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Transformative tourism, its triggers and facilitators' role in transformations

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What is transformative tourism and how is it connected to regenerative tourism





Transformative tourism

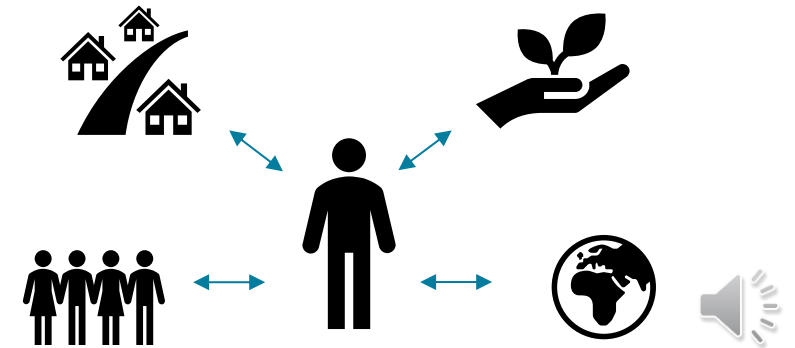
- Tourism is a potential context for transformative experiences → "special time" outside one's mundane living environment
- If a tourism experience leads to some kind of permanent, profound effects or change in customer's life, it's called **transformative tourism / transformative tourism experience**
 - Often intense and memorable experiences that eventually lead to transformation
- Transformation can be either intentional and planned or unplanned and accidental





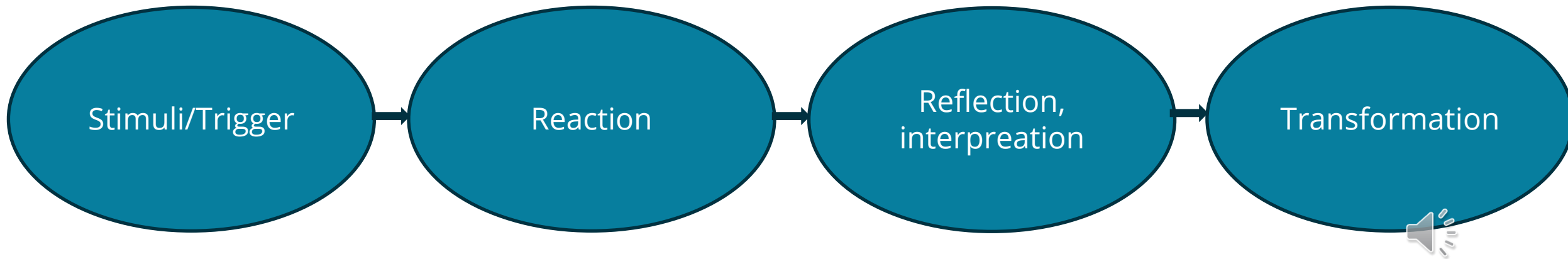
Transformative tourism

- Transformation in attitudes, values, identity, world view, self-awareness, social relationships, behaviour...
- Often long-term outcomes instead of temporary hedonic pleasure
- Benefits not only the individual, but - in one way or another - also the surrounding world
 - Communities, living area, environment...



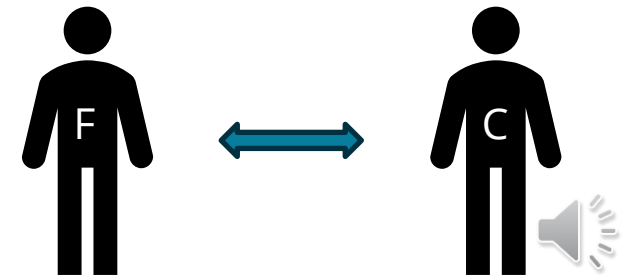
Transformative tourism experience

- In tourism research, transformative tourism experience has been described as a process, in which certain factor "triggers" or stimulates the transformation process
 - The transformation occurs, when the customer reacts, interprets and reflects the trigger
 - Deeply subjective and multilateral process, which is challenging to understand and examine



Transformative tourism experience

- Often described as a "dual process" between the customer (C) and the service provider / experience facilitator (F)
 - Experience facilitator affects the formation of customer's experience
 - However, can also occur outside commercial tourism services





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Connections between transformative tourism and regenerative tourism





Connections between transformative tourism and regenerative tourism

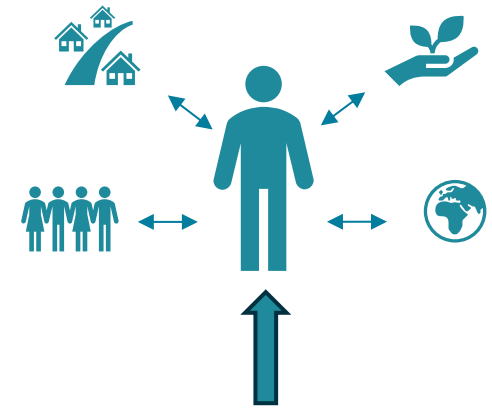
- Similarities between transformative tourism & regenerative tourism
 - Well-being outcomes
 - Benefits / positively impacts "the surrounding world"
 - Idea of transformation
 - World views, values, attitudes, behaviour etc...
 - Long-term / permanent change
 - No clear universal definition, challenging to measure and examine





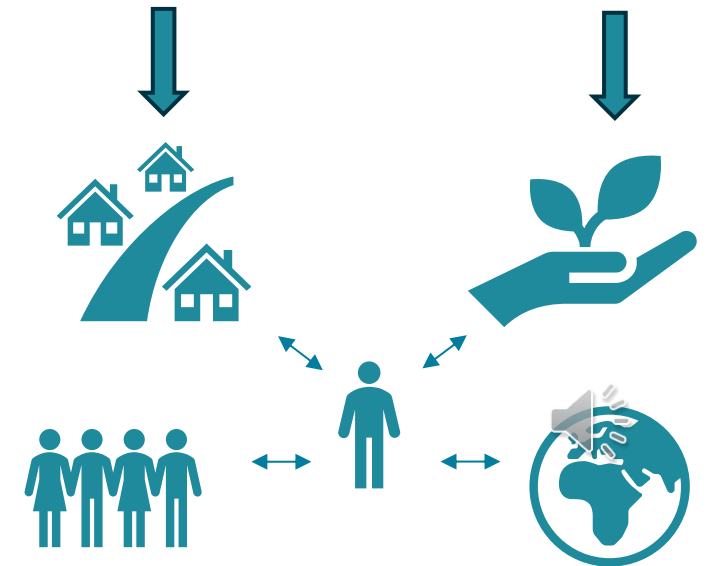
Differences of transformative tourism and regenerative tourism

- Differences between transformative tourism & regenerative tourism
 - TT can be associated with different types of transformations / transformative outcomes → in a way "wider" concept than RG?
 - In transformative tourism the focus is typically on individuals and their transformations, which "spill over" benefitting the surrounding world
 - In regenerative tourism the focus is on the place
 - However, it can be claimed that RT actualizes via individuals and their actions



Transformative tourism: Emphasis commonly on this (basis of definitions)

Regenerative tourism: Emphasis commonly on this (basis of definitions)





Transformative and regenerative tourism – definitions used in the REGGAE project

Transformative tourism

Transformative tourism refers to a phenomenon in which a person, within the context of tourism, has an experience that leads to longterm or even permanent changes in their life.

These changes - whether intentional or unconscious - are often positive well-being outcomes that benefit not only the individual but also the surrounding world. The transformation can manifest as learning, increased self-awareness and personal growth, behaviour change, changes in social relationships, new ideas or aha moments, or shifts in attitudes, values, perspectives, worldview, or even personality.

Principles of regenerative tourism

1. It's about improving places and helping them thrive
Regenerative tourism aims to make tourism destinations healthier, happier, and more vibrant over time.

2. It aims not only to avoid harm, but to actively do good.
Instead of just reducing negative impacts, it aims to leave places better than they were before.

3. It aims to support local people, local cultures and local ecosystems.
In doing so, it helps places become stronger and more resilient.

4. It aims to create long-lasting positive change.
This isn't just a quick fix - regenerative tourism tries to transform how we travel and interact with the world.





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Transformations in travellers and triggers for it: based on our own research project





Our cases

- **Guided one-hour roof walking tour in a historical town center**
 - Roof-walking tour with a group of 6 + guide
 - Looking at views and listening to stories related to the buildings and the area via headphones, guide answered the questions if needed
- **One-night holiday at a lakeside hotel & spa resort: senior customer group**
 - Senior customer group: members of a regional heart disease association that had organized a trip
 - One-night stay in a traditional lakeside hotel resort: spa, saunas, dinner, live music & dancing..
- **Communal family holiday in the countryside**
 - Guided activities for kids and adults (games, yoga, guided fishing etc.)
 - Countryside accommodation, farm animals, lake side saunas
 - Traditionally, same families go on a holiday during the same week each year





Data collection and analysis



- Longitudinal customer interviews
 - Onsite: right after the experience/at the end of a holiday
 - Follow-up 1: remotely 2-3 weeks after the onsite interview
 - Follow-up 2: remotely approximately 3 months after the onsite experience
 - The amount of data per case: Roof-walking tour N = 8; Senior customer group's one-night holiday N = 7; Communal family holiday N = 7
 - Drop-out effect was from two to four informants per case
 - Preliminary data analysis in Atlas.ti
 - Transformative outcomes, triggers of transformation





Customer's transformative experiences



- Predictable transformative experiences vs. surprising transformative experiences
 - It is logical that
 - during the guided tour new information was learned about the contents of the guided tour,
 - the family holiday had a positive effect on family relationships,
 - the leisure day with work colleagues strengthened the internal relations of the workplace, and
 - the seniors got refreshed on a group trip to the spa hotel
 - However, in connection with these same services, new ideas were also got
 - on favoring intangible gifts instead of traditional goods gifts,
 - new ways of organising group trips were learned,
 - motivation was gained to increase activity in everyday life





Customers' transformative experiences

- Deep vs. not-so-deep experiences of transformation
 - Interest to try something out at home, e.g. cooking different kind of food
 - Deeper level of self “soul-searching”
- The duration of the service affected the number and ‘character’ of transformative experiences





Triggers of transformation and elements that support transformation

- The uniqueness or novelty of the experience
- The significance of the environment
 - A beautiful landscape, a unique natural environment, a safe setting, and an environment that differs from one's home surroundings, etc.
- The role of the service provider's representative (facilitator)
 - This emerged as the most central factor influencing the experience of change.





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The role of facilitators/service providers as enablers of transformative experiences





The role of the facilitator in the formation of a customer's transformative tourism experience

- **The role of the facilitator is shaped situation-specifically based on the customer's needs**
 - Sometimes active guidance and participation is needed to facilitate and support the formation of a customer experience (e.g., exciting activities, leading a group of children)
 - Sometimes clients mainly want smooth customer service and a setting for socializing with their own group

→ ***The importance of customer insight is emphasized***

"And then, the fact that the child really enjoyed the outdoor games, and at least during our week, the play instructor was really good and enthusiastic."

"I'd give the sales service a full ten out of ten. There was a really competent person I was working with on all this. They helped with everything and explained things clearly, like where to go and how everything would be on the same bill, and so on. So yeah, the service there was really, really good."





The role of the facilitator in the formation of a customer's transformative tourism experience

- **Facilitator can be a critical factor in shaping the transformative experience**

- Starting a new hobby thanks to an inspiring instructor, children learning new things...

“And maybe especially this year, because the yoga was so good — such a great yoga instructor. Now I’ve started doing yoga weekly back in my hometown too. It kind of stuck with me.”

- **Customers remember guides and instructors they had positive experiences with**

- A challenge can arise when there is staff changes in the company

“So now we have [instructor’s name], who REALLY understands that everyone comes in at a different level. And like, some people just want to rest and some want to sweat. And they know how to adapt and really think about that... They keep saying, ‘You’re on holiday, and this is your experience.’ That’s something I really, really appreciate.”





The role of the facilitator in the formation of a customer's transformative tourism experience

- **Influencing the customer's emotions and the overall atmosphere of the experience**
 - Creating a sense of safety before participating in an exciting activity
 - Fostering a sense of community and a home-like environment
 - This can be achieved either through personal presence or specific actions (e.g., safety briefings, introducing new clients to others)
 - A comprehensive safety briefing was also perceived as a sign of high service quality and the company's professionalism

"I don't have a serious fear of heights, but still, I wouldn't go without a harness and a good guide and all that... I think this was really nicely planned — I never felt like 'oh no' or had any feelings of fear at all. That was probably mostly because the people there were so professional."

"It's kind of cozy. Like homely, active, and relaxed. But not in the sense that it's too relaxed — like, 'just do whatever you want.' Everyone can do what they like, sure, but there's still some structure and guided activities throughout the day."





Elements affecting the customer's transformative tourism experience

Individuality and Authenticity

- Clients compare to "chain places" and recognize "genuine" service

The facilitator's own personality should be visible in the service

- Facilitators can be themselves, it is a richness

Expertise

- For example, learning is supported when the guide can answer the questions posed by the client

Personalized service, the ability to consider the client's potential special needs or requests

- For example, three friends were surprised with a large shared room at the accommodation, which led to strengthening their friendship





Elements affecting the customer's transformative tourism experience

- **Even small factors can create elements in the service that differentiate it from other similar services and support the formation of the experience of transformation**
 - For example: a unique dialect, storytelling, humor, a homely atmosphere

"...and yes, the stories in [regional dialect] still sometimes echoes in my ears and makes me smile, it was really good. ...and it probably would've been good in regular Finnish too, but... the language added a nice touch."

- **Social media communication can support the client's transformation process even after the actual service participation**
 - social media, which brought back pleasant holiday memories that were shared with the family → strengthening family relationships





To conclude

- **In the majority of the identified transformative experiences, the service provider's influence and role was evident either directly or indirectly**
 - Characteristics of the service product or the so-called human-delivered customer service
- **Some of the factors affecting the customer's transformative experiences are beyond the service provider's control (e.g., the customer's personal traits, etc.)**
 - However, for example, personality traits and customer's moods can be read and the customer service can be adapted accordingly (humorous or more "formal" approach etc.)





To conclude

- **Satisfied customers typically experienced more and deeper transformative experiences than dissatisfied ones**
 - This reinforces the understanding of the connection between transformative tourism experiences, customer satisfaction, and loyalty, and thereby, the company's competitive advantage
- **The results also highlighted the potential of transformative tourism to create well-being impacts that extend to society and the environment**
 - Senior citizens becoming more active, preference for intangible gifts, strengthening of family bonds in families with children, etc.
 - ➔ **This reinforces the understanding of the phenomenon's significance**





Thank You!

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<https://www.slu.se/en/departments/forest-ecology-management/forskning/nordic-nature-health-hub/regenerative-nature-tourism/>

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