What is sustainable depends on where and when. Every place is unique. There is no one-size-fits-all solution.
Communities regenerate not from the outside in but the inside out. Wherever we work, rather than import a set of solutions, we begin with a process of discovery. Story of Place® is the approach we use to understand a community. It’s a systemic and participatory process that identifies and honors the unique nature of a place and the people who live there—and a powerful experience that renews a community’s spirit.

In locations as diverse as Mexico City and Paonia Colorado, we use Story of Place to discover core patterns that predate humans and still exist. Through “kitchen table” conversations, in scientific and historical data, in Indian legends and even novels, we find clues to the underlying patterns of a place, and its people. In lifting up those patterns, we honor the distinctive character of the land and the community.

People see what activities and aspirations are appropriate for the place, so that the community can recreate itself systemically and sustainably. The challenge comes in discerning the inherent patterns that reveal the essence of a place.

We have a talent for that.

Regenesis

**Story of Place®** is a regenerative approach to sustainable community development that grows a community’s capacity to discover, share, and live out a story that’s uniquely its own:

- Stimulating a sustainable [living] economy that builds, attracts and retains uniquely appropriate industries, businesses and talent while simultaneously nourishing and being nourished by the distinctive ecological and cultural diversity of their place

- Growing community creativity and resilience through self-organizing learning networks and citizen leaders

- Reweaving the bond between nature and culture, integrating human aspirations with the evolution of natural systems to create elegant solutions grown from the uniqueness of place

- Awakening a deep sense of connection and caring to inspire collaborative change

- Creating authentic branding that lifts up what is at the core of the uniqueness, health, and vitality of a particular place and speaks to what a place can become, and how people can contribute to and benefit from that future.

- Providing a basis for community-aligned development—chartering and encouraging real estate development projects that contribute to a community’s health and unique destiny

As people re-discover their place and its potential in the world, their connections deepen and they begin to appreciate what they share with one another as a community. Story of Place® replaces limited problem solving with true insights about how a whole community can thrive.
The City of McAllen is a thriving, business-oriented city in the “Rio-plex”—the delta area that extends north and south of the Rio Grande. A mixed-use project, Central Park was seen as a keystone in the City’s effort to revitalize its urban core, and eventually revise the City’s master plan. The City wanted an iconic project that reflected its status as an international business center while maintaining and reawakening a connection to its heritage and unique character. The Story of Place® process developed an understanding of the core or essence pattern of relationships that was present whenever and wherever the human and natural communities of this place worked in mutually beneficial partnership. The result: This understanding, presented at a five-day master planning charrette, served as a context for unifying and inspiring the community, an organizing core for the creative work of the charrette, and the basis of the design guidelines, principles and planning concepts that reflected local culture and ecology rather than abstract green planning guidelines. As the developer and city planners noted, the process of “design by discovery” that emerged from the story led to a master plan and design that was both highly innovative and reflective of the deepest sources of life and health of the place as a whole.
Finger Lakes-Genesee region, a nine-county region in western New York launched a comprehensive regional sustainability plan that included energy and transportation infrastructure investment, municipal policies and plans, greenhouse gas emission reduction, climate change, stakeholder alignment and capacity building for affected parties—integrated with economic development. The challenge was to develop a plan that integrated with and supported badly needed economic development, and avoided silo solutions for the multiple aspects being addressed. The result: An innovative planning process that integrated a wide range of technical expertise around a place-sourced holistic approach to planning, while building systemic thinking capabilities. Story of Place® provided the integrating framework for the work of the separate expert technical teams and the stakeholder engagement strategies. It helped identify critical focus areas, systemic leverage points for action, more integrated and place-specific sustainability indicators and strategies for stakeholder engagement. The process will produce a living, evolving document, building local capability to maintain its relevance and value through continuing re-evaluation and updating.
In the North Fork Valley of Colorado, different cultural values had divided communities into camps, turning land use decisions, economic development and governance into arenas of bitter dispute. Understanding the unique character of their place enabled dialogues about what they mutually cared about.

The result: Crystallization of a collective sense of the potential their place had to offer as a “Learning Valley” that stimulated numerous business ideas inspired by that insight—ideas that were creative and cross-collaborative and envisioned how the different small businesses could operate as a mutually supportive system.
Santa Fe, NM is famous for its artisanal cultures, rich history, unique architecture and its “old world” streets. However, starting in the 1950’s and 60’s, Santa Fe began a linear mode of planning that contrasted dramatically with the traditional organic patterns of settlement and development. Soon Santa Fe had wide-lane, linear streets that severed neighborhoods and environmental connections. One of these streets is the six-lane commercial corridor St. Michael’s Drive. Realizing that St. Michael’s Drive is no longer serving them, many in the community wanted to change the traditional top-down planning process into a homegrown, bottom-up approach that can reclaim these severed environmental and neighborhood connections. Story of Place® was seen as key to building collective support for that change. The result: The Mayor, council members, city planners, community activists and business leaders came together to help innovate a new kind of planning process—one that is a citizen driven, neighborhood sourced model, with the aim of creating a partnership between the government and its citizens toward the planning and design of a large-scale infrastructure redevelopment of St. Michael’s Drive. (Project led by Story of Place Institute)
In Baja California, the federal government had sited a new coastal community over an eroding estuary that lay between the mountains and the sea. Once a pivotal factor in the health and abundance of both the marine and terrestrial systems, further degradation would turn it into a source of deteriorating health instead. The Story of Place® provided the foundation for a team of designers and scientists to redesign a community in which a living estuary was an integral part. The result: a new masterplan created villages integrated with tree-lined canals to re-establish the functioning of the estuary, which was projected to produce 500 metric tons of fish per hectare in an area where marine life had almost disappeared. The project’s sales soared and homeowners now see themselves as intimately connected stewards of the health of their place.