

Regenerative development and design to elevate governance, innovation and planetary health

Ms. Leen Gorissen, Founder, Centre4NI

Good morning Ladies and gentleman,

how wonderful to that you joined us for this special event. Before I start, I would like to thank the team that helped making all of this possible. While it is just me standing here, the work presented is the result of a giant team effort. So big thank you to all the people that helped putting this together.

As what I am presenting here today is unfamiliar to most of you,
I would like to start a bit differently.
I hope you indulge me.

Then I kindly ask you to close your eyes and think of a place where you feel **most relaxed**, where you achieve **full peace-of-mind**. Try to image, to picture that place in your head...

Are there other things that you gain from this place?
What exactly is it in this place that is **beneficial** to you?
Can you discern the specific qualities or characteristics?

Is it **revitalizing**?
Does this place **re-energize** you?
Does it **boost** your creativity or your health?

Ok, you can now open your eyes.
Please raise your hand if the place you imaged is in the office, in the city, in nature?

I do this exercise with all kinds of audiences and the result is always the same.
And it is no wonder that most people think of Nature.

NATURE IS OUR HOME.
It is where we originated and where we co-evolved with our environment
for tens of thousands of years.

Evidence of this can still be seen in the fact that nature boosts our immune system and promotes our health. More than a 1000 scientific studies attest to this.

SO THEN WHY HAVE WE ALIENATED OURSELVES
FROM THAT WHICH BRINGS US SO MUCH?

Do we really understand the root cause of the separation between humans and nature?

I know it is a bit unconventional, but I am asking you to close your eyes again and this time try image your body from the inside out. Picture one of your cells and how it is nested inside a tissue, picture this tissue and how it is nested inside one of your organs, picture that organ, your lungs or brain for instance and how it is nested inside your (respiratory or nerve) system, picture this system and how it nested inside your body.

Now, with your eyes closed,
think: what is it that makes your body work?

Can you discern the specific process that enables all these different parts, levels and orders of your body to operate as one coherent whole? A whole that has a unique essence and spirit?

When I asked the question, what makes your body work,
who thought of an economy?
Please raise your hand.
No-one?

Well, that is strange,
because we now know from science
that any living system can maintain its health only
while there is **a balanced economy of interests between parts and whole.**

I say balanced, because there are no such things as rich or poor cells or organs.
**The wealth and vitality of your body, as in any living system,
is in the whole, not the parts.**

No part of a healthy body gains its health at the expense of other parts.
As long as the body is healthy,
the body's ecology and economy are one,
there is no conflict.

In a healthy body every part adds value to the bigger system it is part of, and all the elements operate in right relationship with each other. And this applies to any healthy living system, your body, the place you inhabit, the organization/business you are part of, the ecosystem, the bioregion in which your city is nested...

**Value adding in nested systems
is a basic foundation of life on our planet.**
Any living system works that way.

So, the question of our time is,
can we harness the science of living systems
to effectively resolve the grand challenges of our time
or do we continue with the outdated scientific paradigm
that is good with parts but not with wholes?

And that brings me to the topic of today.

In 1859, Charles Dickens wrote:

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.”

Nothing captures the present moment better than Dickens famous words.
It also highlights what his event, and the report behind it, is about.

WHAT IF WE BECOME THE CO-CREATORS OF THE BEST OF TIMES,
rather than being victims of the mistakes of our past?

Because we sure do live in interesting times!

Satellite footage shows us that the **Earth is a living system**,
just like our body, one that self-regulates and breathes.

DNA sequencing shows us that all life on Earth
descends from one common ancestor,
so all of life on Earth is related,
we are all relatives.

Quantum physics show us that there is no objective science,
the observer effect determines what we see,
even when we isolate things from their context.

Quantum physics also shows us that **everything is connected to everything else**,
nothing exists in isolation.

And what is TRULY MIND-BLOWING
is that **these insights confirm what Indigenous wisdom keepers
have taught since time immemorial.**

SO WHAT DOES IT TAKE
TO MOVE FORWARD TO THE BEST OF TIMES?

That was the aim of the present study:
how can we include and transcend the idea of sustainability?

How can we move from sustaining human well-being within planetary boundaries
to **creating thriving for all**;
full prosperity of the human and the more-than-human world
in **full co-creative partnership between people and planet.**

How can we REGENERATE the systems in which we are nested?

In our report, we show that this has been practiced and evolved through the **discipline of regenerative development and design** with scientific roots going back 50 years and that its uniqueness lies in the fact that it is not about sustaining *what is* or restoring *what was*.

Rather, it is about creating THRIVING LIVING SYSTEMS—social-ecological systems such as places, organizations, communities, and ecosystems—that have the capacity to evolve toward **increasing states of health, vitality and abundance over time.**

Ultimately, this calls for a NEW ROLE for humans; to become regenerators rather than degenerators.

The understanding that this is possible, and an essential and desirable next step for humanity, is based on a new integration among knowledge systems that brings together the **best of modern Western science**, with the best of **ancient Indigenous science**, and **Eastern spiritual philosophies.**

Regenerative development and design builds on the understanding that a fragmented approach that deals with intertwined crises separately will inevitably fall short and that our current theory of innovation and change is ineffective.

It builds on the understanding that our current meta-crisis requires a meta-response, and this is what the meta-discipline of regenerative development and design aims to bring.

Regeneration, as a mindset and intention, focuses on developing the capacity and capability for living systems evolution.

Given the nested nature of all living systems, this implies that to be regenerative, **one must develop the ability to take direction from a higher level living system and develop ways to add value to that higher level.**

For instance, how can an economically, ecologically and culturally important living system like a river and watershed reconnect and reconcile a divided community around a deeper understanding of what they share and what is at stake? This is exactly what the RDD process brought about in Maryland, the US. The approach gave rise to the St. Mary's River Watershed Association which is dedicated to **create a viable legacy for the future**.

Or, how can a new water culture help a local community secure their own water supply, build local skills and self-reliance in an area with high water precariousness? that is what an RDD process generated in La Conchita, Mexico, as it **re-awakened the reverence for water** in the local community.

Or, what if investors take direction from living systems intelligence to develop land regeneratively by **regenerating their thinking**? Here is a short video that illustrates this case.

These examples are described in more detail in the report. Plenty more recent examples can be found, also in Europe but that would require a whole new study.

These examples illustrate that
to move forward to the best of times,
THE OUTER DEVELOPMENT OF URBAN AND RURAL PLACES
MUST ALWAYS BE MATCHED BY AN INNER DEVELOPMENT OF THOSE THAT INHABIT THEM.
That is the essence of the meta-discipline of RDD.

I hope this short presentation has inspired you to read the report.

Let me conclude with the words of astrophysicist Adam Frank,
theoretical physicist Marcelo Gleiser, and philosopher Evan Thompson (2024)
who urge us to **“create a new scientific culture that views ourselves both as an expression of
nature and as a source of nature's self-understanding”**.

Because,
**“Real change will only begin when
we REALIZE that we are the Earth regenerating herself.”**

Thank you.