

TOWARDS REGENERATIVE SOLUTIONS

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1 September 2022

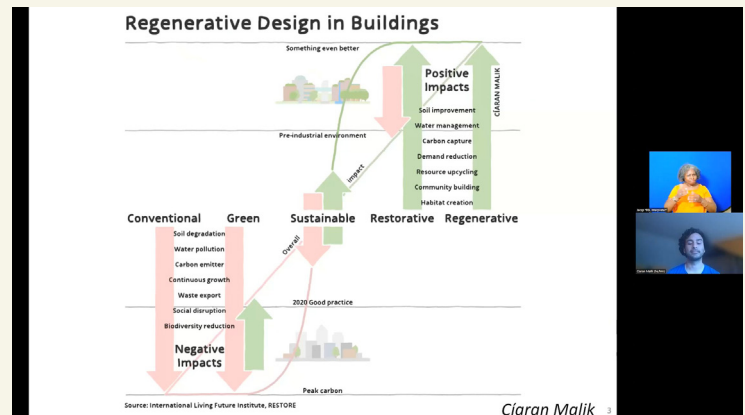
Towards regenerative solutions is a text written in response to **How can we move beyond sustainability?**, the fourth of a series of six online *Constellations* ° *Assemblies*. The event took place on 20 July 2022 and was held within UP Projects' digital participation space, **The Hall**.

How can we move beyond sustainability? was moderated by **Cíaran Malik**, Structural Engineer, Regenerative Designer and Teacher, and invited Amy Franceschini, founder of **Future Farmers**, and Andy Merritt, artist and one half of artist-duo **Something & Son**, to explore if and how the public art community can move beyond the notion of sustainability towards a collective regenerative mindset.

When using the following terms in this text, I will refer to the definitions available in the online publication, **RESTORE: Rethinking Sustainability Towards a Regenerative Economy** (Pg. 8):

- Sustainable: Limiting damage caused
- Restorative: Restoring social & ecological systems to a healthy state.
- Regenerative: Enabling social & ecological systems to evolve

Cíaran began the event by talking about how regenerative design principles are often misunderstood as simply enhanced versions of sustainability. The diagram in the image (right) places sustainability between conventional design and regenerative practice. While he argues, this is a useful place to start, the processes it describes feel increasingly inadequate to capture regenerative design.



Cíaran Malik, *How can we move beyond sustainability?*, 20 July 2022

"It looks like you just need to take Sustainable design and turn it up to 11. I would say that kind of box ticking approach would take you to restorative. Regenerative design requires a new way of thinking."
To help frame the discussion on how to elevate public art projects beyond the notion of sustainability, Cíaran offered three aspects for us to reflect on: co-evolution (how projects can be understood as processes that are evolving); nested systems (how these are connected to the systems within which they are situated) and essence (the impact these have outside of themselves).

In response to this introduction, Amy's presentation focused on Flatbread Society, a public artwork and long-term project in Oslo, Norway, taking the form of a bakehouse, a cultivated grain field and public programming. The project comprises a common area in the waterfront development of Bjørvika which brings together not only local communities, but also a range of practitioners (farmers, over builders, astronomers, artists, soil scientists, and bakers) aligned through a common interest in the long and complex relation we have to grain.

Andy's presentation explored a number of projects produced by Something & Son, including Farmshop, S.W.I.F.T. Code, and Trolley Reef.



Amy Franceschini - Flatbread Society,
How can we move beyond sustainability?, 20 July 2022

The presentation specifically focused on a project currently in development on the Isle of Sheppey, by the river Thames estuary, and realised in collaboration with the art organisation Cement Fields. Andy's presentation foregrounded his intention to create experimental economies around projects, exploring how we can use the infrastructure and actions of our everyday life and turn these into benefits for other species.

Reminding us of the way nature builds layers on top of existing infrastructure through stack systems, Andy points out that natural species don't usually have singular but rather multiple functions. However, within humanity we tend to build things with just one function. *"Humanity is inventing all these amazing things and 99% are of no use to the planet or other species"*. Using this position as a starting point, Andy talked about his commitment to mirroring the stack systems approach found in nature, enabling the environments he intervenes in to evolve and to benefit from the multiple functions. Something & Sons are currently formulating a strategy for interventions along the Sheppey coastline. As the area is one of the worst places for erosion in the UK, the project is creating a layer of allotments on top of the large concrete coastal fences to support biodiversity, providing habitats and food for other species.

Cíaran asked the speakers for their perspectives in relation to scaling up their projects. Amy described the approach of Future Farmers as grounded in the idea of creating a platform for other platforms, or a collective of collectives.

In this case the idea of scaling is more like a pilot project where potential is always there. *"If something is finished then it requires maintenance, whereas a pilot has the potential to always grow, develop, and become something new"*.

Mirroring the principles at the core of regenerative design, both speakers talked about how their projects not only sustain themselves but are also support systems for other projects to grow through knowledge and resource sharing. Andy also talked about the way in which the artworld creates the conditions for projects to be innovative and break down doors, setting precedents and allowing things to happen that wouldn't in other circumstances.



Andy Merritt - Trolley Reef,
How can we move beyond sustainability?, 20 July 2022

Picking up on the constant references of boundaries, barriers, and restraints brought up by both speakers, Cíaran asked what role these play in the development of projects and how limitations help define the parameters and relevance for intervening in specific contexts.

Amy talked about how doubt plays an important part in her practice. Before committing to the Flatbread Society project, Future Farmers did question whether they indeed wanted to take part in a capital waterfront development. After some reflection, they began to see the value of being involved in the process. *"You do get invited to the 16th floor, you get a seat at the table where there is this little window of possibility to change the way things are made or developed"*.



Andy Merritt, Cíaran Malik, Amy Franceschini,
How can we move beyond sustainability?, 20 July 2022

The founder of Future Farmers acknowledged that the project responded to the lack of local motivation for the project among local communities precisely by providing community benefits through alternative ways of doing things such as the temporary bakehouse and local farming. In terms of the local governance motivations, Amy acknowledged that while the project provided the development with positive PR, it also effected positive change by impacting local green policies, forming an urban gardening community called Herligheten and creating a full time position for a farmer hired in collaboration with the Norwegian Farmers Union. Oslo became the first city in Norway to have a city farmer funded by the union, setting a precedent for other cities to follow.

As the speakers reflected on the social and political complexities that are inevitably involved when developing projects in public spaces, Cíaran reminded us that we shouldn't try to separate ourselves from nature. As you are looking forward at the impact of the climate emergency, while simultaneously looking backwards at what the ecology of a site used to be prior to human intervention, how do you reconcile these two processes while also fitting them within the present political, social, and wider changes that happen within a site?

Rather than developing projects that create pristine though separate ecosystems, how can we create systems that we can interact with and have an interdependent relationship with?

According to Andy "there is a different model where different ecosystems can coexist, sustain themselves and also provide, which is what we would have done millennia ago".

Resources provided by Cíaran Malik during the event - questions that relate to the three aspects (co-evolving process, nested systems, and essence) that inform new ways of thinking about regenerative design practice:

- Co-evolving process: Do you think you understood the history of the site? What changes were made in the area leading to your project coming to life? What do you imagine your project becoming in the future?
- Nested systems: What do people around the project consider to be the area? How far do you have to walk to leave here? What areas does your project interact with? How do those wider areas impact your project?
- Essence: What aspects of the history of the site did you understand? Geology, ecological, social, cultural, economic? What has the area been when it has been most successful? What ways have people changed the area that have been less successful?

Regenerative design references:

- Pamala Mang, Bill Reed. 2020. *Regenerative Development and Design*
- Pamela Mang, Ben Haggard, Regenesi. 2016 *Regenerative Development and Design: A Framework for Evolving Sustainability*
- Restore. 2018. *WG1 Sustainability, Restorative to Regenerative*
- Carol Sanford. 2020. *The Regenerative Life: Transform any organization, our society, and your destiny*

You can now watch ***How can we move beyond sustainability?*** as an accessible event recording with closed captions and BSL interpretation.

Constellations is curated by UP Projects and delivered in partnership with Flat Time House and Liverpool Biennial, and is generously supported by Art Fund, Arts Council England, The Barrington Hibbert Associates Access Fund, and the Constellations Patrons and Supporters.