Multidimensional Well-being in Regenerative Tourism Experiences

Travelers' insights from Mahakala Retreats in Montenegro

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic had considerable effects on the tourism industry as well as on individuals. The lockdown led to long-lasting mental health consequences. Equally, awareness of well-being increased, and consequently, demand for tourism experiences that focus on well-being rose. Concerning the tourism industry, a rethinking process was evoked through the pandemic. Tourism scholars were in consensus that a paradigm shift was needed to counteract current sociocultural and environmental challenges while responding to the need to provide tourist offers that support the mental and physical health of consumers. The regenerative tourism paradigm offers a solution as it withdraws from the pro-growth agenda of the current tourism industry and strives towards a net positive impact on nature, people, and planet. The rise in well-being for the whole system is thereby aimed.

The study contributed to the understanding of the regenerative tourism paradigm from the traveler's perspective. Thereby, travelers’ well-being is conceptualized in a multidimensional way including hedonic, eudaimonic, and social well-being. The aim of this study is to understand how different dimensions of well-being are experienced in regenerative tourism. A qualitative approach is applied by using interviews and observations to gather information. The case and research setting is thereby Mahakala Retreats Center in Montenegro which aligns with the principles of a regenerative tourism space. The narrative analysis following an inductive approach leads to the identification of three core themes that represent the answer to the research question. Findings reveal that hedonic well-being is experienced through being in a safe space, surrounded by beauty and nature. The dimension of social well-being is experienced by connecting with other retreat guests and lastly, eudaimonic well-being is experienced through self-reflection. These experiences are all fostered by the regenerative tourism space. It is argued that well-being itself constitutes the regenerative tourism experience, not an activity. The study furthermore identifies three new aspects of a regenerative tourism experience that go beyond the current established principles. Hence, experiencing beauty, experiencing a safe space and the balance between solitude and connection are aspects that are of high importance in regenerative tourism from the travelers’ perspective.

Key words

Regenerative tourism, human well-being, hedonic well-being, eudaimonic well-being, social well-being, human-nature relationship, tourism experience
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1 Introduction

Academic publications about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are numerous and published in various domains such as ecology, economy, health sciences, etc. The body of literature of tourism scholars is explicitly abundant on the pandemic’s consequences. The general truth is that in many destinations, tourism was close to non-existent during lockdown times. This down-scale had far-reaching impacts. Economy-wise, destinations that were highly dependent on income through direct and indirect tourism activities suffered the most. (Fotiadis, 2021; Agrusa, 2021) However, some of these destinations recognized the importance of rethinking and diversifying their touristic services. (Agrusa, 2021, Fountain, 2022) Moreover, besides economic challenges, the pandemic heavily impacted other aspects of daily life. One of the most pivotal outcomes of the COVID-19 lockdown was a rise in mental health issues. (Bhalla & Chowdhary, 2022, Gössling & Schweiggart, 2022) Several studies claimed that anxiety and other symptoms expressing low mental health were observed more frequently during COVID-19 compared to pre-covid times. (Gössling & Schweiggart, 2022) For example, a study focusing on teenagers and young adults in Germany, where lockdown restrictions were strict, showed a lack of feelings of connectedness and a rise in expression of loneliness during the pandemic. (Schnetzer & Hurrelmann, 2021 in Gössling & Schweiggart, 2022)

Health in general is a buzzword in day-to-day life, which equally matters when booking holidays now that the consumption patterns of tourists have changed due to the pandemic. (Fotiadis, 2021) Destinations were chosen for new reasons: for accessibility regarding travel restrictions and for safety measures regarding COVID-19 spreading and for the possibility of social distancing. (Zaman et al., 2022; Fotiadis, 2021) Furthermore, demand rose for well-being-related tourist services in general (Pesonen & Tuohino, 2017) as well as in more environmentally friendly offers. (Bândoi et al., 2020, Lindell et al, 2022, Hartwell et al., 2018) Tourists also seemed to value more experiences that included connecting with people and their place and learning in and from their settings. (Fountain, 2022)

Even though the negative effects of the pandemic were numerous, some positive impacts were also apparent. The lockdown and travel restrictions led to a
regeneration of nature. (Bhalla & Chowdhary, 2022, Koh, 2020) Even more, Koh (2020) stated that the pandemic had a far more significant positive impact on ecosystems than governmental top-down strategies and actions targeting pollution reduction had achieved before. This became most evident in mass tourism destinations, where nature seemed to recover due to the lack of over-exploitation. Furthermore, the lockdown appeared advantageous to some communities that were facing mass tourism overstimulation before the pandemic. (Koh, 2020)

Evaluating the blessings and losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic, scholars were in complete agreement with one fact: the way tourism is understood and practiced could not go back to where it was before the pandemic. (Cave & Dredge, 2020; Becken & Kaur, 2021; Ateljevic & Sheldon, 2022; Tomassini & Cavagnaro, 2022; Gössling & Schweiggart, 2022; Lindell et al., 2022) Even more, the pandemic’s lockdown offered a possibility for repositioning and rethinking priorities in tourism strategies. (Agrusa, 2021, Ateljevic & Sheldon, 2022, Fountain, 2022) Calls to “build back better” got louder. (Gössling & Schweiggart, 2022) Accordingly, tourism stakeholders and scholars showed awareness of the need for a new tourism paradigm (Duxbury et al., 2021; Cave & Dredge, 2020; Becken & Kaur, 2021, Bellato et al., 2022 a) not just an adaption of existing systems to a new reality. (Gössling & Higham, 2021). This new tourism paradigm should make the tourist system from vulnerable to more resilient during challenging periods (Duxbury et al., 2021; Cave & Dredge, 2020; Becken & Kaur, 2021; Ateljevic & Sheldon, 2022, Pollock, 2019, Agrusa, 2021), meaning to have the capacity to adapt to volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) that characterizes the world today. (Major & Clark, 2022, Rockström et al., 2023) Furthermore, this new tourism paradigm should focus on its people’s well-being rather than on economic success. (Pollock, 2019, Bellato et al., 2023)

Due to the shortcomings of the former tourism industry’s agenda, a transformation of the tourism system is needed that counteracts current sociocultural and environmental challenges while responding to the need to provide tourist offers that support consumers’ mental and physical health. An upcoming trend offering a possible solution is the regenerative tourism approach. (Dredge, 2022) Scientific papers on regenerative tourism have primarily been published after 2019, with most
papers published in 2022, after the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. This shows the actuality of the approach and the relevance to contributing to the understanding of it, as the topic is still in its academic infancy.

Deriving from the principles of sustainable tourism to minimize negative ecological, social and economic impacts, regenerative tourism goes beyond these principles and strives to have a net positive impact. (Pollock, 2019, Dredge, 2022, Bellato et al., 2023) While trying to contribute to the regeneration of nature through pro-environmental behaviour and measures, regenerative tourism also emphasizes the need for well-being of tourism stakeholders. (Becken & Kaur, 2021, Pollock, 2019) The tourism stakeholders of regenerative tourism include the local community, tourism businesses, travelers, and any other types of stakeholders directly or indirectly affected by tourism in a specific place. All these stakeholders should be included in the tourism system and ultimately positively affected in their well-being. (Bellato et al., 2022 b) Fundamentally, regenerative tourism aims to have a positive impact on the people, the place and the nature in which tourism occurs. (Bellato et al., 2022; Dredge, 2022, Duxbury, 2021) Regenerative tourism is therefore not a type or niche of tourism, but a new paradigm of tourism that is in its academic infancy. (Bellato et al., 2022, Bellato et al., 2023)

1.1 Research gap

Outside of academia, regenerative tourism is widely discussed in travel magazines, blogs or podcasts and treated mainly from a management perspective, focusing predominantly on how tourism businesses or DMOs can implement regenerative tourism measures. However, regenerative tourism is not sufficiently researched from an empirical perspective. (Bellato et al., 2022 a, Zaman et al., 2022, Bellato et al., 2023) Currently, there are few scientific publications explicitly targeting the new paradigm, as well as little evidence from implications. (Bellato et al., 2023) Regenerative tourism is a trending topic, and practitioners started implementing measures, but their real outcomes are still unsure. It is therefore important to critically challenge the assumptions presented on these regenerative travel websites and magazines and look beyond the idealist stage of regenerative tourism. Specifically, there is a need to contribute to the understanding if regenerative
tourism experiences can in fact enhance the well-being of travelers while respecting nature and people. Travelers are usually mentioned as the focus group on regenerative tourism platforms and magazines. Yet, the perception of tourists towards on-site practices is under-researched. (Prayag et al., 2022) Furthermore, the actual outcome of regenerative tourism for this stakeholder group is barely empirically shown. (Prayag et al., 2022, Lindell et al., 2022, Zaman et al., 2022) Studies claim that the awareness about regenerative tourism experiences and the demand for eco-conscious products rose. Yet, we do not know how the outcome of these are impacting the tourist. (Lindell et al., 2022)

Even though the framework of well-being has been used for centuries and has been discussed extensively in various scientific fields such as social psychology, health science, sociology or management and economics (Diener, 2009) it is still considered an emerging research topic in tourism scholarship. (Vogt, 2020) Regarding regenerative tourism research in particular, the latest literature review conducted by Bellato et al. (2023) revealed a gap in well-being-focused studies. Well-being is predominantly defined as the absence of negative circumstances, subjective satisfaction with one’s life and the state of feeling good, according to Diener’s (2009) definition. However, there are different dimensions to well-being such as hedonic, eudaimonic, and social well-being, which together contribute to the holistic subjective well-being of humans. (Gallagher et al., 2009) However, the extent to which each dimension has been studied so far varies: hedonic well-being has been predominantly studied, whereas eudaimonic well-being has been recognized as a pivotal part of well-being at a later stage. (Huta & Waterman, 2014) Social well-being has received attention as a separate dimension of well-being more recently, in the last two decades, and therefore offer possibility for further exploration. (Gallagher et al., 2009) Correspondingly, studies including all three dimensions of well-being (hedonic, eudaimonic, social) are needed for empirical understanding. (Gallagher et al., 2009) Furthermore, the existing publications on well-being in sustainable tourism mainly present the community’s perspective as well as the importance for destination management. The travelers’ perspective has yet been given comparable little attention and needs to be studied further. (Hartwell et al., 2018; Vogt, 2020; Liu et al., 2023) In regenerative tourism publications, the
focus on travelers as a stakeholder group is close to non-existent still. Hence, there is a need to investigate how travelers experience regenerative tourism, taking well-being as a pivotal aspect of this experience into consideration to show the mutual relationship between well-being and regenerative tourism. Following the complexity of the topic, it is necessary to conceptualize well-being beyond the dominant subjective well-being (SWB) conception (Filep, 2014, Pesonen & Tuohino, 2017) to a multidimensional understanding of well-being.

1.2 Aim and Objective

This thesis proposes that at this early stage of the regenerative tourism paradigm development, descriptive studies are needed to gain a deeper understanding of the approach. By applying an inductive approach, this research thesis helps to gather information that can then be used to create new theories and build knowledge within this new tourism paradigm.

Considering the limited focus on well-being in sustainable tourism, within this study frame, it is considered pivotal to emphasize well-being when discussing regenerative tourism. This allows understanding the reciprocal relationship between well-being and regenerative tourism, meaning how one concept influences the other. The thesis contributes to the understanding of this mutual relationship.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the need for more qualitative research in a new, trending topic (regenerative tourism) and combines it with implementing a well-studied concept (well-being) but conceptualizing it in a multidimensional stance. Specifically, the study explores travelers' lived experiences during regenerative tourism, asking how these experiences affect the different dimensions of their well-being. Therefore, human well-being will be conceptualized in the context of regenerative tourism.

The following research question is therefore aimed to be answered:

How are different dimensions of well-being experienced in regenerative tourism?

In this thesis, the author is positioning herself in an optimistic stance, seeing regenerative tourism as a promising chance. However, a critical lens will be kept to out-balance potential occurring bias.
The link between scholars and practitioners can be drawn by collaborating with Mahakala Retreats Centre in Montenegro. In the background of the research aim, Mahakala Retreats is regarded as the optimal case study choice because their philosophy, touristic offers and measures align with regenerative tourism principles as defined in this thesis. Furthermore, the case study presents possibilities to use merged knowledge and gain insights from on-site observation and data generation. This will help to draw a nuanced and context-specific conclusion. Therefore, the thesis will contribute to understanding the well-being effects of regenerative tourism experiences beyond the theoretical limitations by exploring the topic in a real-life setting with Mahakala Retreats Center as an example.

1.3 Disposition
The preceding paragraph established the relevance of the research topic by showing the contextual background and streams in research leading to the research gap. Deriving from scarce research in specific parts of the research topic, the research question and aim could be determined.

The second chapter explains the theoretical underpinnings: different dimensions of human well-being present the base. Each of these dimensions will be explained by using concepts deriving from human-nature relationship and environmental stewardship, amongst others.

The third chapter offers an overview of the current state of knowledge about the key concepts used in this thesis. The streams and perspectives in publications about regenerative tourism are needed as a basis to work towards the research question. Furthermore, the current streams in well-being in tourism are presented.

The following fourth chapter outlines the methodological choices. The research philosophy and methods used for data collection and evaluation in qualitative research are justified. The specific study case is also explained here.

In the fifth chapter, the empirical results of the conducted research are presented and discussed according to the conceptual framework. Finally, the last chapter presents the derived conclusions and offers recommendations for further research based on the limitations of this study.
2 Theoretical framework

The study employs different dimensions of well-being as the theoretical underpinning to explore experiences in regenerative tourism in the specific case of Mahakala Retreats. Therefore, the well-studied concept of human well-being is used to conceptualize better regenerative tourism experiences, which in contrast, are not well-studied yet. However, to understand regenerative tourism experiences as part of a new and progressive tourism paradigm, the study employs a more complex understanding of well-being, meaning that a multidimensional conceptualization is applied.

As well-being is subjective and culture-specific, the framework needs to be defined considering the context of this study to make responses of the interviews categorizable. Moreover, well-being and its components are not yet uniformly defined (Huta & Waterman, 2014, Gallagher et al., 2009), which is why the complex dimensions of well-being and how they are understood for this specific study are explained in this chapter.

Therefore, the framework proposes three dimensions of well-being: hedonic, eudaimonic and social well-being. Hedonic well-being is predominantly used in well-being literature, followed by eudaimonia. These two dimensions refer to an individual person, hence representing the intrapersonal stance. Social well-being, in contrast, adds an interpersonal view and is therefore considered as pivotal for the study focus. Thus, these three aspects (hedonic, eudaimonic and social) form the variables under study.

As travelers' experiences are the subject of this thesis, only human well-being is directly studied instead of including other perspectives, such as nature or ecosystem well-being. Nonetheless, it is essential for the thesis’ understanding that the theoretical underpinnings are based on the assumption that the well-being of individuals is indeed interlinked with the well-being of other beings, nature included (Lima & Mariano, 2022 citing Bragg, 1996; Mathisen et al., 2022; Hammell, 2014, Van Norren, 2020). As well-being is treated from interdisciplinary fields, publications of social and psychological sciences were used and combined with
inputs from environmental sciences to conceptualize well-being in a way that helps to answer the research question. Referring well-being to the tourism context will be done after the conceptual framework as part of the literature review in chapter 3 of this thesis.

**Human well-being**

The interest in human well-being dates back to the fourth century when historical Greek philosophers such as Aristoteles studied what makes life desirable. (Diener, 2009; Huta, & Waterman, 2014) Aristoteles’s works were interpreted as studies about “happiness” and later associated with the concept of “flourishing”. (Huta, & Waterman, 2014). Since then, well-being has been well-discussed and has received empirical attention for the last 40 years. (Wang et al., 2023, Huta, & Waterman, 2014) However, the subject of well-being has gained revived interest in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Wang et al. (2023) latest publications focus predominantly on rising mental health issues. The study explored coping techniques on how to better the mental wellness status of individuals in a time affected by the COVID-19 lockdown.

The most influential and cited researchers in human well-being are Diener and Seligman. According to Diener (2009), subjective well-being comprises the absence of negative emotions, the abundance of intense positive feelings, and satisfaction with one’s own life. Therefore, subjective well-being is regarded as the minimisation of unpleasant emotions and the maximisation of joyful moments. (Diener, 2009) This will ultimately lead to evaluating one’s life as desirable. Subjective well-being is commonly associated with feelings such as happiness, pleasure, contentment, or joy. (Seligman & Pawelski, 2003) Diener’s definition of well-being is widely understood as subjective well-being and is frequently used as a synonym for the dimension of hedonic well-being. (Gallagher et al., 2009, Lima & Mariano, 2022)

Expanding Diener’s definition of well-being, Seligman was a pioneer in seeing the shortcoming in the mere focus on pleasurable feelings that are assumed to add to a happy life. According to Seligman, to evaluate an individual’s well-being, it is crucial to go beyond the minimization of negative feelings. (Seligman & Pawelski,
Therefore, Seligman & Pawelski’s (2003) definition of well-being includes “strength, virtue and meaning” (p. 160). Therefore, Seligman’s perception of well-being does not oppose Diener’s definition but regards it as insufficient. Apart from adding meaning and purpose to the definition of well-being, Seligman emphasises evaluating an individual’s well-being by considering not only present moments but also past experiences and future outlooks. Thereby, past experiences are considered as they may have led to the present satisfied state. In contrast, future outlooks may influence the current well-being state through hope or an optimistic worldview. Furthermore, Seligman is known as one of the most influential scholars exploring the topic of positive psychology, which is the science of what an individual needs to focus on to give meaning to one’s life and better life satisfaction. Therefore, positive psychology can be understood as a science that includes components of well-being. Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment (PERMA) are suggested components that benefit well-being. (Seligman, 2018). According to Seligman (2018), focusing on determined elements of well-being is pivotal to be able to actively work towards a rise in well-being. However, the determining components of well-being are still a highly debatable topic, as the suggested elements of the PERMA model are not exhaustive. (Seligman, 2018, Mackenzie et al., 2023)

Diener (2009) and Seligman (2018) both support that when studying well-being, negative emotions cannot be neglected. Negative emotions are always interlinked with positive associated emotions. For example, less negative emotions may lead to the perception of more positive emotions. However, studies that explore if negative emotions lead to higher well-being and if yes at which period, are still in its infancy. (Diener, 2009)

2.1 Hedonic well-being

Hedonism is predominantly associated with words such as “pleasure, good feeling, satisfaction, fulfilment” (Kahneman et al., 2006, p. 193), happiness (Lima & Mariano, 2022) or joy (Gallagher et al., 2009). Therefore, in hedonic experiences, the aim is the absence of negative feelings and the maximum amount of good feeling. (Seligman & Pawelski, 2003) In other words, hedonic well-being means
that suffering and pain is aimed to be avoided at any stance. (Lima & Mariano, 2022, Steger et al., 2008)

Derived from the happiness definition of the Greek philosopher Plato, hedonic well-being includes finding pleasure in good and beautiful things. (Diener, 2009) Hence it can be argued that being in a beautiful environment can create pleasure and joy, which benefits well-being. Connected with that is that aesthetics play an important role in how an individual perceives a situation, an experience or a space. Løvoll et al. (2020) conclude that aesthetic experiences positively influence hedonic well-being. Even more, Himes & Muraca (2018) add that “aesthetic and spiritual meanings [are essential] components of a good human life.” (p. 5). Even though these statements are given in context to human-nature relationship, it can be applied to regenerative tourism experiences in general, as living in harmony with nature is equally essential in the regenerative tourism paradigm.

Hedonic well-being is the most studied and frequently used dimension of well-being. (Lima & Mariano, 2022; Gallagher et al., 2009) One of the reasons is that hedonic well-being can be measured more easily compared to other dimensions. (Lima & Mariano, 2022) Furthermore, hedonic well-being focuses on the present moment, where emotions can be measured in temporal stability. (Lima & Mariano, 2022)

2.2 Eudaimonic well-being

Compared to hedonism, eudaimonia has been an object of intense research only for 20 years, yet it can be considered a well-researched dimension. (Hunt & Harbor, 2019; Huta & Waterman, 2014) Eudaimonic well-being refers to Aristoteles’ understanding of a good life where fulfilment and self-development are strived for. (Huta & Waterman, 2014) Therefore, eudaimonic well-being is associated with activities that allow an individual to strive towards one’s full potential and achieve the best in oneself based on the pre-condition of self-reflection. (Huta & Waterman, 2014) Furthermore, doing things that are considered meaningful to the individual and having the feeling of a purpose in life benefit eudaimonic well-being. (White et al., 2017, Gallagher et al., 2009, Steger et al., 2008) These aspects together can be seen as an inner transformative development or self-growth journey. (Gallagher et
Hence, contrarily to hedonic well-being, eudaimonic well-being is associated with the proactive engagement of a person. This dimension of well-being therefore centres around what people are doing, hence about a person's behaviour, based on the assumption that “doing good” leads to satisfaction in one’s life. (Ryff & Singer, 2006, Steger et al., 2008)

Furthermore, autonomy is mentioned as an essential aspect of striving towards a rise in eudaimonic well-being. (Ryff & Singer, 2006, Gallagher et al., 2009, Steger et al., 2008) This means that eudaimonic well-being is self-centred, as independence and satisfaction with one’s own life without external approval are key components. (Ryff & Singer, 2006) Concluding, eudaimonic well-being also entails self-acceptance. (Huta & Waterman, 2014, Ryff & Singer, 2006)

Deriving from the idea that eudaimonic well-being includes behavioural aspects, active stewardship is associated with this dimension of well-being. A study on environmental stewardship, defined as pro-active engagement to restore and protect our environment, shows that active stewardship leads to higher eudaimonic well-being. (Lehnen et al., 2021) Knowledge exchange and learnings are preconditions for these actions. (Jorgensen & Baztan, 2021) Hereby, learning can involve attitudes and active behaviour. (Lehnen et al., 2021) Due to conceptual similarities, in the context of this study, eudaimonic well-being, as defined through fulfilment, purpose, and development, can be achieved through mutual learning experiences and personal learning.

While hedonism is predominantly considered in the present moment, eudaimonia is outcome centred. (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Gallagher et al., 2009, Steger et al., 2008) Therefore, eudaimonic well-being is regarded as the long-lasting dimension of well-being. (Coghlan, 2015, Gallagher et al., 2009, Steger et al., 2008) Continuous self-growth and, consequently the enduring state of high well-being is aimed. Even more, past, present, and future activities can add to eudaimonic well-being (Lima & Mariano, 2022). The future perspective is often associated with the learning aspect of a self-growth journey, which transmigrates in the future.
2.3 Social well-being

Lastly, the dimension of social well-being is used to answer the research question of the thesis. The literature review undertaken for this thesis by the author revealed that even though social well-being is marginally explored as a separate dimension of well-being in tourism scholarship, social well-being is commonly understood as part of human well-being. However, for the purpose of this study, social well-being is also conceptualized as an essential dimension of well-being, as regenerative tourism values meaningful relationships, community sense and engagement in particular.

Social well-being puts the interactions and connections between individuals in the centre. (Gallagher et al., 2009) Therefore, well-being is not only dependent on one individual, as is the case for hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. It is a product of how good different individuals co-exist and interact together. (Keyes, 1998, Gallagher et al., 2009) Moreover, deriving from proactive interaction, social well-being is regarded as an achievement rather than a passive form of receiving. (Keyes, 1998) The result from a study by Diener & Seligman (2002) conducted on students revealed that good social relationships were the single most crucial variable that determined a happy life. A healthy social web and feeling connected to people are essential for human well-being. (Gallagher et al., 2009, Diener & Seligman, 2002, Diener, 2009) Moreover, the feeling of belonging to others is found to influence human well-being positively. (Hammell, 2014) Keyes (1998) adds that beyond the community sense, the basic form of social acceptance and social coherence are crucial for social well-being. Lastly, the feeling described as home can be associated with the emotions of belonging and connectedness and add to the social well-being of humans. (Suess et al., 2020)

However, various authors transferred this conceptual framework to a similar context: connection to other humans can add to social well-being as much as the connection to non-human beings. Human-nature relationship is named as a correlating framework by saying that a rise in social well-being can result from feeling connected to nature. (Petersen & Schubert, 2019, Mayer, & Frantz, 2004, Díaz et al., 2015) Thereby, living in harmony with nature, including flora and fauna, adds to humans’ well-being. (Díaz et al., 2015) Even more, experiences in nature are found to be described as a feeling of home which is characterized by emotions of
connectedness and belonging, similar to the feeling of home through social human connections as explained above. (Løvoll et al., 2020, Krebs, 2014) Thereby, nature’s beauty and aesthetical aspect is found to add to the well-being of humans. (Krebs, 2014)

Connected with this thought is that social well-being through the relationship with nature is rooted in many ancient indigenous worldviews. (Díaz et al., 2015) For example, social well-being is the key message of the African philosophy “ubuntu”, which can be translated as “I am because we are”. The well-being of an individual is, therefore dependent on the well-being of others and the well-being of the surrounding nature. The philosophy puts relationships and kindness to each other and nature at the centre of life’s value. (Van Norren, 2020, Hammell, 2014)

Moreover, results from studies about indigenous cultures revealed that their deeply rooted feeling of belonging to nature and the natural surroundings, including wildlife, is beneficial for well-being. (Hammell, 2014) An example is the Māori people in New Zealand, whose worldview is based on the assumption that people are part of the land and therefore have to embrace the bond to it. (Hammell, 2014, Becken & Kaur, 2021)

Hedonic, eudaimonic and social well-being represent this study’s theoretical underpinnings and will serve to conceptualize the well-being experience in regenerative tourism. However, the dimensions are not exclusive but interconnected and mutually influence each other. (Lima & Mariano, 2022, Huta & Waterman, 2014, Gallagher et al., 2009, Keyes, 1998) Therefore, parts of one dimension can also be represented in another dimension and vice versa. Some components can be present in more than one dimension of well-being. Furthermore, this means that a rise or fall in one dimension can equally influence the level of the other well-being dimension.
3 Literature review

The following literature review provides a foundation for understanding approaches and concepts essential to this thesis’ research question. It reviews the existing relevant scholarly literature to contribute to understanding the thesis’ conceptual framework and investigates the case study in the following steps.

Firstly, the framework of human well-being treated in tourism scholarship is reviewed. Literature about well-being from various scientific fields is exhaustive, yet looking at well-being in tourism seems to be underrepresented. Therefore, the literature review aims to provide an overview of current streams and recent discussions about how well-being can be understood and used in tourism affairs. The literature review therefore also reveals research gaps regarding well-being dimensions in the field of tourism.

Secondly, a systematic review of regenerative tourism elaborates on different streams and perspectives to deepen the understanding. As regenerative tourism is regarded as an upcoming trend and academic publications are still limited, the review aims to picture an overview of the existing research. As regenerative tourism presents one of the thesis’ key concepts, an in-depth understanding is pivotal to grasping an understanding of the research. Lastly, the literature review is summarized to provide an overview of the essential learnings important for this thesis research aim.

3.1 Human well-being in tourism

Even though well-being as a concept has been used for centuries to evaluate people's physical and mental health, well-being has only been marginally linked to tourism. (Smith & Diekmann, 2017, Vogt, 2020) According to Hartwell et al. (2018) the interest in studying the interrelationship between tourist affairs and the well-being of different tourism stakeholders has been on the rise since 2009. However, the focus has been chiefly on wellness tourism, including restoring and curing illnesses as well as pleasure and joy. (Lindell et al., 2022, to Hartwell et al., 2018) Well-being tourism developed out of this form of tourism, emphasizing more
prevention by actively improving mental and physical health instead of curing effects of low well-being. (Lindell et al., 2022)

**Well-being in tourism**

In recent years, scholars mentioned the increasing demand for well-being tourism due to increasingly demanding lifestyles, a rise in mental health issues and awareness of the benefits of travel for mental health. (Dwyer, 2020, Smith & Diekmann, 2017, Bhalla & Chowdhary, 2022, Lindell et al., 2022) Increasingly, studies add to the evidence that well-being can result from tourist experiences. Both, physical and mental well-being can be enhanced through travelling. (Smith & Diekmann, 2017, Vada et al., 2020) However, some tourism niches which can be connected to human well-being, such as voluntourism or nature-based tourism, are more in-depth studied than others. (Smith & Diekmann, 2017) Additionally, establishing the relationship between human well-being and sustainable tourism in specific, is a rather new scientific interest that is not yet sufficiently explored. Therefore, regenerative tourism can be regarded as a promising new academic field.

**Perspectives**

Most published papers in tourism scholarship in the last ten years focusing on human well-being present the perspective of host communities or the management perspective, including destination management. Scholars such as Hartwell et al. (2018) and Vogt (2020) support this finding by stating that the subject of well-being in tourism is pre-dominantly explored from the host-community perspective. The main reason for this focus seems to be that the community’s attitude towards tourism is dependent on their well-being through tourism. And hence, this is a crucial factor for the success of tourism in this place. (Hartwell et al., 2018, Zaman et al., 2022) Even though the community’s perspective seems to be most studied, some scholars still call for more in-depth studies on host communities in specific contexts. For example, Allgood et al. (2022) conclude that there is a need to study the well-being of community members in a reciprocal relationship with the well-being of wildlife in the background of wildlife-based tourism.
Furthermore, Filep & Laing (2019) are in consensus with the statement that the impacts of tourism on communities has been extensively studied, but the authors nevertheless ask for more research on positive psychology and well-being applied on host communities. Pocinho et al. (2021) add a contemporary perspective by saying that community well-being and resilience in the specific context of COVID-19 need to be explored more. Additionally, both papers included a rarely mentioned tourism stakeholder group that needs to be studied more on the topic of well-being: the tourism workers on-site. (Pocinho et al., 2021, Filep & Laing, 2019)

The literature review undertaken by the author revealed that the tourist’s well-being seems under-represented. Supporting this finding, a significant number of scholars demand more studies on well-being in tourism experiences from the tourist perspective. (Vada et al., 2020, Filep, 2014, Filep & Laing, 2019) Even though publications about travelers’ well-being are thriving in recent years (Agrusa et al., 2021, Suess et al., 2020) as "well-being is one of the buzzwords of the decade" (Smith & Diekmann, 2017, p. 1), the topic is still regarded as under-represented. (Vada et al., 2020, Filep & Laing, 2019) Specifically, there is a trend noticeable where tourism scholars see the potential of exploring eudaimonic tourist experiences. (Câmara et al., 2022, filep & laing, 2019) In comparison, studies about hedonic well-being seem numerous, as that is the predominant approach of tourist well-being in tourism scholarship. (Câmara et al., 2022, Filep & Laing, 2019)

**Duration of well-being**

When researching the travelers experience, it is essential to categorize the periods when the well-being status of the respondents is interrogated. In each time span, different intensities can be determined. Most articles class research time frames into pre-departure, on-site and after-stay. (Agrusa et al., 2021) Thereby, Filep & Laing’s (2019) literature review revealed that the post-holiday stage is looked upon most and the on-site well-being of tourists lacks academic evaluation. Regarding the intensity, there is a consensus that travellers’ well-being is highest on-site compared to the other stages. (Smith & Diekmann, 2017, Filep & Laing, 2019)

After returning home, most studies discovered a quick decline in well-being. (Filep & Laing, 2019, Smith & Diekmann, 2017) Some studies even claimed that holidays
do not have an effect on the well-being of travelers in the months after their tourist experience at all. (Smith & Diekmann, 2017 citing Mitas, Nawijn, and Jongsma, 2016) Yet, this decline is most noticeable in combination with mere hedonic tourist experiences. (Filep & Laing, 2019) If pleasure-seeking is the goal of the tourist experience, Filep & Laing (2019) conclude that the feeling of positive emotions through hedonism is of short endurance and will fade quickly when returning to daily life.

A literature review conducted by Smith & Diekmann (2017) offered an overview of opposing results. Even though most studies supported the before mentioned statement, some studies show that well-being can indeed endure after the stay. The results of different studies show that the pre-condition is that the tourist experience has been challenging, engaging or inspiring. These experiences evoke the process of reflection at the post-travel stage, which can lead to longer-lasting well-being of travellers. An example underlines this statement: the study conducted by Knobloch et al. (2017) focused on different nature-based tourist activities where tourists engaged actively. The findings highlighted that feelings of achievement, overcoming a fear or deep emotions that go beyond hedonism result in long-lasting eudaimonic well-being. (Knobloch et al., 2017) Hence, this means that the well-being of tourists can go beyond the actual on-site time period, if the experiences are not only of hedonic but also of eudaimonic character. (Knobloch et al., 2017) Hunt & Harbor (2019) support this statement by reinforcing the argument that reflections are essential to keep the feeling of eudaimonic well-being, especially after the trip. Hence, the literature review findings align with this thesis's research gap saying that a more complex well-being approach needs to be applied, which can then include on-site and post-travel evaluations.

**Negative feelings**

Adding to the thought of challenging tourist experiences which lead to long-lasting eudaimonic well-being, a new stream in well-being scholarship is noticeable. While traditional tourism scholars use the definition of maximum positive emotions and minimum negative emotions to enhance the well-being of travelers, recent publications show a more complex approach. The assumption is, that negative
emotions can add to the well-being of travelers in the long term through reflection and self-growth. (Vada et al., 2020, Smith & Diekmann, 2017, Wang et al., 2021) Several authors claim that a more complex way of well-being needs to be established to evaluate the well-being of tourists that goes beyond the mere absence of negatives. (Coghlan, 2015, Lindell et al., 2022) However, this connotation mainly refers to the act of flourishing where proactive engagement in the tourist experience is central. The focus here is that the experience should not only be positive but also go beyond the mere feeling of pleasure and adding a personal meaning. (Coghlan, 2015)

Taking this even a step further, recent publications revealed that well-being can indeed also be a result of negative emotions. (Vada et al., 2020, Wang et al., 2021, Smith & Diekmann, 2017, Diener, 2009) This is a seldomly explored topic and also a relatively new trend, as well-being is traditionally connotated by words such as happiness, joy and life satisfaction, etc. (Lindell et al., 2022, Vada et al., 2020). However, negative emotions, such as shame or sadness, can help travelers to reflect on what led to these emotions and find ways to work with them, ultimately resulting in long-term eudaimonic well-being. (Smith & Diekmann, 2017, Wang et al., 2021) Real-life examples would be yoga or restorative retreats where life-changing challenges would be faced, discussed, and worked on to find positive perspectives. (Smith & Diekmann, 2017) Yet it can also include active tourist experiences that help to overcome one’s trauma or fear, such as skydiving. (Wang et al., 2021) As a result, travelers undergo a process of self-growth which leads to long-term positive effects through negative connotated feelings. (Wang et al., 2021) This form of well-being is usually delayed in time as the eudaimonic well-being unfolds over time. (Vada et al., 2020) Wang et al. (2021) add another perspective by underlining the diversity of emotions, not promoting either positive or negative feelings. According to him, the diversity of emotions is “consistently linked to greater well-being”, “regardless of whether it involves positive or negative emotions” (p. 1097)

Smith & Diekmann (2017) summarize that well-being in tourism can be achieved through both: hedonism and the handling of negative emotions. Therefore, Wang et al. (2021) ask to explore well-being more through the combination of hedonic and eudaimonic tourist experiences. These statements are essential in the background of
the research question, to be aware that diverse experiences in regenerative tourism can lead to tourist well-being.

**Nature activities**

After evaluating the psychological side when talking about positive and negative emotions that lead to well-being, this section gives an overview about the on-site experiences that are found to add to tourist well-being.

There is a large body of literature on the topic of nature-induced well-being. Much of the current literature emphasizes the positive well-being effects of nature and natural landscapes. Lindell et al. (2022) even regard the well-being of nature as a precondition to provide opportunities for tourists to get well-being out of it. This statement follows the ecological-self theory or the ecocentrism theory based on the assumption that humans are not separated from nature: humans, non-human, and nature are all interconnected. (Lima & Mariano, 2022 citing Bragg, 1996, Gössling et al., 2015)

On the one hand, it is stated that the mere observation of natural landscapes or the mere being in such an environment adds to the well-being of travelers. (Bhalla & Chowdhary, 2022, Farber & Hall, 2007, Smith & Smith & Diekmann, 2017, Filep & Laing, 2019, Sheldon, 2020, Lindell et al., 2022, White et al., 2017, Lima & Mariano, 2022) Smith & Diekmann (2017) summarize natural settings that have been studied in the context of well-being through nature-based tourism and found that green environments, including forests and all types of landscapes characterized by water such as the coast, lakes or waterfalls, are named as most favourable in terms of positive contribution to the mental health of tourists. This finding reflects the exact positioning that other interdisciplinary studies outside of tourism confirmed. White et al. (2017), for example, conclude in their quantitative analysis targeting urban and peri-urban residents that “reconnecting with nature can play a key role in maintaining […] well-being.” (p. 83) Løvoll et al. (2020) furthermore add that aesthetic experiences in nature such as star gazing, doing a fire or being surrounded by trees add to both, hedonic and eudaimonic well-being.
On the other hand, an extensive number of publications show the importance of active engagement in natural settings to enhance their well-being. (Lindell et al., 2022, Pesonen & Tuohino, 2017, Houge Mackenzie et al., 2023, Lima & Mariano, 2022) According to the study by Pesonen & Tuohino (2017) nature-based activities do not only include outdoor sports and fitness but also activities which focus more on relaxation, such as recreational spa treatments or yoga. Houge Mackenzie et al. (2023) add that the connection with and to nature is central during these activities to affect physical well-being positively. Moreover, adventure sports experiences are found to add to travelers’ well-being. (Vada et al., 2020, Hunt & Harbor, 2019, Bhalla & Chowdhary, 2022, Houge Mackenzie et al., 2023) Examples can include rafting or surfing (Vada et al., 2020, Houge Mackenzie et al., 2023) but adventure tourism experiences are often integrated into wellness tourism. (Hunt & Harbor, 2019) However, Hunt & Harbour (2019) show there is a lack of studies of eudaimonic well-being linked to adventure tourism, which is also supported by Houge Mackenzie et al. (2023).

Another significant influence on tourists’ well-being is encounters with wildlife. (Vada et al., 2020, Farber & Hall, 2007) Similar to being in nature, the more intense the experience, the more effects it has on well-being. For example, watching wildlife in a proactive and mindful way is stated to have highly positive effects on mental health. (Farber & Hall, 2007) Taking this idea full circle, Allgood et al. (2022) contributed to the knowledge about the relationship between wildlife well-being to community well-being by stating that caring for wildlife is equally enhancing the well-being of the residents. Thereby, indigenous values related to wildlife and conservation techniques seem helpful to maximize the benefits. (Allgood, 2022) This shows the holistic approach of well-being in tourism: Community well-being is thus dependent on wildlife’s well-being, whereas tourist well-being depends on thriving wildlife.

Connecting the findings of well-being through nature activities to the introduction of this thesis, nature-based tourism has been increasingly in demand during the COVID-19 lockdown and afterwards. The rising importance of studying nature-based tourist experiences and how these experiences enhance human well-being is summarized well by Sheldon (2020). The author states that reconnecting people
with nature evokes a reciprocal relationship: the personal connection to nature enhances the preservation of nature, which again reinforces the potential to get well-being out of nature for people. (Sheldon, 2020) These findings are consistent with those from a recent study published by Rockström et al. (2023), who emphasize the need to reconnect people with nature to counteract COVID-19’s negative effects and work towards the resilience of the ecosystem. Furthermore, by fostering a human-nature relationship, a mindset shift towards more eco-consciousness can be evoked which will lead to pro-environmental behaviour which is ultimately benefitting the well-being of humans and nature equally. (Rockström et al., 2023)

Food-related experiences

A recent study which was conducted during the COVID-19 lockdown time in New Zealand showed the increasing importance of food in tourism for well-being. According to the author Fountain (2022) tourists appreciate more the local and regional food and the tourist experience connected with such kinds of food during travel restrictions. According to the author, eating traditional and regional food can demonstrate a way to connect with a space in-depth while connecting to the people of a place through learning their food traditions. As a result, the well-being of the tourists can be equally positively influenced by the well-being of community members who are included in the tourist experience. (Fountain, 2022) A recently published study by Liu et al. (2023) equally mentioned healthy food as a recommended focus for tourism practitioners to support the well-being of travelers. Smith & Diekmann (2017) add to this idea by finding that usually, tourists seem to consume food on their holidays that bring them short-term hedonism rather than food that increases their well-being in the long term. For example, food which is easily accessible such as fast food and is tasty because of fats and sugar content is often preferred during holidays compared to slow-prepared food, which contains fresh ingredients and healthy nutrients. Hence, there is still great potential to nudge tourists more to food experiences that are favourable for their long-term physical and mental health, as this will add to their long-lasting well-being instead of short-term joy. Combined with that is the rise in the well-being of local producers who can be part of the value-creation of the touristic product and experience economic and social benefits through it.
Local, sustainable food production is hereby stated as the pre-condition for the well-being of the community which both can subsequently help to offer food experiences that positively influence the well-being of travelers. (Fountain, 2022) Another research paper focusing on the Australian tourism market shows similar results by stating that sustainable and ethical food production is pivotal for a just tourism system that can better the well-being of the community and travelers. Thereby, indigenous food production is mentioned as promising as it cannot be commercialized or produced elsewhere. (Boluk & Panse, 2022) Hence, focusing on offering touristic food experiences which combine pleasure, ethics, and sustainability would be a win-win situation for the well-being of the environment, community and tourists.

Adding on the idea that food offers the possibility to connect with a place and its residents, several studies suggested that the feeling of connection in general is essential for the well-being of tourists. Especially in post COVID world, meaningful connection is looked for in tourist experiences due to a lockdown period that interfered with meaningful social interaction. (Filep, 2014) Therefore, feeling connected with like-minded people as well as connecting with residents through touristic experiences, can enhance the long-term well-being of travelers. (Filep, 2014, Suess et al., 2020)

**Component of connection**

Dwyer (2020) explored the topic of well-being through social connections primarily from a host communities’ perspective, finding that residents who share the same values and beliefs have a stronger feeling of connectedness and trust. This in turn makes them interact more between each other which has a positive effect on their well-being. Eslami et al. (2018) draw conclusion that this positively affects the perception of tourism at a place. A strong feeling of togetherness and emotional connection between individuals of the community is found to better the attitude towards sustainable tourism development. However, the authors are aware that opposing studies have shown the opposite: that community attachment may make residents more hostile towards tourists. (Eslami et al., 2018) In any case, as stated above, the well-being of the community is undoubtedly a pre-condition of travellers'
well-being and needs to be included as pivotal when creating tourist experiences. Even more, social connections between travelers and community members are found to be considerably beneficial. (Suess et al., 2020) As an example, Suess et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of having a connection with the local community when stating that “the feeling of home contributes […] to travelers’ well-being.” (p.489)

Even though the connection is usually associated with other beings, Lindell et al. (2022) emphasize that the connection to oneself is as important as the connection to others or to nature. According to the authors it is crucial to connect with one’s own intuition to be able to have long term positive effects on wellbeing. Understanding one’s own needs is a precondition to pro-actively work towards a maximization of one’s well-being. Thus, tourism experiences that offer space to connect with one’s self can help to be even more aware of what influences one’s well-being, which can multiply this effect. (Lindell et al., 2022) Bhalla & Chowdhary (2022) published a study targeting the connection between self-focus and nature. Results show that finding a connection with one’s self inner voice with the aim of enhancing well-being is best done in natural spaces and remote environments.

The study by Filep & Laing (2019) raised a discussion about activities in sustainable tourism that enhance well-being by thinking even a step further. According to the authors, it is not the activity that should be the reason for a touristic experience, but the gained well-being itself. Hence, managing tourism experiences should be centred on enhancing well-being as the main driver, not the specific activities as the main focus. (Filep & Laing, 2019) A recently published quantitative survey about wellness travelers’ experiences and their influence on well-being reinforced these statements by concluding that “well-being [is] the ultimate goal.” (Liu et al., 2023, p. 17)

3.2 Regenerative tourism

As previously indicated, regenerative tourism became a buzzword after the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. (Zaman et al., 2022) The new tourism approach is frequently discussed in academia and outside academic circles. For instance, a travel platform called regenerativetravel.com was established in 2019 to offer education and
knowledge exchange for tourism practitioners as well as connecting travelers with hotels that strive towards regenerative tourism principles. Another example would be thetourismcolab.com which was also founded in 2019. This social enterprise offers consulting, academic education, and an online place for discussions about regenerative tourism. A real-life example of a regenerative tourism initiative is the 2-year project called “the islander way” at Flinders Island, Australia, where regenerative tourism principles have been implemented throughout the whole island. A resort-level example is the boutique hotel Playa Viva in Mexico, which applied regenerative principles on-site and is embedded in the local ecosystem. Furthermore, podcasts such as “Good Awaits” or “Our Regenerative Future” were founded in recent years to discuss upcoming trends and advancements in the field of regenerative tourism. Obviously, regenerative tourism is much talked about and becoming a trending topic outside of the academic world.

3.2.1 Origin and definition
The fact that regenerative tourism is a well-discussed topic raises the question of where the new paradigm derives from. Major & Clarke (2022) for example state that regenerative tourism is not a new concept as such but builds on existing regenerative concepts. Regenerative agriculture is named as a known concept, for example. (Major & Clarke, 2022) Even more, the idea of regenerative tourism was already mentioned in preliminary work by Pollock dating back to the year 1995. Zaman et al., (2022) support this view by citing Arfweson (1994), who was one of the first scholars to mention regenerative travels in 1994. However, it was not frequently discussed in academic publications during that time. (Major & Clarke, 2022) Therefore, it can be assumed that the concept itself is not new but the application to current structures is. This explains why regenerative tourism is usually referred to as a new concept in recent publications.

Even though regenerative tourism seems to be known amongst limited scholars for several years, there is not yet a uniform definition or understanding of it. (Bellato et al., 2022 a) Hence, many scholars in the tourism field argue that regenerative tourism is not yet scientifically well-understood. On the one hand, regenerative tourism initiatives are continuously rising, even though at the current state, the total
number of known real-life practices is still limited. On the other hand, there is no scientific evidence yet about the impacts of these practical measures and procedures. (Prayag et al., 2022, Lindell et al., 2022, Zaman et al., 2022, Bhalla & Chowdhary, 2022, Bellato et al., 2022 a)

The literature review reveals that a few researchers are quoted most frequently in regenerative tourism. Anna Pollock, Dianne Dredge and Loretta Bellato have published some of the most influential works contributing to understanding the new paradigm. Even though some of Pollock’s works are not yet published in scientific journals but on an online research website called medium.com, her insights are still considered as pivotal and quoted frequently by other tourism researchers. Her work, alongside other papers published on regenerative tourism in top-tier tourism journals, is the base for this literature review chapter.

Two definitions of these prominent scholars will help to get a first understanding. According to Dredge (2022)

“Regenerative tourism seeks to ensure travel and tourism delivers a net positive benefit to people, places and nature and that it supports the long-term renewal and flourishing of our social and ecological systems.” (p. 270). Pollock (2019) adds that regenerative “tourism has the potential to become an agent of positive transformation that can contribute to a better quality of life for all.” (para. 1)

It is pivotal, however, to understand that regenerative tourism is not a type or niche of tourism but a holistic paradigm. (Bellato et al., 2022 a) When questioning this paradigm’s, numerous studies reveal that regenerative tourism can be regarded as a successor of sustainable tourism: being aware of its failure to improve or reform its principles. (Nitsch & Vogels, 2022, Becken & Kaur, 2021, Pollock, 2019, Bellato et al., 2022 b, Bellato et al., 2022 a) Some add that the concept of regenerative tourism is derived from regenerative development, where development is in balance with the flourishing of nature, animals and the people living in the system. (Bellato et al., 2022 b, Bellato & Cheer, 2021) This is coherent with including an ecological worldview where the whole world system is regarded as connected and constantly changing. (Bellato et al., 2022 b) Moreover, tourism scholars have a consensus that
regenerative tourism should combine Western sciences with indigenous knowledge and practices. In this way, place-specific tradition and expertise are acknowledged and valued. (Major & Clarke, 2022, Bellato et al., 2022 a)

Due to the complex nature of regenerative tourism, the perspectives studied so far are equally versatile. Publications focusing on regenerative tourism were categorized by Ateljevic & Sheldon (2022) into the following sub-sections: circular economy and regenerative economic practices, transformational tourism and aligning activities, natural and cultural values and practices including regenerative agriculture. All of these are usually linked to the precondition that policies and governmental structures allow the adaption to a more regenerative norm. (Major & Clarke, 2022, Duxbury, 2021) Tourism scholars agree that the beliefs and values of decision-makers are a key precondition for the success of regenerative tourism. (Gössling & Higham, 2021, Cave et al., 2022, Dwyer, 2020, Bellato, 2022 a)

3.2.2 Sub-structure of regenerative tourism
The sub-titles in the following sections show the different principles and aspects that are dominant in the available literature on regenerative tourism as a main subject. However, scholars are not yet in general agreement about which aspects to include. Hence, the sub-sections help to understand better the whole idea of regenerative tourism and which different parts are named as essential by various tourism scholars.

Thereby, the importance of living system theory and human-nature relationship are explained as well as the importance of the local scale of regenerative tourism. Furthermore, the key aspects of involvement, inclusion and equality are described and concluded by explaining mutual learning. Finally, the chapter describes the overarching topic of well-being and how that concept interlinks all aspects.

Living System and human-nature relationship

Ateljevic & Sheldon (2022) introduce an overarching principle by stating that “tourism is regenerative when it regenerates more than just itself.” (p. 268).

Regenerative tourism strives to build a healthy living system rather than focusing on industry. (Bellato et al., 2022 a) On the assumption that regenerative tourism derives
from the sustainable tourism paradigm, scholars are in consensus that the ecological, economic and social impacts should not only be minimized if negative but that the regenerative tourism principles should strive to have a net positive impact instead. (Pollock, 2019, Zaman et al., 2022, Dredge, 2022, Duxbury, 2021) Moreover, the net positive impacts should not only be limited to the trinity of ecology, economy and society but should include the whole system in which tourism occurs. Therefore, a core idea of the regenerative tourism paradigm is that tourism is regarded as a living system, not an industry, compared to how it used to be seen in the traditional tourism paradigm. By approaching tourism through the lens of living system theory, it becomes evident that not the different individual parts of tourism should be focused on separately, but the dynamic relationships between them. (Pollock, 2019, Zaman et al., 2022, Major & Clarke, 2022, Bellato et al., 2022 b, Dredge, 2022). Therefore, the whole tourism system is as a web of relationships. Ideally, these relationships should be mutually beneficial and reciprocal. (Bellato et al., 2022 b, Bellato et al., 2022 a) As a consequence, the regeneration of a place would positively influence the well-being of all stakeholders, following an eco-centric philosophy where all beings are seen as interconnected. (Mathisen et al., 2022) With that as a precondition, Pollock (2019) states that tourism as a whole system could be self-organizable while being aware of its constant change.

Consequently, it is essential in tourism development to keep the complexity of regenerative tourism in mind. Best-case scenarios developed to be generalized and implemented in various destinations in the same way will not succeed. Every space in which tourism occurs is different and needs to be recognized as a unique living system. Each space is developing and changing at its own speed and rhythm; therefore, the principles and practices of regenerative tourism need to be progressively adapted. Acknowledging the complexity of regenerative tourism is consequently crucial to ensure the long-term flourishing of the regenerative tourism system. (Bellato et al., 2022. Fusté-Forné, 2022, Mathisen et al., 2022)

Deriving from the living system theory, within the regenerative tourism paradigm, humans are considered as part of the ecosystem, as part of nature. (Major & Clarke, 2022, Bellato et al., 2022 b, Dredge, 2022, Ateljevic & Sheldon, 2022) Humans are consequently not regarded as superior to any other living being. (Bellato et al., 2022
b) This assumption is rooted in indigenous worldviews, as the feeling of belonging to nature and one’s land is a central philosophy of many indigenous cultures worldwide. (Hammell, 2014) Therefore, social gains are intertwined with positive impacts on the ecosystem and vice versa. (Pollock, 2019) Humans and nature should be in harmony and positively influence each other’s well-being. (Lindell, 2022, Ateljevic & Sheldon, 2022) Fostering the relationship between humans and nature is therefore seen as a pivotal step to benefit the well-being of humans and the whole ecosystem in the long term. (Rockström et al., 2023) This environment-centrist stance stands in contrast to the economy-centred agenda of the traditional tourism approach. (Dredge, 2022)

**Local scale**

Even though an ecological worldview is applied in regenerative tourism, the practices should not be global-oriented but place-based. Nonetheless, focusing on local regeneration ultimately benefits the whole world’s ecosystem. (Pollock, 2019, Bellato et al., 2022 b, Dredge, 2022) Tourism stakeholders should consider each place unique and approach it in a peerless, unique way. (Bellato et al., 2022 b, Dredge, 2022, Duxbury, 2021) Hence, pro-active engagement during tourism experiences as well as inclusion of community members in such activities should be practiced on a local level. (Bellato et al., 2022 b) Recent research findings supported this assumption by reporting that micro-scale, place-based practices have a higher impact at a specific place than global initiatives regarding sustainable and pro-environmental practices. (Duxbury, 2021) Mathisen et al. (2022) add a context-specific finding saying that “small-scale regenerative activities can contribute to the flourishing of regenerative tourism practices.” (p. 337). Hence, bottom-up approaches are favoured in regenerative tourism compared to traditional top-down strategies. (Dredge, 2022)

**Involvement**

A key aspect emphasized in regenerative tourism publication is that within the specific place where tourism occurs, the community's involvement is essential to be aimed by tourism practitioners. (Zaman et al., 2022, Bellato & Cheer, 2021, Duxbury et al., 2021, Bellato et al., 2023) Deriving from the idea that regenerative
tourism can only be realized if the community and nature around them are flourishing, scholars name the act of co-creation as pivotal for the long-term success of tourism. (Cave et al., 2022, Bellato et al., 2023) Co-creation means that all stakeholders can engage and create value. Communities, tourists, local tourism companies and other stakeholders affected can proactively participate in creating tourism offers and services. (Cave et al., 2022, Bellato et al., 2022 a, Mathisen et al., 2022, Bellato & Cheer, 2021) Recent research from other scientific fields supports the importance of co-creation in fostering resilience in a local context. In specific, Rockström et al. (2023) suggest that knowledge co-production must include context-specific knowledge from local actors combined with scientific knowledge.

In regenerative tourism, proactive stewardship of the local community and active engagement in tourism-related services is vital. (Pollock, 2019, Major & Clarke, 2022, Duxbury, 2021, Bellato & Cheer, 2021, Bellato et al., 2023) Thereby, meaningful connections are built through collaboration rather than following an individualistic and competitive approach. (Major & Clarke, 2022, Dredge, 2022) This again reflects the idea of living system theory, where relationships are at the core. (Pollock, 2019) The idea that the local community should be included in local development deriving from tourism is not new. However, within the sustainable tourism concept, the aim was to minimalize the negative impacts on the local community, whereby within the regenerative tourism concept, the local community’s well-being represents a precondition, and the flourishing of all members is regarded as the aim of the tourism system. (Major & Clarke, 2022, Bellato & Cheer, 2021) Thus, it goes beyond the principles of sustainable tourism.

**Inclusion and equality**

Bringing the idea of inclusive community development forward, Boluk & Panse (2022) seem to be one of the pioneers showing the importance of a feminist viewpoint. According to their research findings, the feminist ethic of care is irreplaceable in a regenerative tourism system. This aligns with Nitsch & Vogels’ (2022) statement saying that empowering women will positively affect the development of regenerative tourism systems. Other scholars agree that gender
equality is one of the first steps to consider to get to a just tourism system. (Nitsch & Vogels, 2022, Boluk & Panse, 2022, Ateljevic & Sheldon, 2022)

Additionally, including indigenous people and their knowledge are indispensable in a just tourism system. As stated above, regenerative tourism principles draw on indigenous values and ingenious people’s place attachment. (Bellato et al., 2022 a, Fusté-Forné, 2022) Moreover, indigenous practices, such as conservation practices (Allgood et al., 2022) or harvesting and consumption of traditional, local food, are mentioned as benefitting the people, place and nature in which tourism occurs. (Boluk & Panse, 2022, Fountain, 2022) Consequently, including indigenous people as equal stakeholders in tourist development and planning as well as offering tourist services, is vital. Moreover, to work towards equity in regenerative tourism, focusing on decolonizing approaches by “inclusion and empowerment, especially for Indigenous peoples, their worldviews and perspectives” (Bellato et al., 2023, p. 9) is a crucial part of a regenerative tourism agenda.

Major & Clarke (2022) resume that empowering women as well as indigenous people and all different kinds of minority members is one important principle of the regenerative tourism paradigm. Bellato & Cheer (2021) support this view by stating that marginalized groups must be included in tourism management and destination planning. By being inclusive, the way tourism is understood can change from a traditional industrial mindset to a whole system thinking where co-evolving and mutual learning are acknowledged while culture and traditions unique to its place are preserved. (Major & Clarke, 2022, Duxbury et al., 2021, Bellato et al., 2023, Rockström et al., 2023)

Learning and mindset change

Another central principle of regenerative tourism is the meaningful exchange between travelers and the community. (Major & Clarke, 2022) The tourist experiences should be designed in a way that they lead to connection with different stakeholders. Key to this connection-building is mutual learning and knowledge exchange between travelers and community members. (Boluk & Panse, 2022) Consequently, a travel experience should go beyond the mere aim of relaxation and pleasure, even though it can still be part of it. Experiences in regenerative tourism
should be transformative, meaning that an individual is inspired and flourishing on-site but also after their stay. (Pollock, 2019, Major & Clarke, 2022) Personal growth can thereby happen through the connection and exchange with the community and the interactions and inspiration through the environment around. (Major & Clarke, 2022) Central in achieving a transformative experience is that the traveler contributes actively to the regenerative tourism experience, which again reflects the importance of co-creation. (Bellato et al., 2022 a)

Through exchange and learning experiences, the mindset of tourism stakeholders can be nudged as part of a self-growth or transformational experience. Tourism scholars are in agreement that a mindset shift is both the precondition and the outcome of regenerative tourism. Getting away from the traditional tourism paradigm and opening up to new regenerative ideas is critical to work towards a change in the tourism industry. (Pollock, 2019, Dredge, 2022, Bellato et al., 2023) Therefore, tourism stakeholders must adapt their beliefs towards a supportive attitude regarding a regenerative tourism paradigm, including the principles listed here. Bringing awareness to government and policymakers is regarded as the most challenging step, as a thriving tourism living system needs to be supported by local and national decision-makers. (Duxbury, 2021, Major & Clarke, 2022, Cave et al., 2022, Gössling et al., 2015, Rockström et al., 2023) However, as Zaman et al. (2022) state, the progress and success of touristic affairs are deeply dependent on the attitudes of the community members. If their mindset is supportive towards regenerative tourism happening in their space, it will be striving in the long term. Considering travelers as another stakeholder group, changing their awareness towards the appreciation of regenerative travel experiences is needed for a long-term striving tourism system. (Dredge, 2022) However, out of all tourism stakeholder groups, travelers seem to be more resilient to change than other stakeholder groups because they adapt most quickly to change. This became evident after the Covid-19 lockdown, as travelers were found to be the stakeholder group with the highest readiness to change travel habits. (Gössling & Schweiggart, 2022) Therefore, raising awareness about regenerative tourism to encourage travelers to favor this approach and choose such experiences instead of other less sustainable options seems to be a promising strategy. Changing their awareness and
consciousness on-site through knowledge exchange and nature-based activities will contribute to shifting the beliefs of travelers. This shows once again that a mindset change is a precondition for regenerative tourism as well as the aim and outcome. Summarized, knowledge exchange should be regarded as co-production, where indigenous people, tourism practitioners and other tourism stakeholders are included. (Bellato et al., 2023)

**Well-being**

A last regenerative tourism that is seen as the outcome of all aspects named above, is well-being. (Duxbury et al., 2021) Through having a net positive impact on nature, the place and the community, regenerative tourism strives to enhance the well-being of the whole living system. Therefore, scholars emphasize the need to include different dimensions of well-being, such as economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being. Hence, striving to better the well-being of humans is equally important as benefitting the well-being of non-humans in regenerative tourism development. Furthermore, the well-being of not only existing generations but also future generations needs to be addressed by tourism stakeholders. (Bellato et al., 2022 a, Bellato et al., 2022 b, Mathisen et al., 2022)

The holistic well-being approach is rooted in indigenous traditions and it claims that human well-being is created through the connection to nature, the relationships to the community and the connection to oneself. (Major & Clarke, 2022, Mathisen et al., 2022) When speaking about human well-being in specific, Mathisen et al. (2022) conclude that well-being in regenerative tourism is expressed by the feeling of being, belonging and becoming. In this definition, being is referred to as the present state of an individual; belonging constitutes the relationship with one’s environment and becoming can be understood as self-growth. Lindell et al. (2022) support the idea of holistic well-being. According to the authors, different experiences can support an individual’s well-being while being part of the place. These experiences can include connecting to animals, being in nature, meaningful connections with the community, or physical and mental activities that foster the connection with oneself and the community. These kinds of small-scale activities in regenerative tourism lead to a higher appreciation of the place and its people.
Major & Clarke (2022) recently found out that these regenerative tourism experiences ultimately lead to a more pro-environmental mindset and support stewardship in both places: on-site and once travelers turned back home. Consequently, there is a correlation between human and nature's well-being which is cultivated by regenerative tourism experiences.

**Regenerative growth**

Subsequently, some scholars hold the view that growth is essential in regenerative tourism, yet growth is defined in a very different way compared to the traditional economic definition. In regenerative tourism, the focus is on personal growth, growth in social gains, growth in the well-being of all, etc. It is thus suggested that growth in general is not neglected in the regenerative tourism paradigm. Instead, it is defined in complex ways, which differs drastically from the restricted growth definition in traditional industrial tourism. (Pollock, 2019) Thus, while the mere economic growth and profit maximization agenda is opposed, growth in the well-being of all stakeholders, nature and the place is aimed through regenerative tourism practices. In other words, a diverse and complex growth agenda is favoured which goes beyond mere monetary and non-monetary measurements. (Lindell et al., 2022, Pollock, 2019) Pollock (2019) summarized the growth agenda of regenerative tourism well by stating that “regenerative tourism is not anti-growth; it simply asks that we grow the things that matter most to us in ways that benefit the entire system and never at the expense of others.” (para. 4)

**Criticism**

However, as sustainable tourism businesses and destination managers have faced criticism about greenwashing instead of contributing, the same question must be taken into consideration for regenerative tourism. (Pollock. 2019) Even though regenerative tourism is seen as a possible solution for the needed change in the tourism industry, it has yet to be scrutinized from a critical lens. The question at stake is if regenerative tourism is too idealized, proposing a normative ideal that cannot in fact be implemented in practice. Hence, the need to study regenerative tourism seems to be much needed at this early stage of knowledge about the new paradigm.
Resume

To summarize the literature review about regenerative tourism, the following needs to be remembered: tourism should be seen as a complex phenomenon rather than an industry. The living system theory helps to understand the importance of relationships and connections, which are vital in regenerative tourism. The regenerative tourism paradigm aims to have a net positive impact on the nature, the place and the community in which tourism occurs and strives to enhance the well-being of all tourism stakeholders directly and indirectly affected by tourism. These include humans and non-humans. Growth of environmental, social, cultural and economic well-being is aimed in regenerative tourism. A precondition to push the new paradigm forward is to raise awareness of the importance of regenerative tourism and a mindset change among tourism stakeholders. Consequently, a change in beliefs and attitudes is not only the precondition to push the regenerative tourism agenda forward but also the outcome. In general, the regenerative tourism principles draw on western sciences and place-based indigenous values and practices which are of equal importance. Lastly, regenerative tourism can be understood as a successor of sustainable tourism by having a more holistic approach and considering justice and equity. (Zaman et al., 2022, Nitsch & Vogels, 2022)

4 Case Study

4.1 Case selection

According to Frohlick & Harrison (2008), one of the most challenging tasks to face as a researcher when studying tourists is how to approach the respondents and how to find a space where the tourists are able and willing to cooperate in an expedient way. Therefore, the first step in this thesis research was to determine a suitable and context-relevant space. According to Creswell & Poth (2017), qualitative data collection is good when conducted “in a natural setting sensitive to people and place under study.” (p. 42 f.)
Following these pre-conditions and the research aim, the case is required to fit into the regenerative tourism framework. Therefore, the case had to fulfil several of the above-mentioned characteristics of a regenerative tourism place. After careful evaluation, the Mahakala Retreat Center in Buljarica, Montenegro, seemed to offer the best option amongst comparable places. According to their website and Instagram publications, the retreat center combines various regenerative tourism practices without stating them as such. Hence, the retreat is not yet certified as a regenerative tourism enterprise but can be regarded as such in the context of this study. The author settled on choosing this particular case nonetheless because of two reasons. First, she was on-site in July 2022 and therefore was able to evaluate the suitability as research case personally. Second, Mahakala Retreats’ philosophy and its resulting implications of those were found to be to be more closely aligned with regenerative tourism principles as similar recognized establishments, according to the assessment of the author.

Furthermore, the case in Montenegro adds perspectives on sustainability and well-being in a developing country, which is currently still under-represented. (Lima & Mariano, 2022) As explained in this thesis, the framework of well-being is context specific, meaning that well-being is perceived and understood differently around the world, determined by an individual’s cultural and historical background. (Lima & Mariano, 2022, Dłużewska, 2019) Hence, the geographical location (developing country) of the case was chosen to add qualitative data from a perspective that is not sufficiently studied yet.

4.2 Case setting: Mahakala Retreats

The following paragraphs aim to justify the choice of Mahakala Retreats as a suitable case to answer the research question. Therefore, information from a personal interview (on-site, 30. March 2023) with the co-founder and co-owner Marijana Lemm was used as the primary source.

Mahakala Retreats was founded by Dr Vesna and Marijana Lemm, a mother-daughter duo, in 2019. Regarding their background knowledge, Dr Vesna Lemm brings in scientific insights from being a holistic doctor, focusing on nutrition. Marijana specialises in modern-day healing practices, environmental stewardship,
and activism targeting ecological awareness and implements this knowledge during the retreats. The retreat is therefore a women-run enterprise from the start. (M. Lemm, personal communication, 30. March 2023). The retreat center itself is located in Buljarica, a small coastal town in Montenegro. While being close to the seaside, the center is within walking distance of pristine forests, waterfalls and mountains. The center was created to be embedded in the natural surroundings, and it’s architectural design followed a Chinese Feng Shui philosophy. The aim of the retreat center is to create a safe space where guests can unwind, and reconnect to themselves whilst reconnecting with nature and finding a sense of community. (Mahakala Center, 2023)

According to Marijana Lemm, the focus on mere yoga retreats changed over the years. Nowadays, the retreats include a wider variety of practices and activities that align with the aim of connecting people with themselves, others, and nature. Combining different workshops and activities such as yoga, fire ceremonies, waterfall hikes or activities rooted in deep ecology are aimed to offer a pool of tools that can help individuals strive towards their own well-being on-site and when returning home. The activities are designed to balance inner work and self-reflection while finding a sense of belonging in the retreats’ community and creating meaningful connections with other travelers and instructors. Figure one and two visualize these activities to get a better understanding of the case. The ultimate goal or rather an organic outcome should be internal change and mindset shift through reflection. The retreat offers a space to learn how life is possible that is in tune with one’s intuition, the community, and the nature we live in. Through this learning process at the retreat, internal changes can happen. These ultimately lead to a change in how travelers live and act in their daily life, having a more socially and environmentally aware mindset in general. This idea of mindset change and transformation through learning also presents components of regenerative tourism.

Furthermore, one of the core values of Mahakala Retreats is close cooperation with the local community. Firstly, most of the staff is directly from Buljarica or the mountains of Montenegro. Their knowledge is included in the daily operations of Makahala Retreats. Secondly, Marijana Lemm strives to cooperate with local producers as much as possible. Nearly 100 % of the food is sourced from local,
organic farmers. Figure three for example shows the local organic farmers market. Furthermore, local artists and small Montenegrin service suppliers are supported by promoting them at the retreat center or by selling their offers. So-called community nights are happening every Thursday during Retreats to offer any community member to share something with the guests – cooking classes, or music sessions are examples. Therefore, allowing active participation and involvement is a core value of Mahakala Retreats and rooted in the regenerative tourism paradigm.

Being a women-run business, the ethos of Mahakala Retreats is based on equity and justice. In specific, they are dedicated to empowering women. By training Montenegrin housewives to work in the kitchen or have leadership roles, these women can earn their own income and become more independent. Feminist approaches help to create a safe and supportive working environment. An example is their menstrual cycle policy, which offers menstruating people to take a day off. Summarized, Marianna explains their work ethos as “very compassionate and supportive. Everything that we teach and provide we also live.” (M. Lemm, personal communication, 30. March 2023) Therefore, equally men and women proudly work for Mahakala Retreats, which was also observed by the author on-site and confirmed by an employee in a personal conversation.

When focusing on co-creation, knowledge exchange is central in regenerative tourism in general, as well as at Mahakala Retreats in specific. According to Marijana, each of the stakeholders can learn through their mutual relationship. An example are the knowledge exchange that is happening while maintaining the regenerative agriculture garden: the local organic farmers pass on their farming practices that have been applied to this land for centuries. Furthermore, the chefs bring traditional and local cooking techniques and recipes. In return, Marijana and Vesna Lemm brought in vegan, healthy cooking styles and educated their staff about environmentally conscious decisions, which are not yet rooted in the local culture. Plastic reduction, vegan lifestyle or composting are examples of this. Adding to the topic of knowledge exchange, various facilitators bring insights from different cultures – herbalists or yoga teachers are examples. However, even though their practices may be rooted in indigenous knowledge, Marijana emphasizes that the implementation at Mahakala Retreats is mainly adapted to modern lifestyles.
Therefore, Mahakala Retreats includes an important principle of regenerative tourism: combining indigenous knowledge with western sciences.

One of the key aspects of regenerative tourism is the well-being of the environment and nature in which tourism is happening in. Mahakala Retreats has rooted this idea in its deep ecology philosophy. Humans are therefore seen as interconnected with nature. By including nature-based activities, Mahakala Retreats strives to deepen this relationship with their guests and spark a shift towards more eco-consciousness. Some examples are mindful walks in nature, workshops at the waterfall, fire ceremonies and swimming in the sea. By reconnecting with nature, people can bring home a more environmentally friendly mindset and behaviour in the best case.

Marijana Lemm is not only offering the space to connect with nature but is also implementing techniques such as regenerative agriculture herself to show real-life examples. By eating locally sourced food, guests can connect to what nature provides for us. According to Marijana’s statement, “modern-day agriculture is destroying soils and ecosystems. [...] And the biggest thing we can do for not only the people but also our environment is having sustainable ways of growing food.” (M. Lemm, personal communication, 30. March 2023) Figure two and three depict how the connection with nature is fostered at Mahakala Retreats and depicts the organic food philosophy.

Regenerative tourism is always unique to its place and is progressing on a local scale. As for Mahakala Retreats, the fundamental principles are deeply rooted in the place. Mahakala Retreats could not provide the experience it does if it was not placed in this specific context, surrounded by the pristine nature and embedded in the Montenegrin community. Furthermore, the philosophy driven by Vesna and Marijana Lemm supports localized projects that catalyse greater change.

To summarize, the statements given by co-owner Marijana Lemm all align with the different aspects of regenerative tourism. Therefore, it can be argued that Mahakala Retreats offers a suitable option to study well-being dimensions of travelers through regenerative tourism experiences.
Figure 1: Retreat space and common areas. (own source)

Figure 2: Creative activities and activities in nature with retreat guests and volunteers. (own source)

Figure 3: Organic food market, regenerative farming garden and vegan dinner example with locally sourced and organic ingredients. (own source)
5 Methodology

The following chapter outlines the methods used in this thesis to answer the research question, “How are different dimensions of well-being experienced in regenerative tourism experiences?”. As the study focuses on human experiences, this thesis applies a qualitative research approach while following a social constructivist lens. A qualitative research design including a narrative approach is regarded as ideal to value the individual stories that help to understand how travelers experience different dimensions of well-being during their regenerative tourism experiences. According to Flick (2018), narrative analysis is ideal to understand subjective experiences. Furthermore, well-being and the perception of experiences are highly subjective. (Smith & Diekmann, 2017, Câmara et al., 2022) Furthermore, well-being is characterized by change according to the context, such as the social or cultural environment. Therefore, it can be argued that the evaluation of well-being and experiences is socially constructed, which needs to be considered within the methodological positioning. An inductive approach is hereby essential, to contribute to the understanding of the new tourism paradigm combined with the framework of well-being beyond already known conceptualizations.

Thereby, semi-structured interviews were chosen as a suitable method as they offer a frame which enables comparison between the responses while simultaneously allowing the interviewees to speak of their personal focus. (Flick, 2018, Creswell & Poth, 2017, Bryman, 2016, Gioia et al., 2013, Galletta & Cross, 2013) The researcher acknowledges her subjective position during the data collection by adding value through subjective experiences, beliefs or attitudes. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) Pre-condition is the researcher’s extensive knowledge about the research topic of regenerative tourism experiences and human well-being, which is provided in the literature review of this thesis. (Galletta & Cross, 2013) Hence, the researcher’s skills, including both academic background knowledge and social skills, are regarded as pivotal to gain relevant information and being able to interpret and use these to answer the research question.

The detailed methodological positioning as well as the data collection process, are outlined in the following sub-chapters. First, the philosophical assumptions leading
to the social constructivist paradigm in which this thesis is situated are explained. Based on this, the narrative approach is outlined, constituting the basis for the interview guideline. Next, the chosen qualitative methods, comprising of in-depth interviews and observations, are explained and the data collection process is outlined. Lastly, the coding procedure and guidelines leading to the interpretation are explained. The chapter concludes with limitations and ethical considerations underlying this research project.

5.1 Social Constructivism

Philosophical assumptions offer a frame in which the research is conducted and reflect the viewpoint of the researcher. The approaches and methods used in this thesis are hence the results of the determination of philosophical positioning. (Creswell & Poth, 2017, Flick, 2018)

The four philosophical assumptions are ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology. Collectively, they represent the researcher’s beliefs and guide how the researcher interprets, understands and uses data. (Creswell & Poth, 2017) Thereby, ontology can be understood as how the scholar understands reality and represents how the scholar defines knowledge. (Bechara & Van de Ven, 2016, Creswell & Poth, 2017) Epistemology includes the relationship between the researcher and the respondents by trying to minimize the distance between both to be able to describe the individual’s views as detailed as possible. (Creswell & Poth, 2017) Following the axiological assumption, the researcher is aware of her own values and beliefs, which cannot be eliminated in the study process. Therefore, the focus of the research, the questions asked and the findings are influenced by the researchers’ worldviews and values and cannot be fully objective. (Creswell & Poth, 2017) Lastly, the methodological stance leads to the process and methods used by the researcher which include the data collection and interpretation based on the researcher’s knowledge and capacity. (Creswell & Poth, 2017)

By adopting the ontological assumption, the thesis is guided through a social constructivist framework. Within this framework, individuals’ realities are assumed to be socially constructed. Furthermore, the diversity of meanings through the experiences of individuals is acknowledged. This means that the complexity of the
respondents’ answers is valued rather than generalizing or categorizing the results in specific areas. Consequently, the framework allows to conduct nuanced answers. (Flick, 2018) The variety of in-depth insights from individuals therefore builds the basis to create knowledge about the study subject. This leads to an inductive approach of this thesis, meaning that neither theory nor themes are determined in the beginning but developed within the process of data interpretation. (Flick, 2018, Creswell & Creswell, 2018)

Following the assumption that realities are socially constructed, the study subject was always recognized in its own context, as it is constantly changing. Hence, the responses were regarded as a product of the specific environment that respondents were set in at the moment. (Gioia et al., 2013, Creswell & Poth, 2017) Additionally, the social, cultural, and historical background were taken into account by each individual to be able to understand their own subjective realities. Hence, key in social constructivism is to understand that the respondent’s beliefs and values are shaped through experiences that are then again dependent on social interactions and discussions. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, Creswell & Poth, 2017)

Regarding the researcher’s influence, it is pivotal to understand that the researcher’s position is always subjective within social constructivism. Therefore, the scholar’s background knowledge is recognized throughout the thesis process as it was used to understand and interpret the data. Hence, the interpretation of the conducted data depends on the researchers’ own experiences, usually referred to as reflexivity. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, Creswell & Poth, 2017) Therefore, social constructivism is often equated with interpretive research. In conclusion, within a constructivist approach, respondents and researchers are both contributing to the findings of the research. Even more, nuanced answers to create knowledge depend on the interaction between the respondent and researcher. (Flick, 2018)

Consequently, the social constructivist framework offers a fitting possibility to explore the new tourism paradigm (regenerative tourism) combined with a factor depending on an individual’s subjective evaluation (well-being and experiences).
5.2 Narrative approach

The author positions herself within the philosophy of social constructivism by applying a narrative approach to value an individual’s story and meaning towards their experiences. The narrative approach makes use of different methods that aim to understand the diversity and complexity within the varying realities of individuals and how these are presented. (Mura & Sharif, 2017, Flick, 2018) The aim of applying a narrative approach is to depict these social realities. This can be done through storytelling, as individuals construct their reality through narratives. The different meanings towards experiences are therefore represented through each individual story. (Creswell & Poth, 2017, Mura & Sharif, 2017, Flick, 2018) The key is to understand in which way an individual is constructing one’s own story. Through understanding how this is done, the socio-cultural environment of a person can be interpreted as much as the constructed realities someone wants to present. (Creswell & Poth, 2017, Mura & Sharif, 2017, Gioia et al., 2013) The narrative approach thus allows to go beyond mere text mining but instead leads to valuing stories as its whole. When analyzing the narratives as well as considering the background, the context, the audience and the moments in between such as silent moments, the true subjective reality can be discovered. (Mura & Sharif, 2017, Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015)

However, embedded in the social constructivist framework the narrative approach asks for a pro-active role of the researcher. The interviewer is co-creating the results as the stories are understood and interpreted according to the knowledge and background of the researcher. (Creswell & Poth, 2017) Even more, the narrative analysis is based on the assumption that stories are depended on the listening audience, which means that the narrative itself can change with the context in which it is presented. (Mura & Sharif, 2017) Key in a narrative approach is therefore to keep in mind its dual interpretation: first, interviewees interpret their lives through the stories they tell and second, the researcher who interprets the construction of the stories.

The philosophical assumption of the thesis, including the narrative approach, allowed the researcher to understand the diversity of how people evaluate the meaning of their regenerative tourism experience. Simultaneously the
methodological positioning allowed the researcher to find nuanced interpretations of the respondent’s well-being. By letting travelers at the specific regenerative tourism space (Mahakala Retreat Center) tell their stories, the researcher could interpret their constructed realities. The travelers at the retreat center were a non-homogenous social group where each individual perceives experiences and one’s own well-being in different ways to different extents. Furthermore, each traveler brought one’s own background, history and social influence to the place which could subsequently present an opportunity to have even more nuanced results. The narrative stories in this research comprised specific experiences at the retreat, which are regarded as situational narratives, rather than looking for narratives which comprise the life history of a person. (Flick, 2018, Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) Personal stories presented therefore the base of knowledge creation. This in turn means that the interpretations of stories are the base for answering the research question. (Gioia et al., 2013)

5.3 Qualitative methods
The literature review conducted in the context of this thesis revealed a scarcity of applying qualitative methods and, in particular, a lack of interview-based research on regenerative tourism. Moreover, as regenerative tourism is at an early stage of research contributions, qualitative research can help to explore this new paradigm. By allowing respondents to narrate their meanings and experiences through their stories, information can be gathered and then used to create knowledge about the new paradigm. An inductive, explorative approach is hence regarded as suitable.

5.3.1 In-depth Interviews
Gathering in-depth information through interviews allowed the researcher to find streams that are not yet based on existing concepts. (Gioia et al.,2013) Beyond that, dimensions of well-being and how they correlate with different experiences are highly subjective topics and the meaning towards these experiences can only be fully understood through interviews. Narrative interviews allowed respondents to illustrate the various factors and their intensity that influenced their well-being.

Hence, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were chosen as a primary method for this thesis research. However, in line with the narrative approach, these were
combined with narrative interview questions. According to Flick (2018), a combination of semi-structured and narrative interviews offers the possibility to understand experiences and situations while at the same time acknowledging the individual’s history that shaped the perception of these experiences. An interview guideline (see Appendix A) was predefined to set a rough structure. It enabled a frame to answer the research question while simultaneously allowing the respondent to speak as freely as possible. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Galletta & Cross, 2013)

Eight broad, open-ended questions were posed as leading questions, combined with several sub-questions which specified the answers. Follow-up questions were asked in case the response did not offer sufficient in-depth insights. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Flick, 2018)

The questions were linked to this thesis’s concepts and theoretical framework, targeting different areas for each question. The first leading question aimed to understand the cultural and historical background of the respondents and their present emotional status. The following six leading questions were formulated to encourage interviewees to share stories about their regenerative tourism experience and their reflections on them. The eighth and, therefore, last leading question aimed to test the concepts of this thesis, namely regenerative tourism, and well-being. By openly formulating the questions, the respondents were able to understand the direction yet openly share their own associations. The researcher encouraged the respondents to narrate their regenerative tourism experience in a detailed way to connect the story with the different dimensions of well-being in the ongoing data interpretation process. In specific, sub-questions took up ideas that were already mentioned by the participants when answering the leading question. The sub-questions therefore clarified the respondents’ answers. Hence, the sub-questions helped to link the respondents’ responses to the theoretical framework. Leading questions are outlined in Table 1; the detailed interview guideline is attached in Appendix A.

Prior to the interview recording, every respondent was provided with general information about the research background and aim, the data usage, the time and effort required and the expectations. Furthermore, high priority was given to explaining ethical considerations and the confidential use of data. Consent was
either given by signing the consent form or verbally. Moreover, on-site and virtual interviews were treated with equal engagement to create a trustful and comfortable atmosphere in order to create a space where participants could openly speak about experiences and emotions. (Creswell & Poth, 2017) During the actual interview, each leading question presented in Table 1 was asked, yet the wording could vary according to the interview situation. (Bryman, 2016) Furthermore, keeping the same order of the questions was not needed, as a conversation flow was aimed. (Flick, 2018) Letting the respondent speak freely and giving them the space to narrate their perspectives on their regenerative tourism experience led to several adaptations of the order of the questions or the adaptation of the sentences’ structure. Lastly, attention was given to formulating the questions intentionally in a way that they did not influence the directions of the answers and to allow the interviewees to set their own, non-nudged focus.

However, the researcher is aware of her influence, nevertheless. The mere presence, appearance, pronunciation, or gestures might have affected the respondents. Moreover, the researcher acknowledges possible translation bias, as the interview questions were all asked in English. As most of the respondents were non-native speakers, explanations were needed for some questions. Additionally, a translator was used for one interview. The researcher is aware of the potential translation bias here.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Volunteers &amp; Retreat Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background Story, Culture, History &amp; emotional status</td>
<td>Tell me your story of what brought you here. What made you come to this retreat?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hedonic Well-being</td>
<td>Could you tell me about your most memorable/important moment here at the retreat?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eudaimonic well-being</td>
<td>Could you tell me about a challenging/intense experience here at the retreat?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social well-being</td>
<td>Can you share how it was for you to come to this place where you live closely with others? How do you feel now having the experiences here together with other people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eudaimonic well-being, long-term well-being</td>
<td>What will you take home from this retreat? What impact did the retreat have on you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regenerative tourism &amp; well-being</td>
<td>Can you please describe what you appreciated most here at the retreat space? (apart from the actual scheduled workshops?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All dimensions of well-being</td>
<td>What impact did the retreat have on your well-being?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regenerative tourism & well-being | What would you say is most important for a place like Mahakala to be able to enhance well-being of guests?
---|---
Regenerative tourism & well-being | How would you describe well-being? Regenerative tourism?

Table 1. Leading questions according to theoretical framework and concepts. Full interview guide with sub-questions in Appendix A.

5.3.2 Interviewee selection
This qualitative research used purposeful sampling, where participants are proactively chosen instead of random selection. According to pre-defined criteria, including being able to share relevant information, being available and willing to respond, and contributing to a variety and diversity in viewpoints, the selected respondents were then regarded as suitable (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, Galletta & Cross, 2013, Creswell & Poth, 2017, Bryman, 2016, Flick, 2018). As participants were selected through the researcher, her own academic knowledge and social skills were used to guarantee that respondents could provide relevant data for answering the research question. (Gioia et al., 2013) As a result, the interviewees were subsequently “treated as knowledgeable agents.” (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 26)

The potential respondents were selected based on the author’s evaluation, as she had personal interactions with each of them. The author herself was part of a retreat at Mahakala Center in July 2022 and was on-site during the fundraising Ukrainian women retreat in April 2023. Thus, the researcher had direct contact with all potential interviewees and built a base of trust prior to reaching out to them. In total, 23 potential respondents were directly approached. First, ten potential participants were contacted on-site, during the last three days of their fundraising women’s retreat at Mahakala Center. Second, thirteen participants who were part of the retreat in 2022 were directly contacted via WhatsApp Messengers. However, not all potential interview participants were able or willing to participate, either because of language barriers, emotional boundaries or unavailability.

The prior observations of the retreat guests allowed an evaluation of potential participants in terms of being suitable to share stories and experience that are relevant to the research topic. The researcher evaluated the potential respondent’s capability to provide useful data in terms of their openness to share their experiences and emotions in a detailed, nuanced way. Hence, English knowledge to
express their stories about the experiences was an additional selection criterion. Furthermore, respondents needed to be in an emotional state where they were willing to share experiences and emotions. The researcher was aware that interviewing guests at a retreat center must be done with the greatest attention towards the emotional circumstances of the respondents. Mahakala Retreats offers a safe space where guests can reflect on and share intense life situations. Hence, the researcher was aware that guests may not want to share experiences yet when still reflecting on and processing challenging situations. In contrast, conducting interviews from a retrospective allowed the inclusion of travelers who may have been unwilling to share experiences on-site due to limited time for self-reflection or emotional instability, but were able to speak about the experience after some time has passed.

Combining on-site and retrospective interviews therefore allowed to include a wider range of perspectives to study the complex phenomenon of well-being in regenerative tourism experiences. Furthermore, the travelers have experienced different types of retreats including slightly differing experiences yet being at the same regenerative tourism place which added a diverse range of experiences. Lastly, interviewees were selected according to the idea of choosing a variety in backgrounds and viewpoints, as this is key to purposeful sampling. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, Galletta & Cross, 2013, Creswell & Poth, 2017, Bryman, 2016, Flick, 2018) Hence, contacted interviewees included retreat guests as well as volunteers from different cultural and historical backgrounds, age groups, genders, and societal roles.

In general, qualitative research with a narrative approach seeks a low number of purposefully chosen participants to gain an in-depth understanding rather than being able to generalize results. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) According to Bryman (2016), a minimum of twenty interviewees is considered scientifically valid. This number of participants usually ensures that new themes or patterns are probably not arising with additional respondents. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) However, Creswell & Creswell (2018), as well as Galletta & Cross (2013), argue that in fact another factor is more important than the pre-defined number of interviewees: the number of interviews can therefore be regarded as sufficient when no more new
streams or thematical ideas are observed to be added by the respondents. This concept of finding a representative number of people is called saturation. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, Guest et al., 2006) Contrary to the recommended number of twenty interviewees to ensure saturation (Bryman, 2016), Guest et al. (2006) discovered that in most qualitative case studies, saturation occurs already within the first twelve interviews.

In this research study, a number of 20 respondents was aimed. However, due to factors such as emotional boundaries, language barriers, unavailability or time differences, a total of 10 interviews were included in this research. As saturation of new themes occurs mostly within the first twelve interviews Guest et al. (2006), ten interviewees can be regarded as sufficient in the background of this thesis's aim, as saturation occurred within these 10 interviews. Table 2 offers an overview of the ten interviewees. The names of the respondents were all anonymized; resemblance to real names is coincidental. The abbreviations are used later in the results chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Identified</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria M.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>Real-time</td>
<td>On-site</td>
<td>28 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia S.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Real-time</td>
<td>On-site</td>
<td>52 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olesia H.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Real-time</td>
<td>On-site</td>
<td>21 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramona W.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>Real-time</td>
<td>On-site</td>
<td>44 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ksenia R.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Real-time</td>
<td>On-site</td>
<td>43 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelina A.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Real-time</td>
<td>On-site</td>
<td>42 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liam G.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>retrospective</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>35 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josefine K.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>retrospective</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>43 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie L.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Swiss</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>retrospective</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>34 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pauline S.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>retrospective</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>37 min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Overview of interview respondents
5.3.3 Data collection
The interviews were conducted between the 30th of March and the 25th of April 2023. Six interviews were conducted on-site at Mahakala Retreats, and four were conducted online via Skype. All respondents were guests at Mahakala Retreats at some point and engaged in experiences on-site either during the time of interviews or in the year before, in 2022. The two interviewee groups were on the one hand participants and on the other hand volunteers, as they are both regarded as travelers to a regenerative tourism space. Retreat participants stayed for a duration for one or two weeks at the Mahakala Center, depending on the retreat format, and volunteers were on-site for a period between two and eight weeks.

On-site interviews were conducted at the Mahakala Retreat Center from the 30th of March to the second of April 2023. Two volunteers and four retreat guests were interviewed here. The format of the Retreat that happened during this time was a fundraising retreat for Ukrainian women who are affected by war. Therefore, the structure and organization of the two-weeks retreat varied slightly from the usual retreat format at Mahakala Center. The aim hereby was to provide a space for the Ukrainian women to rest, to find silence and connect with people who had similar experiences. The retreat participants were provided with basic needs such as healthy food and a safe space for reflections as well as optional activities to connect with their own inner voice and with others. Offered activities included, amongst others, hiking in the mountains, journaling by the waterfall, sound healing workshop, Yoga classes, creative art sessions, sharing circles or fire ceremonies. Retreat participants were all women working in heavily affected war areas in the Ukraine, such as health care workers, teachers, nurses, or psychologists. Volunteers during this fundraising retreat were European women who travelled to Mahakala for a two weeks’ time period.

The interviews were conducted during the last three days of their retreat, which enabled the guests to reflect on their two-weeks experience at the regenerative tourism space. Doing the interviews at the very end of the retreat also allowed the guests to be fully settled into the space and to be able to evaluate how one’s well-being changed. As the retreat guests came from a very different context to the researcher, the researcher was trained beforehand to be able to approach the
respondents in a sensitive and appropriate manner. One week before the interviews, the author had a coaching session with well-being manager Sasha Laskey via Zoom. This training helped the researcher to be able to approach the guests in a sensitive and compassionate way while simultaneously leading the interview to receive relevant results. Additionally, the author was briefed by the organizer Susanna Ketsmur on-site to understand the historical and cultural background as well as emotional status, including possible trigger points of the guests. The researcher adapted one leading question of the interview guide in terms of wording after this briefing.

Combined with on-site interviews, retrospective interviews were conducted via Skype between the 4th of April to the 25th of April 2023. Three former retreat participants and one former volunteer were interviewed. These retreat participants were part of a Restorative Retreat in July 2022. The focus here was to combine yoga classes with reflection workshops and nature-based activities such as meditative walks, fire ceremonies or swimming in the sea. Volunteers stayed for a time period between two to eight weeks.

The average duration of the ten interviews was 37 minutes, whereby the individual ones had a duration between 21 and 52 minutes. The time only indicates the actual period for answering the leading questions, without the introduction to the research topic or explanation of the aim. Table two shows an overview of the ten interviews.

The on-site interviews were all audio recorded with the smartphone of the researcher, whereas the Zoom online interviews were video recorded through the laptop’s facility. The recording through technological devices ensured that the researcher could fully concentrate on the conservation flow, posing in-depth follow-up questions instead of taking notes alongside. (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) These recordings constituted the base for a detailed transcription of the verbal content in the next step. Transcribing is hence an essential part of qualitative research to make the verbal data accessible for interpretation. (Flick, 2018) The author used a combination of manual transcription and automated speech-to-text-transcription using the online f4 software. Both were necessary, as some audio files were unclear because of background noises on-site. Additionally, manual transcription helped the
researcher to familiarize herself with the content intensively. Nonetheless, automated transcriptions were proofread in alignment with the audio files.

5.3.4 Observations
Together with interviews, observations were used to gain information. While interviews are the most common qualitative research method, observations are regarded as a suitable addition to data gathering. As respondents constructed their realities through their stories, observations revealed insights that were not touched upon during the interviews or constructed in a way that reflected the individual’s ideal reality. Moreover, differences in what respondents said versus what they actually did was revealed through observations. (Corbin & Strauss, 2015)

Furthermore, participants at Mahakala Retreats were mostly non-native English speakers, and observations could disclose information that participants were not able to express or were not confident to express. Observing the respondents in their natural setting, paying attention to their behaviour, interactions, and conversations with other retreat participants and their activities added important insights to answer the research question. Nevertheless, the author was aware that well-being is subjective and complicated to see visually.

Participatory observation allowed the researcher to get insights while being an active member when taking part in workshops and everyday life at the retreat center. These were combined with non-participatory observation, where the researcher was observing from the outside. (Creswell & Poth, 2017, Flick, 2018) The observed participants were selected by situation: according to their behaviour and interactions that seemed to be of interest to the study. (Flick, 2018)

The author went on-site for fifteen days, of which seven days were spent mostly together with the fundraising Ukrainian retreat participants. During these seven days, observations were made. The first three days merely constituted the possibility to understand the atmosphere of the case setting, before contacting potential respondents for the interviews. On the first day, the author was introduced to the participants by co-owner Marijana Lemm and organizer Susanna Ketsmur. The researcher was allowed to be present at the retreat center during the following days and to join in the day-to-day life of the retreat guests. The goal in the first three days
was to build trust and learn how to approach the participants sensitively. Observations were mostly made during shared eating times, where everyone gathered. Furthermore, scheduled activities such as a creativity workshop were joined by the author, which offered the possibility for visual observation. During sharing circles, observations could be made based on conversations and interactions between the participants. Lastly, the author provided morning yoga classes on the last three days of the retreat to connect with the participants and observe their behaviour and interactions. All in all, observations were primarily made by situation to not disturb the guests' flow and comfort.

The observations were noted by hand on-site. The field notes included interaction and conversations between the respondents, their behaviour and the author’s reflections on them. Afterwards, the notes were sorted according to recurring patterns. These first patterns included the topic of food, nature, interaction with others, beauty, learning new things, a healing atmosphere and a safe space. These patterns were later added to the process of finding the themes presented in the results chapter.

5.4 Analysis and Coding

Knowledge creation through data interpretation, coding and discussion is essential to go beyond mere gathering of opinions. (Bechara & Van de Ven, 2016) Qualitative data analysis is commonly understood as making sense of the data through interpretation. (Flick, 2018) The aim is to understand and describe the phenomena under study by using the information gained through interviews and observations. (Flick, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018)

5.4.1 Narrative Interpretation

Recording the audio and transcribing are pre-conditions for the analysis to reflect on the content and understand the meaning of the information gained. Thereby, including explicitly mentioned words are regarded as crucial as including meanings between the lines. Consequently, associations linked with words or meanings that the respondents transport without explicitly naming them need to be included in the interpretation. (Flick, 2018, Corbin & Strauss, 2015) This aspect was highly valued in this research project, as language barriers led to the need to “read between the
lines” and connect the interview narratives with observations on-site to gain a deeper understanding of the constructed stories.

According to the methodological positioning, the interviews were interpreted through narrative analysis. Following the six key aspects needed to analyze a narrative, proposed by Dollard (1935) and revised by Polkinghorne (1995), a focus was set on three of these aspects. These elements can help to understand the travelers’ narratives better as they are a non-homogenous focus group from different backgrounds and environments. Creswell & Poth (2017) and Flick (2018) support this idea by stating that the context of each respondent’s life must be considered to understand their narratives. Therefore, the researcher identified the following elements of narrative interpretation as pivotal for this thesis subject:

1. **Culture**: The cultural context of respondents, their social surroundings and networks they interact with in their daily life as they formed their beliefs and values.

2. **Emotions**: The respondent’s emotional status quo, worldview and values, personal interests and motivations.

3. **History**: Past experiences that shaped present habits as well as beliefs.

Therefore, the respondent’s cultural, emotional and historical background were acknowledged throughout the interview process (see table 1). In specific, the first opening question of the interview guideline was designed according to these three pivotal elements of narrative analysis. Therefore, the respondents were free to share their stories about how come that they came to the retreat. Most respondents included their emotional status quo before the retreat and added stories about their cultural background. Most participants with Ukrainian background also included historical background to this first question.

5.4.2 **Coding process**

“Coding is a process of labelling and categorizing data” (Flick, 2018, p. 423) which constitutes the base for data analysis and hence knowledge creation. The coding process developed over several stages, beginning with reflecting on the content and organizing the data into relevant concepts. (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) The coding process was initialized based on the in-depth examination of the data. In specific,
the transcripts of the interviews were printed and read several times to get familiarized with the content. This allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the information and reflection on possible meanings. During the reading process, patterns were observable on how travelers constructed their stories about their regenerative tourism experience. The coding process was then carried out manually, without making use of an online software. Manual coding helped the researcher to revise the codes and add notes and thoughts throughout the process while simultaneously being unbiased and free in categorizing and merging concepts without following a structure in an online tool. Furthermore, notes from observations were added to the interview transcripts. The observed patterns were then manually merged into categories which could be labeled as overarching themes could be labelled in the last step. Finally, these themes allowed the interpretation and understanding of the linguistic material in the background of the thesis’s aim and made conclusions possible. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, Flick, 2018)

The author used a three-phase coding to identify the analytical categories of the narratives. (Saldaña, 2009). Through the transcription process and in-depth reading, a variety of recurring patterns became apparent. In the second-round coding, the patterns were merged into specific categories. Finally, the categories were labeled into themes which represent the answer to the research question on how dimensions of well-being are experienced in regenerative tourism. The identified codes, categories and themes are presented in Figure 4.

Thereby, an inductive approach was employed for the analysis of this thesis’ data. The themes were not pre-defined to be tested but emerged through the interpretation of interviews and observations. Hence, the analytical categories were discovered throughout the analysis process and can be then explained with the theoretical background of the researcher. (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) In line with the inductive approach, in vivo coding was employed to capture the interviewees terminology. Hence, the codes refer to the actual wording or phrases of the interviewees rather than being induced by the author beforehand. (Saldaña, 2009) However, the theoretical framework helped to explain these codes in the following process, which is outlined in the results and discussion chapter.
5.5 Limitations of the study

As in any empirical study, limitations of the methodological approach and data-gathering process have to be acknowledged. Although the choice in methods and interviewees are justified to be most suitable for the thesis’ results, certain limitations occurred, nonetheless.

First, the author used purposeful sampling to determine the potential interviewees. This could affect the results, as a bias may occur regarding the perspectives represented. It can be argued that participants were chosen to align with the researcher’s perceptions and beliefs towards the study topic. However, to counteract this bias, the researcher included a wide range of respondents, including volunteers and retreat participants on-site as well as from the retrospective.

An arguable weakness of the study is that interviewees who were contacted via video calls were more distant from the study subject than those interviewed on-site. Interviewees who were reflecting on their regenerative tourism experiences in the retrospective were not as emotionally close to the subject as on-site participants. However, the researcher observed that online interviewed respondents were able to reconstruct their experiences very well and were able to narrate their stories in a similar extensive way than on-site respondents. Connected with the distance between the researcher and interviewee during online interviews is the challenge of understanding the respondents’ current emotional status at the point of the
interview. As mentioned in the last paragraph, emotions as well as cultural and historical background are essential for the interpretation of the linguistic material and observations and thus could be of importance for the results of the study. On-site interviews allowed the researcher to fully absorb the atmosphere and emotions of the participants, whereas during online video calls only face and body impressions helped to interpret the current emotions. The researcher included time before and after the online interviews to take in more observations during casual conversation.

Furthermore, the study was limited by the researcher's context and background versus the respondents' context. This limitation became evident on-site when the researcher was briefed about the retreat participants’ background and their potential trigger points to be aware of during the interview. For example, the Ukrainian respondents' cultural upbringing and their country’s current political situation characterized by war shaped and changed their beliefs and perspectives immensely. Whereas the worldviews and beliefs of the researcher are shaped by her history and German culture as well as the academic education focus of Swedish and German Universities. Therefore, interview questions may be oriented on these conditions and may not fully reflect the spectrum of possible themes people from other backgrounds and cultures may include. By choosing a narrative approach with broad leading questions, the researcher tried to outbalance this contextual bias.

Another factor limiting the study's results is that the current study has only included retreat participants or volunteers who were proficient in conversational English. This may have limited the range of perspectives represented. Additionally, a translation bias may have occurred as most of the respondents were not mother-tongue English speakers. Furthermore, one interview was conducted with the help of a translator. Even though the themes and ideas seemed to be transmitted, small notions may have been lost in translation.

Connected with the language barrier is the relatively small number of interviewees, as on-site interviews were fewer than initially planned due to linguistic limitations. The researcher was unaware that only a minority of guests at the fundraising Ukrainian retreat were fluent in English. On-site, the number of potential interview
respondents was therefore limited and smaller than initially planned. A more significant amount of respondents would have fortified the thematic results and expanded the potential for discussion. However, the actual number of respondents was found to be enough to have a profound base for answering the research question as no new themes arose anymore.

5.6 Ethical considerations

Qualitative research is characterized by close contact between respondents and the researcher. Therefore, ethics have to be considered during the interviews in specific, yet also need to be taken into account in every step of the study process. (Creswell & Poth, 2017) Contacting the Mahakala Retreat as case study site, approaching the interviewees, and using the narratives provided are all based on ethical considerations.

When applying a narrative approach, the relationship between the two interview partners is essential in determining how meaningful and relevant the results turn out. Hence, close proximity between both is vital. Within this close contact, building a trustful and respectful atmosphere was crucial to allow the respondents to share emotions and personal experiences. (Creswell & Poth, 2017, Corbin & Strauss, 2015, Flick, 2018) Especially in the retreat setting, where emotional experiences are common, it was necessary to approach the respondents in a highly sensitive way. Allowing the respondents to be vulnerable by creating a safe atmosphere was key, especially when discussing eudaimonic well-being, as reflections about positive and negative emotions were included here. The respondents were not forced to answer and were aware of the possibility to withdraw or stop the interview at any point. To ensure the approval to record and use the anonymized narratives, the consent form was signed or verbally approved. Furthermore, the researcher presented herself and the research aim to be transparent at any stage of the interview.

Lastly, following the narrative approach within the social constructivist framework, the author is aware of her own influence and the narrative analysis may be biased by the researcher’s knowledge and experience. However, the researcher did not intend to influence or bias the respondent’s answers. Even more, the researcher did not nudge answers towards an aspired outcome. During the data collection, it
endeavoured to create an atmosphere where every answer was valued and appreciated. Even more, the researcher followed Creswell & Poth (2017) recommendations to actively withstand stereotypical associations, yet acknowledging the respondents’ different backgrounds and cultures which created their stories. However, the researcher is aware of her subconscious subjectivity and cannot entirely exclude tendencies when approaching different groups of respondents. Lastly, knowledge gaps and asymmetrical power situations between respondents and the interviewer were acknowledged. (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015)

6 Results

The following chapter presents the results of the ten semi-structured interviews based on the analysis of the narratives, combined with the insights from on-site observations. By applying an inductive coding approach, the resulting themes represent the answers to the research question: “How are different dimensions of well-being experienced in regenerative tourism?” Hence, the themes add to the understanding of the new regenerative tourism paradigm from the travelers’ perspective, applying the lens of multidimensional well-being. However, the author regards the presented themes with sub-themes as not exhaustive but as the most relevant ones transmitted by the narratives at the selected case of Mahakala Retreats. Three themes in regenerative tourism experiences and their correlating dimensions of well-being were identified. These are:

1. Being in a safe space, surrounded by nature and beauty which relates to hedonic well-being.

2. Cultivating connection with people which relates to social well-being.

3. Facilitating self-reflection which relates to eudaimonic well-being.

Even though one dimension of well-being is predominantly determined in each of the themes, all dimensions of well-being are interdependent and mutually influence each other. Hence, hedonic, social and eudaimonic well-being is intertwined in each of the presented themes, however focus will be given to demonstrate the correlation
between the themes and most relevant dimension of well-being that emerged during the analysis of the responses.

As the thesis follows an inductive approach, the themes emerged through the narratives of the respondents. However, the underlying theory of this thesis is used to explain and comprehend these themes. Consequently, the narratives about regenerative tourism experiences are explained by establishing a connection with the conceptualization of well-being.

6.1 Being in a safe space, surrounded by nature and beauty.

The first identified theme depicts that the travelers experienced hedonic well-being through being in a safe space and surrounded by nature and beauty. Furthermore, the benefits through the environmental context can be understood as the basis of the following themes, as being in a safe space, in a natural and beautiful environment was found to be a pre-condition for further experiences in regenerative tourism.

6.1.1 Nature

Observations, equally as the analysis of the interviews, revealed a strong appreciation from travelers of the surrounding nature. The mere observation (Bhalla & Chowdhary, 2022) as well as active engagement in nature, are beneficial for human well-being which explains the respondents’ focus on nature-based experiences. (Houge Mackenzie et al., 2023, Lima & Mariano, 2022) In fact, narratives about experiences in nature appear in every interview without exception, however, with varying weighting. In some narratives, nature and its intrinsic value represent the core experience, whereas other narratives are constructed in a way that transmits the idea that experiences are reinforced through the natural environment. Narratives that outlined experiences in nature included various activities at the beach and sea (RW, AA, SS, PS, LF), hiking in the mountains (AA, SS, PS, KR) and being in the forest (AA, PS). Smith & Diekmann (2017) explain that these natural surroundings, including green environments as well as coastal areas, are found to have the highest positive effect on human well-being compared to other environmental features. Words that were used to describe these experiences were all connotated with positive emotions such as “beautiful” (AA, KR, LF) and “amazing” (SS), “unbelievable” (KR) and “surreal” (RW) or “untouched” (LF), “wild” (KR)
and “freedom” (KR). The surrounding nature of the regenerative tourism space itself was described using words such as “paradise” (KR), “sanctuary” (MM) or “Mother Nature” (KR) to illustrate their personal meaning. This description of their experiences showed that through experiences in nature, their hedonic well-being is lifted by feeling good (Diener, 2009) and being inspired by aesthetics. (Diener, 2009, Løvoll et al., 2020)

New experience and reconnection

Reconnecting people with nature is essential for the ecosystem's and humans' well-being equally (Løvoll et al., 2020, Sheldon, 2020, Lindell et al., 2022). Deriving from this idea, regenerative tourism experiences should cultivate this reconnection. (Major & Clarke, 2022, Mathisen et al., 2022) Set into practice at Mahakala Retreats, this was visible when retreat participants talked about experiences in nature they had never had before. A retreat guest points out that “some memorable things are connected to going out to nature.” (SS) For her, experiences she considers most important happened in natural surroundings, such as a long hike in the mountains. It gets clear that it was a “new experience” (SS) for her to be exposed to this kind of pristine nature, as she never had the possibility to be in similar environment in her usual day-to-day life so far. Another retreat guest (KR) adds a similar story, speaking about a hike in nature as one of her most memorable experiences. However, the natural surroundings in her story reinforced the experiences but were not the core of the narrative. KR shared that she guided other women during a hike in the mountains. Again, this was a new experience for the interviewee as she had never guided other people through a natural landscape before. Another retreat participant (PS) reflected on her experiences in nature during her stay by concluding that she developed a different mindset towards flora and fauna. She shares that:

“At home, when I see an insect in my flat, I’m a little bit scared. But here it was like wow, they have huge insects! But not in a disgusting way. It was just so interesting to see and to be aware of.” (PS)

These stories of retreat participants point out that through exposure to nature, they learned new facets of appreciating it, reinforcing their relationship with nature.
Mahakala Retreats, as a regenerative tourism space, encouraged these encounters by offering nature hikes and waterfall meditation, as supporting the human-nature relationship is a core principle of regenerative tourism. (Major & Clarke, 2022, Mathisen et al., 2022) As the retreat participants regard these new experiences as pleasurable and joyful, it is assumed that they mostly correlate to the dimension of hedonic well-being. (Kahneman et al., 2006, Gallagher et al., 2009)

**Benefits**

In fact, nature seemed to occur in different narratives as the source of well-being as respondents shared how nature made them feel good. Extensive research has been carried out to confirm the well-being benefits of natural environments on humans, which explains this focus of the respondents’ stories. (Bhalla & Chowdhary, 2022, Farber & Hall, 2007, Smith & Diekmann, 2017) For example, AA shares her beneficial relationship with nature and its importance to her as follows:

"Montenegro is a beautiful country and it’s a very beautiful space. The sea and the rocks and the forests and so on. It’s a range of very different options. And that’s what helped me and what was important for me." (AA)

By concluding that the natural environment has helped her, AA refers to a rise in her well-being. Another retreat guests equally reported this experience of feeling a benefit through nature in a more personal way, saying that negative feelings were lifted by being in nature:

"In usual life, when I felt deep sadness, I communicated with friends. Here I can be with nature. And nature helps. And I got an experience that when I feel sadness, and I feel lonely, I always have Mother Nature. That is was helps me." (KR)

KR shared a story where she explained that she felt hurt and “sadness” (KR) by words from another retreat participant. Before being able to talk about the incident, she went to nature to throw stones into the water and to scream out loud. According to her story, being in nature helped her to feel the emotions deeper and to release the sadness faster. Various studies verify this observation by summarizing the capacities of nature to reduce stress and balance emotions. (Løvoll et al., 2020, Lima &
Mariano, 2022) Even more, active engagement is found to better the mood and hence lead to happiness, which was the case in this story of KR. (Capaldi, 2014)

Another woman carries this thought further by seeing nature as essential for the human’s inner state of peace. When MM was asked to reflect on the main reason why she came back to the Mahakala Center she responded:

“100 percent the people and nature as well. It’s a sanctuary for me. I think the nature is 100 percent crucial. It’s imperative to everyone’s inner peace and humanity. “(MM)

By mentioning that inner peace can be found in nature, a connection can be drawn to two dimensions of well-being: hedonic well-being as well as eudaimonic. Nature experiences positively influence hedonic well-being in the form of feeling satisfied with one’s life (Diener, 2009; Huta, & Waterman, 2014), while eudaimonic well-being rises through as a process of self-acceptance which leads to peace. (Gallagher et al., 2009) However, the way MM presents her story indicates that inner peace for her is less a process but more the absence of negative feelings, which supports the idea that nature experiences in regenerative tourism benefit hedonic well-being.

Awareness and connection

The experiences in the natural surroundings of Mahakala Retreats were designed to make participants more aware of the surrounding nature in the first place and feel more connected to it in the second place. Various workshops were offered, such as a hiking in the mountains, a writing workshop to explore one’s relationship with nature by the waterfall, or a fire ceremony by night next to the sea. These offered activities again draw on one of the regenerative tourism principles to support and strive towards harmony between humans and nature. (Lindell, 2022, Ateljevic & Sheldon, 2022) As observed by Díaz et al. (2015), this symbiosis between humans and nature then adds to the well-being of humans.

Some interview responses directly stated that they became more aware of their natural surroundings by saying “I felt a little bit more connected and aware of the nature around” (PS). Additionally, some retreat participants constructed a story which depict the same thought between the lines. KR, for example, shares an
experience where she consciously observed nature and became aware of her interconnectedness with nature:

“On my silent day I came to the water and started to build a ferry by the rocks. And it was a really interesting experience. It’s not easy and I concentrated very deeply on the process. And I see. I see how one rock can change something. And everything I do, nature has immediate response. It’s so simple. But if I read about it in books or on social media, I think, oh what a simple thing. No it’s not! It’s interesting, when you lived in this process, it’s your mantra.” (KR)

This story shows that the simple experience of building a ferry in the water helped the guest to gain a deeper awareness of nature by saying that she recognizes that one rock can change something. KR becomes aware of her reciprocal relationship with nature by explaining that there is always a response from nature, whatever she does. Another retreat guest equally emphasizes the connection to nature as an essential part of her regenerative tourism experience by claiming that nature was what she appreciated most, as she felt “like a small part of the great nature and the universe.” (OH) Hence, depicting her connection to nature.

Knowing that the “interdependence of nature has positive relationships with eudaimonic wellbeing” (Lima & Mariano, 2022, p. 10), KR’s and OH’s stories about becoming aware of the human-nature relationship can be assumed to relate to eudaimonic well-being. (Lima & Mariano, 2022, Jorgensen & Baztan, 2021)

Moreover, when OH stated to feel part of nature, her social well-being was positively influenced based on the assumption that feelings of belonging to nature are benefiting the social well-being dimension of humans. (Hammell, 2014)

**Learning**

For some retreat participants, experiences in nature constitute a new learning opportunity in the form of learning to appreciate nature and its connected benefits. This learning process was reinforced by non-personal as well as personal communication at the Mahakala Center. Various information sheets are placed throughout the center to educate guests and volunteers about the effects on the
environment through their vegan, local and organic food philosophy or guests’ light and water consumption on-site, inter alia. Additionally, co-owner Marijana Lemm shared her knowledge about regenerative agriculture and communicated her own philosophy of ecological awareness via personal communication. By doing so, Mahakala Retreat’s proactive way of knowledge transfer aligns with the regenerative tourism principles, which aim to support knowledge exchange that fosters a regenerative future. (Boluk & Panse, 2022) Furthermore, by sharing context-specific insights about environmental effects on the local environment as well as sharing local expertise from regenerative gardening approaches passed on by local farmers, Marijana Lemm values the sense of place, which is one of the critical principles of regenerative tourism. (Pollock, 2019, Bellato et al., 2022 b, Dredge, 2022) As a result of this knowledge exchange, several participants shared stories about their learning experience from an eco-conscious perspective, going beyond mere awareness of nature or its values for humans. SS, for example, depicts her eco-conscious learning experience by saying:

“I value so much the outlook of Marijana towards eco issues, towards nature. It really gives me very, very, very good feelings to understand that by being here, I’m not just a consumer. I do not use or abuse the nature around. I manage to renew myself. And still the things here are happening with the ultimate respect towards nature around.” (SS)

Another retreat participant (JK) summarized this statement by SS in her narrative about her regenerative tourism experience by emphasizing that she appreciated that “nobody was hurt or exploited” while referring to “Montenegro’s beautiful nature”. (JK) Hence, retreat participants were not only aware of the natural beauty of the environment but also understood the importance of counteracting its exploitation by preserving it by using words such as “abuse” (SS) or “exploit” (JK). Even more, by including these statements in their stories, retreat participants showed an understanding of Mahakala’s regenerative tourism approach. This again confirms the assumption that a mindset change towards a supportive attitude of the regenerative tourism approach is needed to progress its development. (Pollock, 2019, Dredge, 2022, Bellato et al., 2023) Even more, saying that it gives SS “very good feelings” to understand the importance of a regenerative approach can be
explained with the dimension of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. First, understanding that SS is not doing any harm to nature is reducing negative feelings, which is found to add to hedonic well-being. (Seligman & Pawelski, 2003, Lima & Mariano, 2022) Second, eudaimonic well-being rises through finding a purpose in her holiday by contributing to something good for the environment. (White et al., 2017, Gallagher et al., 2009)

6.1.2 Beauty
Another sub-theme concerning the surroundings of Mahakala Retreats is beauty. As mentioned in the quotes of the previous paragraphs, natural surroundings were described as beautiful, yet additionally, the retreat center itself was perceived as beautiful. In fact, the value of beauty was one of the first and most prominent observations on-site, as guests frequently spoke about it in ordinary conversations. Even though beauty apparently constitutes an essential part of the regenerative tourism experience for travelers, it is not yet represented in any regenerative tourism publications. However, valuing aesthetics directly reflects the dimension of hedonic well-being, as it includes finding pleasure in beautiful things. (Diener, 2009)

On-site, one woman was so touched by the surrounding beauty that she mentioned it as most impactful on her compared to other aspects of her experience. SS’s story describes the importance of beauty for her inner peace and reflection as follows:

“I felt like my eyes are having rest, seeing this beauty… I’m not seeing any flaws. Seeing so many places to have rest, to work with your body, to work with your soul. I felt like that’s the place where I’m about to rebuilt myself. At least a little. [...] There is not only lack of distraction but also beauty. There are so many details that catch your eye and it’s so thoughtful. [...] This place is built and furnished and decorated with so much thought and heart and so much love. [...] And the strange thing is that it feels so natural to be surrounded by beauty. But beauty is so rare in our life that every time you come to a place like this, you feel to value it like it’s something extraordinary. [...] It inspires me to cherish beauty, to value beauty.”
This story by a retreat participant of the fundraised Ukrainian women’s retreat showed that beauty is not only of high value but also constitutes the pre-condition for inner work and inner peace. A participant of the same retreat supported this statement by referring to beauty as a catalyst for a “meditative process”. (KR) Additionally, a volunteer from a completely different background draws the same conclusion about how beauty influenced her experience. MM explains in her story that the aesthetics of the retreat center had great benefits for her mental state:

“Simplicity and minimalism are great references to the aesthetics of Mahakala. And I think they are very important because when we overcomplicate things, when complexity is the denominator, we get cloudy, it gets foggy. I don’t think that would encourage peace and it doesn’t encourage all the philosophies that this space holds. […] I feel very at ease here, very relaxed. I think the aesthetics encourages relaxation and I think it deeply encourages inner peace as well.” (MM)

Through these different narratives, it is apparent that the retreat guests appreciate beauty because of its hedonic value. Beauty apparently creates a positive state of mind in the present moment (“inner peace”, “meditative”, “lack of distraction”) while distraction and disturbance from the surroundings are minimized. (Lima & Mariano, 2022) But even more, the narratives transmit the idea that experiencing beauty constitutes the pivotal base for inner work, as it enables to “work with your soul” (SS). Hence, beauty stimulates hedonic well-being and lifts eudaimonic well-being through inner development. (Gallagher et al., 2009) To conclude, travelers’ hedonic well-being is positively influenced by the aesthetics of Mahakala Retreats, which is the base for a process of self-reflection which adds to their eudaimonic well-being.

Even though only three interviewees mentioned beauty and aesthetics as an essential part of their regenerative tourism experience, the observations suggest the high relevance of beauty for the well-being of the travelers. Every one of the interviewees expressed words of admiration and appreciation towards the aesthetical characteristics of Mahakala Retreats, including its design, architecture, decoration, surroundings and food presentation, outside of the interview setting. One possible
reason for the discrepancy between observation and interview analysis could lie in the language barrier. Both here quoted interviewees who explained how beauty influenced their experience at the regenerative tourism space were eloquent and fluent in English and therefore able and confident to dedicate a whole narrative on how their well-being was influenced through experiencing beauty. Furthermore, as the perception of beauty is subjective and intangible, it may have been challenging for some respondents to explain its value for their regenerative tourism experience. However, the respondents showed that beauty, in this context, can be regarded as aesthetically pleasing in combination with surroundings that enforce a harmonious and peaceful atmosphere.

6.1.3 Safe Space
The interviews revealed that the natural surroundings as well as the aesthetics of Mahakala Center led to the perception of the regenerative tourism place as a safe space. However, not only beauty and nature were determining factors, but also other aspects led to this connotation as a safe space. Striking is the fact that even though interviewees came from different contexts, and some even said from “different realities” (SS), five of the ten interviewees, independently from hearing or seeing the other respondents, used the wording “safe space” to describe Mahakala Center. (RW, MM, SL, JK, PS) Three of the remaining interviewees used the word “home” (MM, SS, OH) or “homelike” (MM) to express their comfort and connection at Mahakala Retreats. Suess et al. (2020) explains that the feeling home is rooted in the dimension of social well-being, which would explain the respondents’ focus. Absence of fear
A recurring aspect adding to the well-being of the guests on-site was the absence of fearful emotions during the retreat. This theme came up unattached to the historical and cultural background of respondents. For example, a volunteer (RW) from the UK shared her story about “feeling anxiety” and “stress” in her day-to-day life living in a big city which for her seems to be utterly absent at Mahakala Retreats. Another woman from Greece (MM) explains a similar observation by constructing a story about living “in alarm” and in a “fight or flight” condition in her daily life, especially regarding expressing her femininity. According to her, it was unique to
find a place “where we can all coexist without fear” which shows that MM did not have fearful emotions at the retreat space. As well-being consists of general satisfaction with one’s own life circumstances (Diener, 2009) combined with an abundance of positive feelings (Seligman & Pawelski, 2003), the absence of “anxiety”, “fear” or “alarm” can be connected to higher hedonic well-being of the retreat guests on-site compared to in their daily life circumstances.

Moreover, every interview partner who attended the Ukrainian fundraising retreat shared stories about fear, anxiety and stress in their daily reality. Even though only one interview partner (SS) with Ukrainian background emphasized the difference in external stress factors in her day-to-day life compared to the retreat space, observations allowed to assume that all participants at the Ukrainian fundraising retreat shared similar thoughts. They all shared personal stories outside of the interviews directly with the author or were observed to share lived experiences in circles which expressed their high alert status in everyday life. Equally, the observed interaction showed their high appreciation of the absence of these external stress factors and connected feelings of anxiety and fear. For example, one of the retreat participants explicitly names this by saying: “here, I have no fear.” (KR). Also SS expresses the importance of a peaceful atmosphere:

“Here are basic needs provided, like food, like silence, like a peaceful environment. It means a lot.” (SS)

Hence, these two statements illustrate the absence of suffering (“no fear”) through external factors at the retreat center and its surroundings which presents an essential part of their on-site experience (“means a lot”). Existing literature explains this finding as the absence of suffering correlated with a rise in hedonic well-being (Lima & Mariano, 2022). Hence, to meet the regenerative tourism principle of striving towards a rise in well-being of all stakeholders, the findings suggest that this can be done by offering a safe space. (Duxbury et al., 2021, Bellato et al., 2023)

**Safe space for Self-acceptance**

By experiencing fear and worry-free surroundings, interview respondents concluded that “the environment allowed us to be very vulnerable” (SL), that they felt
comfortable to open and “just be”. (JK, RW) Hence these statements show that a
safe space (“the environment”) is needed for travelers to be present at the moment
and present with their own feelings. Moreover, PS, RW, MM and SL shared that the
safe and non-judging atmosphere helped them to be empowered to be themselves.
For example, some retreat participants shared they through being in a safe space,
they felt confident in embracing all facets of themselves, including being
“vulnerable” (SL) or a “child” (MM), as the following narratives by MM show:

“I believe that I am most myself here. I am allowed to be a child here,
which is never allowed anywhere else. So, in most ways, I believe “I” am
found here.” (MM)

Also SS shares that she values the safe space of Mahakala Center, by saying that it
offers a “sense of freedom” as the “space itself and the building doesn’t restrict you
in any way”. (SS) Thereby, she refers to the freedom of being allowed to be oneself
when speaking of the sense of freedom in this narrative. Mahakala Retreats as a
space supports that feeling by offering the right atmosphere, which gets visible
when SS says it is not “restricting” this process. Therefore, it can be assumed that
the dimension of eudaimonic well-being is positively influenced by experiencing a
safe space where travelers can be their true selves, as Gallagher et al. (2009)
includes autonomy and self-acceptance as two essential components of eudaimonic
well-being. Autonomy here refers to being “restricted” from external factors at the
retreat center while self-acceptance is achieved through allowing oneself to embrace
all facets, whether it’s being “a child” for a moment or “vulnerable” through the
atmosphere.

Safe Space for Self-reflection

The narratives showed that the absence of fear, stress or judgement empowered the
travelers to be themselves but also encouraged them to reflect on themselves and
work on themselves. According to Gallagher et al. (2009), “the capacity to
effectively manage one’s life” (p. 1027) is one of the aspects that define eudaimonic
well-being. Hence, having the capacity to reflect on one’s own life or one’s own
whole being can induce eudaimonic well-being. In regenerative tourism, this
capacity is enabled by offering a safe space which is visible through various
narratives. For example, KR states that the space is not only benefitting her emotional status through the landscape but that “it’s deeper. People can feel themselves here.” (KR) OH adds that “this space allows you to take care of yourself.” (OH) Hence, being able to feel oneself directly links to the aspect of self-acceptance and “caring for oneself” links to the pro-active behaviour to strive toward one’s own potential in the dimension of eudaimonic well-being. (Ryff & Singer, 2006)

Furthermore, MM was able to verbalize the intangible feeling of experiencing a safe space as follows:

“How pure it is here. It is a temple, and it is here to nest you. It is here to be of refuge to you. To protect you. To heal you. Nourish you. Whatever you need, you will figure it out here. [...] It provides the space and nourishment for the person to give it to themselves. Mahakala is an energetic field that just motivates and provides. It influences people to do the best work they can do to themselves. [...] It's physical, it's metaphysical, it's spiritual.” (MM)

Again, this narrative shows that proactive behaviour is needed to feel good but simultaneously emphasizes the importance of being in a space that allows a person to do that. It gets clear that the capacity to reflect is enabled through the regenerative tourism space itself. This can be explained by one of the main principles of regenerative tourism, saying that a tourist experience is co-created, and active engagement of travelers and tourism practitioners is key. (Bellato & Cheer, 2021, Bellato et al., 2023)

In conclusion, different stories shed light on the fact that Mahakala Center is valued because of its beneficial atmosphere where beauty, nature and absence of external stress factors represent aspects of it. As PS points out, “the environment and the feeling you have while being here” are essential for the hedonic and eudaimonic well-being of individuals. Mahakala Center is therefore seen as “much more than a building” (RW) and “more than a destination or service”. (MM) By referring to Mahakala Retreats as a space that is not only characterized by its geographical location or physical constitutions, MM subconsciously connected the retreat space
to its rooting in the regenerative tourism approach where whole system thinking is promoted. (Pollock, 2019, Dredge, 2022) Therefore, humans and non-humans are equal parts of the regenerative tourism experience, which goes beyond the act of a “service” to be regarded as a tourist experience. (Bellato et al., 2022) Furthermore, the aspect of sense of place which is a core theme of the regenerative tourism approach, is reflected in the narrative. (Bellato et al., 2023, Pollock, 2019) By saying that Mahakala Retreats is “more than a destination”, it is transmitted that the whole place is an essential part of the tourist experience, not just the mere destination context. Pollock (2019) explains this aspect of sense-making of a place that is reflected in MM quote by saying that “the unique spirit of a place cannot be defined but can only be expressed” (para. 5) It can thus be concluded that a regenerative tourism experience is part of a whole system that is affected and that is affecting the travelers instead of a mere activity, a building, or a service. This is ultimately leading to the rise in well-being of the whole system where regenerative tourism is happening equally as to the rise of well-being of the travelers, which would close the loop to strive towards a positive impact on people, places and nature. (Dredge, 2022, Pollock, 2019)

6.2 Cultivating connection with people

Even though the space itself and its surroundings were expressed as a key aspect of the regenerative experience at Mahakala Retreats, the interpersonal, communal aspect was emphasized even more by the travelers. Consequently, various sub-themes emerged from the analysis of the narratives which demonstrate that well-being in regenerative tourism is experienced through community sense, balance of solitude and connection, feeling accepted and being offered help and support.

6.2.1 Community sense

Creating meaningful connections and relationships is at the core of the regenerative tourism paradigm, striving towards a regenerative system together. (Pollock, 2019, Bellato et al., 2022 a, Boluk & Panse, 2022) Clearly, this aspect of a regenerative tourism experience reflects the dimension of social well-being, which sees social connections as the reason for a rise in well-being. (Gallagher et al., 2009) At Mahakala Retreats, most respondents emphasized the human aspect in their
narratives by sharing stories including connecting with others mainly during shared meals, creative events or sharing circles, inter alia. Even more, RW, AA, SL, LF, MM, AA, JL, and PS stated that the community sense was the main reason for their on-site well-being and, therefore, the most valued aspect during their stay. For example, AA shows that the connection with people was what she appreciated most at Mahakala Retreats by stating: “People make spaces”. Equally, JK shared the same thought by mentioning the community as the most critical aspect of her regenerative tourism experience: “Number one is the people. Because they make the space what it is.” Equally, RW refers to “togetherness and community” when she was asked about her most memorable experience. The fact that RW does not name a specific activity but the community sense as most important during her stay leads to the assumption that community sense itself is the experience. Hence this statement supports the idea of fostering meaningful relationships as part of a regenerative tourism experience. (Pollock, 2019, Bellato et al., 2022 a, Boluk & Panse, 2022) Furthermore, most interviewees included the absence of feeling “alone” (RW, PS, JK, OH) in their narratives – referring to it from a physical perspective but even more from an emotional side, meaning not being alone with one’s feelings. (JK, OH) Knowing that feeling connected to others is essential to raise social well-being, explains why the respondents emphasize the community sense as number one aspect of their regenerative tourism experience. (Gallagher et al., 2009, Diener & Seligman, 2002, Diener, 2009)

All retreat participants and volunteers were observed to value community sense. However, there were notable differences in the way how the well-being of individuals was affected by others. Some respondents shared that they always felt comfortable in the presence of others during the retreat. For example, MM outlines that she had the feeling of community from the first moment on by sharing how supported she felt by other people at the retreat:

“Even from the first moment I stepped into the place until the welcoming ceremony. [...] So in a way, there were no walls, no restrictions. All of those felt demolished. As soon as I stepped in, I realized what this place implies. It is complete belonging and complete, unconditional support.” (MM)
The welcoming ceremony depicts one example of an experience that Mahakala Retreats created to value the aspect of knowledge exchange as well as to develop meaningful relationships within their regenerative tourism approach. (Pollock, 2019, Major & Clarke, 2022) Furthermore, according to Hammell (2014) the feeling of “belonging” is associated with social well-being, which explains why MM connotates positive emotions with this story.

Contrarily, different interviewees constructed their narratives in a way that expressed a change in the effect of others on their well-being status. Several retreat participants shared hesitancy at the beginning of the retreat, where they felt rather uncomfortable being surrounded so closely by other people. This feeling declined over time and allowed them to feel good in the presence of others and gain positive feelings by being surrounded by others. For example, OH shared that she felt “alerted” and “careful” concerning the closeness to other women on the first days of the retreat and AA added that it was “difficult” because of the convergence of different characters. These connotations reflecting negative emotions about the communal aspect changed when they were asked how they felt at the end of the retreat. They concluded that “everyone is treasure” (OH) and that now they’re “glad” (AA) being surrounded by others. These stories transmit a change in social well-being from being close to non-existent as they felt “alerted” to a higher level of social well-being when they appreciate others and are “glad” to have them close. A similarity in all stories around the topic of community sense was however that the space enabled the people to connect very fast, going “from strangers to family” (MM) and enabling the people to form “quickly a really strong relationship” (RW). Hence, social well-being was supported by Mahakala Retreats by facilitating space and activities to connect instead of leaving the participants to do that merely by themselves.

6.2.2 Balance of solitude and connection
Another striking discrepancy in the narratives was that for some respondents, “community sense” (OH, MM, LF, PS, AA) was what they valued most, while for others, the pure form of “co-existence” (RW, MM, SS, SL) was nurturing. The difference is that community sense was described as feeling part of a group of people with deep connection and sharing, while co-existence values the mere
presence of other retreat participants and their acceptance while being able to focus on oneself. The shared core of both concepts is that other people are an essential part of being able to feel good. However, the fact that people value different aspects of communal living in a regenerative tourism space lies in the assumption that well-being is subjective and culture or background constructed. (Huta & Waterman, 2014, Gallagher et al., 2009) Even more, age is a variable that impacts the extent to which aspects of social well-being leads to higher well-being. (Keyes, 1998) In specific, some retreat participants perceived social well-being as they feel good through close connection while others valued the eudaimonic well-being side where autonomy and self-reflection are catalysts for feeling good. (Ryff & Singer, 2006) Both lead to a rise in well-being through the communal aspect of a regenerative tourism experience.

Retreat participant SS illustrates the importance of the duality of community sense and solitude by saying that she appreciated that she was not alone even though she did not feel closely connected to each individual personally:

“I can’t refer to it as the sense of belonging. Maybe not completely. Maybe it’s about knowing that someone is there, that someone is there for you if you need that. [...] Talk about co-presence. Very simple, but so good.” (SS)

By saying that she felt “good”, SS shows that social well-being is not dependent on the feeling of belonging, but equally the mere form of social acceptance. Gallagher et al. (2009) for instance explains that social acceptance adds to a rise in social well-being.

Additionally, it was found that alone time was of high importance for the well-being of retreat participants. RW, MM, PS, SS, and KR stated that the balance between connecting with others and having personal space alone was highly important for their well-being. However, the allocation of value of alone-time and time to connect with others varied. Some respondents stated that they rarely needed time for themselves during the retreat and found being together with other travelers most nurturing (MM, JK). In contrast, others emphasized the need to be in solitude in between social workshops to be able to flourish. (SL, SS, KR, PS) For example, SL
shared that she valued both, solitude and connection, when responding to the question about how she felt living so closely with others.

“I felt comfortable, and I think it has two aspects to it. They really did a good job creating common spaces where you can reach out to other people, but at the same time you can retract and go to separate private spaces if you need it. So for me, this was perfect. [...] The perfect balance. That was for me a very very important aspect.” (SL)

By emphasizing the importance of “balance”, SL subconsciously shows her need to boost her social well-being through connection (Gallagher et al., 2009, Diener & Seligman, 2002, Diener, 2009) and her eudaimonic well-being through self-reflection while being autonomous. (Huta & Waterman, 2014) When saying that “they” offered her the possibility to focus on both, she refers to Mahakala Retreats who established a space where guests’ well-being is one core aim to work towards an overall rise in well-being for all stakeholders. (Duxbury et al., 2021)

6.2.3 Exchange and sharing
The feeling of connection enabled exchange and sharing between the retreat participants. The author observed on-site that sharing circles at the beginning of the retreat created a trustful atmosphere. As a result of establishing trust among the participants, it was evident that the retreat participants shared experiences, knowledge and emotions in workshops but also apart from the scheduled activities, such as at shared meals. Most interviewees consider the exchange with others as important, as it was perceived as beneficial to their well-being. For example, MM expresses that the sharing circles were “healing and nurturing”, which shows that negative emotions were counteracted (healing) by speaking with others. This can be explained with Gallagher et al.’s assumption that the mere interaction with other people contributes to the dimension of social well-being.

A guest at the Ukrainian fundraising retreat, AA, dedicates a long narrative to her experience of how she felt better by sharing deep emotions with others.

“You have this intimacy and really deep emotional moments together. And it was so, so important for me. I have never seen something like this
before. Things like women's circle or women's community. It is so much of help for me. [...] The opportunity to share deep feeling and talk about it”

Equally, another interviewee narrated her personal story that showed the value of the exchange experience through sharing circles and community-based activities for her well-being by feeling seen and supported:

“I had never connected with this amount of women in a circle before, and I had never been immersed into communal work and community-based experiences and activities in such a supportive, open, loving and unconditional way. [...] It was the first time I truly felt seen. I truly felt heard, supported, unconditionally wild and free that normal society could never provide me. [...] it was complete liberation and happiness” (MM)

This story leads to the assumption that through exchange, feelings of being seen and understood were reinforced. Furthermore, exchanging thoughts and emotions with others stood in mutual relationship with feeling accepted. The feeling “seen”, “understood”, and “accepted” are strong indicators that MM and AA experienced a rise in social well-being through exchange. (Gallagher et al., 2009) Furthermore, hedonic well-being was positively influenced by connotating this experience with “happiness” in the present moment. (Seligman & Pawelski, 2003, Diener, 2009) By focusing on activities where people can connect and exchange emotions, Mahakala Center aligns with regenerative tourism principles. This involves facilitating meaningful relationships and connections and equally working towards a positive influence on the well-being of all stakeholders, of which travelers are part of. (Pollock, 2019, Dredge, 2022)

6.2.4 Experiencing support and help
Observations and interviews furthermore revealed that sharing stories and experiences further enabled the retreat participants to support and help each other but also learn and inspire each other. For example, techniques to deal with daily stress such as meditation, yoga or mindfulness practices were shared, spiritual knowledge was exchanged, or discussions about conservation techniques and farming emerged, to name a few. Hence, these examples align with the core principle of the regenerative tourism approach to foster an inclusive knowledge
exchange (Boluk & Panse, 2022), where travelers proactively engage in knowledge co-creation. (Rockström et al., 2023)

For instance, some interviewees felt supported by the mere presence of the retreat group, which MM depicts by saying she felt “supported by the unification of everyone”. Hence, she refers to the aspect of social coherence, which is one of the critical components of social well-being defined by Keyes (1998). In comparison, SS emphasized the importance of actual acts and services to add to her well-being state by saying that “Eventually, somebody took care of me. So there is this feeling of, okay, I’m being taken care of. I’m saying this and I want to cry.” She refers mainly to the provided basic needs in her story. Additionally, OH shares SS view of appreciating actual help of others by stating that “the support, the people who are ready to help” (OH) were the determining factor that helped her to overcome challenging emotional moments on-site.

Not only help from others but collaboration and working together were highly valued as part of the regenerative tourism experience, as mentioned by several interviewees. For example, RW shared that she felt a rise in well-being by working and collaborating with other retreat participants:

“If you’re feeling empowered or you’re going through these things together you can laugh and have fun and it’s going to help. It makes you feel even more well.” (RW)

The challenging situation included not only difficult life circumstances but also challenging mental thinking patterns that were worked on during the retreat. OH and KR both shared similar experiences where support through understanding the same emotions helped to address challenging thinking patterns. JK outlines this process by pointing out that she felt good by understanding that others have similar thoughts and emotions as she has:

“It was so nice to hear how they feel about their experience at Mahakala Retreat because most of them were matching: they also had this feeling like I had. And I was like oh, nice! So, I’m not the only one? And that was really powerful, and I love this feeling.” (JK)
Hence, the aspect of social coherence is stimulated by experiencing connectedness through having “matching feelings”. (Keyes, 1998) Thus, the story transmits that feeling connected through the regenerative tourism experience added to social well-being.

A recurrent theme in the interviews was implementing on-site learning in their daily lives. Thus, the knowledge exchange facilitated by the regenerative tourism space (Boluk & Panse, 2022) led to a pro-active learning process which is of enduring character and therefore positively influences the eudaimonic well-being of the travelers. (Jorgensen & Baztan, 2021, Gallagher et al., 2009) For example, RW shares that she learned how to live in a community and strives towards creating one in her daily life to nourish her social well-being also outside of the retreat center:

“I know that this kind of community living is possible, and I know that it makes me feel good. I know that that’s how people should be treated. I’m still learning it myself and how to demonstrate it.” (RW)

MM supports RW’s enthusiasm to adapt learning of communal living in her daily life by constructing her narrative about what she is taking home from her stay as follows:

“It is to be able to magnetize such a way of living anywhere else. And it gives me motivation and encouragement and ambition that it is possible to create such communities, even if the environment is different. [...] It provides me with a great amount of ambition and optimism that I can obtain this lifestyle and this way of communal life anywhere else, no matter where I am.” (MM)

These statements suggest that the regenerative tourism experience had enduring impacts on the retreat participants and volunteers. RW points out that the knowledge exchange on-site had a long-lasting effect on her, as she is “still” learning how to implement communal living ideas. This depicts the idea of striving towards mindset change through a mutual learning process which is fostered by a regenerative tourism experience (Boluk & Panse, 2022, Pollock, 2019, Major & Clarke, 2022). By referring to learning that can be adapted “anywhere else”, MM subconsciously
adds to the aim to inspire people to adapt their beliefs and attitude towards the new tourism paradigm to collectively strive towards a regenerative future. (Duxbury, 2021, Major & Clarke, 2022, Cave et al., 2022)

6.3 Facilitating self-reflection
The third key theme identifiable by analyzing the respondent’s narratives is well-being through self-reflection as part of the regenerative tourism experience. Thereby, self-awareness, self-development, applying learnings beyond the retreat setting and confronting negative feelings are found to add to the well-being of retreat guests. By facilitating self-reflection, Mahakala Retreats implements the regenerative tourism principle of aiming to offer a travel experience that goes beyond the mere aim of relaxation and pleasure and strives toward having a long-lasting positive effect on the tourist that ideally is of transformative nature. (Pollock, 2019, Major & Clarke, 2022) As the traveler is pro-active engaging in this experience, the theme of self-reflection is found to predominantly reflect eudaimonic well-being. (Ryff & Singer, 2006, Steger et al., 2008)

6.3.1 Self-awareness
An ongoing theme in the interviews was that travelers felt good by bringing awareness to themselves. A research paper on eudaimonic well-being conducted by Huta & Waterman (2014) reveals that self-awareness creates the base on which enduring self-development can derive, leading to long-lasting well-being. AT Mahakala Retreats, the retreat guest AA illustrates the importance of self-awareness by saying that consciously noticing one’s own feelings leads to happiness:

“I guess it’s important that you have the opportunity to feel the moment where you are. Right now. When you can put aside all your responsibilities and what you need to do and just enjoy where you are right now. Just feel. If I and other people could live like this, in the present moment, all our life. I guess we would be so much happier. [...] It gives me permission to just being here and relieve my sorrows. To be with my own emotions, my own thoughts.”

As AA speaks of experiencing this process “on her own,” it can be assumed that she felt “happier” through a rise in eudaimonic well-being by focusing on the
component of autonomy. (Ryff & Singer, 2006, Gallagher et al., 2009, Steger et al., 2008) JK adds another short statement describing the importance of the present moment to be aware of one’s one emotions. In her statement, she answered the question of what was essential for her well-being at the regenerative tourism space:

“It’s basically those two things: trying to live in the present and feel everything and accept it. And to have really nice people around you.”

(JK)

Several respondents spoke of the benefits of being aware of themselves by sharing stories about their self-growth journey and added how being aware of one’s own thoughts and emotions was an essential part of it. For example, RW links understanding her own feelings to being able to know how to lift her own well-being. She shares that: “I think it’s being really aware of your own feeling and what you do and how. And what makes you feel good.” Equally, SS shares that for her, well-being is about knowing what makes her feel good:

”Often, we don’t understand ourselves what our mind and body and soul needs. So, well-being is about understanding yourself, about being able to provide.” (SS)

By explaining that the awareness of one’s own status leads to the determination of factors influencing the well-being level, RW and SS not only show that the reflection helped to understand one’s own emotions but also to be able to balance emotions better. Seligman (2018) considers knowing what makes oneself happy as essential to actively work towards a rise in well-being.

KR, as well as MM, connect the ability of self-reflection to the efforts of Mahakala Retreats, who are cultivating this process through offering regenerative tourism experiences. For example, KR was positively influenced in her self-growth journey by the efforts of the retreat, which she phrases as follows: “This place has helped to even more listen to what you actually need” (KR). Another volunteer shared a similar thought by saying, “Whatever it is that you need. You will figure it out here”. (MM) Hence, Mahakala Retreats (“this place”, “here”) offers the right
circumstances in which self-reflection (“listen to what you need”, “figure it out”) can happen.

6.3.2 Working on oneself
A frequently mentioned aspect of the self-awareness and self-growth theme was the importance of “working on oneself” to feel better. Scholars of eudaimonic well-being are in consensus that striving towards one’s own potential leads to a rise in well-being. (Gallagher et al., 2009, Ryff & Singer, 2006, Steger et al., 2008) Hence, the proactive engagement of an individual is pivotal to working towards self-growth. (Gallagher et al., 2009) In this case, various narratives illustrated the proactive position of the travelers as they included wording such as “inner work” (JK, OH), “working on myself” (LF, RW, KR, SS) or “gaining knowledge” (MM) in their narratives while referring to their regenerative experience. On-site observations added to the assumption that self-work is an essential part of a regenerative tourism experience, as people shared in private interactions that they valued this kind of holiday because it was purposeful to them instead of focusing solely on pleasure. This enabled them to work for their own health and long-term well-being. Hence, travelers value that Mahakala Retreats worked towards the regenerative tourism principle of supporting an experience beyond mere relaxation and encouraging a transformative experience instead. (Pollock, 2019, Major & Clarke, 2022) These allow a rise in eudaimonic well-being by allowing an ongoing self-growth journey instead of focusing on the present moment of mere pleasure. (Huta & Waterman, 2014) Activities such as journaling workshops, meditation or specific yoga styles were some offered activities that supported the inner work process. Furthermore, guests were found to journal, reflect, or read alone outside of the scheduled activities and Mahakala Retreats offered them the space to do that.

However, most on-site retreat participants shared that their self-growth journey just started and could therefore not be fully explained at the current state on-site. This again depicts the characteristic of a transformative experience as part of the regenerative tourism approach. (Pollock, 2019, Major & Clarke, 2022) For example, SS states that she is working on herself independently by saying that she is “in a stage where I’m reflecting inside, where I am not sharing much.” She refers to the well-being dimension of eudaimonic well-being by valuing its self-centered focus of
this well-being dimension as she is not sharing her thoughts with others but working on herself in autonomy. (Ryff & Singer, 2006) Equally, AA outlines that she is still figuring out how to integrate the learnings from self-reflection: “I think it is still an open question for me and I’m still working on it”. Hence, she again refers to the transformative nature (“still working”) of a regenerative tourism experience. (Pollock, 2019, Major & Clarke, 2022) A retreat participant who shared her retrospective insights similarly adds that reflecting and working on herself did not end with the last day of Mahakala Retreats but is still part of her self-development journey by outlining that “it started a really big process”. (JK)

Hence the theme of inner work and self-growth can be assumed to be of long-lasting character, as the process started at Mahakala Retreats but was found to be ongoing beyond the framework of the retreat. This reflects the transformative character of a regenerative tourism experience as outlined by Pollock (2019) and Major & Clarke, (2022). To conclude, the dimension of eudaimonic well-being is experienced through self-improvement and self-growth facilitated by Mahakala Retreats through correlating activities as well as offering the space to encourage this process.

6.3.3 Applying lessons outside of the retreat setting
Deriving from the idea that regenerative tourism should induce mindset change, aiming to have a long-lasting effect on travelers is a key principle of regenerative tourism. (Pollock, 2019, Major & Clarke, 2022) This long-lasting effect was verbalized by different retreat participants and volunteers as concrete learning outcomes applicable at home, outside of the retreat setting. Hence, long-lasting eudaimonic well-being was stimulated by focusing on “what” made them feel good and implementing this concrete behaviour. (Ryff & Singer, 2006, Steger et al., 2008) Contrary to those on-site interviewees who were not yet at a stage to share the outcomes of their reflections, several respondents from the retrospective shared their key lessons. For example, AA outlines the lessons that she learned through her regenerative tourism experience as follows:

“It was like something really fresh. And something which helps you to feel good also in a different place. And it breaks your habits which you live for
every day. And it helps you move things around in your head, helps you builds new things in your mind.”

Another retreat participant shares similar insights from the retrospective:

“You can call them life lessons or just learnings. So that I really did take with me. So the inspiration and the things someone recommended that I tried out when I came home. So that had a sustainable impact on me, a long-lasting impact.” (SL)

Hence, both stories reveal that long-term learning refers to mindset shift as well as practical implications. According to Seligman (2008), it is essential to determine activities or situations that add the one’s well-being to be able to actively work towards a rise in well-being. Hence, by implementing activities such as journaling, reading, or choosing to eat healthier, vegan, or organic, the retreat guests determined these activities as essential for their well-being. Hence, the retreat guests implement learnings from their workshops and exchange with others in their day-to-day life. Referring to the implementations as “routines” (PS), “habits” (PS) or “rituals” (RD) reflects the long-lasting character and is essential to create an enduring rise in eudaimonic well-being.

Apart from practical implementation, some volunteers and retreat participants shared that the regenerative tourism experience has induced change in their thinking patterns. This reflects the core principle of regenerative tourism to create mindset change towards an appreciation of regenerative development to strive towards a regenerative future of the tourism system. (Pollock, 2019, Dredge, 2022, Bellato et al., 2023) Again, changing thinking patterns reflect the eudaimonic well-being dimension as self-growth and self-development are hinted at. (Gallagher et al., 2009) For example, RW reflects on her main takeaways from the retreats that she volunteered for and concludes by saying that she is aware of a mindset change that was induced:

“It’s not merely a physical take. It’s more like a mental take and a realization to take home.”
However, a discrepancy concerning a mindset change or shift in thinking patterns was identified. Even though a mindset shift was observed through the narrative of most retreat participants and volunteers, some say that they felt inspired but would not refer to it as a “whole mindset shift” (JK) as most of the learnings were already part of their day-to-day life, even though to a different extend. Additionally, SL shares that the regenerative tourism experience was not “changing” in terms of a mindset shift but added to her inspiration by outlining the following:

“I already have a very good, healthy lifestyle. I think mentally, it was for me like: I try it out, but this is not changing me. I’m always happy to try out new things. I learned things, it was fun.”

Hence, this statement illustrates that the guest was already aware of the importance of regenerative tourism principles. Therefore, no mindset change was induced for SS as she is already living a “healthy lifestyle”, which she explains as living eco-conscious. This finding clearly reflects the regenerative tourism idea that mindset change is a precondition as well as an outcome of the regenerative tourism experience. (Dredge, 2022) Consequently, people with an eco-conscious mindset and value the regenerative tourism approach will support it by choosing tourist products that include the regenerative tourism approach. On the other hand, this eco-conscious mindset and appreciation of the regenerative tourism approach is the outcome of a regenerative tourism experience.

6.3.4 Confronting negative feelings and facing challenges
The last finding through the analysis of the interviews was that a long-term eudaimonic well-being was experienced through confronting negative feelings at the retreat center. When studying well-being, negative emotions cannot be neglected. (Diener, 2009, Seligman, 2018) A diversity of emotions, including positive and negative ones, lead to an overall greater well-being compared to only having one-side emotions. (Wang et al., 2021) Furthermore, confronting negative emotions is found to negatively influence the well-being in the present moment but multiply eudaimonic well-being in the long term leading to an overall enduring state of life satisfaction. (Smith & Diekmann, 2017, Wang et al., 2021) This explains why respondents share stories which center around a confrontation with negative
emotions as part of the self-growth journey. Activities that encouraged the confrontation included for example sharing circles, fire ceremonies where negative emotions could be released, and dancing workshops to let go off inner stress, amongst others. Almost every respondent shared an experience of facing challenging and intense emotions and concluded that this experience helped them to feel better afterwards.

For example, JK points out that for her, being challenged and uncomfortable was essential part of her self-growth journey which was encouraged by the retreat center:

“I am struggling with coming out of my comfort zone. I am not often pushing myself outside of it. I’m really into my habits. So, I’m really happy if someone is pushing me a little bit. [...] I think during normal vacation, I’m just resting. But at Mahakala, it was also going over my borders and out of my comfort zone. I think this really had a long-lasting effect on myself.”

Additionally, SS ends a narrative about challenging thoughts that she faced during the retreat with: “even good things, you know, they don’t come easy.” By summarizing her on-site self-growth journey, she depicts that discomfort was essential for her to feel better in the long term. The two stories reflect the idea of eudaimonic well-being through shifting negative emotions to positive ones through reflection, which leads to self-growth. (Wang et al., 2021)

In contrast, MM mentioned that even though being challenged is an essential part of her self-growth experience at Mahakala Retreats she does not resonate with connotating this process with negative feelings. When asked if she was facing negative connotated emotions, she replied by saying “no, here never.” However, she resonated with the idea of being uncomfortable or challenged as beneficial for her eudaimonic well-being by saying:

“Spiritually, mindfully, soulfully. Every compartment of my being is replenished here and re-boosted. It’s not just one component that is challenged here and therefore healed. It’s my entire being.”
MM explains that confronting negative emotions (“challenging”, “out of comfort zone”) leads to a rise in well-being in the long term (“healing”, “long-lasting effect”). Hence, handling negative emotions as part of a self-growth journey can be associated with the eudaimonic well-being dimension in this narrative. (Smith & Diekmann, 2017, Wang et al., 2021) Concluding, findings show that encouraging confronting negative emotions can be part of the regenerative tourism experiences. These experiences are part of the learning process of travelers which ideally lead to personal growth. (Pollock, 2019, Major & Clarke, 2022)

7 Discussion

The analysis of the narratives revealed various aspects of experiences in regenerative tourism and how they correlate with human well-being. Consequently, the following discussion aims to answer the research question “How are different dimensions of well-being experienced in Regenerative Tourism?”. The three overarching themes of i) being in a safe place in nature, surrounded by beauty and nature ii) cultivating connection with people, and iii) facilitating self-reflection are thereby intertwined with the theoretical framework of hedonic, social and eudaimonic well-being. Furthermore, these findings are analyzed by adding existing research results in the field of tourism scholarship to debate consistencies and differences. Hence, the following discussion aims to summarize the analysis and interpretation of the results chapter.

Environmental context and hedonic well-being

Through interpreting the results of the interviews, it becomes clear that travelers’ well-being is positively influenced through nature-correlated experiences in regenerative tourism. The correlating dimension of well-being is assumed to be predominantly hedonic well-being. These activities were encouraged by Mahakala Retreats within their schedule. Even more, the retreat’s owner encouraged knowledge exchange about the importance of conserving the environment. By facilitating and encouraging these activities, Mahakala Center acts in alignment with regenerative tourism principle of working towards a harmony between humans and non-humans, nature included. (Lindell, 2022, Ateljevic & Sheldon, 2022)
interpretation of the results revealed that respondents were found to reconnect to nature or reinforce their relationship with it by being exposed to nature.

Furthermore, the travelers shared that they were more aware of the natural features through nature-based activities, which led to a rise in appreciation of nature. Lastly, the interpretation of interviews revealed that guests and volunteers internalized the importance of preserving the environment. These experiences are connected to a rise in hedonic well-being through nature’s features of transmitting joy and pleasurable emotions to the travelers. (Diener, 2009) It can thus be concluded that hedonic well-being is experienced though nature-centred activities in regenerative tourism. This key finding is in alignment with results from various tourism scholars who confirmed the idea that connecting people with nature benefits their well-being. (Sheldon, 2020, Smith & Diekmann, 2017, Farber & Hall, 2007)

Another key finding is that experiencing beauty is an essential part of a regenerative tourism experience and can be linked to hedonic well-being. Guests and volunteers were in consensus that beauty in the natural surroundings as well as at the retreat center was highly advantageous for their mental state and therefore emphasized the importance of beauty in their regenerative tourism experience. The respondents shared that beauty facilitated inner peace and inner work by creating a meditative atmosphere. By referring to experiencing beauty in regenerative tourism as pleasurable and satisfying, a clear connection to the dimension of hedonic well-being can be drawn. (Diener, 2009) Even though the aspect of aesthetics is extensively researched within the field of well-being (Diener, 2009, Himes & Muraca, 2018, Løvoll et al., 2020), there is scarce literature connecting the aspect of well-being through aesthetics with tourism experiences. However, a study conducted by Oh et al. (2008) supports this research project's findings, saying that aesthetics was the most important determinant of guest satisfaction, contrary to findings by other existing literature though. (Oh et al., 2008) In the field of regenerative tourism in specific, the aspects of beauty and aesthetics are not yet included in the definition or principles. Hence, the finding that experiencing beauty is an essential part of the hedonic well-being dimension in regenerative tourism experiences constitutes a novelty for regenerative tourism research.
Lastly, the dimension of hedonic well-being was experienced by being in a safe space. The respondents considered Mahakala Retreats as a safe space by referring to the absence of anxiety-related emotions on-site. Even more, the atmosphere of the retreat center was described as beneficial through having a harmonious and peaceful character. Travelers shared that they felt comfortable to open up and being vulnerable by the ambience of the place. The feeling of being comfortable, which reflects hedonic well-being (Kahneman et al., 2006), was found to constitute the base for self-development, which added to the eudaimonic well-being of travellers. (Huta & Waterman, 2014) A core principle of regenerative tourism is to strive towards the rise in well-being of all stakeholders. (Pollock, 2019) Thus, offering a safe space based on knowing it will better the well-being of travelers is part of Mahakala’s aims. Experiencing a safe space is therefore a tourist experience that should be included in the regenerative tourism principles.

These three components of the environmental context of Mahakala Retreats, namely nature, beauty and safe space, are all associated with hedonic well-being. By experiencing these three components as part of their regenerative tourism experience, travelers feel a rise in positive emotions. What is important to take away is that this experience is of passive nature. Hence, the environment induces well-being rather than the traveler proactively working towards it. The mere being in these surroundings is therefore adding to the hedonic well-being. Thus, experiencing an environment consistent of nature, beauty or safe space is regarded as the actual regenerative tourism experience rather than the activity which is undertaken there. The last takeaway from the analysis of this theme is that the components of nature, beauty and safe space only refer to the present moment.

Social context and social well-being

The second key finding deriving from the analysis and interpretation of the interviews and observations is that social well-being is experienced through social connection in regenerative tourism. Retreat participants expressed that the connection with others was of high importance for their well-being. As travelers shared stories of belonging and social interaction, which led to positive connotated emotions, the dimension of social well-being is alluded to. (Gallagher et al., 2009)
Furthermore, respondents emphasized the importance of exchange and interaction to feel accepted and seen. Lastly, feeling supported and receiving help lifted the well-being of the travelers.

By facilitating these different aspects of a community sense, Mahakala Retreats aims to work towards one of the core principles of regenerative tourism, which is outlined as creating meaningful relationships and enabling knowledge exchange between multiple stakeholders. (Major & Clarke, 2022, Dredge, 2022) Facilitating connection can therefore be regarded as a regenerative tourism experience which leads to a rise in social well-being. Even though these findings align with existing literature about the importance of social connections for a flourishing regenerative tourism system (Fusté-Forné & Hussain, 2022, Major & Clarke, 2022, Pollock, 2019), the connection between sole travelers as depicted in these results is close to non-existent. Hence, facilitating connections between travelers can be regarded as an additional aspect of a regenerative tourism experience that literature has not focused on yet.

Additionally, the interpretation of the interviews revealed that providing a balance between social connection and solitude leads to a rise in well-being of the travelers. A recent study conducted by Liu et al. (2023) supports this finding by mentioning that offering too many shared activities for wellness tourists led to a decrease in well-being as it was regarded as stressful. Hence, Mahakala Retreats adds to the well-being of its guests by facilitating space for being alone as well as space for connection. However, this finding is not yet represented in regenerative tourism scholarship, as social connections are generally regarded as merely beneficial. The aim to foster relationships and connections refers primarily to community members and on-site stakeholders (Major & Clarke, 2022, Dredge, 2022), which is why traveler experiences add a new perspective on how cultivating connection is understood.

Unlike passively experiencing nature, beauty, and safe space, connecting with people is a proactive experience. Hence, travelers work proactively to raise their social well-being by seeking other people or withdrawing from the social
environment. However, similar to the environmental context of the regenerative tourism experience, the social component is equally limited to the present moment.

**Personal context and eudaimonic well-being**

The third key theme representing a regenerative tourism experience that enhances well-being includes self-awareness, self-development, applying lessons beyond the retreat setting and confronting negative feelings. The interpretation of narratives revealed that mindset and behaviour change are induced through regenerative tourism experiences. This happens through a self-development process where the traveler proactively works towards improvement. Pre-condition for this process is self-awareness. Mahakala Retreats as a regenerative tourism space facilitates this personal process by offering the space and activities. Thus, Mahakala Retreats follows a regenerative tourism approach by striving towards mindset change through a transformative learning experience. (Pollock, 2019, Major & Clarke, 2022) The regenerative tourism experience of self-reflection is thereby associated with the dimension of eudaimonic well-being because long-term development of the traveler is induced. (Huta & Waterman, 2014) As travelers share that their self-reflection process continued beyond the retreat space, the findings of this study stand in contrast to the ones presented by Smith & Diekmann (2017). The authors state that most tourism experiences do not have a lasting effect on the well-being of tourists. However, the studies Smith & Diekmann (2017) examined mostly focused on the dimension of hedonic well-being. Hence, a multidimensional conceptualization of travelers’ well-being in regenerative tourism is needed to capture long-term results.

**Interrelationship**

Based on the assumption of interconnectedness and mutual influence of the well-being dimensions outlined by Gallagher et al. (2009), the three dimensions of well-being as part of regenerative tourism experiences are likewise interconnected. In fact, the findings argue for a hierarchical structure of the dimensions. First, experiencing nature, beauty and a safe space that is lifting hedonic well-being is the base from which connection and exchange can be facilitated. A beneficial environment and atmosphere are found to be essential for travelers to be able to
experience connection through exchange, learning or withdrawal. The dimension of social well-being is associated with this stage. Lastly, a beneficial atmosphere, together with connection and exchange with other travelers lead to the facilitation of self-reflection as part of the regenerative tourism experience. This last step is associated with the eudaimonic well-being dimension, which is long-lasting. The results align with the idea that not the actual activity is important for the travelers but how well-being can be created. This finding is supported by various tourism scholars who similarly promote the idea that well-being should be the primary goal and motivation of a tourism experience rather than an activity or destination. (Liu et al., 2023, Filept & Laing, 2019)

8 Conclusion

Within the regenerative tourism approach, the aim is to strive towards a net-positive impact on nature, place and people. Thereby, a rise in well-being of the whole living system is aimed. (Dredge, 2022, Bellato et al., 2022 a, Bellato et al., 2022 b) One of the stakeholder groups that are included in the regenerative tourism approach are travelers. Hence, a core principle is to enhance the well-being of travelers as part of the whole living system in which tourism occurs. Therefore, it is essential to understand how this stakeholder group perceives well-being to be able to enforce it. This study aimed to shed light on travelers’ perspectives as under-represented stakeholder group and explore how they experience different dimensions of well-being in regenerative tourism. Thereby, well-being was conceptualized in a multidimensional way, including hedonic, social and eudaimonic well-being.

A pivotal outcome of the thesis is that well-being is regarded as experience, rather than an activity. Hence, the study suggests that the themes of experiencing a safe space, surrounded by nature and beauty, cultivating connection with others and fostering self-reflection are embodiments of experiencing well-being. This idea can thus be applied to a wider context, outside of a retreat setting. However, even though the process can be generalized, the specific implementation always depends on the local context and the unique ecosystem in which the tourism system is placed in.
Furthermore, based on the whole living system theory, nature, place and people are intertwined. Hence, a rise in well-being for one component influences the well-being of others. It can thus be concluded that focusing on creating regenerative tourism experiences that lead to a rise in well-being for travelers ultimately leads to a rise in well-being for the whole living system. Consequently, the study proposes that regenerative tourism can act as a multiplier to strive towards regenerative development, where nature, place and people mutually benefit one another.

In fact, global scientists are in consensus that changing the growth paradigm and focusing on sustaining the ecosystem and fostering social equality, ultimately leads to a rise in well-being for nature and people. (Ripple et al., 2020, O’Neill & Corvellec, 2018) Hence, the new tourism paradigm can be a promising solution to counteract issues resulting from economic-centred approaches, gender inequality, lack of resilience, or mental health issues, which will automatically lead to a rise of well-being for all stakeholders.

Even more, as building resilience in a world characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) is essential (Rockström et al., 2023), regenerative tourism can offer a place to build on the individual’s resilience. This is found to be done by offering a safe place in particular, as this creates the base for further development in social capital building and self-development. Building resilience through focusing on the well-being of travelers in regenerative tourism can hence be one contribution to striving towards the resilience of the whole system.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to question normative and idealistic principles of the new tourism paradigm, considering the criticism faced by sustainable tourism and the anticipated challenges of regenerative tourism. The study showed that creating a tourism system with the well-being of all stakeholders in mind can represent a contribution to a better world, where long-term regeneration is anticipated. Hence it is essential to be aware of the idealistic ideas of regenerative tourism and yet strive towards having a positive impact. This implies that the objective should be to strive towards a regenerative tourism system where the well-being of the whole system is embraced rather than solely fulfilling a set of principles.
8.1 Implications

**Practical contribution**

Apart from answering the research question by pointing out the three main themes of how well-being is experienced in regenerative tourism, three key learnings contribute to understanding travelers’ well-being in regenerative tourism beyond the existing principles.

First, it is argued that beauty and aesthetics are essential parts of a regenerative tourism experience, as these aspects enormously affect the hedonic well-being of travelers. Furthermore, beauty as part of the regenerative tourism experience is found to act as a multiplier effect, hence enabling processes that affect the social and eudaimonic well-being of travelers based on experiencing beauty.

Secondly, it was found that experiencing a safe space is essential to create the base for hedonic well-being. Being in a safe space was found to a pivotal foundation to be able to experience social and eudaimonic well-being. Therefore, beauty, according to the context defined as creating a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere which is aesthetically pleasing, should be included in the regenerative tourism principles.

Lastly, it was newly discovered that the balance of connection and solitude needs to be cultivated by a regenerative tourism space. The duality was found to be connected to the highest overall well-being. This finding refers explicitly to the regenerative tourism stakeholder group of travelers.

**Theoretical and methodological contribution**

This study was the first qualitative research that explored travelers’ well-being in regenerative tourism, as far as to the author’s knowledge. Furthermore, it was the first study that conceptualized well-being in accordance with the regenerative tourism approach in a multidimensional way. Thereby, well-being was conceptualized beyond the prominent subjective well-being framework and comprised hedonic, social and eudaimonic well-being. By including social well-being as one of the well-being dimensions, the author furthermore contributed to filling the research gap on this under-represented dimension of well-being in tourism scholarship.
By using a narrative analysis approach, the context-specific stories of travelers could be interpreted to add to the complexity of the meaning towards the regenerative tourism experience. Furthermore, a narrative approach allowed to value the respondents' historical, cultural and emotional background.

8.2 Limitations
The limitations of this research study have to be acknowledged even though the methodological framework was chosen as a suitable approach to the best knowledge of the researcher. The researcher is aware that the anticipated number of interview partners was not met. The reasons for the relatively low number of interview partners were primarily language barriers between the researcher and on-site retreat participants, as fewer retreat guests were fluent in English as expected. Additionally, social distance to potential respondents that were contacted via Zoom reduced the number of actual participants. The researcher is aware that additional interview partners could have added to a nuanced presentation of results.

Furthermore, the author is aware of the limited representation of perspectives. Perspectives presented in the study include travelers and volunteers on-site and retrospective views, which were of diverse age groups, different genders, and cultural backgrounds. However, all respondents had a European background. Insights from guests from the global south could have added additional insights based on the assumption that well-being is culture-specific and would have counteracted the criticism that research on well-being is mostly western-centric. (Smith & Diekmann, 2017, Rockström et al., 2023) Moreover, none of the respondents was from Montenegro, where Mahakala Center is based. This viewpoint could have added more insights into how regenerative tourism experiences influence a traveller's well-being who lives where tourism is happening. Furthermore, only one interview partner identified as male, hence there was an imbalance of gender representation in this study. The author therefore recommends considering a balance in genders represented, as Liu et al. (2023) found that gender influences how well-being is perceived in tourism experiences.

Lastly, the researcher acknowledges that the conceptualization of well-being is developed from the background in tourism scholarship. Even though this approach
revealed valuable results, it may fall short in addressing the psychological aspects of multidimensional well-being. Hence, shortcomings in explanation from a psychological science viewpoint are acknowledged.

8.3 Directions for further research

Methodological research recommendations

From a methodological perspective, several future research suggestions emerged. As regenerative tourism as a research field emerged only in recent years, there are no results of longitudinal studies yet. Publications at this moment mostly include viewpoint papers and case studies of short duration. However, connected with the research findings, data collection over an extended period is needed to understand the long-term effects of regenerative tourism experiences specifically for exploring the traveler’s perspective. Hence, deriving from the finding that self-reflection and self-growth are part of the regenerative tourism experience as reflecting the eudaimonic well-being dimension, longitudinal studies are needed at this point.

Furthermore, a lack of inductive, qualitative research was identified by the researcher. However, these are needed at this point, as regenerative tourism research is still in its academic infancy. Moreover, due to the complexity and progressive nature of the regenerative tourism approach, explorative studies can lead to a better understanding of the new paradigm. Specifically, when extending the research on well-being of travelers, the researcher suggests including qualitative methods to value the subjective character of the well-being concept.

Additionally, the researcher suggests the inclusion of participatory methods in future studies. First, to value the importance of knowledge co-creation between scientists and tourism stakeholders and second, to add to the need for explorative knowledge creation at this development stage of the new tourism paradigm. Regarding the multidimensional conceptualization of well-being in regenerative tourism experiences in specific, the author recommends participatory methods to gain insights from the subjective perspective of individuals. For example, autophotography can be a promising methodological approach to value the subjective experience through the travelers’ viewpoint photographs. In autophotography, travelers take photographs to show what is relevant to them in
their experience. (Xanthe et al., 2017) Hence, travelers can show their meaning towards different regenerative tourism experiences and what they value most. Accordingly, this approach could add additional insights into the beliefs and meanings deriving from the analysis of narratives from the travelers perspective.

**Further research fields**

The author recommends several potential research directions based on the research gaps that evolved throughout the study. Further research fields in regenerative tourism should target travelers’ well-being as this perspective is still under-represented. In specific, it is recommended to study how focusing on travelers’ well-being can link back to the well-being of the whole tourism system.

Deriving from the novelty character of this study, future research can continue to explore which regenerative tourism experiences lead to hedonic, social and eudaimonic well-being, as the here presented results are not exhaustive. Furthermore, the author recommends exploring the three newly added aspects of experiencing beauty, a safe space and the balance of solitude and connection as part to the regenerative tourism experience to verify this assumption.

Additionally, conceptualizing travelers’ well-being in an alternative way beyond hedonic, social and eudaimonic well-being can again help to understand the additional aspects of the regenerative tourism experience. Possible conceptualization of well-being could include spiritual, physical or mental well-being.

Lastly, a future research recommendation is applying a critical viewpoint to the new regenerative tourism paradigm and exploring real outcomes and evidence of implications beyond the theoretical conceptualization. As regenerative tourism is seen as the successor of sustainable tourism, it needs to be critically evaluated if the same shortcomings are rising. In specific, greenwashing techniques of tourism actors should be questioned and ways to counteract these should be explored.
References


Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Introduction

My name is Sandrina, and I am doing a master’s degree in Sustainability and Tourism in Sweden. For my master thesis, I’d love to speak with you about your experience of being a guest at Mhakala Retreat and what impact it had on your well-being.

We would talk for about 45 minutes and you are most welcome to share any detail that comes to your mind. Everything that is important for you is of interest for me. I would like you to freely share your experiences and feelings.

- Thank you for your help and being open to speak about your experiences. Thank you for taking time to have this discussion with me.
- Your participation is voluntary, and you can stop any time.
- Your answers will be anonymized and used only for my research project. To be able to use your insights I will record your answers.
- If you feel comfortable with that I’d appreciate if you could confirm verbally or sign the document form.

Background story of respondents (Culture, History, Emotions).

Story about what brought you here.

1. Tell me the story of what brought you here. What made you come to this retreat?
2. What would you say was the main reason for you to came to this retreat?
   - So, would you say you came here to feel better?

Stories about what you did/your experiences.

1. Could you tell me about your most important / memorable moment here at the retreat?
2. How did this experience made you feel?
   - Would you say it was a feeling of joy? Tell me about it.
   - Did you establish a connection with others? Tell me about it.
   - Did you feel like you learned something? Tell me about it.
1. **Could you tell me about a challenging/intense experience you had here at the retreat?**
2. How did you overcome this challenging situation? What helped you?
3. How do you feel now about it?
   - Would you say you learned from it? Tell me about it.
   - Would you say sharing and exchanging your story with others helped? In what ways?
   - So would you say having time to reflect about it has helped you? In what ways?
   - Would you say the Retreat allowed the space to be alone with your emotions/finding your own space?

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1. **Can you share how it was for you to come to this place where you live closely with others?**
2. How do you feel now having experiences here together with other people?
3. Can you share the most memorable moment that you shared with the others?
   - Would you say you felt connected to the people? How did that feel?
   - Would you say you felt like part of a community here? How did that feel?
   - Would you say the experiences that you had deepened the relationship with others? In what ways?
   - Would you say you valued being alone and having space for your own?

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**About the Regenerative Tourism place.**

1. **Can you describe what you appreciated most here at the retreat space**  
   (apart from the actual scheduled workshops)?
2. How did you feel in this moment/in this surrounding?
   - Would you say the aesthetic, or the beauty of the place inspired you?
   - Would you say the nature helped to feel good?
   - Would you say the calm and peaceful atmosphere helped to feel good?
Would you say the food helped to connect with people? Would you say the food helped to feel good physically?

Would you say the silence and peaceful atmosphere helped to feel good?

**Lasting effects**

1. **What impact did the retreat have on you / on your well-being?**
2. What will you take home from this retreat?
   - How would you say you learned new ways to preserve your well-being?
   - How would you say the retreat impacted your mindset (about your well-being)?
   - How would you say the retreat impacted the way you treat yourself/others/nature?
   - How would you say the retreat helped you to find more joy also in your daily life?

**Ending question to test concepts.**

1. What would you say is most important for a place like Mahakala to be able to enhance well-being of guests?
2. How would you describe well-being? What is important about it for you?
3. How would you describe a regenerative tourism experience? What is meaningful about it to you? How do you think about regenerative tourism, the kind of tourism space here?
Appendix B: Consent form for respondents

Interview consent form

Project name: Regenerative Tourism & Human well-being
Interviewer: Sandrina Maria Thurow

Purpose

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of my master degree in Sustainability and Tourism at Linnaeus University. Your support is much appreciated!

As part of ensuring ethical standards in the research process of my project, I would like you to review the subsequent statements and know at the start of the interview whether you agree with how I intend on using the information you provide in the interview in my research. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Please review the following statements:

- Your participation in the interview is voluntary. You decide what information you want to share with me as part of the interview and research process.
- With your permission, I will record the audio of our interview. This information is the basis for an anonymized transcript I will write and serves as data for my study and the later publication of results.
- Access to the recording and the original transcripts is limited to two parties: me and academic staff of Linnaeus University, who might need to check the data to assess the quality and integrity of my study.
- I will anonymize any summary interview content and direct quotes from the interview made public through academic publications, presentations or other outlets so you cannot be identified. I will also ensure that any other information in the interview that could potentially identify you is not revealed.
- Your anonymized data will be stored for research purposes and publications related to this research project for three years after completion of this study.
- No other use of your information will be made unless you provide explicit written permission.

Consent

I agree with the above terms of handling my interview data.