

Living Hospitality

The Art of
Shaping
Relationships

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The Art of Shaping Relationships

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We are part of living systems.

Why a Naturepaper?

This document is not a white paper. White papers often describe strategies, methods and solutions, asking how we can act more effectively within existing systems.

Our starting point lies one level deeper. We ask how we understand these systems in the first place. We question the thinking that underlies them before addressing metrics. Effective solutions begin with effective thinking.

Anyone seeking to understand how organisations can remain fit for the future in an increasingly complex world can find an extraordinary teacher in nature. Nature inherently demonstrates how diversity and connectedness help living systems adapt to change and allow something new to emerge again and again.

So we begin with a fundamental question:

What can we learn from nature?

We are convinced that anyone who wants to shape the future of hospitality should first understand how living systems work – and what it means to be part of one. From this comes a different way of looking at strategies, methods and solutions.

That is why we call this document a **Naturepaper**.

Introduction

We are in a crisis of relationships. Climate change and biodiversity loss are its most visible symptoms, however the real challenge lies deeper.

Today we know more than ever about climate change, planetary boundaries and the consequences of our actions. Sustainability has become established in business, politics and society. At the same time, many people feel increasingly unable to act effectively despite all this knowledge.

The hospitality sector is right in the middle of this tension. Many businesses want to take responsibility. At the same time, economic pressure is increasing, people are in short supply, combined with the rising expectations of guests and society. Complexity is growing – and with it has come the feeling that we are reactive to change rather than pro-actively shaping it.

The problem is not a lack of willingness. Most hosts want to run good businesses in which people feel well while making positive contributions to the environment and society.

But perhaps we are asking the wrong questions. What if the real challenge is not that we lack time, money or people? What if it lies in a way of seeing the world that separates connections which are, in reality, inseparable?

This Naturepaper explores precisely this question. It invites us to stop seeing hospitality as a sum of individual processes and instead understand it as a living system – a place where relationships can be consciously shaped. **A liveable future emerges where people and the more-than-human world strengthen one another.**

1. How We Understand Organisations Changes Everything

Organisations today are confronted with a multitude of changes happening simultaneously. Climate change, biodiversity loss, geopolitical tensions, labour shortages, digitalisation, artificial intelligence and economic uncertainty no longer appear as separate challenges. They reinforce one another and change the conditions in which organisations operate.

Many companies therefore experience a constant need to adapt. What provided orientation yesterday is often no longer enough today. Decisions are becoming more complex, change management faster and the future increasingly harder to predict. The real challenge today is less about solving individual problems and more about shaping organisations so that they can remain dynamic, capable of learning, adapting and creating a viable future under these conditions.

Against this backdrop, sustainability also takes on a new meaning. The sustainability movement has shaped our sector profoundly. Hardly any hotel, destination or tourism company today is not dealing with issues such as energy efficiency, regional supply chains, waste reduction or social responsibility. Certifications, frameworks, sustainability reports and carbon accounting are expressions of a serious effort to take responsibility.

This is major progress, but the conditions have changed. Many sustainability approaches focus on individual fields of action: energy, mobility, purchasing, waste or social responsibility. In an increasingly complex world, this perspective alone is no longer enough.

The challenge is how organisations can remain viable – ecologically, socially and economically – under conditions of growing complexity.

This tension is prominent in hospitality. Sustainability is often considered as an additional field of responsibility – alongside sales, marketing, human resources or quality management. In an already demanding operational environment, it can quickly become yet another requirement to deal with, rather than an integrated part of organisational development.

This creates a paradox. Sustainable action is more important than ever and increasingly expected by guests. Yet many businesses feel that the demands are growing faster than their ability to meet them. They have already invested, implemented measures and changed processes, and still neither the to-do list seems to get shorter nor the ecological situation better. Responsibility turns into overload. Commitment does not automatically create a sense of agency. There is a gap in the understanding of where to intervene as opposed to the willingness to act. Identifying how the individual challenges are connected, and how many individual measures can become effective development of the organisation as a whole.

Sustainability remains indispensable, but its impact increasingly depends on whether organisations learn to deal with complexity, change and interdependence.

This leads to a more fundamental question: How should we understand organisations so that sustainable action can truly become effective?

2. We Have Forgotten to Understand Relationships as the Foundation of Our Actions

Imagine a tree whose branches are beginning to wither. If we treated each branch individually without looking at the soil, the trunk, the roots or the water, little would change. We would be working on the symptom rather than the system.

We behave in a similar way with many of the challenges of our time. We treat symptoms without looking at the relationships from which they emerge. **Our greatest challenge is not a lack of knowledge. It is a way of thinking that separates connections and loses sight of relationships.**

Many thinkers – including Otto Scharmer – describe the crises of our time as expressions of three fundamental divides: our separation from nature, from one another and from ourselves.¹ We share this perspective. For hospitality, we would formulate the thought more simply:

We have forgotten to understand relationships as the foundation of our actions.

Nature lives through relationships. No living being exists independently of the world around it. Life emerges and changes through interaction with other living beings and the conditions that surround them. Every action changes the system, and the

system in turn acts back on every action. When we lose sight of these connections, we make decisions that may seem sensible in isolation but have unintended consequences in the wider system.

Our relationship with the more-than-human world

Nature becomes a resource. Animals become products. Food becomes a commodity. Landscapes become locations. Where we see only function, the relationship disappears from view.

Yet every decision reaches far beyond the boundaries of our own business. Purchasing influences agriculture. Agriculture influences biodiversity. Food influences climate, health and global justice. If we do not consider the connectivity of these relationships, we create impacts we never intended.

Our relationship with ourselves

We have also lost relationships within ourselves. Most people want to act responsibly. At the same time, they experience everyday life as shaped by time pressure, expectations and economic constraints. A gap emerges between attitude and action. Responsibility becomes obligation; agency becomes exhaustion.

When we lose contact with our own values, it becomes increasingly difficult to consciously shape relationships in the world around us.

Relationships within the organisation

Organisations, too, often think in separate areas. Purchasing is considered independently from food and cuisine; people separately from organisational culture; profit separately from responsibility; and brand separately from purpose and values.

But in reality, all of these things are connected. Decisions affect one another, changes in relationships create consequences

elsewhere. Isolated measures can therefore be sensible and still achieve too little to the entirety of the system.

The good news is that this separation is not irreversible, the principle is not new – the challenge is. Hospitality has always been about relationships: between host and guest, between people, places, food and the more-than-human world. The challenge today is to carry this principle into a world whose connections are increasingly more complex, more global and more consequential.

If we want to understand how relationships make a system alive and resilient, it is worth looking to nature.

3.

When Organisations Become Living Systems

What makes nature so successful? For almost four billion years, it has created life. It survives crises, continually adapts to changing conditions and creates something new again and again. It is resilient. It is adaptive. It enables diversity. It regenerates itself. Applying an organizational lens, it is worth looking more closely at how this works.

In a forest, a highly complex system emerges from the interaction of fungi, microorganisms, insects, plants and animals. It continually adapts to changing conditions, survives crises and renews itself.

Living systems reveal a number of recurring principles. They cannot simply be transferred to organisations, however **they can change the way we look at the conditions that make organisations resilient, adaptive and alive.**

Nature lives through relationships

The defining feature of living systems is interdependent relationships. We tend to look at individual things: the tree, the bird or the fungus. Their real strength does not lie only in themselves, it emerges in the relationships between them.

A forest is far more than the sum of its trees, it is a living system. What makes it alive is the network of fungi, microorganisms, water, light, insects, plants and animals. This network enables exchange, growth, mutual support and adaptation. Its resilience emerges largely from the diversity and quality of these relationships.

Aliveness emerges through interaction – not through the individual parts.

How would our view of a hotel change if we measured its success not first by its efficiency, but by the quality of its relationships? Between employees. With guests. With partners. With the region. And with nature.

Nature strengthens diversity

Living systems do not strive for uniformity. They thrive on diversity, different plants, animals and microorganisms perform different functions. This diversity makes an ecosystem resilient. If one part fails, others can take on its role. Diversity creates adaptability.

Applied to organisations, diversity means more than different skills. Different biographies, perspectives, experiences, cultural backgrounds and ways of thinking expand a system's repertoire.

It is not enough for diversity simply to exist, people must also be able to contribute their perspectives. Diversity needs inclusion to become effective.

In this way, diversity expands an organisation's ability to respond to different situations and changes.

How diverse are the perspectives from which a hotel makes decisions? And how well does it succeed in making these differences productive?

No living system exists for itself

No living system exists independently. A forest lives through harmonization and balanced exchange between water, light, soil, climate and the many living beings around it. Its boundaries are permeable.

In organisations, we often draw the system boundary around our own business. Yet a hotel does not develop independently of its surroundings. Employees, guests, producers, suppliers, neighbours, the local economy, landscape and nature influence what is possible within the business – and are in turn influenced by its decisions.

A hotel strengthens its own future viability when it also strengthens the people, places and natural foundations on which it depends.

What becomes possible if we understand all these actors not as the hotel's environment, but as parts of its web of relationships?

Nature strengthens its foundations

Before a tree grows upwards, it develops roots. Before a forest becomes resilient, fertile soil develops over many years. Real growth begins beneath the surface.

Organisations also need conditions on which development can build. These include trust, knowledge, respect, good collaboration, psychological safety, mutual understanding and the opportunity to take responsibility.

These foundations do not emerge by themselves. Leadership, structures and everyday collaboration strengthen or weaken them. And they influence how well people can deal with change, solve problems and develop something new. How much trust exists? How safe do people feel bringing their ideas forward? What opportunities do they have to take responsibility? How do we learn together?

Anyone who wants lasting good results must nurture the conditions from which good results emerge.

What conditions do we create so that people, ideas and collaboration can flourish?

Nature lives in cycles

Living systems do not grow continuously.

In nature, growth and rest, flowering and retreat, emergence and decay alternate. Leaves do not fall because the tree has failed. They fall because this is part of what makes new life possible.

Organisations often think differently. Growth is seen as success, stillness as risk and decline as failure.

Nature offers another perspective. Development is not linear. There are times of departure and times of consolidation. Times of harvest and times of letting go. Times of intense activity and times when what matters most happens beneath the surface.

Not everything that ends is a loss. Some endings create the space for something new.

Where does our business need growth right now – and where does it need rest? What should we continue to develop, what should we let go of? And where do we need to create space for something new?

“Life creates conditions conducive to life.”

– Janine Benyus

Few sentences capture the logic of living systems better. There is a powerful thought here for organisations too: we cannot fully plan or control the future, but we can create conditions in which people, relationships and ideas can flourish.

We simply need to remember what hospitality originally was: the art of shaping relationships.

4.

The Relationship Model of Living Hospitality

A hotel has to make money. At the same time, it affects people, society and the more-than-human world. Both belong together.

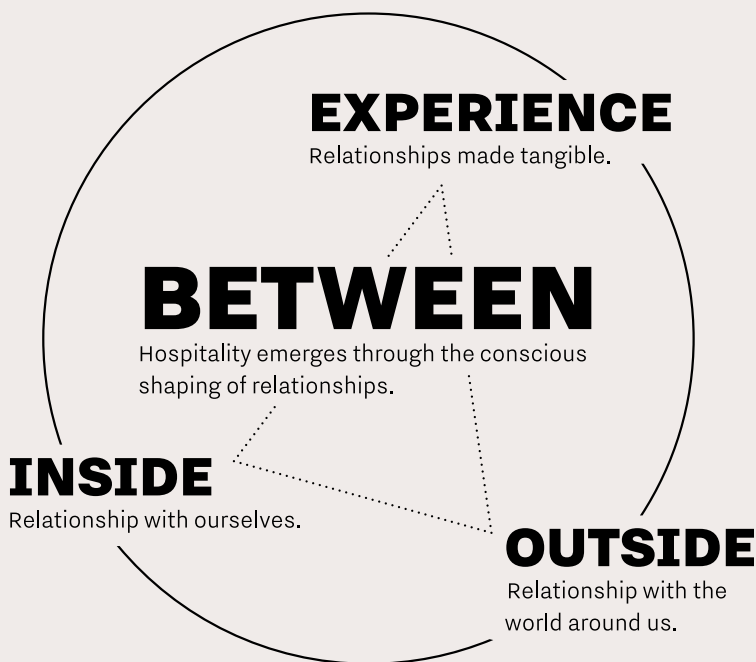
Hosts can think in terms of revenue and feel compassion. They can increase efficiency while considering ecological consequences. They can want to be economically successful while asking themselves: In what society and in what more-than-human world does this success take place?

We trust hosts to think both small and large at the same time. And we believe organisations need precisely this ability to remain successful in the long term. Living Hospitality grows out of this understanding. Our relationship model helps translate it into concrete decisions.

BETWEEN – the quality in between

BETWEEN is the connecting principle. Hospitality emerges between people, interests, decisions and their effects.

Who is affected by our decision – directly and indirectly? Who gains, and who bears the costs or risks? Which relationships are we strengthening or weakening? What dependencies are we creating? What comes back to us from the system? Who should be involved in this decision?



The Relationship Model of Living Hospitality

INSIDE – From what inner stance do we act?

INSIDE focuses on the people and the organisation itself: attitude, energy, values, capabilities and the conditions under which decisions are made.

What do we actually stand for – not only on paper? Where do we act against our own convictions? Do employees understand the ‘why’ behind decisions? Who is allowed to participate and take responsibility? Where does resistance emerge – and what is it telling us? Where do people lose energy? Where do fear, cynicism or cognitive dissonance emerge? What do people need in order to do a really good job?

OUTSIDE – What world are we creating?

OUTSIDE expands the space of decision-making beyond the organisation. The hotel is understood as part of a larger system with which it is in constant exchange: with people and other living beings, with the region and with the ecosystems on which it depends.

Where does what we use come from? What forms of production and economic activity are we financing? What effects arise for climate, biodiversity, health, other living beings and society? What do we take from the region – and what do we give back? Which consequences are we shifting to other places or into the future? What impact could we strengthen instead through the same decision?

EXPERIENCE – How does this become hospitality?

EXPERIENCE translates attitude (INSIDE) and impact (OUTSIDE) into what people actually experience. A guest does not experience a strategy, organisational structure or sustainability matrix. They experience a hotel.

What should the guest feel here? Which decision should become easy for them? What do they experience without us having to explain it? Where do we create friction, paternalism or contradictions? Where do our values become tangible and natural? What might the guest take with them into everyday life?

The model in practice

A model becomes interesting only when it helps us see the world differently and creates new possibilities for action. The relationship model therefore starts one step earlier than many instruments and processes: with the perspective from which we look at an organisation. Familiar questions change. Connections become visible that are easily separated in everyday operations.

In the following two chapters, we explore this through two very different areas of hospitality.

Chapter 5 takes us to our food offers. Food reveals how many relationships converge in what appears to be a simple decision, and how attitude can become a concrete experience.

Chapter 6 takes us into team development. Here we see that a hotel team is not a collection of isolated functions, but a living system whose relationships shape what a hotel radiates to the outside world and what it enables its guests to experience.

Two different perspectives. One shared understanding: **Living Hospitality emerges where we stop looking at things in isolation and begin to consciously shape the relationships between them.**

And in the end, it is also about money

Living Hospitality does not promise that every right decision will immediately be rewarded economically. Some changes initially cost attention, time and money. Its strength lies elsewhere: it seeks to develop businesses so that they remain economically, socially and ecologically viable in the long term.

When we consider relationships and feedback loops, we recognise causes earlier instead of continually repairing symptoms. This can reduce staff turnover, decrease dependencies, increase learning capacity, improve offers and strengthen loyalty. Not all of this can be measured in Euros immediately. In the long term, however, it has a very concrete influence on how well an organisation can respond to change and operate economically.

The quality of a hotel's relationships is therefore one of the foundations of economic stability.

5.

The Power of Food

Nowhere do the relationships of a hotel become more visible than on the plate.

Food is therefore at the heart of Living Hospitality. Here, attitude, economic decisions, people and the more-than-human world meet directly. And the guest can taste the result.

A dish is never just a dish. Numerous relationships converge in it: between guest and kitchen, producers and agriculture, soil and water, climate and biodiversity, people and other living beings, culture and region.

Food is therefore relationship work. With every purchasing decision, every dish and every menu, a business shapes relationships: with guests and employees, producers and region, soils, plants and other living beings – and with its own values.

Food connects inner attitude and the more-than-human world

What a business buys and serves reveals its understanding of quality. Which kind of agriculture it supports. What role health plays. How it treats other living beings. What regionality means to it, and ultimately how it develops tradition. This is about far more than the origin of individual ingredients – for example, whether they come from the region.

Agriculture can be conventional – or organic. It can primarily grow plants for human consumption or devote large parts of its land and harvest to animal feed. It can include animals as means of production – or, as in biocyclic-vegan agriculture, operate entirely without animal husbandry and animal-derived

inputs. Purchasing decisions help support all these different forms.

On the plate, attitude becomes a concrete decision.

With every dish, a hotel reaches far beyond its own premises. A breakfast egg, a piece of beef, a lentil patty or an apple each stand at the end of a web of relationships. They require different amounts of land and water, support different forms of agriculture and have different impacts on climate, biodiversity, animals and health.

The guest does not need to understand all these connections first. They can taste them.

Food creates identity.

A single dish can anchor a place more strongly in memory than the entire room design.

Food is never just nourishment, it is memory, culture, home, ritual and belonging. That is why food shapes the identity of a hotel so strongly. People remember their grandmother's cake, a holiday breakfast, a flavour they had never experienced before.

For hotels and restaurants, this creates an enormous opportunity. A distinctive cuisine tells a story about where a place is, who it is connected to, and how it understands its region and traditions. Tradition does not mean standing still. Living cuisine preserves what is valuable and develops what no longer works under today's conditions.

Taste can create memory. Repeated positive experiences strengthen the relationship with a hotel and shape its brand.

There is an opportunity to create an experience even in the simplest moments of utility.

Food makes complexity tangible

We can talk at length about climate change, biodiversity, soil health, health or animal ethics... Or we can serve an incredibly good mushroom dumpling.

That does not make the big questions smaller. It translates them into an experience that works immediately. People do not eat according to scientific tables. They eat what tastes good, what feels familiar, what other people eat and what feels right in the moment.

So the principle is: First desire, then logic.

Food can change what feels normal.

Hotels have particular power here. For a certain period of time, people are taken out of their everyday lives. They experience a different breakfast, discover a new dish or encounter familiar regional cuisine in a new way.

What feels natural, attractive and genuinely good does not have to be experienced as change. It can simply become the new normal. What surprises today can become familiar tomorrow. What becomes familiar can become a habit.

This is the power of food for Living Hospitality: it translates large interconnections into concrete experiences and can thereby change relationships, perceptions and habits.

A dish viewed through the relationship model

Let us look closely at our mushroom dumpling. More precisely: mushroom dumplings with braised pointed cabbage and a rich onion jus. A familiar dish with a strong connection to the region. Viewed through our relationship model, we can see how many relationships are shaped by a single culinary decision.

INSIDE – Relationship with ourselves

The dish connects attitude and action. A hotel that wants to take responsibility for climate, biodiversity, health and animals translates this intention directly into its offer.

At the same time, this is not a cuisine of omission. Mushrooms provide umami and depth, braised pointed cabbage brings sweetness and roasted flavours, and the onion jus provides richness. The kitchen team can use its craft and creativity to develop regional cuisine rather than merely replacing animal ingredients.

This also opens up a different perspective on professional pride: We cook this way because we believe it is the better cuisine for our hotel and our time.

OUTSIDE – Relationship with the more-than-human world

With this dish, the hotel changes relationships far beyond its own kitchen.

Plant-based ingredients cause significantly lower greenhouse-gas emissions and require considerably less agricultural land than a comparable dish with beef. No animals are raised and killed for the dish. Instead of financing feed production and animal husbandry, purchasing directly supports the cultivation of food for people. The ingredients also create concrete relationships with the region: cabbage and onions can come from regional vegetable growers, grain from a local farm, mushrooms from specialist producers nearby.

By choosing suppliers, a hotel can support forms of agriculture that strengthen soil fertility and biodiversity – including organic and biocyclic-vegan farming. The menu is always a decision about which form of agriculture we support.

EXPERIENCE – Relationship made tangible

The guest does not need to know any of this at first. They receive a fragrant dumpling, braised cabbage and a dark, intense jus. Something familiar, hearty and satisfying. The dish does not need to convince through sustainability. It needs to convince through taste.

That is its strength. A far-reaching ecological and ethical decision is not experienced as a measure, but as good food.

Only afterwards can the story add meaning: Where do the mushrooms come from? Who grows the cabbage? Why does the hotel interpret regional cuisine in this way? Stories of regional connection also strengthen the relationship with the guest.

BETWEEN – Consciously shaping relationships

Everything comes together in the space between.

The kitchen team develops a contemporary interpretation of regional cuisine. Purchasing builds relationships with producers who share this attitude. Producers, in turn, influence the kitchen through their knowledge. Service translates the idea into hospitality without lecturing the guest. Guests respond through their orders, conversations, enthusiasm or rejection – giving the system feedback.

Perhaps the jus becomes richer. Perhaps the dish needs a different name. Perhaps it becomes a bestseller. Perhaps the vegetable grower inspires the kitchen to create another dish.

The dish is not the end of a decision. It is part of a cycle of relationships, experience, feedback and further development.

This is Living Hospitality: a single dish can create enjoyment, strengthen regional value creation, reduce ecological impacts, take animals out of the logic of production, develop culinary

culture and contribute to the economic success of the hotel. Precisely because these goals are considered together.

The hotel has the power to bring value at different levels to all stakeholders even increasing the experience of simple utility.

6. The Team as a Living System

Hospitality begins long before a guest encounters an employee. It emerges in teams, between leaders and employees, between the different areas of a hotel and in the way people work, communicate and make decisions.

Living Hospitality therefore begins with the people who create it every day.

The following reflections are based, among other things, on a 14-month case study at Hotel Kühberg in the Alps. As part of the work, the team was accompanied on its journey from a sustainability-oriented hotel towards a regenerative understanding of organisations and hospitality. The experiences from this process contributed to our shared understanding of Living Hospitality.

In a hotel, countless roles and relationships interweave. A team is a living fabric of people, relationships, experiences, expectations and shared habits. Kitchen, housekeeping, reception, service, leadership, purchasing and ownership influence one another.

A tense atmosphere in leadership can reach the service team. Good collaboration in the kitchen can change an entire evening.

A purchasing decision influences not only costs and quality, but also relationships with producers and the story a hotel can tell its guests.

What happens between people affects the organisation. **And what happens in the organisation affects people in return.**

Change therefore begins with a system's ability to perceive itself.

At Hotel Kühberg, this became particularly clear. At the beginning of the project, many sustainability measures were already established. What was missing was less knowledge about what else could be done than a shared view of what was happening within the system itself.

Before developing new measures, the team paused. Nature-based exercises, personal reflection, journaling and dialog based formats helped make perceptions, tensions and team dynamics visible and discussable – things that can easily disappear in the operational routine.

Pausing became a form of self-observation: What is happening among us right now? What gives us energy? What creates resistance? Which patterns keep repeating? And which of them do we want to change?

Perception enables learning.

A team that can observe itself can recognise its own patterns and begins to speak differently with one another. And a team that speaks differently can begin to change its own patterns.

A group of functions slowly becomes a group of people working together. This is not about creating harmony. A living system needs differences, friction and diversity. Trust means that different perspectives, doubts and resistance can be expressed without threatening one's sense of belonging to the team.

Living Hospitality needs spaces in which relationships themselves become an object of attention.

Through shared self-observation, the team at Hotel Kühberg also developed a clearer picture of where the hotel wanted to go. Vision, values and roles were reflected on and shaped together. It was crucial not to consider the future solely from the perspective of the business.

The team does not end at the front door.

A hotel team is not a closed system. A system map made the larger web of relationships visible in which the hotel is embedded: employees, guests, owners, producers, suppliers, the local community and the natural world.

This also changed the question of the hotel's future. Not only: "Where do we want to go?" But also: "How do we want to develop together with the system of which we are a part?"

Co-creation therefore creates more than orientation. Above all, it creates connection with what is to emerge.

This also enhances the role of leadership. In a living system, leadership has a central task: creating the conditions in which people can take responsibility, shape relationships and learn together.

At Hotel Kühberg, this meant enabling more ownership and participation. Sustainability and regenerative development were not meant to become additional tasks alongside the actual work. They were meant to become part of the team's capacity to shape the organisation.

This also requires a change in leadership. Participation means sharing responsibility and control and accepting that not all answers are known in advance. A living system cannot be fully planned, it develops through interaction.

The inner development of the team is directly connected to the relationship model of Living Hospitality. **INSIDE** and **OUTSIDE** are not separate spaces. What happens inside influences relationships outside – and vice versa.

How people work together in a hotel becomes tangible for guests. A guest experiences the attentiveness of a person, the atmosphere of a room, the way someone listens resulting in whether a service interaction feels mechanical or warm or if staff seem merely to perform their tasks or are genuinely present.

Team culture therefore becomes part of the experience.

This makes team development an immediate part of hospitality. It is difficult for genuine hospitality to emerge from people who themselves feel no connection to themselves, their work, their colleagues or the place they represent. An organisation cannot credibly communicate connection to the outside if it does not live it on the inside.

The experience at Hotel Kühberg shows that no single workshop is enough. What matters is the connection between reflection, dialogue, co-creation and the subsequent translation into everyday life. In the project, greater openness within the team, stronger connections between employees, a shared language for aliveness and a clearer vision of the future became visible as important developments.

Transformation begins with a system's ability to perceive itself, learn together and respond to what becomes visible.

Living Hospitality creates **conditions in which a team itself can become more alive, more capable of learning, more connected and more able to act.**

Because the relationships of a hotel are shaped every day by the people who work in it.

7. Creating a Viable Future

At the beginning of this Naturepaper stood a simple question:
What can we learn from nature?

Perhaps our answer can now be expressed just as simply:
Effective thinking begins with seeing relationships and connections.

No decision stands alone. The wellbeing of a hotel is connected to that of its employees, guests, partners, region and the more-than-human world. Decisions affect this system – and their effects return. Future viability therefore also depends on how well we perceive and shape these relationships.

This also changes our understanding of growth. A tree does not grow indefinitely upwards. Its growth depends on its location: on water, light, soil, nutrients, space and the living beings around it. It intentionally grows in two directions at the same time.

A forest also develops within conditions and limits. Limits are part of living systems. Economic activity also takes place within real limits: the resilience and capacity of people, the availability of resources and the planetary boundaries of our Earth. Living Hospitality helps us perceive these limits and locate our business within this system.

This brings another question into focus: What should grow? Relationships can grow stronger. Knowledge and creativity can grow. Soils can become more fertile, ecosystems more diverse, teams more capable of learning and regional networks more resilient.

Businesses can develop economically while strengthening the foundations on which they depend.

Operating within planetary boundaries and in alignment with principles found in living systems means rethinking what should grow and how.

Many hotels are already on this path. At the ahead Hotel in Lenzen/Elbe, plant-based, organic and mindful principles guide decisions. They connect food, purchasing, the way people are treated and the understanding of place. This creates coherence between decisions that are often made separately elsewhere – from breakfast to purchasing to the question of how people relate to one another and to the more-than-human world. Some country hotels, such as Landhaus Beckmann, have also already implemented numerous ecological and culinary changes and continue to develop them.

At the same time, hotels do not develop independently of their surroundings. The framework conditions are changing too. In Germany, many plant-based alternative products are now, for the first time, cheaper than its animal-based counterparts. Germany is investing millions in the expansion of alternative proteins, Denmark is pursuing a national action plan for plant-based foods, and the EU wants to strengthen domestic protein production and reduce import dependencies.²

A more plant-based cuisine is therefore a system question on several levels. What happens on the plate depends as much on developments outside the hotel as on relationships within the business.

The next step therefore does not always have to be in the kitchen. A hotel can ask which relationships are enabling or limiting development. Perhaps the decisive lever lies in team culture, in the relationship with guests, or in a partnership that does not yet exist. This expands the space of possible solutions and can strengthen several relationships at once.

Living Hospitality is therefore not a desired end state. It is a systemic way of perceiving one's business, making decisions and continuing to develop.

At the same time, we should not romanticize nature. In nature we find cooperation and symbiosis, but also competition, disease, death, predation and being preyed upon. Nature does not provide us with ethics, that is our task.

We can recognise connections, reflect on the consequences of our actions and make conscious decisions. We can feel compassion for people and other living beings who do not directly contribute to our own benefit. Our task is therefore not to copy nature. We can learn from living systems and use our human capacities to act responsibly within them.

What we describe here for hotels does not end at the boundaries of our industry, it creates openings. Every organisation shapes relationships with people, places and the more-than-human world and depends on the systems from which it draws its life.

Living Hospitality can therefore also become a field for experimenting with a more alive economy. As we have seen, hospitality has particular potential for this. It brings people together shaping spaces, food, work and encounters. It can make other forms of economic activity tangible and experiential for many people.

This is where the opportunity lies: to connect economic success with stable relationships to people, regions and the more-than-human world.

8.

What Can Emerge From This

This Naturepaper is emerging at a particular time: harvest time in September. The two of us – Andreas Koch and Balázs Tarsoly – have brought together thoughts, observations and experiences from recent months and developed them further through our shared work.

Autumn is beginning. In nature, the rhythm changes. Growth slows down, leaves fall, nutrients return to the soil. Some things disappear and, by doing so, create the conditions for what may emerge later.

Perhaps this season makes particularly visible what this Naturepaper is about. Living systems cannot simply be steered in a desired direction. But we can perceive what they need. We can understand and shape relationships. Above all, we can create conditions in which development becomes possible.

Our different perspectives on hospitality have complemented, challenged and changed one another through our work together. Added to this were the experiences of the people and hotels we work with. This, too, is a central idea of Living Hospitality: Something new does not emerge from individual ideas alone, but through relationships between people, experiences, places and the more-than-human world.

This Naturepaper is intended to contribute to that process. Not as a finished answer to how Living Hospitality works, but as a starting point. It is intended to help hotels – and ourselves – perceive more precisely how people, decisions and the more-than-human

world are connected. And to open spaces in which teams can learn together, experiment and develop their own path.

What emerges will look different from place to place, that is a good thing.

At the beginning, we looked at a tree whose branches were drying out. Perhaps we see it differently now: its roots, the soil, the water, the forest around it – and ourselves as part of this system.

Future-oriented business begins with this perception: We are part of living systems. Our success also depends on them remaining alive.





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Sources

1 See Otto Scharmer: Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges. The Social Technology of Presencing. Berrett-Koehler, 2009. Scharmer describes three fundamental “divides” – ecological, social and spiritual – which can be understood as separation from nature, from one another and from ourselves.

2 See ProVeg Germany (2025): Price Study 2025 – Plant-based basket on average cheaper than animal-based basket for the first time; Scientific Advisory Board on Agricultural Policy, Nutrition and Consumer Health Protection at BMLEH (2026): Alternative Proteins – Framework Conditions and Developments; Danish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries: Action Plan on Plant-Based Foods; European Commission (2026): Protein Action Plan – Reducing the Plant Protein Deficit of the European Union.

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