unified and deeply rooted framework. A hyperlocal approach means focusing on micro-territorial dynamics, often invisible to general policies, and responding to specific needs that arise within circumscribed communities. Its strength lies in the ability to read the local as a layered reality, where historical, cultural, social, and economic elements intersect, generating targeted solutions that cannot be replicated through standardized schemes.

Unlike a reductive vision that might confine the term "local" to marginal or secondary phenomena, the hyperlocal introduces a qualitative and relational dimension. It rests on a dual axis:

- the connection with traditions, material and immaterial traces, stories, and imaginaries that define a place;
- the transformative capacity that arises from these roots, oriented toward creating new shared possibilities and aspirations.

Hyperlocal design also introduces a temporal perspective: the past is reinterpreted as a resource for the present and the future, in a circular process that links memory, innovation, and collective imagination. Heritage, stories, and local actions become opportunities to activate cultural and social regeneration paths, where communities are not mere beneficiaries but co-authors of change.

Hyperlocal practices translate into initiatives capable of co-creating solutions with residents, placing at the center their knowledge, available material resources, and widespread skills. The goal is to generate circular, low-impact relationships between people, places, and productions, strengthening the sense of belonging and fostering long-term forms of community stewardship.

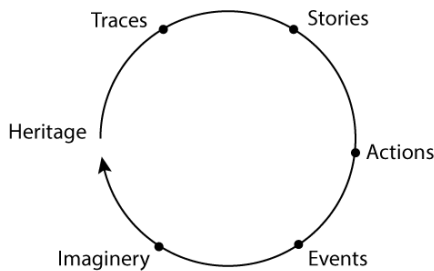
Examples of possible solutions and tangible effects are: community archive projects that transform family memories into collective heritage; activities that regenerate abandoned spaces through artistic residencies and local cooperative; museums creating new touristic

¹⁰ ibidem



offers that detours visitors to meet local communities. Thus creating processes for preserving of cultural heritage, reactivate civic participation, create new skills for local economies.

The hyperlocal approach represents an invitation to rethink how actions, policies, and projects are conceived: rooted in context, guided and open to a transformative imaginary capable of holding together past, present, and future.



A circular perspective on heritage, traces and stories, actions and imaginery supports an hyperlocal approach.

Translated and re-drawn scheme from italian original: Fagnoni, R. (2018). Da ex a next. MD JOURNAL vol. 5, pp. 16-27.

Crucial for giving the hyperlocal approach a regenerative perspective is to introduce four regenerative action models¹¹:

Repair: Actively restore degraded ecosystems, regenerate local biodiversity, rehabilitate built heritage, and protect natural resources.

Reconnect: Create authentic connections between visitors and residents, between humans and nature, and between generations through meaningful experiences.

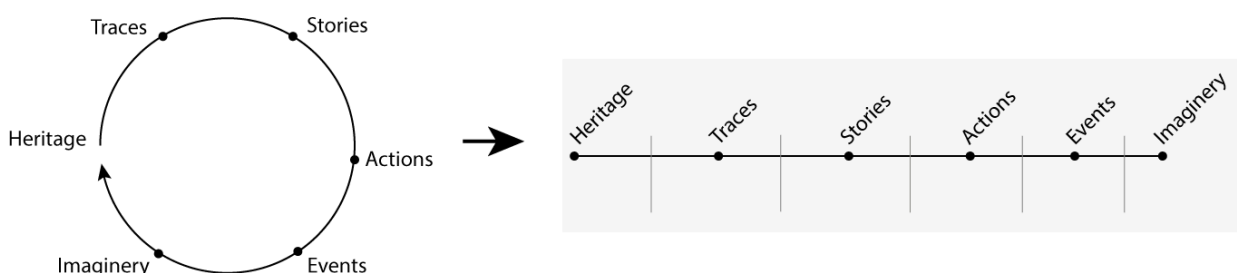
Re-engage: Actively involve all stakeholders in tourism governance, encourage citizen participation, and empower visitors.

Redistribute: Ensure equitable distribution of economic benefits, promote the local economy, and guarantee quality jobs throughout the region.

These regenerative actions shape how the hyperlocal network of stakeholders, stories, heritage etc can be connected into a solid regenerative plan.

1.3.1 Research phase

The research phase is defined as a period of time dedicated to identifying and bringing to light networks and tacit knowledge, in order to describe them within systems that organize information and make the possible connections between elements visible. One of the most effective methodologies is to search for keywords within a territory or community and to use a table to translate the circular vision into a recording tool.





Heritage	Traces	Stories	Actions	Events	Imaginary
Types of heritage present in local area; immaterial, landscape...	Local traces of the presence of a specific heritage or community	Stories (also very recent) about a place, a community...	Already existing community and citizen initiatives	Events existing in the local area	Which kind of imaginary is present in the local area (slow tourism, difficult neighborhood...)

1.3.2 Planning phase

In the planning phase of a regenerative tourism action, the hyperlocal approach guides choices toward circularity and giving back to the community: the materials, knowledge, and relationships that emerge from research (heritage, traces, stories, actions, events, imaginaries) are recombined into low-impact value chains, where what the project takes from the context returns in the form of skills, cultural services, maintenance of places, and new opportunities for residents and visitors.

This way of planning—integrating the temporal dimension (creative reuse of the past to innovate the present and open up futures) with the spatial one (micro-contexts, proximity, local networks)—avoids “one-size-fits-all” models and leverages local networks and knowledge to translate values into operational choices (materials, partners, logistics, governance), generating tangible returns for stakeholders and added value for designers: more precise focus, shared impact metrics, and greater capacity to break down narratives and obstacles related to the 5 MED4REGEN Challenges (overtourism; mainstream touristic narratives; naturalistic/scientific heritage & landscape; touristic attractiveness of urban cultural centers; suburban cultural centers).

In practice, hyperlocal planning structures deliverables and activities into short cycles of co-design with local actors (museums/cultural centers, SMEs, associations, public authorities), so that each decision reinforces community bonds and long-term stewardship, supported by shared tools (hyperlocal framework, toolbox, evaluation) already foreseen in the project. In this way, the challenge is not only to “mitigate” impacts, but to regenerate: to reactivate heritage, diversify flows, rewrite narratives, and create services anchored to the specific needs of the place, as indicated by the hyperlocal approach and the project agreement on the five challenges that guide the entire process.

1.3.3 SMEs and cultural sector joint venture

In the planning phase, it is useful to propose to companies that already express social values and a willingness to act in the local area to enter into a hyperlocal process: they are presented, in a clear and visual way, with the elements that have emerged (traces, community needs, actors, resources, and imaginaries) and shown how these can converge into a concrete regenerative action to sponsor or co-create. Within this framework, a broad definition of Corporate Social Responsibility is adopted—understood as the company’s



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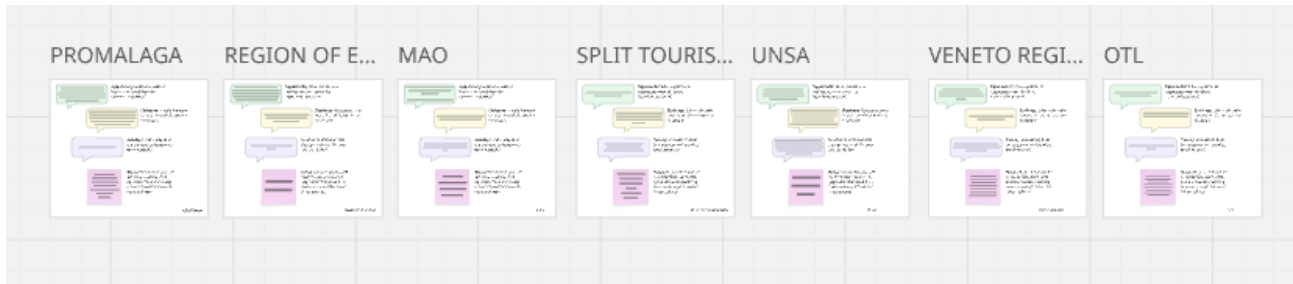
commitment to generating positive economic, social, and environmental impacts—together with stewardship, intended as the responsible and continuous care of the common good: together, they become the main drivers for promoting action, aligning business objectives with community needs.

The hyperlocal approach guides the transition from collected data to intervention: it systematizes micro-dynamics, local stories, and resources to co-design solutions with the people who inhabit the place, avoiding “one-size-fits-all” models and enhancing the specificities of the context. In this framework, it is strategic to open collaboration also to **small associations** and **small businesses**, providing for scalable **micro-commitments**: from the selection of cultural content to the design of pathways or event formats, up to operational support in specific phases of the project.

In this way, an ecosystem is built in which museums/cultural centers, SMEs, and communities act as catalysts for change, supported by capacity-building pathways and a shared toolbox that translates the method into reusable practices and tools in pilot areas and beyond. This framework is consistent with the MED4REGEN approach, which promotes hyperlocal strategies, cross-sectoral engagement (museums, communities, SMEs), and the implementation of regenerative solutions through training, testing, and shared tools.



1.4 Feedback from PPs' focus group on Hyperlocal approach



An online focus group was organized in order to collect from PPs feedbacks about the hyperlocal approach.

Overall Perceptions

PPs generally welcomed the hyperlocal approach as a way to deepen connections with communities, strengthen storytelling, and bring residents more actively into cultural and tourism strategies. They saw it as a chance to move away from generalized narratives toward more nuanced, place-specific perspectives that value memory, participation, and lived experiences.

Opportunities Identified

Community empowerment: Many partners highlighted that hyperlocality can empower locals, build trust, and provide long-term stewardship of projects.

Narrative enrichment: Several noted its potential to diversify or challenge simplified or mainstream stories (e.g., Sarajevo, Olympic heritage, local history in Ioannina).

Education and intergenerational dialogue: Museums and archives (like Atena Lucana or Epirus) were seen as platforms where younger generations can connect with heritage.

Experimentation and pilot actions: Regions (like Veneto) stressed that small-scale testing could generate models to be scaled up.

Design and innovation: PPs with design expertise (e.g., MAO, IUAV) linked hyperlocality to participatory and creative methodologies already in use (nanotourism, co-design).

Challenges Raised

Engaging locals: Paradoxically, locals can be the hardest to involve. Some projects risk side effects that alter daily life, which must be carefully managed.

Accessibility and infrastructure: In Epirus, transport barriers were mentioned as critical to ensuring inclusion of more remote communities.

Operationalization: Partners (e.g., Veneto, OTL) stressed the difficulty of moving from principles to practical solutions and linking the approach clearly to specific challenges.

Awareness and knowledge sharing: The success of hyperlocal methods depends on locals understanding and valuing their own role; this is not always easy to achieve.



Overlap with Existing Practices

Many partners noted that they already use approaches close to hyperlocal:

Community-based cultural strategies (UNSA's museum collaborations, PROMALAGA's urban regeneration work).

Design-driven and participatory methods (MAO, IUAV, OTL).

This means the hyperlocal approach resonates strongly with existing experiences, while also offering a more structured and shared framework across the partnership.

Reception by Associated Partners (APs)

Most PPs believed their APs would be receptive to hyperlocality, especially if supported by **policy guidelines, schemes, or clear frameworks**.

1.5 Self-assessment tool

An hyperlocal approach is enabled by conducting research and building relationships with stakeholders. Conducting research doesn't necessarily mean creating strong bonds with the community, but it does provide a broad understanding of the local context. On the other hand, building important relationships with stakeholders doesn't always mean deepening the local context; it can simply mean identifying an ongoing project and moving it forward.

This tool supports researchers, designers, and local actors in assessing the extent to which a project, action, or research path incorporates the dimensions of the hyperlocal approach. It focuses on the connection between traces and traditions on one side, and possibilities of transformation on the other.

Instructions

For each dimension, answer the guiding questions and assign a score from 1 (very weak) to 5 (very strong). Use the reflection space at the end to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.

Heritage

- Which tangible and intangible heritages have been identified (landscape, architecture, traditions, knowledge)? How is going to be connected to the project?
- To what extent are these heritages recognized and valued in the project?

1 2 3 4 5

Traces

- Have tangible or intangible traces been identified (places, signs, uses, memories)? How are they going to be used?
- Are they integrated into the project's narrative?

1 2 3 4 5



Stories

- Have stories (even recent ones) about the community and its territory been collected? How are they giving shape to your project?
- How much these stories inspired or oriented the design?

1 2 3 4 5

Actions

- Have existing citizen or association initiatives been mapped? How?
- How much the project connect to or reinforce these initiatives?

1 2 3 4 5

Events

- Are there events structuring the cultural or social life of the area?
- How much does the project enhance, support, or create synergies with them?

1 2 3 4 5

Imaginary

- Which imaginaries characterize the place (e.g., slow tourism, difficult neighborhood, ideal landscape)?
- Does the project contribute to strengthening, transforming, or redefining these imaginaries?

1 2 3 4 5

Regenerative actions

- Which regenerative actions are you planning to use (choose two in order to have an effective project)?

Repair: Actively restore degraded ecosystems, regenerate local biodiversity, rehabilitate built heritage, and protect natural resources.

Reconnect: Create authentic connections between visitors and residents, between humans and nature, and between generations through meaningful experiences.

Re-engage: Actively involve all stakeholders in tourism governance, encourage citizen participation, and empower visitors.

Redistribute: Ensure equitable distribution of economic benefits, promote the local economy, and guarantee quality jobs throughout the region.