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## Tourism Social Enterprises Obstacles and Strategies for Regenerative Tourism: A Social Movement Perspective

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# Regenerative Tourism and Social Enterprises Engagement

## Introduction

Tourism faces challenges such as over-tourism, climate change, and emerging socio-economic-environmental problems at the destination level that call for innovative solutions and transformational change. This change requires a fundamental paradigm shift in mindset and practice by destination stakeholders. For some, this has meant a focus on sustainable tourism. However, others argue that because of the major climactic and social shifts already occurring, sustainability is no longer enough. Others argue that regenerative tourism moves beyond sustainable tourism, creating net positive effects by increasing the regenerative capacity of human societies and ecosystems, leaving the destination better than before (Pollock, 2019; Bellato et al., 2022). If the goal of sustainable tourism is to minimize the harm at the destination, regenerative tourism seeks to replenish and revitalize the destination's resources so it can not only survive but also thrive for the long term (Sheldon, 2022).

When considering regenerative tourism, tourism social enterprises are key stakeholders to build regenerative principles into their operations or practices from the ground up (Ateljevic & Sheldon, 2022; Cave & Dredge, 2020). These enterprises are harnessing innovation and creativity and hence becoming catalysts for the transformation of the industry as well as educating those who engage with it, such as tourists and community residents (Ateljevic & Sheldon, 2022).

Since proponents of regenerative tourism call for transforming tourism practices fundamentally, this study uses social movement theory as a framework to investigate tourism social enterprises' obstacles and counter strategies to engaging in regenerative tourism. Social movement theory serves as a foundation of this study because tourism scholars have used it to explain how an organized effort by a group of people can change a wide range of significant aspects of society (McGehee *et al.*, 2014; Dilletta & Benjamin, 2022). Specifically, we ask social entrepreneurs how they are challenged from activating the social movements catalysts of self-efficacy, consciousness-raising, personal as political at the individual level, and resource mobilization at the organization level. Hence, the overall research question for this study is: *How and in what ways do tourism social enterprises perceive obstacles to regenerative tourism and work to overcome them?*

## Literature Review

### *Regenerative Tourism and Tourism Social Entrepreneurship (TSE)*

While sustainable tourism has shown some progress in reducing damage caused by excessive resource use, scholars argue that it is failing to deliver a fundamental shift to the problem and to change the values and mindsets needed for the interconnected stakeholders in the tourism system (Ateljevic & Sheldon, 2022; Becken & Kaur, 2022). Bellato *et al.* (2022) highlighted that the integral change agents in regenerative tourism are the hosts and local communities; the change comes from their interventions in the systems. Comparatively, sustainable tourism initiatives are often top-down from the private sector and government-led development (Chassagne & Everingham, 2019). Another distinctive difference is that the purpose of regenerative tourism is to build the capacity of support systems for net positive impact (Cave & Dredge, 2020) while

sustainable tourism focuses on doing less harm while generating economic prosperity (Hall, 2010). Becken and Kaur (2022) also stated that regenerative tourism emphasizes the place-based approach which recognizes the place and its unique geography, human history, culture, local environment, and changing human needs.

Bellato *et al.* (2022) developed a conceptual framework and proposed a working definition of regenerative tourism as follows:

*“Regenerative tourism is a transformational approach that aims to fulfill the potential of tourism places to flourish and create net positive effects by increasing the regenerative capacity of human societies and ecosystems.”* (Bellato *et al.*, 2022, p.9)

Adapted from Fullerton’s (2015) principles of a regenerative economy, Sheldon (2022) developed eight principles of regenerative tourism (Figure 1). We use these principles to guide our analysis that derived from the interview findings with the social entrepreneurs.

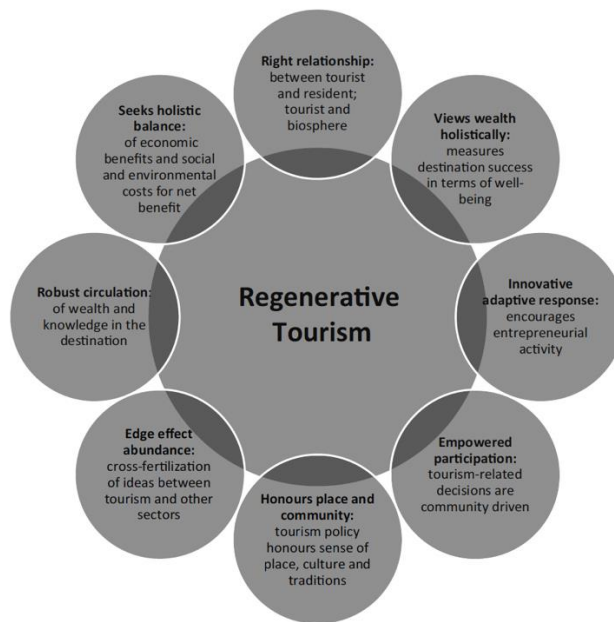


Figure 1. Eight principles of regenerative tourism. Source: Sheldon (2022)

Any new conceptualization of the tourism system will require a conveyance device that shares common goals and values. This study hopes to explore the potential for social enterprises to fulfill that role. Scholars have argued for the potential for tourism social enterprises to drive change and have called for additional studies to deepen the understanding of the social entrepreneur’s experience with regenerative tourism (Ateljevic & Sheldon, 2022; Cave & Dredge, 2020). Sheldon *et al.* (2017) define tourism social entrepreneurship as:

*“A process that uses tourism to create innovative solutions to immediate social, environmental and economic problems in destinations by mobilizing ideas, capacities, resources and social agreements, from within or outside the destination, required for its sustainable social transformation”* (Sheldon *et al.*, 2017, p.7).

Dredge (2022) emphasizes the importance of systems change in regenerative tourism, shifting the thinking from “me” to “we” to develop a collaborative action. This concept aligns with the perspectives of earlier scholars (Sheldon, 2021; Major & Clarke, 2022) who highlight the importance of a long-term, systems-thinking approach to understanding tourism as interconnected entities that form symbiotic relationships with the broader community. The regeneration process should be able to heal the system back, improve the resources and community capital used for tourism development, and create a feedback loop in tourism to contribute to both people and destination (Becken & Kaur, 2022).

As with any major concept, regenerative tourism has its challenges. Since regenerative tourism needs a fundamental shift in the system, it is not easy to achieve and needs a long-term commitment and stakeholder collaboration. Another challenge is the need to value the destination’s resources differently by measuring destination success in new ways beyond financial capital (Sheldon, 2022). Several examples of regenerative tourism movements at the destination level are emerging, including the state of Hawaii in the USA, the Bay of Plenty in New Zealand, and Flinders Island in Australia. Regenerative tourism can offer the chance for tourism destinations to become a force for good, but to date, very little empirical work has been conducted to examine both the obstacles and strategies for success in achieving these goals.

#### *Theoretical Framework: Regenerative Tourism as a Social Movement*

Social movement organizations comprise individuals and networks with shared aspirations for social change (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). These organizations, often resource-constrained, drive transformation through collective action. Social movement are collections of social movement organizations that form *informal networks* based on collective identity and it examines how these organizations function at both individual and organizational levels (Della Porta & Diani, 2020). New Social Movement researchers focusing on tourism have found three elements as most crucial to participation and involvement in social movements: self-efficacy, consciousness-raising, and the personal as political (Dillette & Benjamin, 2022; Della Porta & Diani, 2020; McGehee et al., 2014).

Self-efficacy refers to an individual’s belief in their ability to reach their goals (Bandura, 1977). Given the challenging nature of tourism social entrepreneurship that requires perseverance and tenacity, self-efficacy is arguably a vital trait for its participants but has not been explored as such. This has particular potential when considering means of overcoming obstacles to participation in regenerative tourism.

Consciousness-raising refers to an individual’s identification with and awareness of the ‘battlegrounds’ of social conflict (Mueller, 1992). It involves putting the spotlight on inequities, injustices, and inequalities, exposing the larger group of those being exploited to information that changes their view of an issue. Consciousness-raising is potentially important at numerous points of the tourism social entrepreneurship-regenerative tourism process.

The personal as political occurs when individuals can make the connection between their personal circumstances and their power, and then focus their consumer behavior in a way that reflects their political views (Whittier, 2017). For example, climate-conscious individuals may engage in making political personal by purchasing local produce, limiting their air travel, and recycling. The purchase of regenerative tourism products or services by both tourists and tourism social entrepreneurs is another potential personal as political activity that has not been examined.

Resource mobilization is considered the cornerstone of social movement theory (Della Porta, 2020) and is also crucial. McGehee *et al.* (2014) define resource mobilization as “*how and through what networks social movement organizations obtain economic, political, and human resources*” (p.142). These networks are arguably vital for tourism social entrepreneurs to participate in regenerative tourism, but they have not been explored as such. This study utilizes the classic community capital framework as a guide to categorize resource mobilization for tourism social enterprises (Aquino *et al.* 2018; Flora *et al.* 2004).

## **Methodology**

### *Research Paradigm*

An interpretive paradigm, grounded in the ontological belief of recognizing multiple realities, will guide this research (Bailey, 2007). This approach was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of the obstacles to regenerative tourism from the perspective of tourism social enterprises. The study employs a qualitative approach based on in-depth interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) with founders, CEOs, and managerial teams of tourism social enterprises.

### *Participants*

The participants in this research were selected using a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling methods. The author utilized connections with two community platforms, tourism social enterprise award winners, and snowball sampling to identify tourism social enterprises focusing on the regenerative tourism movement. The first platform is the *B Tourism* community, a global network of certified B Corporation travel and tourism companies and organizations. According to their website, this community aims to be a ‘resource for the regenerative travel movement and to help travelers enjoy a vacation experience that embodies interdependence and interconnectedness’ (B Tourism, 2023). The author pitched the research at their June 2023 virtual meeting and invited tourism social enterprise leaders to participate in the research. The lead author also reviewed the list of tourism-related certified B Corps organizations located on the official website of B Corps (B Corporation, 2023) and extended an invitation to all.

The second platform is *Regenerative Travel* (Regenerative Travel, 2023), a community of independent social enterprise hotels and travel agencies focused on regenerating people and places. Their platform assists travelers in finding hotels and agencies that share the vision of transforming the travel industry into a force for good. In addition to these networks, potential tourism social enterprises were identified through the list of winners from the *UNWTO SDGs Global StartUp Competition* and the *Social Tourism Competition*. Finally, the snowball sampling technique (Saldaña, 2015) was employed by asking for recommendations of other tourism social enterprises at the end of each interview.

Overall, approximately 150 companies were contacted through email invitations, resulting in successful interviews with 57 entrepreneurs. The majority of the final interviewees came from the *B Tourism* community (22), followed by the *UNWTO SDGs Global StartUp Competition* (13), *Regenerative Travel* platform (6), *Social Tourism Competition* (5), and the remaining 11 interviewees came from snowball sampling. These interviews were conducted via Zoom video (54) or audio calls (3). The types of tourism social enterprises included in the study encompassed various categories: tour operators and travel agents, accommodation providers (e.g., hotels, eco-

lodges, resorts, and villas), marketplace or app-based companies, consultants, and tourism businesses offering innovative products. Descriptive information about the participants and enterprises is provided in Table 1 in the Appendix A.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

An inductive thematic approach is employed to analyze the data (Saldaña, 2015). Following this approach and acknowledging previous theoretical knowledge, we utilize social movement theory as a starting point for our investigation of regenerative tourism participation. This research design aims to build a model for the 'regenerative tourism social movement theory' from the perspective of tourism social enterprises. To address trustworthiness in the data collection process, an audit trail was maintained, member checks were performed, and data triangulation of interviews, and website analysis were employed (DeCrop, 2004). The interviews lasted from 45 to 60 minutes via Zoom with guided questions. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for maximum transparency in data analysis. Themes, stories, and details were repeated across participants until we reached "theoretical sufficiency," in which we had categories that were well described along with the data presented, and we had an adequate depth of understanding from the data (Dey, 1999).

## **Results**

The interviews and supplemental data revealed three stages of tourism social enterprise's development and subsequent engagement with regenerative tourism, each interacting with social movement catalysts in unique ways: *Inspiration, Sustaining, Exploring, and Participating* stage. Perhaps the most important discovery through analysis of the interviews and materials was that a tourism social enterprise must be conceived of as possible before any thought of engagement in regenerative tourism can occur.

Inspiration Stage details the factors sparking the creation and innovation of tourism social enterprises, a precursor to regenerative tourism engagement. Perhaps the most intriguing finding of this component of the study is how participants emphasize a sense of purpose over self-efficacy as vital to facing and overcoming obstacles. Many of the tourism social entrepreneurs interviewed believe in their ability to overcome obstacles in their lives, but their strong sense of purpose to deliver social change far overshadows self-efficacy. It was almost as if they had no time or interest in worrying about *whether* they could do it but more a matter of the fact that they *must*. For many, this endeavor feels like a calling that persistently urges them to address intricate social phenomena. Nearly every tourism social enterprise's website shared that their company has a strong sense of purpose by using terms like "*purpose-driven organization*" and "*create positive change through the joy of travel*". Playa Viva in their impact report mentioned that "*the central aim is regeneration, both of the landscape and the communities in which they are located.*"

The Sustaining Stage examines the challenges in maintaining the business, strategies for success, and their recognition of the value and potential of regenerative tourism practices in helping the business flourish. In the sustaining stage, agency is less of an emphasis and resource mobilization becomes the key catalyst. Participants shared their views on the essential capitals needed for identifying obstacles and creating strategies to overcome them, how priorities for different capitals evolve over time, and even identify a new form of capital.

The Exploring and Participating Stage delves into the obstacles and strategies of engaging in regenerative tourism practices. In addition to the three stages, there was consistent evidence of the importance of a systems approach to problem-solving by the organizations. This approach created a feedback loop that energizes the enterprise and provides fresh catalysts of agency and resource mobilization. Figure 1 illustrates this process, depicting how tourism social enterprises integrate social movement catalysts and systems thinking for successful regenerative tourism participation.

The Regenerative Tourism Social Movement Theory Model: A Systems Approach

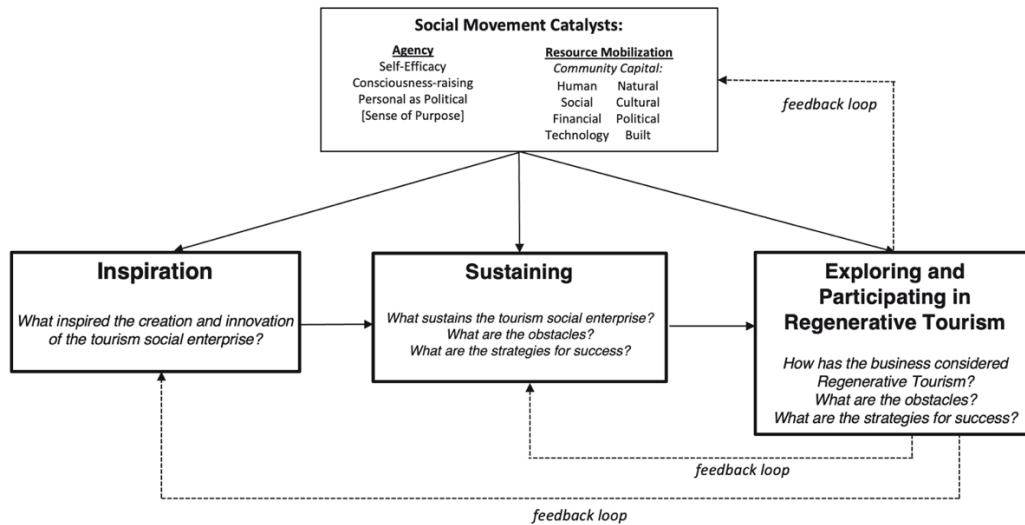


Figure 1. The Regenerative Tourism Social Movement Theory Model: Systems Thinking Approach

## Conclusion and Discussion

This research delves into the obstacles and strategies employed by tourism social enterprises as they embrace regenerative tourism. Employing social movement theory, fifty-seven interviews with tourism social entrepreneurs globally were conducted. This study has unveiled three stages of tourism social enterprises' development and subsequent engagement with regenerative tourism using social movement catalysts, revealing the importance of feedback loops and a systems thinking approach. The three stages are inspiration, sustaining, and exploring and participating in regenerative tourism.

At the inspiration stage, across 57 enterprises in the study, an overarching foundation of social movement agency among these participants is evident, introducing the importance of a sense of purpose, revealing the role of consciousness-raising experiences, and providing support for the value of personal-as-political commitment.

At the sustaining stage, *resource mobilization* emphasizes mutual benefit exchanges between social enterprises and destinations. Technology capital was illuminated by participants as crucial to success. The rise of technology utilization resonates with Della Porta & Diani's (2020) finding on the emergence of a "network society" in the new social movement where information

technology plays a central role in the social movement. At the exploration and participation in the regenerative tourism stage, the theme of *systems thinking* among tourism stakeholders, closely related to social capital, emerges as pivotal for successful regenerative tourism. This idea aligns with the perspectives of previous scholars (Sheldon, 2022; Major & Clarke, 2022) who advocate for a long-term, systems-thinking approach to understand tourism as interconnected entities that form symbiotic relationships with the broader community. This implies that as a business, tourism social enterprises are interdependent with the place and people including key stakeholders such as the community, business partners, DMOs, local government, and tourists.

Finally, the success of regenerative tourism not only rejuvenates destinations but reinforces social movement agency and mobilization of resources, catalyzing a *feedback loop*. These successful best practices align with the regenerative tourism goal of leaving destinations better than before, enhancing the capacity of ecosystems and human societies for a net positive impact (Cave & Dredge, 2020; Bellato et al., 2022).

This study brings distinct contributions to the tourism management literature. It extends the research in regenerative tourism by looking at the tourism social enterprises through the lens of social movement theory. The study extends the conversation around social movement agency through the identification of the participants' notions of sense of purpose as more important than self-efficacy as a form of agency for tourism social entrepreneurs. This work highlighted for the first time the specific resource mobilization strategies that are leveraged by tourism social enterprises with regenerative tourism engagement. The creation of the Regenerative Tourism Social Movement Theory Model reveals the importance of 1) social movement catalysts fueling three stages of tourism social enterprises, 2) the benefit of systems thinking in overcoming obstacles of regenerative tourism and the feedback loop it creates.

In practice, this study identifies tourism social enterprise obstacles to engagement in regenerative tourism and provides recommendations to overcome those obstacles. Tourism social enterprises are encouraged to adopt a systems thinking approach in their operation, recognizing that they are integral parts of the tourism ecosystem. Tourism social entrepreneurs are advised to prioritize collaboration over competition with key stakeholders to foster regenerative tourism. Joining a network of regenerative tourism practitioners and regularly sharing best practices is highly recommended. It can be a platform for educating other businesses and organizations on adopting regenerative tourism, including involving local government agencies and providing them with concrete examples of how regenerative tourism can benefit the destination. These successful practices align with the regenerative tourism goal of leaving destinations better than before, enhancing the capacity of ecosystems and human societies for a net positive impact (Cave & Dredge, 2020; Bellato et al., 2022).

As with any research, this study has limitations. Regenerative tourism as a concept is in its early stages, so measurement and analysis are difficult. Furthermore, to understand the overarching issue of regenerative tourism beyond tourism social enterprises, we need to include other stakeholders in the systems thinking approach, including Destination Management Organizations, tourists, residents, and mainstream tourism businesses. Future studies dedicated to comprehending the motivations, obstacles, and best practices of these stakeholders in driving regenerative tourism can be highly enlightening. For instance, a study could examine how DMOs can engage with

regenerative tourism and the impact on destination perception. These multi-dimensional investigations can collectively contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities and dynamics underpinning regenerative tourism.

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**Appendix A. Table 1. Demographic Profile of Participants**

Name	Gender Identity	Job Title	Enterprise' Headquarter Location	Company Name	Company Type	Years in Business
Aabiskar	Male	Founder & CEO	Asia	Explore Evenmore Tour & Travels and Sharing Seeds	Tour Operator	6 years
Aayusha	Female	CEO	Asia	Community Homestay Network	Marketplace, Platform, Apps-based	6 years
Adam	Male	Sustainability Specialist	North America	Greenstep	Consultant	15 years
Adi	Male	PR & Marketing Manager	Asia	Mana Ubud	Accommodation	4 years
AJ	Female	Founder & CEO	North America	Wandermaps	Marketplace, Platform, Apps-based	2 years
Alexander	Male	Founder & CEO	Europe	Socialbnb	Marketplace, Platform, Apps-based	4 years
Amalia	Female	Director	Oceania	Rubrik Solutions <i>(formerly known as Decorum)</i>	Consultant	6 years
Areli	Female	Sustainability Manager/ Regenerative Ambassador	Central America	Hanamasi	Accommodation	21 years
Asis	Male	Founder & CEO	Asia	Panauti Bike Station	Tour Operator	4 years
Bill	Male	Founder & CEO	Asia	Kizuna Travel	Tour Operator	5 years
Christian A	Male	Founder & CEO	South America	SmArt for Sustainability	Marketplace, Platform, Apps-based	4 years
Christian S	Male	Founder & CEO	Asia	Ngalung Kalla	Accommodation	20 years
David	Male	Founder & CEO	North America	Playa Viva	Accommodation	17 years
Debbie	Female	Founder & CEO	North America	The Coconut Traveler	Tour Operator (Onsite)	5 years
Eliza	Female	Co-Founder	Oceania	The Centre for GOOD Travel	Consultant	10 years
Elvies	Male	Founder & CEO	Africa	Merry & Memories Tours, Travels and Events	Tour Operator	4 years
Emanuele	Male	Founder & CEO	Europe	Fairbnb	Marketplace, Platform, Apps-based	4 years
Emma	Female	Social Purpose and Sustainability Manager	North America	Legacy Vacation Resorts	Accommodation	13 years
Evan	Male	Founder	North America	StayAltered	Marketplace, Platform, Apps-based	4 years
Gloria	Female	Co-Founder & CEO	Africa	GoPark Safaris	Tour Operator	8 years
I Made	Male	Co-Initiator with local community	Asia	JED Bali	Consultant	21 years
Suarnatha						
Iben	Male	Founder & CEO	Asia	Sebumi	Consultant	8 years

Table 1. Continued

Name	Gender Identity	Job Title	Enterprise' Headquarter Location	Company Name	Company Type	Years in Business
Indis	Male	Founder & CEO	Asia	Deگو Deگو Na Bira	Accommodation	4 years
Jenna	Female	Founder	North America	Camp Denali	Accommodation	48 years
Jennifer	Female	Founder & CEO	North America	Global Family Travels	Tour Operator	14 years
Jessica	Female	Founder & CEO	Asia	Bumi Journey	Tour Operator	4 years
John	Male	CEO	North America	Frontiers North Adventure	Tour Operator	36 years
Jonathan	Male	CEO	North America	UnTours	Tour Operator	47 years
Joy	Female	Founder	Oceania	Independent Volunteer	Consultant	25 years
Juan	Male	Head of Sustainability	South America	Explora	Tour Operator	30 years
Juliana	Female	Founder & CEO	South America	Impulse Travel	Tour Operator	5 years
Kieron	Male	Founder & CEO	North America	First Nature	Tour Operator	10 years
Krishna	Male	CEO	Asia	Serenity Bali	Accommodation	16 years
Marilyn	Female	Founder & CEO	South America	Nuevos Caminos Travel	Tour Operator	16 years
Marrien	Female	Sustainability Manager	Europe	Costruction	Innovative Product in Tourism	2 years
Matt	Male	Founder & Chief Regeneration Officer	Oceania	Regeneration Projects	Consultant	3 years
Mauricio	Male	Co-Founder & CEO	North America	La Mano Del Mono	Consultant	15 years
Mike	Male	Co-Founder & CEO	Africa	Kasbah Du Toubkal	Accommodation	45 years
Nadine	Female	Regenerative Tourism Specialist	Oceania	Untamed Escapes	Tour Operator	25 years
Nora A	Female	Founder & CEO	Asia	Ibu Bumi Orangutan	Tour Operator	5 years
Nora L	Female	Co-Founder & CEO	North America	Animal Experience International	Tour Operator	12 years
Pablo Martinez	Male	Founder & CEO	Central America	Etnica	Tour Operator	7 years
Pablo Menendez	Male	Founder & CEO	South America	Komu Travel	Consultant	3 years
Paola Sota	Female	Founder & CEO	South America	Ancestral Teacher	Marketplace, Platform, Apps-based	1 year
Polyana	Female	Founder & CEO	South America	Viare	Tour Operator	7 years
Rachel	Female	Founder & Eco-preneur	Europe	New Forest Escapes	Accommodation	13 years

Table 1. Continued

Name	Gender Identity	Job Title	Enterprise' Headquarter Location	Company Name	Company Type	Years in Business
Raisa	Female	Founder & CEO	Africa	The African Thrillist	Tour Operator	5 years
Reza	Male	Co-Founder & Chief Operating Officer	Asia	Atourin	Marketplace, Platform, Apps-based	4 years
Romy	Female	Co-Founder and Wellness Director	Africa	Future Found Sanctuary	Accommodation	3 years
Sajana	Female	Founder & CEO	Asia	Explore Hub Nepal	Tour Operator	5 years
Samantha	Female	Founder & CEO	North America	Roamwell	Consultant	4 years
Sandra	Female	Co-Founder & CEO	North America	Sea Salts of Hawaii	Innovative Product in Tourism	4 years
Sonal	Female	Founder & CEO	Asia	Astrostays	Tour Operator	4 years
Tim	Male	Founder & CEO	Asia	Astungkara Way	Tour Operator	3 years
Tom	Male	General Manager – North America	Oceania	Intrepid Travel	Tour Operator	34 years
Travis	Male	Co-Founder & CEO	Central America	Bodhi Surf Yoga	Accommodation	13 years
Zachary	Male	Co-Founder & CEO	North America	Journey Mexico	Tour Operator	20 years

\*All participants are preferred and approved use of their real name and company