

Editorial: Regeneration and regenerative business research

Sustainability has been a primary focus for societies, policymakers, and businesses globally (Agyemang *et al.*, 2025; White *et al.*, 2025). Corporations and businesses pursuing sustainability seek to reduce the negative impacts of their operations on the environment and society. Sustainable business models have gained widespread attention, sustainability reporting has become near-universal among large companies, and environmental management systems have diffused across global value chains. However, the biophysical indicators that matter continue to deteriorate. The ecological thresholds that scholars were urged to take seriously more than a decade ago continue to be breached (Whiteman *et al.*, 2013), and progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has largely stalled (Greenland *et al.*, 2023; Khot *et al.*, 2026). It is increasingly recognized that sustainability, while fundamental, may be insufficient on its own, as many pressing challenges require the restoration and renewal of existing systems rather than their mere preservation (Väätänen, 2025). A paradigm built on doing less harm cannot, by construction, restore systems that are already degraded (Reed, 2007; Hickel, 2019).

Growing interest has been directed toward regeneration, an approach that extends beyond sustaining existing systems by emphasizing restoration, renewal, resilience, and the creation of conditions that enable ecosystems, societies, markets, and firms to flourish over the long run (Camrass, 2020; Thomas, 2025). Regenerative businesses refer to those “that enhance, and thrive through, the health of social-ecological systems in a co-evolutionary process” (Hahn and Tampe, 2021, p. 456). Regenerative business models are oriented toward planetary health and societal well-being rather than the firm’s own resource efficiency (Konietzko *et al.*, 2023). A regenerative perspective highlights a system-based definition of goals (goals derive from system health rather than competitive position), an adaptive management orientation (regeneration is an ongoing process rather than a fixed end state), and a net positive ambition (the firm gives back more than it takes).

Regeneration extends sustainability (Yunibandhu and Hallinger, 2025) and differs from it in several ways. First, regarding the nature of the firm – sustainability typically views the firm as an entity that affects an external environment, whereas regeneration considers the firm as part of a living system whose viability is inseparable from that of the system as a whole. This distinction reflects the difference between weak and strong sustainability and supports Hahn and Tampe’s (2021) argument that regenerative goals cannot be grounded solely in business interests. Second, with respect to objectives: sustainability aims for equilibrium by balancing economic, social, and environmental priorities within existing frameworks, while regeneration seeks vitality and co-evolution. According to resilience theory, adaptive cycles of growth, release, and reorganization characterize living systems (Holling, 1973). Within this view, disturbance becomes an opportunity for renewal rather than a threat to stability. Recent cross-disciplinary research clarifies this transition by specifying qualities that maintain regenerative dynamics across social-ecological scales (Buckton *et al.*, 2023; Fischer *et al.*, 2024). Third, in terms of practice, sustainability is frequently dominated by efficiency logics that narrow, slow and close resource loops. Regeneration adds restoration and active enhancement of the socio-ecological base (Das and Bocken, 2024). This also clarifies the boundary with the circular economy. Circularity is a necessary but insufficient condition for regeneration, since closed-loop efficiency alone cannot restore what has already been lost (Morseletto, 2020).

Despite increasing interest in regenerative business, empirical work remains relatively limited. Research is also concentrated in a few settings, including agriculture and food systems with measurable outcomes in soil, carbon and biodiversity (e.g. Sher *et al.*, 2024) and



hospitality and tourism (e.g. Dredge, 2022). However, much of the latter is still superficial (Bellato and Pollock, 2025). Research on rural development, regenerative supply chains, innovation and finance is emerging but remains fragmented (Salonen et al., 2025). Other areas such as marketing, accounting and international trade remain underrepresented and warrant further exploration.

Prior work has been anchored mainly in systems thinking, with extensions via business-model and stakeholder perspectives (Hahn and Tampe, 2021; Konietzko et al., 2023). By contrast, behavioral and institutional explanations for how firms and consumers respond to regenerative claims remain limited, despite their importance for understanding implementation tensions. Measurement issues are evident and the operationalization of concepts across contexts remains nascent. For example, Fischer-Kreer et al. (2026) validate a 12-item, two-factor scale of firm-level regenerative orientation, while Chuah et al. (2025) offer a complementary concept map but report an unstable factor structure. What remains missing is robust measurement beyond the firm level (for consumer perception, supply chains and places) and evidence of cross-cultural validity. A key unresolved research question, therefore, concerns how regenerative claims are interpreted and acted upon across different organizational, consumer and cultural contexts and whether existing measurement approaches are sufficiently robust to capture these variations. In particular, more studies in emerging and developing economies are needed, since regenerative expectations are often transmitted through export value chains as compliance requirements, which can shift transition costs onto upstream suppliers and raise distributive questions about who should bear those costs.

To sum up, regeneration does not render sustainability obsolete. Rather, it extends the foundations of sustainability (Yunibandhu and Hallinger, 2025). Harm reduction remains essential, while regeneration articulates a more ambitious agenda for restoration and renewal. Whether the field consolidates will depend on a clearer conceptual definition, rigorous measurement and systematic empirical testing. It will also benefit from more research conducted in emerging and developing economies, which are more exposed to ecological and social pressures yet underrepresented in the literature (Chuah et al., 2025).

Ninh Nguyen

References

- Agyemang, A.O., Osei, A. and Kongkuah, M. (2025), "Exploring the ESG-circular economy nexus in emerging markets: a systems perspective on governance, innovation, and sustainable business models", *Business Strategy and the Environment*, Vol. 34 No. 5, pp. 5901-5924, doi: [10.1002/bse.4278](https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.4278).
- Bellato, L. and Pollock, A. (2025), "Regenerative tourism: a state-of-the-art review", *Tourism Geographies*, Vol. 27 Nos 3-4, pp. 558-567, doi: [10.1080/14616688.2023.2294366](https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2023.2294366).
- Buckton, S.J., Fazey, I., Sharpe, B., Om, E.S., Doherty, B., Ball, P., Denby, K., Bryant, M., Lait, R., Bridle, S., Cain, M., Carmen, E., Collins, L., Nixon, N., Yap, C., Connolly, A., Fletcher, B., Frankowska, A., Gardner, G., James, A., Kendrick, I., Kluczkowski, A., Mair, S., Morris, B. and Sinclair, M. (2023), "The regenerative lens: a conceptual framework for regenerative social-ecological systems", *One Earth*, Vol. 6 No. 7, pp. 824-842, doi: [10.1016/j.oneear.2023.06.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2023.06.006).
- Chuah, C., Homer, S.T. and Loo, W.H. (2025), "Mapping regenerative business: a conceptual framework building upon systems thinking in Southeast Asia", *Asian Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 407-435, doi: [10.1007/s13520-025-00244-w](https://doi.org/10.1007/s13520-025-00244-w).
- Das, A. and Bocken, N. (2024), "Regenerative business strategies: a database and typology to inspire business experimentation towards sustainability", *Sustainable Production and Consumption*, Vol. 49, pp. 529-544, doi: [10.1016/j.spc.2024.06.024](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spc.2024.06.024).
- Dredge, D. (2022), "Regenerative tourism: transforming mindsets, systems and practices", *Journal of Tourism Futures*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 269-281, doi: [10.1108/JTF-01-2022-0015](https://doi.org/10.1108/JTF-01-2022-0015).

- Fischer, J., Farny, S., Abson, D.J., Zuin Zeidler, V., Von Salisch, M., Schaltegger, S., Martín-López, B., Temperton, V.M. and Kümmeler, K. (2024), "Mainstreaming regenerative dynamics for sustainability", *Nature Sustainability*, Vol. 7 No. 8, pp. 964-972, doi: [10.1038/s41893-024-01368-w](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-024-01368-w).
- Fischer-Kreer, D., Greven, A., Desel, L. and Brettel, M. (2026), "Measuring regenerative orientation: a new scale for firms' net-positive impact beyond sustainability", *European Management Journal*, Vol. 44 No. 3, pp. 505-519, doi: [10.1016/j.emj.2025.04.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2025.04.008).
- Greenland, S.J., Saleem, M., Misra, R., Nguyen, N. and Mason, J. (2023), "Reducing SDG complexity and informing environmental management education via an empirical six-dimensional model of sustainable development", *Journal of Environmental Management*, Vol. 344, 118328, doi: [10.1016/j.jenvman.2023.118328](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2023.118328).
- Hahn, T. and Tampe, M. (2021), "Strategies for regenerative business", *Strategic Organization*, Vol. 19 No. 3, pp. 456-477, doi: [10.1177/1476127020979228](https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127020979228).
- Hickel, J. (2019), "The contradiction of the sustainable development goals: growth versus ecology on a finite planet", *Sustainable Development*, Vol. 27 No. 5, pp. 873-884, doi: [10.1002/sd.1947](https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.1947).
- Holling, C.S. (1973), "Resilience and stability of ecological systems", *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, Vol. 4, pp. 1-23, doi: [10.1002/sd.1947](https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.1947).
- Khot, U.A., Warchold, A. and Pradhan, P. (2026), "Existing gaps in understanding sustainable development goals interactions: insights from a systematic review", *Environmental Impact Assessment Review*, Vol. 118, 108274, doi: [10.1016/j.eiar.2025.108274](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eiar.2025.108274).
- Konietzko, J., Das, A. and Bocken, N. (2023), "Towards regenerative business models: a necessary shift?", *Sustainable Production and Consumption*, Vol. 38, pp. 372-388, doi: [10.1016/j.spc.2023.04.014](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spc.2023.04.014).
- Morseletto, P. (2020), "Restorative and regenerative: exploring the concepts in the circular economy", *Journal of Industrial Ecology*, Vol. 24 No. 4, pp. 763-773, doi: [10.1111/jiec.12987](https://doi.org/10.1111/jiec.12987).
- Reed, B. (2007), "Shifting from 'sustainability' to regeneration", *Building Research and Information*, Vol. 35 No. 6, pp. 674-680, doi: [10.1080/09613210701475753](https://doi.org/10.1080/09613210701475753).
- Salonen, K., Ritala, P. and Bocken, N. (2025), "Emerging regenerative business paradigm: narrative review, synthesis, and research agenda", *Journal of Circular Economy*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 1-28, doi: [10.55845/dozq3944](https://doi.org/10.55845/dozq3944).
- Sher, A., Li, H., Ullah, A., Hamid, Y., Nasir, B. and Zhang, J. (2024), "Importance of regenerative agriculture: climate, soil health, biodiversity and its socioecological impact", *Discover Sustainability*, Vol. 5 No. 1, p. 462, doi: [10.1007/s43621-024-00662-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s43621-024-00662-z).
- Väätänen, J. (2025), "Regeneration is the new sustainable development, because sustainability alone is no longer enough", available at: <https://www.lut.fi/en/articles/regeneration-new-sustainable-development-because-sustainability-alone-no-longer-enough>
- White, K., Cakanlar, A., Sethi, S. and Trudel, R. (2025), "The past, present, and future of sustainability marketing: how did we get here and where might we go?", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 187, 115056, doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.115056](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.115056).
- Whiteman, G., Walker, B. and Perego, P. (2013), "Planetary boundaries: ecological foundations for corporate sustainability", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 50 No. 2, pp. 307-336, doi: [10.1111/j.1467-6486.2012.01073.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2012.01073.x).
- Yunibandhu, R. and Hallinger, P. (2025), "From sustainability to regeneration: mapping the conceptual foundations and future directions of regenerative development", *Sustainable Development*, Vol. 33 No. 6, pp. 8569-8585, doi: [10.1002/sd.70112](https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.70112).