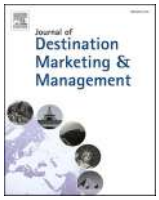
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# Tourism in the Pluriverse: Bridging theory and practice for regenerative futures in the Pacific

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ABSTRACT

Pacific Islanders have long been grappling with tourism as a livelihood strategy, yet environmental and cultural sustainability challenges persist. Envisioning a better future in which tourism delivers profound and lasting wellbeing outcomes for local people benefits from integrating diverse perspectives. Drawing on collective input from a Community of Practice, made up of Pacific Island experts and researchers, the Three Horizons approach was used to engage in transformational thinking and connect metatheorising with lived practice. Exploring innovations that support the transition from the declining tourism system of the present to a 'fitter' system in the future was central to the approach. Drawing on regenerative, sustainable, and livelihood frameworks, the emerging future tourism model proactively addresses systemic tensions and proposes eight bridging mechanisms for tourism transformation.

## 1. Introduction

Pacific Islands have long sustained vibrant local economies, but the legacies of colonial modernity have drawn many into global systems of capital, governance, and exchange that privilege external actors (Arora & Stirling, 2023). Within this context, tourism is promoted internationally as a pathway to inclusive sustainable development (UN Tourism, 2023), yet it remains embedded in global structures that, to some extent, reproduce dependency and limit local agency. Pacific Island states have also been long-standing recipients of overseas development aid and partnerships shaped by successive post-colonial policy paradigms. The problem we address in this research is the gap between tourism's promises and the persistent challenge of balancing environmental, social, cultural, and economic needs for host communities in a self-determined manner (Pratt et al., 2016; Sharpley, 2020; Westoby et al., 2021). These issues are well documented for the Pacific Islands (Movono et al., 2018; Scheyvens et al., 2023), where national and regional organisations are dedicating significant effort to improving tourism outcomes for "*the wellbeing of peoples and environments*" (Scheyvens, 2024, p. 2).

Here, we approach Pacific tourism as situated between the global forces of neoliberal capitalism and international tourism demand, and the local value systems and practices that remain deeply rooted in local cultural knowledge. The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced commitment to transition the Pacific tourism system (Becken & Loehr, 2022; Scheyvens et al., 2023) to one that genuinely serves host communities and ecosystems in an authentic 'Pacific way' (SPTO, 2021). Tangible evidence of system transformation, manifesting in substantial, positive shifts in values and practices (Nalau & Handmer, 2015), is emerging. Vanuatu, for example, has begun incorporating a 'flipped' perspective into their tourism strategies (Government of Vanuatu, Department of Government of Vanuatu Department of Tourism, 2021), where local needs are

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prioritised over external interests, and tourism activity is positioned as a vehicle for delivering well-being and resilience for the people of Vanuatu. However, tensions remain, and strategies are needed to achieve the desired shifts within the pluriverse (Savransky, 2019), where multiple worlds, knowledge systems, and realities inform everyday life (Becken et al., 2025).

Envisioning new tourism models necessitates reconciling diverse perspectives that reflect the realities of local communities, business owners, policymakers, and those operating in global tourism (including international scholars). In Pacific Island tourism, navigating across cultural boundaries is grounded in the lived experiences of communities that must negotiate both Indigenous and Western paradigms. Many communities in the region have developed the capacity and flexibility to engage with multiple knowledge(s) and adapt conceptual tools to suit shifting contexts and goals (Midgley, 2011). This is not by choice but reflects ongoing asymmetries of colonial modernity; the intertwined processes of colonisation and modernisation that continue to shape the Global South (Arora & Stirling, 2023). Opportunities for genuine transformation can arise when tensions are acknowledged, imbalances addressed, and 'fitter' models are co-created in ways that consciously bridge epistemic diversity (Tribe & Liburd, 2016). In some cases, reframing the problem may represent a hopeful beginning. For example, rejecting colonial narratives of 'small island states' and affirming Pacific identities within the global-local nexus Hau'ofa (1994) describes the region as a 'sea of islands'; a vast, connected world shaped by mobility, plentiful resources, exchange, and agency.

In recognition of the multi-faceted context in which tourism in the Pacific Islands occurs, the approach of this research was to establish a Community of Practice (CoP) that fosters social learning amongst its members from diverse backgrounds. The core proposition of a CoP is that regular interactions lead to mutual capacity building (Wenger, 2010) and, over time, can transcend theoretical and practical boundaries to inspire new tourism models and meaningful action (Midgley, 2011). This paper presents findings from a research project centred around a tourism CoP, composed of Pacific Islanders and the research team, with the common purpose of collaborating on transformative tourism pathways. Following a period of foundation building, the community engaged in a 5-day 'immersion' retreat to foster a holistic understanding (Edwards, 2009) of tourism and, ultimately, inform a new model.

One day of the retreat focused on future visioning using the *Three Horizons* approach (the focus of this paper), which explores the present (H1), identifies emerging changes (H2), and imagines an aspirational future (H3). This method is well-suited to navigating complexity and accommodating diverse worldviews and knowledge systems (Sharpe et al., 2016). Analysis of this process was informed by three complementary transformation frameworks, namely sustainable development, sustainable livelihoods, and regeneration. The project does not claim an explicit or authoritative engagement with Pacific Indigenous worldviews, recognising that such work requires a different approach and team, but it draws on regenerative tourism as an evolving paradigm that shares resonances with long-standing Indigenous approaches to reciprocity and stewardship. In doing so, it connects theoretical frameworks with the aspirations of Pacific communities, opening space for potential bridge-building in future work. The originality of this research lies in our approach to envisioning tourism futures: it explicitly surfaces the legacies of the Pacific tourism pluriverse by convening a diverse community of Pacific changemakers in a setting that enables meta-theorising in practice. The resulting bridging mechanisms address existing tensions and offer hopeful pathways towards an aspirational tourism system.

The paper establishes a theoretical foundation for integrating multiple frameworks to gain a deeper understanding of complex systems. Focusing on tourism in the Pacific Islands, it examines three relevant frameworks in depth before operationalising this pluralistic approach through a diverse CoP that co-designed tourism futures using the Three Horizons process. The resulting transformation elements are then connected back to the three frameworks to identify mechanisms that bridge theoretical and practical tensions. The paper concludes by reflecting on the research approach and its contribution to developing transformative tourism models.

## 2. Theoretical guidance

The transformation of human-environment systems necessitates integrating diverse frameworks and their associated concepts and theories (Ostrom, 1999). Relying on a single theory can produce partial views with unintended consequences, blind spots, and feedback loops that undermine well-intentioned interventions. Disciplinary constraints and the rules of dominant paradigms can limit our ability to explore transformative potentials (Tribe & Liburd, 2016). Within the vast transformation literature (Nalau & Handmer, 2015; Sharpe et al., 2016; Voulvoulis et al., 2022), three different frameworks emerged as relevant: Sustainable Development, Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, and Regeneration. These frameworks – and their underpinning theories and critiques – create an opportunity for theoretical pluralism in which different ideas, concepts, assumptions, and biases can be made apparent (Midgley, 2011). This process of meta-theorising allows deeper insights into a particular empirical problem beyond individual theories (Edwards, 2009). Theories can compete, exist alongside each other, or act complementary. This research focused on the complementary approach, where "*the issue of ontological and epistemological compatibility may appear less pressing because we are encouraging different understandings of the world*" (Cairney, 2013, p. 8). Here, we draw on tensions evident in how the frameworks interpret the fundamental nature of reality (i.e. ontology) as well as origin and limits of knowledge (i.e. epistemology). However, instead of treating the frameworks as competing prescriptions for tourism, we focus on a pluralistic world that calls for diverse and adaptable transformation mechanisms.

### 2.1. Sustainable Development

It is widely agreed that Sustainable Development emphasises a systems approach that seeks to balance economic, societal, and environmental pillars. It formally entered the global and political arena through the World Commission on Economic Development and the Commission's Brundtland (1987) that addressed the growing evidence of a degrading 'Spaceship Earth' and widespread poverty, despite economic progress. The widely cited goal of meeting humanity's needs today without compromising the ability of future generations was embedded in a worldview of "*a new era of economic growth*" (p. 16) in which social inequality was to be addressed by improving redistribution of a growing prosperity pie. The work was groundbreaking in many ways, including establishing global frameworks to address common challenges. Theories for liberal institutionalism, common pool resources, and polycentric governance, amongst others, helped explain multi-level systems. A pertinent example is how the global body of UN Tourism works with local destinations on sustainable tourism.

The Sustainable Development framework catalysed theoretical approaches to understanding 'externalities' leading to the inclusion of non-economic activities in economic frameworks. Environmental and ecological economics emerged as disciplines, exploring tools like Pigouvian taxes to address market failures, Corporate Social Responsibility in business, and consumer-focused theories of ethical or green consumption, including mechanisms for behaviour change such as nudging. Carrying capacity became a central concept, initially addressed through technologically driven, utilitarian approaches (Jacob, 1994). Research has also sought to determine community wellbeing through indicator-based approaches such as Gross Happiness (Pratt et al., 2016). While these methods provided measurable frameworks aligned with a positivist paradigm, they tended to underplay social, cultural, and governance dimensions, leading to later critiques and the emergence of more adaptive, participatory models.

The most fundamental criticism of this framework relates to its embedded growth theories. Herman Daly (1990, p. 26) pointed to the "*unresolved, indeed unaddressed, issue of steady state versus growth as the normal, healthy condition of an economy. Economists' growth-bound way of thinking makes it hard for them to admit the concept of throughput of matter-energy, because it brings with it the first and second laws of thermodynamics, which have implications that are unfriendly to the continuous growth ideology*." Implying questions of justice and power, Daly further argued that growth ideology is popular amongst politicians because it avoids challenging discussions on diverging lifestyles and resource sharing. A similar emphasis on economic self-preservation, rather than collective problem-solving, is also evident in a review of sustainable tourism development research (Sharpley, 2020).

Sustainable Development and its incarnations of the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals are rooted in an anthropocentric worldview, unlimited opportunities and resources, humanity's journey of infinite progress, a rationale for individual wealth, and the role of science in achieving these (Jacob, 1994). This mechanistic worldview comes with a preference for hard data and measure-to-manage heuristics, where progress is certified against auditable standards (Hall, 2019). In tourism, where experiences are highly tailored, the narrow conceptualisation of sustainability has been critiqued as inadequate for engaging hosts and guests amid existential crises (Becken & Coghlan, 2024). The framework has since evolved to include indigeneity, decolonisation, and a shift from economic goals to a broader value base such as community well-being (Mika & Scheyvens, 2022; Scheyvens et al., 2021). Critical scholars also aim to advance the sustainability paradigm by exploring different ontological perspectives and cross-fertilising ideas from evolutionary, relational, and durational perspectives (Garud & Gehman, 2012).

### 2.2. Sustainable Livelihoods

Another tourism-relevant framework emerged from the Brundtland Report's emphasis on poverty alleviation and livelihoods. Recognising some of the failures of early international development support, the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach intended to deliver more effective and holistic outcomes by focusing on poverty elimination. Sustainable Livelihoods interventions are guided by an evidence-based, systemic assessment of current conditions and build on existing strengths. It draws on theories related to human and social capitals (alongside physical and financial capitals) and capabilities (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Sen, 1985). The exact nature of 'capitals' that make up the building blocks of wellbeing continues to be debated (Morse & McNamara, 2013). However, it is understood that access to capitals and power are shaped by structural 'entitlements' amongst people and communities (Adger & Kelly, 1999).

Intangible capitals (e.g. identity, belonging, networks or spirituality) play a vital role in the wellbeing of Pacific Island cultures. Examples include traditional kastom, cultural sites and sacred places, Indigenous and local knowledge, life-sustaining tools, biodiversity and ecosystem values, and deep connections to land and sea. These are particularly relevant where customary land is not merely an asset but a source of cultural practices, meaning, and sense of place. Movono et al. (2018) reflect on the construction of a tourist resort on communal land in Fiji, which resulted in the erosion of interactions between people, their customary resources, traditional belief systems, and livelihoods, and ultimately compromised "*people's skills relevant to survival within their natural surroundings*" (Movono et al., 2018, p. 458). Instead, a tourism-focused intervention using the SLA framework would focus on increasing resilience to reduce vulnerability to stress or shocks, rather than target the expansion of tourism per se (Lasso & Dahles, 2018). In this way, resilience theory underpins sustainable livelihoods thinking, offering a lens for understanding the interplay between tourism, traditional livelihoods, and community wellbeing in mixed economies of the Pacific.

Despite the framework's strengths-based language and attempts at decolonising development support, a dominant deficit discourse persists, often framed by outsiders looking towards the Pacific through the lens of what is missing or failing. At this vanguard is the notion of 'helping' the 'other' without adequately acknowledging local autonomy, creativity, and diverse capabilities at scale (Westoby et al., 2020). In contexts shaped by excess consumption, capital, and mobility in the West, focusing too heavily on 'resilience' can shift responsibility onto others to adapt (Said, 1978), while overlooking the power imbalances and exploitative systems that contribute to the root causes of vulnerability (Arora & Stirling, 2023; Chandler, 2020). The emphasis on resilience has therefore been critiqued for shifting responsibility to individuals and communities to 'cope' without confronting systemic injustice (Chandler, 2020). The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach is informed by multiple ontologies, including emancipatory, Indigenous, and relational perspectives, recognising that knowledge takes different forms and is shared through diverse delivery modes. Agency and empowerment are central to its moral underpinning—that people should be free to achieve their desired livelihood strategies to support their wellbeing (Sen, 1985). Still, the framework falls short in guiding significant transformations, in particular due to a potential oversimplification of structural and transformative elements, including the role of global forces such as climate change (Natarajan et al., 2022). While also critiqued for theoretical ambiguity, the core concepts remain valuable for exploring relationships among tourism, development, and community livelihoods.

### 2.3. Regeneration

The Earth Charter (2000) laid an important foundation for viewing Planet Earth as a co-evolving and self-regulating organism, supporting biocentric perspectives like those expressed in deep ecology. Arne Naess (1988) proposed that all beings are equal. He emphasised the concept of self-realisation as a combination of spiritual and material realities, contrasting these with Western mechanistic dualism (Jacob, 1994). Thus, the ethics of biocentrism are based on ecological sciences but also represent values such as the thesis that all species and landforms hold intrinsic value. We interpret the academic framework of Regeneration, distinct from its long-standing practice, as a Western concept that expresses a longing for a world different to prevailing paradigms of the North (Bellato & Pollock, 2023; Dredge, 2022; Pollock, 2015). Regeneration draws, in principle and idealistically, on Indigenous worldviews about reciprocity, stewardship, and interconnection. By including this framework, we recognise attempts to bridge between the Western-dominated world of tourism, the shortcomings of established paradigms such as sustainability, and the continued role of Indigenous ontologies.

Academically, researchers are attempting to theorise regenerative knowledge and practices, often more prevalent in the Global South, into what could become a new paradigm. Buckton et al. (2023) summarise key principles as: (i) an ecological worldview, (ii) mutualism, (iii) high diversity, (iv) agency for both humans and non-humans, and (v) reflexivity. In the domain of tourism, regeneration as a concept also gained fast traction, with researchers examining diversified economic models (Mika & Scheyvens, 2022), 'value-based' tourism models (Becken & Kaur, 2021), the central role of 'place' and localisation (Higgins-Desbiolles & Bigby, 2022), guidance offered through Indigenous peoples' knowledge (Te Ava & Page, 2020), and regenerative literacy (Becken & Coghlan, 2024). Regenerative tourism draws on theories on pro-environmental behaviour, governance, stewardship, and visitor experience, for example, through emotional engagement or sense-making. It explicitly encourages diverse forms of knowledge and worldviews (Bellato & Pollock, 2023). Regenerative tourism accommodates anthropocentrism by promoting empathy with nature (Bellato et al., 2023) as a path to reconcile humans' apparent dominance with pressing ecological imperatives and hopes that traditional knowledge

systems will save humanity. As such, regenerative tourism is also often connected to theories of decolonisation, peace and justice (Mika & Scheyvens, 2022).

Despite its vision, how regenerative approaches can meaningfully challenge the deeply embedded neo-liberal 'project' remains unclear. Key issues, such as human domination over other humans, environmental justice, and poverty alleviation, remain largely undiscussed. Recent moves to grant personhood to landscape features, for example, demonstrate interest in levelling the biosphere and human systems, but also reveal risks inherent in incorporating ecological values into anthropocentric systems (O'Donnell, 2020). Transformation requires shifts in systems, mindsets, and practices (Becken & Coghlan, 2024; Dredge, 2022). However, a key barrier is the lack of acceptance of a biocentric worldview amongst politicians and traditional scientists (see Shi et al., 2019, p. 7 on "absurdly strong sustainability"), and stakeholder confusion about its meaning (Pung et al., 2024). Like deep ecology, regenerative tourism faces critiques of ambiguous scientific grounding and utopian tendencies (Jacob, 1994). Outside tourism, there are attempts to advance a theory of regeneration grounded in a scientific understanding of complex adaptive systems and their failures (Santa Fe Institute, 2023). However, overly localised approaches risk ignoring planetary boundaries (Rockström et al., 2009) and missing a larger 'turn' of humankind (Macy & Johnstone, 2022). This tension is evident in regenerative tourism's reliance on carbon-intensive air travel.

### 2.4. Interweaving the frameworks

The Sustainable Development, Sustainable Livelihoods, and Regeneration frameworks reveal a complex landscape of perspectives, narratives, knowledge systems, and practices, each offering distinct insights for transforming tourism. They all seek to improve life on Earth and engage with systemic thinking to identify leverage points across spatial and temporal scales. Sustainable Development connects directly to global institutions and policy frameworks, often working within existing structures to balance growth and sustainability. Sustainable Livelihoods focuses on place-based empowerment, resilience, and local capitals, while Regeneration provokes more profound transformation through biocentric ethics, intrinsic values, and consciousness (Pollock, 2015). Regenerative tourism challenges the dominant paradigms, but its transformative potential remains constrained by entrenched neoliberal structures, limited political acceptance, and conceptual ambiguity. Together, the frameworks reflect the real-world paradox of sustainable tourism: an industry driven by profit and globalisation, yet aspiring to 'give back' by restoring ecosystems and local wellbeing (Becken & Kaur, 2021).

Complementarity between the frameworks is an important starting point for co-developing a 'fitter' tourism future. However, it is also constructive to consider contradictions. Eight tensions can be identified where the different frameworks offer diverging perspectives and 'pull' the system in different directions. Two tensions manifest at the deepest level of diverging worldviews: *Growth vs Post-growth* and *Anthropocentrism vs Biocentrism* predisposition (Fig. 1). As argued earlier, Sustainable Development is closely tied to growth-oriented economic systems, whilst the focus on local wellbeing taken in livelihood approaches indirectly questions this assumption. Regeneration rejects eternal growth logic, evoking concepts such as reciprocity and circularity, rather than linearity. In terms of prioritising human needs over those of other species, only the Regeneration framework rejects human domination over the rest of the natural world.

At the rules and system structures level, there are tensions in how frameworks conceive the role of *Global vs Local Governance*. Sustainable Development effectively takes a global approach, whilst the other two frameworks focus attention on the local level. Related to this is the tension around *Universality vs Justice*, which brings to the fore whether and how frameworks address embedded and historic injustices. The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach incorporates justice dimensions, but it continues to be framed as helping the "poor other." Regeneration recognises differentiated responsibilities and justice challenges (distributional, procedural, intergenerational, environmental) (Rastegar & Becken, 2025) but lacks widely accepted tools for resolving these tensions. It also tends to idealise indigenous ways of life ("we all need to live this way"), which risks trivialising context-specific struggles or power

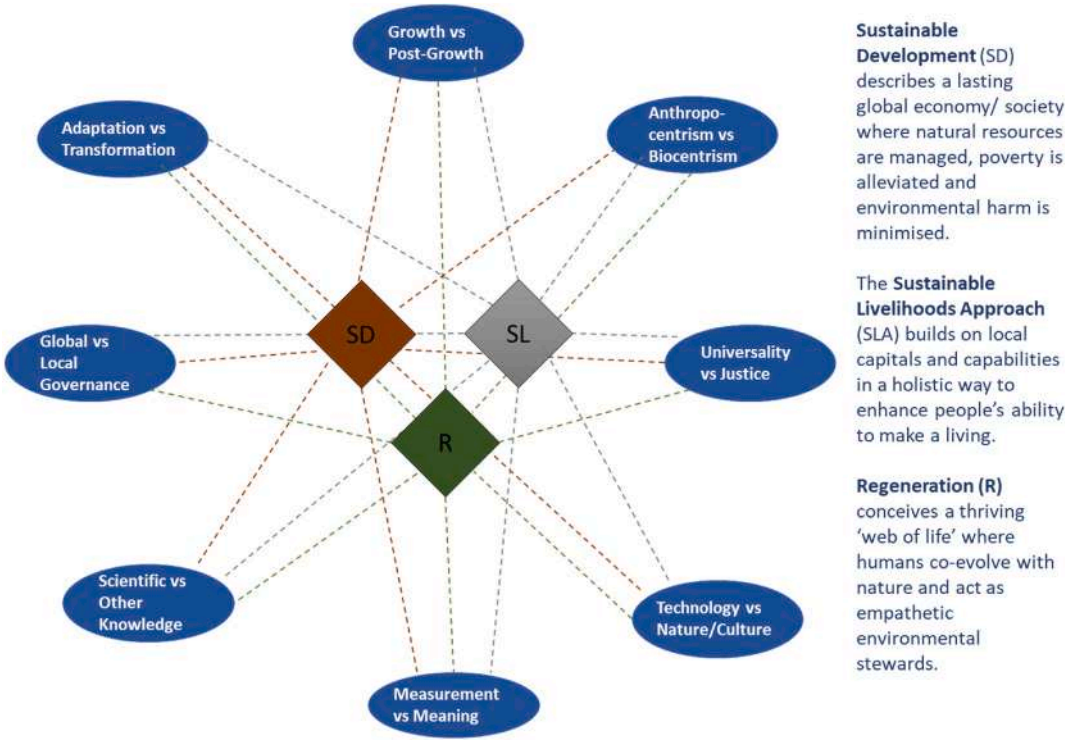



**Fig. 1.** Three transformation frameworks visualised as a symbolic web with eight tensions.

differentials. Building on this, a separate tension focuses on knowledge legitimacy, specifically, *Scientific vs Other Knowledge*. The Regeneration framework is set apart by embracing epistemic diversity, while the livelihoods approach partly recognises practical knowledge and local strengths. Finally, both intensity and direction of change envisaged in the three frameworks differ markedly. Encapsulated in the tension *Adaptation vs Transformation*, Sustainable Development is largely focused on incremental change that continues to be anchored in existing paradigms, whilst Regeneration explicitly calls for fundamental changes.

Two more tensions are situated at the practical system level. *Measurement vs Meaning* captures how the Sustainable Development framework is based on quantifiable verification and global comparability through standards, which contrasts with how the other frameworks capture meaning as evidence of success. The final tension focuses on solutions grounded in *Technology vs Nature/Culture*. Many have critiqued technocratic approaches to development, calling for broadening the spectrum through nature-based solutions (e.g. in climate change adaptation) or cultural shifts and personal transformation in people's inner worlds (Taveras-Dalmau, 2024).

## 3. Methodology

The research is guided by an *appreciative inquiry* that counters the deficit framing that often characterises international engagement. Rather than asking "what is missing," appreciative inquiry builds on participants' resources, capital, skills, and strengths (Nyaupane & Poudel, 2012). Moreover, and borrowing from the context of peacebuilding, the elicitive approach recognises the central role of participants as the seedbed of change (Lederach, 1995). Aligned with the sustainable livelihoods and regenerative frameworks, researching 'with' rather than 'about' is essential. Before funding success in 2022, the research underwent extensive dialogical processes with local partners to co-develop the research problem and approach. Beyond being 'reflexive', our deepest commitments were to amplify Pacific stakeholder voices through this project.

### 3.1. Establishing a Community of Practice

The CoP created a structured space for interaction, collaboration, and multidisciplinary solution development (Watkins et al., 2018; Wenger, 2010). Eight partner organisations participated, representing diverse aspects of the tourism system that are not readily visible from countries' tourism strategies and marketing material. Although the private sector was not directly represented, all partners are actively engaged in the tourism industry. The group was intentionally composed to reflect sectoral, cultural, and environmental interests: two NGOs working with tourism enterprises, one organisation focused on cultural education, and three partners supporting conservation through tourism collaboration. Two regional bodies, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme and the South Pacific Tourism Organisation, added unique perspectives related to diverse regional policy contexts. Importantly, and as common in the Pacific, each participant in the CoP 'wears multiple hats', for example, in the form of traditional leadership roles, entrepreneurship, or religious capacities within the community, contributing insights well beyond their professional positions. In addition, the CoP included a doctoral student from the Solomon Islands who focuses on Indigenous knowledge, two Research Associates from Fiji and the Cook Islands, and the research team from Griffith University. The Griffith researchers saw their roles as facilitating the process and connecting the group's ideas and aspirations with the scientific realm of sustainable tourism and transformation. The CoP was a genuine attempt to bring together the 'practice' of tourism and academic discourses.

Before the in-person 'Immersion' retreat, it was critical to build trust and rapport. Once the project had formally started, three online workshops were held throughout 2022 and 2023 to explore key aspects of the project, including capacity-building opportunities for Pacific partners and researchers. Partnership building continued during field visits in the Cook Islands and Fiji, enhancing the collective understanding of key tourism issues, the role of the project, and opportunities for collaborative planning (Vogt et al., 2016). One-on-one exchanges with partners on specific topics produced shared knowledge about aspects of the tourism system. The CoP's discussions guided the selection of three complementary frameworks for exploring alternative tourism futures. Engagement with partners highlighted the need to address environmental pressures, cultural change, and the lived realities of Pacific tourism. In response, the research team drew on sustainable tourism development literature to frame broad system challenges, regenerative tourism to incorporate restoration and the central role of local and Indigenous knowledge, and the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach to reflect tourism's importance for community wellbeing and micro-enterprise.

### 3.2. Three Horizons workshop

In February 2024, members of the CoP convened for five days to engage in culturally appropriate processes (Smith, 2012) of co-researching, via Talanoa (telling stories or having conversations) and sharing of realities guided by emotional, cultural, and spiritual life worlds (Movono et al., 2018). During this week, acknowledging the perceived and actual power of 'Western' facilitators was paramount. We committed to stepping back from 'expertise' in the spirit of openness and non-disciplinarity (Westoby et al., 2025). We authentically embraced relational, embodiment, and holistic perspectives, guided by established research principles and protocols (University of Otago, 2011). Central to this immersion week was an honouring and commitment to pluralism and diverse knowledge(s). The co-design research we engaged in together involved the 'Three Horizons Mapping' method (Sharpe et al., 2016). Participants are listed in Table 1, but quotes in the findings are anonymised to protect individual identities.

The Three Horizons practice provides a structure to engage in future thinking. Embracing complexity and uncertainty, the method encourages creativity in visioning forward and reflecting backward. The focus is on understanding how the current system is functioning, how it should evolve and what types of innovations might bridge between the present and the future. The practice is not just a facilitation tool but can be used as a boundary-crossing space where different worldviews are negotiated. For detailed facilitation tools, readers are referred to the rich resources provided by H3Uni (2024). In summary, the tools anchor around mapping the horizons on a chart where the horizontal axis indicates time, whilst the vertical axis reflects the prevalence of a particular pattern (Schaal et al., 2023; Sharpe et al., 2016). In our research, the y-axis represents the tourism system's 'fitness' in delivering on Pacific aspirations. Fitness is shaped by prevailing paradigms, discourses, practices, and power relations that evolve over time.

During the CoP Immersion week, the mapping process began outdoors with a shared discussion to clarify the problem and agree on a system goal (Photo 1, top). The group then explored Horizon 1 (H1), identifying features of the current tourism system and responding to prompts such as "what evidence do you see that the current system is failing" and "what elements are worth keeping?". Sticky notes with ideas were placed on a poster for group discussion (Photo 1, middle). Following common facilitation guidance, the third Horizon 3 (H3) was addressed next (Photo 1, bottom). H3 represents a transformed future characterised by new patterns, actors, and system interactions. Facilitation questions were "what visions are there for the future" and "what long-term trends are leading us there"? As the final stage of the workshop, Horizon 2 (H2) captured turbulent transition activities that connect H1 and H2. Some of these innovations may drag the system back into the old stage (referred to as negative H2), and others enable a profound transformation (positive H2) (Sharpe et al., 2016; Wahl,

**Table 1**
CoP participants (N = 14) of the Three Horizons workshop.

| Participant # | Gender | Partner organisation represented | Country of origin | Country of workplace |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 (facilitator) | Male | University | New Zealand | Australia |
| 2 (facilitator) | Female | University | Germany | Australia |
| 3 (facilitator) | Male | University | Australia | Australia |
| 4 | Male | University | Solomon Islands | Australia |
| 5 | Female | Tourism Consultant | Cook Islands | Cook Islands |
| 6 | Female | University | Fiji | Fiji |
| 7 | Male | Foundation | Fiji | Fiji |
| 8 | Female | NGO (local) | Fiji | Fiji |
| 9 | Female | NGO (national) | Cook Islands | Cook Islands |
| 10 | Female | NGO (national) | Cook Islands | Cook Islands |
| 11 | Male | NGO (local) | Australia | Vanuatu |
| 12 | Female | NGO (international) | Solomon Islands | Solomon Islands |
| 13 | Male | Regional Organisation | Kiribati | Regional |
| 14 | Female | Regional Organisation | Samoa | Regional |

2017). The group identified examples of emerging innovations within Pacific tourism that could act as enablers of system change.

In our workshop, participants were advised that all horizons exist simultaneously, but the dominance of the different frames evolves. Three Horizons mapping took one day and was undertaken in three groups of 3–4 participants. The session was recorded, and the research team re-listened to the conversations to make sense of the maps and identify poignant contributions that enhanced the sticky notes. Two months after the workshop, participants were invited to review and validate the consolidated horizon maps generated across the three groups. Following the approach of Schaal et al. (2023), the lead researcher then clustered the written notes and combined maps into thematic groupings. These clusters were reviewed with research partners, who suggested refinements. Six CoP members subsequently provided additional feedback on the thematic clusters and an early draft of the tourism model. Based on this, 12 transformation elements were derived, beginning with key themes from H3, followed by H2 and H1. These elements were then connected systematically with the previously identified tensions visualised in Fig. 1. Table 2 in the Appendix summarises the analytical steps followed to derive bridging mechanisms.

## 4. Three Horizons findings

### 4.1. Problem statement agreed on by the CoP

To begin, a Talanoa helped create a consensus problem statement. From an appreciative inquiry perspective, the problem was then reframed to an aspirational lens: 'Tourism catalyses benefits to people and nature in island destinations.' In doing so, participants resisted viewing Island people as dependent on tourism. Instead, participants proposed to reframe tourism as, in fact, being reliant on local nature and people in the Pacific. During this Talanoa, several participants noted the importance of anchoring discussions around shared values rather than specific words. The richness of some Pacific languages already connects regenerative principles with sustainability practices, making conversations around (Western language) frameworks or theories redundant. The rejection of semantic discussions of whether tourism should be 'sustainable' or 'regenerative' was evident in the CoP and signalled a gap between 'outside academic/Western' approaches and 'lived practices'. Instead, one participant proposed "*place attachment or attachment to place is critical to Islander identity and should, in many ways, be the angle to explore tourism futures …*". The group agreed that the aspirational framing of H3 should prioritise stopping any further loss of nature and culture from tourism activities in the Pacific. Restoring what has already been lost is the second priority, followed by delivering livelihood enhancement and improved wellbeing. This positions natural and cultural capitals as non-negotiable foundations for future human activities.

### 4.2. From the present to the future: evolving horizons

There was strong agreement across the three workshop groups regarding the nature of the current tourism system (H1), its shortcomings, and the elements worth keeping. As illustrated in Fig. 2, participants characterised H1 as dominated by profit maximisation and mass tourism, increasingly viewed as unfit for purpose. Sticky notes highlighted insufficient political will, lack of care, and greed, with one participant citing airline "flash sales" as emblematic of extractive business models. This rejection of business-as-usual must be understood in the context of tourism development that is often externally driven, where "*access to managerial roles for Pacific Islanders is difficult*" and where rising visitor numbers are not matched by adequate infrastructure. Significant environmental problems result from poorly managed growth, not just in tourism. Participants also observed erosion of culture, the breakdown of societal structures, ill-considered government policy, increased amounts of imported food, and the loss of educated Pacific Islanders going overseas. Education gaps, among local actors, visitors, and politicians, were seen as a key barrier to more sustainable, locally grounded tourism. Positive aspects of the current system included the vibrant Indigenous knowledge and a growing appreciation for the opportunities to integrate it into tourism practices (Fig. 2). Forward-looking partnerships and grassroots initiatives were welcomed (e.g. "*NGOs and the private sector partner provide opportunities for visitors to give back to the environment*"). Concerning the group itself, one participant shared that they "*really loved learning from all the NGOs in the CoP. Great to see empowering the private sector to do good. We need to replicate successful examples*". Climate finance is beginning to trickle into the tourism system, alongside investments in green technologies. However, these need urgent scaling.

The language used to describe H1 reflects critiques of neoliberal capitalism and draws on the Sustainable Development framework, with recurring references to economic leakage, the commodification of culture, and greenwashing. When discussing the present system, CoP participants drew on established development narratives: culture was to be 'integrated', stakeholders were 'consulted', conservation practices 'improved', and 'financial literacy' was to be developed. Their framing of H1 revealed anthropocentric and technocentric perspectives, alongside a sense of disenfranchisement of being subject to forces beyond their control.

In contrast, the future tourism system (H3) maps a shift from extractive, growth-oriented tourism toward a holistic, place-based system that regenerates nature and culture while redistributing power and benefits (Fig. 3). Participants determined the system's goals as creating multi-dimensional well-being, characterised by inclusiveness, equity, and local ownership ("*give voice to Pacifica*"). The language used aligned closely with the Regeneration framework, invoking terms such as "mindful," "flourishing," and "thriving." Participants identified existing 'seeds of hope', such as nature-based solutions or interest in regenerative

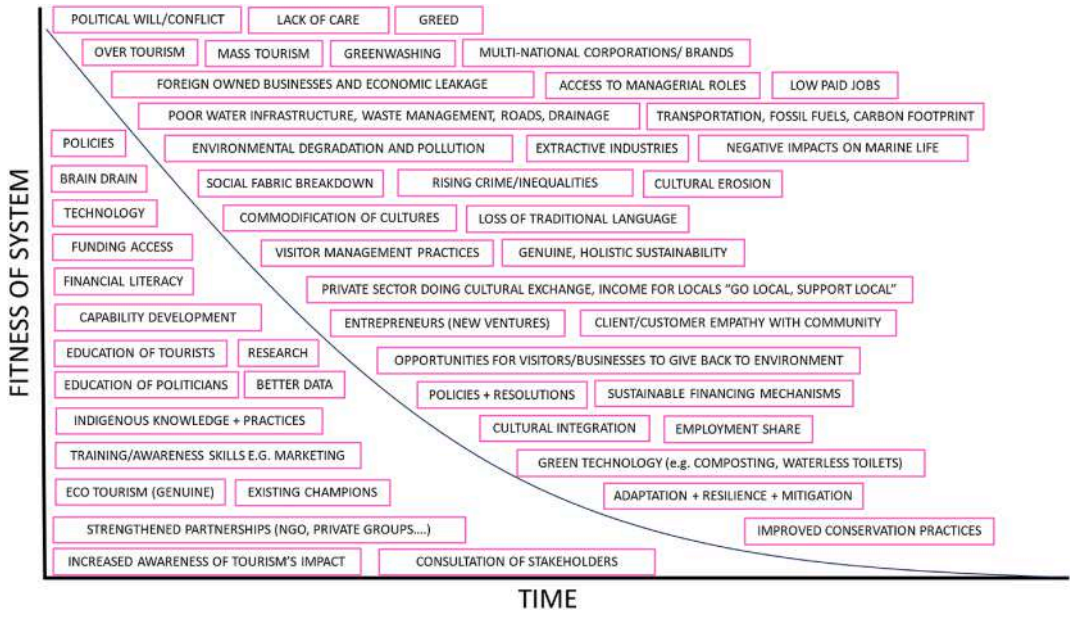



**Fig. 2.** The current tourism system (H1).

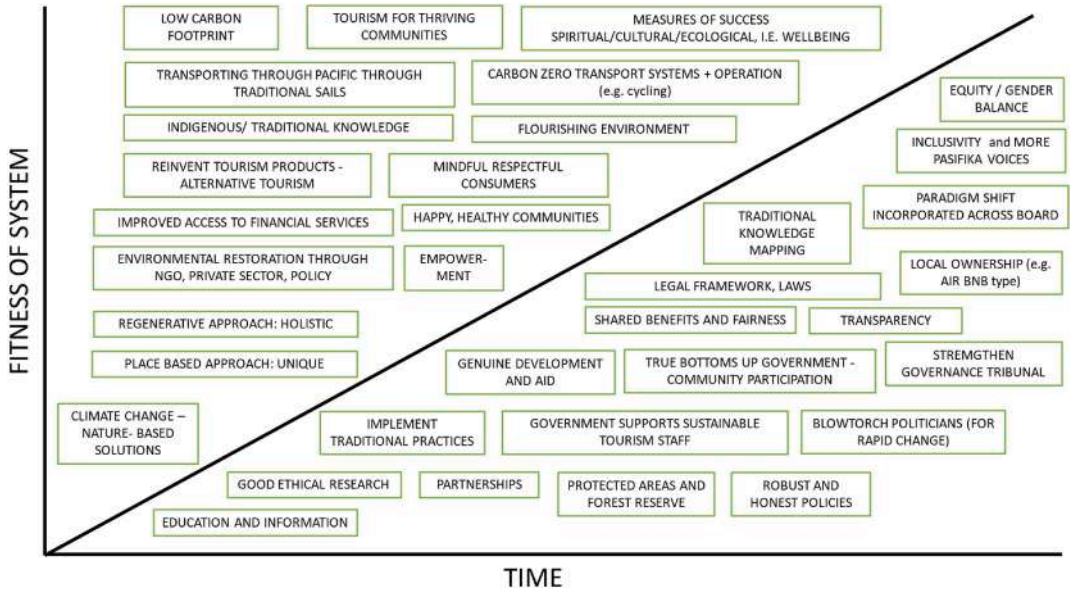



**Fig. 3.** The future tourism system (H3).

tourism projects. Several participants emphasised "*we really don't want to reinvent the wheel*" but build on existing knowledge and mechanisms. Thus, transformation required building a pragmatic bridge between existing groundwork and future aspirations. Academia offered a clear illustration. In several Pacific countries, research practices are already shifting through the adoption of Indigenous methodologies. Continuing along this trajectory is essential for further decolonising knowledge production, prioritising Pacific Islanders and managing research undertaken by outsiders with strict ethical protocols. Taking back control was also evident in suggesting that governance systems must change to enable "*true bottom-up community participation*" and share resources more fairly. Governments are expected to "*ensure all tourism revenue is captured appropriately, and* funds *are channelled … and invested into local people*".

When exploring H2, participants shared diverse ideas for change grounded in an orientation towards community sovereignty, cultural revitalisation, and ecological stewardship (Fig. 4). Specific examples related to innovative livelihoods (e.g. farm-to-table, a local coffee shop) and new conservation methods. The Niue Ocean Commitment, for example, serves as an example where "*donors and anyone, really, can actually* fund *the conservation of Niue's ocean; there is a map and depending on how much money you put into the trust* fund *it shows you how much you protect of the ocean, we should be thinking about similar models in our own countries*". The Palau Pledge evokes an eco-centric turn, whilst reigniting Pacific Islanders with traditional skills, practices, and knowledge, which could be pivotal in reaffirming people's connectedness with land and water. Moreover, sharing knowledge, lessons learned from experimentation and collaborative approaches were identified as accelerating transformation. For example: "*Lots of great things, wonderful things, are*

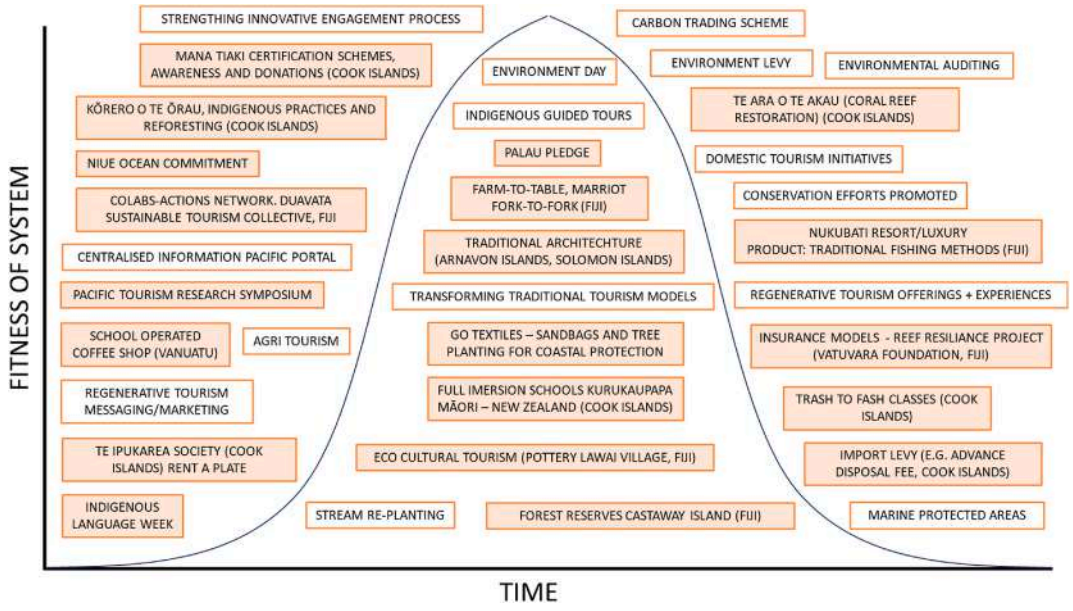



**Fig. 4.** Innovations for change (H2) (Note: orange-highlighted notes are examples of real-world initiatives). (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the Web version of this article.)

*happening already that nobody knows about, we need to be better at sharing things, […] we need to get better at collecting information and sharing, to feed into the Pacific Portal*[1] *so that our own people can learn and initiatives get documented*". The language used in H2 connected with the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, for example, by highlighting "agribusiness-tourism linkages," "capacity development," and "local ownership". It also laid the foundation for an ontological reorientation towards regeneration, although some of the current practical initiatives remain at the symbolic level (e.g. trash-to-fash; fashion made from waste).

### 4.3. Towards tourism transformation

The Three Horizon method perfectly reflects the pluriverse in which Pacific Islanders engage with the tourism sector. All three horizons coexist at any point in time; rather than replacing one another, their relative prominence shifts in response to political will, community readiness, agency, and internal or external pressures. At this point, H1 (current system) dominates, H2 (innovations) is emerging, and H3 (aspirations) offers a guiding vision. Drawing on the desirable features across the horizons, twelve transformation elements were identified. These comprise four future-oriented visions (H3), five nascent innovations (H2), and three elements already embedded in the current system (H1) (see Appendix Fig. 6). However, the twelve elements exist in a world of tensions, just like the ones identified in the theoretical framework earlier. Fig. 5 illustrates this by positioning the transformation elements at the centre of a "tension web," highlighting how the Pacific tourism system is pulled in multiple directions.

In contrast to the earlier framework, however, Fig. 5 replaces the original eight tensions with positively framed bridging mechanisms that directly reflect the aspirations expressed by Pacific Island CoP members. Each bridge reframes a polarisation into an integrative pathway: growth versus de-growth is addressed through a focus on growing holistic wellbeing; anthropocentric–biocentric divides through a nature-positive ethic that activates humans as stewards; and global–local governance tensions through ground-truthing global standards in locally empowered, place-based practices. This reframing also addresses justice concerns through the centring of Pacific voices. Epistemic tensions between scientific and other forms of knowledge are bridged through a plurality of knowing and being, while adaptation–transformation debates are reframed as a shift from coping to creating. Divergent evaluation paradigms are reconciled through an emphasis on 'impact data' that combine measurement with meaning, and tensions between technological and nature–culture-based solutions are addressed through complementary, meaningful technologies that support regenerative human–nature relationships.

The case of global tourism markets illustrates how bridging mechanisms can be applied. The current system pulls tourism in the direction of 'growth' and 'global governance', where Pacific Islanders feel disempowered and exploited. Participants rejected that 'outsiders' in overseas travel agencies 'sell' the Pacific Islands by stereotyping them as sun, sea and sand products. One CoP member critiqued "… *do they have the same passion that we do? Are they pushing for the traditional trajectory up up up, because they don't care?*". Yet, there was consensus that tourism remains integral to the economic wellbeing of most Pacific Islands. Bridging this tension requires a shift from growing tourism to growing wellbeing. Participants identified mechanisms such as setting limits on visitor numbers, increasing value per visitor, and redistributing tourism revenues to address local priorities. Ground-truthing global systems is another bridging mechanism that could help improve global distribution channels. This includes ensuring Pacific representation in leadership roles within the global tourism system, validating global standards (e.g., for quality or sustainability) through indigenous verification, and developing Pacific-grown online platforms to shape narratives and market access.

## 5. Concluding discussion

This paper documents the co-creation process of a future tourism model that resonates with Pacific Islanders' aspirations, grounded in theoretical understandings of system characteristics seen through different but complementary lenses. A Three Horizons workshop helped structure the Talanoa over a 5-day immersion week to derive a shared understanding of the present system, a 'fitter' future, and an innovative transition phase. This approach proved to be a constructive way of distilling desirable elements from the present, whilst recognising those

[1] The Pacific Portal is a digital platform to empower tourism stakeholders https://southpacificislands.travel/spto-unveils-innovative-tourism-training-portal-a-game-changer-for-the-pacific-regions-workforce/.

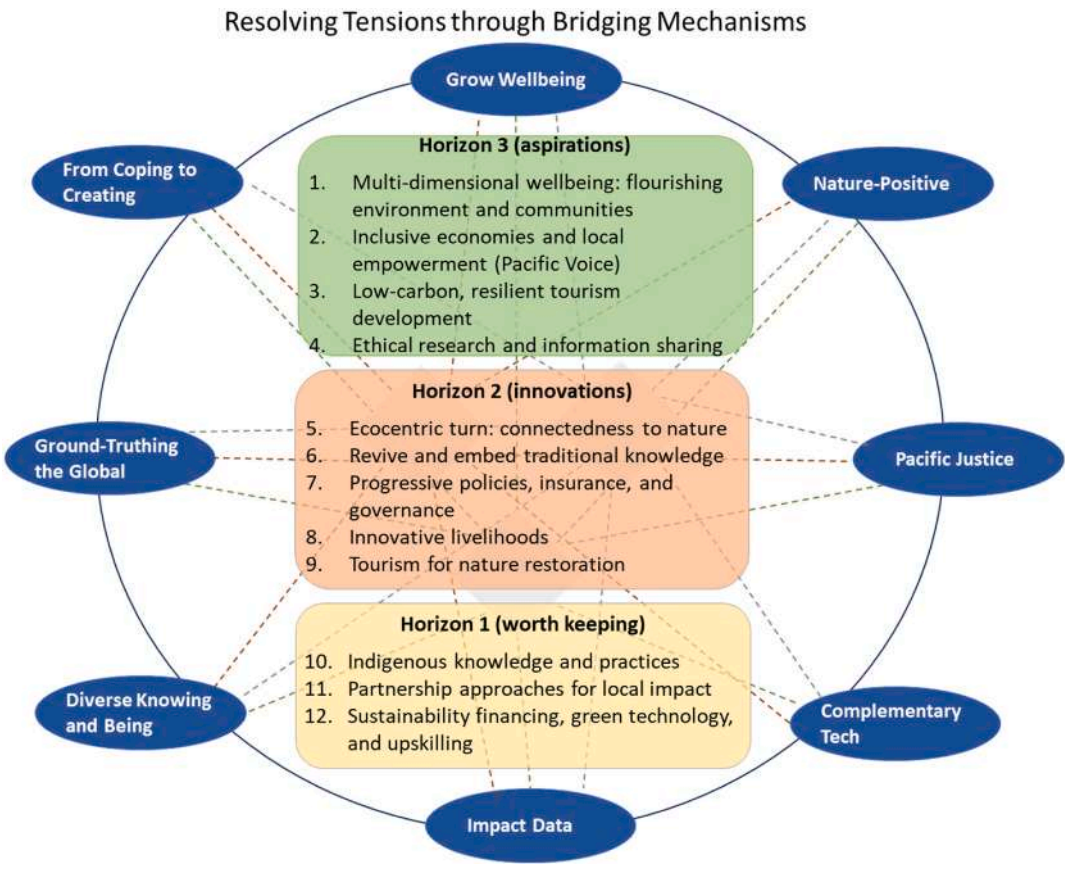



**Fig. 5.** Twelve key tourism system elements emerging from the Horizon mapping and eight bridging mechanisms (blue) for overcoming systemic tensions. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the Web version of this article.)

aspects that do not serve or even restrict transformation. In essence, the Three Horizons approach mapped the plurality of present and future tourism systems in the Pacific, empowering local initiatives and organisations to shape the system transformation (Schaal et al., 2023). An improved understanding of what system elements are perceived as 'unfit', and a deeper exploration of those that bear potential for transformation, should be of value to all organisations involved in the governance of tourism.

The space created by this group was safe for dreaming of a different future where exchanging ideas, knowledge, visions, and pain were made possible; a space in which local values and interests were heard and positioned centrally in the research endeavour. As members of the CoP we have diverse voices. The 'outsiders' in this endeavour, the academics, have learnt much. Cognisant that very little direct Pacific culpability exists in contributing to the 'great unravelling' of planetary crises (Macy & Johnstone, 2022), we gained new insights into the tendencies to deficit frame Pacific subjects and valued the opportunity to connect the shared experiences and wisdom from our Pacific partners with the notion of metatheorising in the academic space. Such reflections through a critical lens, without romanticising, have allowed 'us' (the outsiders) to experience Pacific peoples as actors already expressing many virtues of the 'Great Turning' (Macy & Johnstone, 2022) or the more Western-framed 'regenerative' theories. The fact that examples drawn from the regenerative tourism discourse, such as people walking barefoot in sand to reconnect to Mother Earth, were met with humour/astonishment demonstrates that some 'transformational' aspects of the regenerative movement are long-lived realities in the Pacific (Becken et al., 2025). Herein lie important insights for tourism academics and other 'experts' working in this region.

The 'Great Turning' is argued to be a simultaneous process of mutually reinforcing activities that include shifts in consciousness (Taveras-Dalmau, 2024), supporting life-sustaining systems (Bellato et al., 2023; Higgins-Desbiolles & Bigby, 2022), and implementing actions in defence of life on Earth. Through the CoP, we have witnessed the multiple hats individuals wear to make a living, express their spirituality and live up to expectations associated with traditional societal systems. Rather than being constrained by theoretical silos, our partners enact a form of strategic pluralism, selectively mobilising elements from different frameworks and systems to advance locally meaningful outcomes. For example, organisations that aim to revive cultural practices and traditional knowledge will find themselves stretched between Indigenous worldviews (with implications for their mission and operations, see Scheyvens et al., 2021) and Western structures when applying for donor funding or positioning activities 'in the market'. Resulting behaviours could be seen as a conflict, but in a world of multiple co-existing paradigms, they are necessary strategies for success. Recognising this navigation as a legitimate and powerful practice opens space for more inclusive, context-sensitive models of tourism transformation (Midgley, 2011). This has practical relevance for how Pacific Islanders run their tourism businesses, how destinations are marketed and the level to which visitors are expected to make positive contributions.

Combining insights from three theoretical frameworks, Sustainable Development (SD), Sustainable Livelihoods (SLA), and Regeneration, and their inherent tensions, with data generated through horizon mapping, this work presents a transformative systems approach toward an emerging and aspirational Pacific tourism model. It recognises that Pacific Islanders operate within a pluriverse, where all horizons exist simultaneously and must be navigated in parallel. A central contribution is the identification of eight bridging mechanisms that help resolve tensions between competing frameworks, such as growth vs post-growth, global vs local governance, and scientific vs other knowledge




**Photo 1.** Participants discussing the problem statement (top) in an outdoor setting, followed by a structured workshop for group discussions.

systems. These mechanisms, for example, growing wellbeing, ground-truthing global systems, and embracing epistemic diversity, offer practical and culturally grounded pathways to shift the tourism system from being extractive and externally driven toward one that is regenerative, inclusive, and locally empowered. Whilst each destination is different, the mechanisms could provide a valuable starting point for decision-makers to explore in more depth how their current system is performing, whether tensions are evident and how they could be resolved. As such, this research could have relevance beyond the context of the Pacific Islands.

## Appendix. 7

## CRediT authorship contribution statement

**S. Becken:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **R. Westoby:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Conceptualization. **C. Fleming:** Writing – review & editing, Resources, Investigation, Funding acquisition. **M. Ariki:** Validation, Methodology. **J. Loehr:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Conceptualization. **M. Mafi-Stephens:** Writing – review & editing, Validation. **F. Mate:** Writing – review & editing, Validation. **S. Tiraa:** Writing – review & editing, Validation. **M. Vakacola:** Writing – review & editing, Validation.

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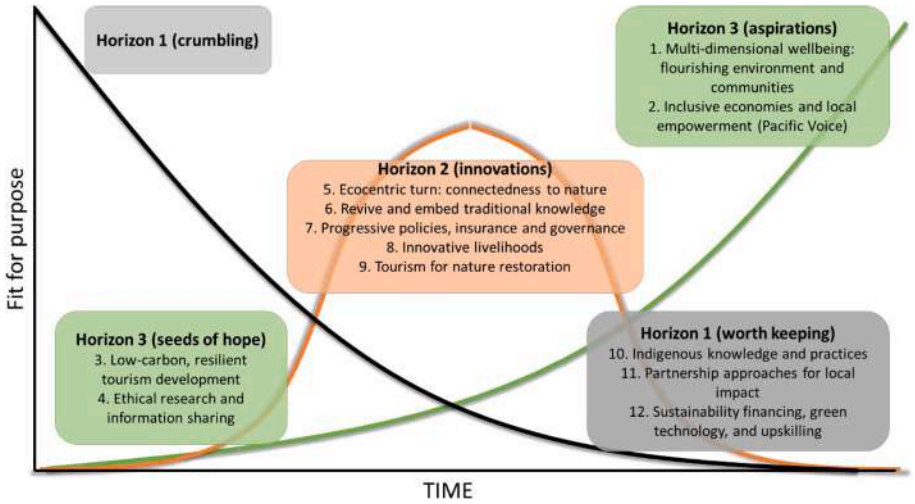



**Fig. 6.** Integrated finding of 12 elements derived from the three horizons (H1, H2 and H3) and the key themes that emerged from future aspirations and seeds of hope (H3), innovations that drive the system (H2) and aspects worth keeping from the present (H1).

**Table 2**
Connecting the three theoretical frameworks and their tensions with insights from the Horizon mapping to derive bridging mechanisms.

| Tension | Reconciling theories | Empirical data from Horizon mapping | Bridging mechanism |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Growth vs Post-Growth** | Use SLA and Regeneration to challenge growth assumptions and grow locally defined capitals (e.g. cultural, natural, spiritual) | Grow holistic wellbeing (H3); Niue Ocean Commitment (H2); Indigenous guided tours (H2) | Grow Wellbeing |
| **Anthropo-centrism vs Biocentrism** | Draw on Regeneration and encourage biocentric ethics through education and indigenous leadership. | Stream replanting (H2); Palau Pledge (H2); Mindful, respectful consumers (H3) | Nature-Positive |
| **Global vs Local Governance** | Shift decision-making power locally. Draw on SD to connect to global systems. Use SLA to build capacity and Regeneration to embed place-based governance. | Mana Tiaki certification scheme (H2); Environmental auditing (H2); Insurance models - reef resilience project (Vatuvara foundation) (H2); True bottoms up government (H1) | Ground-Truthing Global |
| **Universality vs Justice** | Prioritise justice in local contexts. Use SD to understand universal principles but draw on SLA and Regeneration to highlight differentiated responsibilities and historical legacies. | Education of tourists and politicians (H1); Inclusivity and more Pasifika voices (H3) | Pacific Justice |
| **Scientific vs Other Knowledge** | Use scientific knowledge from SD (e.g. renewable energy) to address 'modern' problems, whilst promoting epistemic diversity and elevating the role of indigenous knowledge for local solutions and policies. | Immersion schools to teach youth about traditional knowledge (H2); Indigenous language week (H2); Pacific tourism research symposium (H2); Traditional architecture (H2) | Plurality Of Knowing And Being |
| **Adaptation vs Transformation** | Capitalise on SDs 'tested practice' to scale what works and be guided by Regenerative ambition to develop transformative solutions. Draw on SLA to build in resilience to external shocks. | Carbon-zero transport, including through traditional sailing (H3); Nukubati self-sufficient luxury resort (H2) | From Coping To Creating |
| **Measurement vs Meaning** | Develop hybrid indicators that combine quantitative metrics (informed by SD) with cultural and ecological meaning (informed by SLA and Regeneration). | Pacific research frameworks and methodologies (H3) Implement traditional practices (H3) | Impact Data |
| **Technology vs Nature/Culture** | Blend green technology promoted through SD with cultural practices and regenerative use of resources (e.g. compost). Identify local solutions that work 'with' nature and culture to affect change. | Green technology, such as composting toilets (H1); Climate change nature- based solutions (H1) | Complementary Tech |

## Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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