

Regenerative Community Planning ***Story of Place® – A Transformative Change Process***

Communities seeking sustainability face an increasingly complex, rapidly shifting environment. Technical solutions can only succeed and endure in the context of community understanding, cooperation and support. This requires vigorous participation by multiple diverse stakeholders, adding even more complexity.

Story of Place® is a regenerative change process that builds the capability to see opportunity in complexity, and the will to take on the whole-system transformation required for enduring change. It sets the stage for joining diverse stakeholders around a larger shared purpose and effort by approaching change efforts in terms of the contribution people and a community can make to the health of their place (rather than a narrow focus on harm reduction), and the reciprocity and resilience they gain as a result. It develops the ability to think, act and collaborate from a whole-systems understanding. It reveals opportunities for initiatives that can simultaneously stimulate economies that nourish and are nourished by the distinctive ecological and cultural diversity of their place; grow community creativity and resilience; reweave the bond between nature and culture; and promote collective decision making and collaborative action.

Key elements of this approach: There is no formula for carrying out a Story of Place® change process; each is designed to address the unique nature of a place, and the requirements of the change initiative. A framework of key elements guides its design and implementation, and includes 6 phases that iterate as it moves out and across scales.

Defining reveals the system (versus the element or problem) that the change effort needs to focus on to accomplish its overarching aim, and the nested socio-ecological wholes, or place, within which the system exists.

Discovering begins with an Integral Assessment that develops three elements critical to transformative change: 1) an authentic basis for a shared community identity and vocation; 2) identification of systemic leverage points and indicators, and 3) the regeneration of a “story field” that promotes collaboration through growing connection to and caring about place. Focused on patterns and patterning rather than data collection, this whole-systems assessment (cultural, economic, geographic, climatic, biological and ecological) develops understanding of how community and place work as an interdependent living whole.

Signifying engages community members in developing a “story of their place” as a vehicle for collectively grasping complexity and growing shared meaning across widening rings of engagement. It unleashes creative energy for individual and collective actions, while maintaining alignment with the authenticity of place and the overall aim of the change initiative. Starting

with the planning teams and moving out, facilitated dialogues enable people and organizations to share and create their own stories within the story of place framework, seeing their place within the whole, and the distinctive contribution they can and do make.

Integrating draws on the systemic understanding to develop strategies and action plans that harmonize human actions with the underlying dynamics of place and grow a shared sense of community identity and vocation.

Embedding focuses on embedding into the community the regenerative capability to creatively adapt while maintaining coherence across all its dimensions—economic, cultural, social and environmental. In a living world, sustainability is a process not a steady state to be achieved and then maintained. Human sustainability requires maintaining the dynamic potential for further evolution, which in turn depends on the regenerative adaptive capacity of both human and natural living systems within a place.