

Creativity and Diversity as Regenerative Force

Fostering economic transformation through arts- and nature-based research to accelerate regenerative business models

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Extended abstract

Problem

The call for proposals from NBM2024 clearly articulates the necessity for societal transformation to address worldwide challenges such as climate change, the depletion of natural resources, and social change, highlighting sustainable business models as key facilitators.

Locally, this global transformation necessitates a new social paradigm, which Capra (1996) defines as a constellation of *concepts*, *values*, and *practices* shared by a community. Organizations must evolve into regenerative business models, which are deeply integrated into social and economic systems (Capra and Luisi, 2014). Drupsteen and Wakkee (2023) explore the concept of regenerative business models in their Delphi study and conclude that regenerative business models prioritize human and natural elements, and central to these models are concepts of co-evolution and co-creation. Like Capra and Luisi they see regenerative business models play a crucial role in restoring the socio-ecological system.

Rotmans (2017) argues that organizations must transition to become part of a new society in where they do more good, rather than less bad. To make such a significant shift, he suggests that organizations need flexibility in their *structure*, *culture*, and *behavior*. These concepts align with Capra's components and underscore the commonalities in systemic influence, whether societal or organizational. To engage with all three pillars effectively, a shift beyond a purely cognitive approach to business models is needed; one that engages the *head* (concepts/structure), the *heart* (values/culture), and *hands* (practices/behavior),

and recognizes the interplay of organizations, the economy, and society within the broader living earth system.

Until now, scholars in general, and in this specific context the Centre for Economic Transformation (CET), have primarily employed conventional, cognitive research methods. While informative, they do not fully capture the complexity of economic transformation. This hinders our ability to support regenerative entrepreneurs in their journey toward a fair and sustainable economy. In our search for a more integrative approach to building new business models, our curiosity led us to arts- and nature-based research.

Why the arts? Chappell and Muglia (2023) state scientists and artists are both driven by curiosity and creativity. The idea that art and science are strictly separate does not do justice to the scientific breakthroughs that are the result of the coming together of artistic and creative efforts of researchers. To tackle the major challenges of today's society, it is essential to encourage and value interdisciplinary work.

The unique perspectives and experiential insights offered by arts and those engaged in arts-based research are increasingly valued, complementing the expertise of social scientists (Ledford, 2015; Black *et al.*, 2023). Collaborations between the arts and social sciences can lead to a more comprehensive grasp of socio-ecological challenges and help understand the interconnectedness between the environment, society, and economy (Black *et al.*, 2023). Lutters (2020) sees art as a gateway to alternative perspectives, fostering openness and imagination.

Why nature? It's widely accepted that the economy must shift toward ecological sustainability, we need to fundamentally change how we interact with nature (IPBES, 2019). Regenerative practices should be standard across all industries, ensuring production and consumption to restore natural resources. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) regards nature-based solutions as a means to achieving regenerative practices: "actions to protect, sustainably manage and restore natural and modified ecosystems in ways that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, to provide both human wellbeing and bio diversity benefits" (www.iucn.org).

Why arts- and nature-based research? Attenborough (2020) notes the arts encourage creativity just as nature promotes biodiversity. In his regard, there is a direct link between creativity and nature; as biodiversity declines in our living world, so does creativity. Diversity in all living systems is essential for creativity to arise. At CET we are intrigued by this combination of the arts and nature as a tool to integrate cognitive, emotional and practical elements (head/ heart/ hands), but we're stepping into new territory here. There's not an extensive body of knowledge when it comes to the integration of arts- and nature-based research in the economic domain. Our curiosity led to the following research question: *how can innovative methodologies that focus on lessons from the arts (creativity)*

and nature (diversity) help to enrich the understanding of economic transformation among researchers and entrepreneurs engaged in regenerative practices.

Method

This study employs an action-oriented research approach, designed to incorporate research activities with progressive learning and reflective monitoring and evaluation. Two researchers are working on a literature review on arts- and nature-based research. Simultaneously two workshops are given: one for five researchers and two staff members and one for five researchers and eight entrepreneurs of regenerative practices. During the workshops the participants go outside and collect pieces of nature. With these materials they compose their own work of art. Participants, under guidance, step-by-step, 'engage in dialogue' with their artwork based on their own question, eventually experiencing an answer or direction to the question.

The goal of the workshops is engagement of researchers and entrepreneur at a more integrated level of head, heart and hands to enrich the understanding of the participants of economic transformation. The two facilitating researchers monitor the reaction of the participants at the level of their head, heart and hands. This is evaluated through interviews of all participants immediately after the workshop and after two weeks, to assess the impact on participants' perspectives on economic transformation.

The facilitating researchers themselves reflect on each workshop and interview, aiming to understand how this combination of arts and nature can contribute to a deeper understanding of economic transformation. This project is an ongoing effort and continues after the summer of 2024, in co-creation with entrepreneurs, to further explore the opportunity of arts- and nature-based research to accelerate regenerative practices of entrepreneurs. However, the presentation during NBM2024 will focus only on findings from the session with research staff and the combined session with entrepreneurs and researchers.

Preliminary findings

Ahead of experimentation and data collection, we propose that this project is innovative in the sense that it integrates art- and nature-based research into the economic domain. We use art- and nature-based research to spark dialogue and offer fresh perspectives to researchers and entrepreneurs for building a creative and diverse framework within the system of the living world. They can use this framework to deepen and develop their research and their own regenerative practices.

Set within the context of the Centre of Economic Transformation this project brings together researchers with expertise in the diverse fields of entrepreneurship, craftsmanship, co-ownership and economic ecosystems and entrepreneurs of regenerative practices. They emerge themselves in innovative research methods aimed at integrating

head, heart, and hands to enhance diversity and creativity and enrich their understanding of economic transformation.

Keywords

Arts- and nature-based research, regenerative business models, entrepreneurs

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