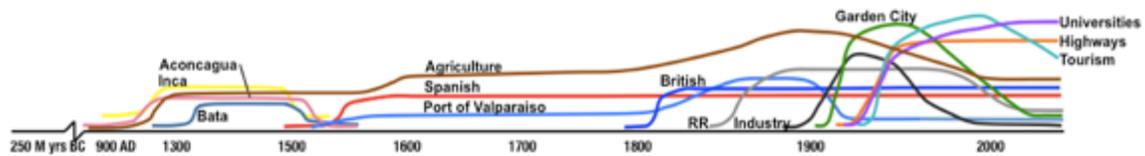


Three Case Studies

Regenesis – www.regenesishgroup.com

Las Salinas, Viña del Mar, Chile

Reconciling the health of the whole Ecological System (the Community, 'Nature', and the Developer)



When confronted by community activists fighting against a real estate development project, the conventional reaction by many developers is to engage public relations firms and lawyers to “solve the problems” with the various special interest groups (e.g., environmentalists, historical design, zoning law, urban designers, transportation, neighborhood concerns). This time consuming and expensive approach often results in a pastiche of compromises with which no one feels satisfied. This was the situation Regenesis was invited to address by Inmobiliaria Las Salinas, the developer of a 19 hectare, 400,000 square meter (47 acre, 4,000,000 sf), mixed-use project on a brownfield site in Viña del Mar, Chile.

There were at least 25 special interest groups (academics, neighborhoods, social activists) who were extremely negative towards the project. Because this was the only large parcel of land left in the urban zone, the special interest groups saw this as a last-ditch opportunity to fight against the steep downward trajectory of degradation of this garden city that had occurred over the last 30 years. The decline included social fragmentation, cultural decline from the accommodation of

mass tourism, degradation of ecological system health; automobile dominance in the fabric of the region; disenfranchised neighborhoods; and political intractability.

The practice of “Regenerative Development and Design” takes its approach from the way living systems cooperate. Nature doesn't compromise - it adapts, reconciles and harmonizes relationships. It has been found that if people take the time to 1) experience and reconcile the core concerns and needs of the developer and community; 2) engage in an understanding of the way life naturally wants to ‘work’ in this particular ecosystem; and 3) engage in developmental dialogue that aligns the interests of the parties around reciprocal value exchange and benefit, decisions can be made much more rapidly that add immediate and long-term value to the quality of life to the overall community, ecosystem, and developer.

In Viña del Mar, the developer heard of our regenerative practice from their master planner, Sasaki Associates, an international interdisciplinary design firm. ILS acknowledged the potential of years of court battles with no assurance of winning, so they retained Regenes Group to lead the reconciliation process. Most of the people engaged on the project felt that it was a long shot that any process other than negotiations and trade-offs could work.

Over an initial two-week period, Regenes investigated the patterns of life in the Viña del Mar and Valparaiso region; engaged and co-learned with the municipal government, the developer, and most of the community activist groups. This process of co-discovering the processes and inter-relationships that helped create the city they love is what we call a *Story of Place*®.

The unfolding of this Story helped to establish a common foundation of understanding from where it was possible to help the citizens paint a vivid picture of the potential of Viña del Mar. By reflecting on the place's long history as a thriving and sustainable contributor to the region, the *Story of Place* articulated key patterns of health and resilience that, once restored, would enable the Viña del Mar to regenerate itself as a whole socio-ecological system.

The result was remarkable. Every group learned the seriousness of the developer in wanting to help the community align around united action. At first both the developer and the community were tentative, but as the process of *Story of Place* unfolded, an alignment emerged whereby the community and developer realized that 1) the developer was serious about the development process as a way to transform their own practice and relationship with the community, 2) the community stakeholders began to engage and collaborate with each other and the developer, 3) ecological health in the region could be improved with highly leveraged interventions, 4) the community would receive social, economic and environmental benefits that would improve the quality of life in the region, 5) a partnership of trust was being formed and a process implemented that would reconcile additional concerns as they arose.

Ninety-five percent of the participants shifted from an extremely negative perspective (they universally called the developer “the enemy”) to being gratefully engaged. They were excited about the potential to bring back the health of their city. They were willing to commit to work together to find synergistic solutions.

The other side of this story is the developer also had to be willing to adapt their master plan to creating new potential in the community – such as restored ecological habitat connectivity, social re-integration, the quality of the formerly extensive tree canopy, and the restoration of a severely degraded estuary. One core issue, made clear to all the stakeholders, is that the developer had to be able to make a fair profit.

It takes the consistent engagement of a design team and community leaders and the real-time application of reconciling principles (a practice) to begin to understand what it means to be in a mutually beneficial relationship with each other and an ecosystem. Two months into the process, at the third workshop, the development manager, who was still quite worried about what he would have to ‘give up,’ made his first personal discovery. He actually stopped the meeting and announced that he “got it”. “Got what,” we asked? “Reciprocity. I’ve been holding the idea that we could only be in a transactional relationship with the community, trading this for that. This is a dance of relationship, a development of understanding of what’s important, at the core, for all the players.”

As the developer observed, “we see ourselves differently now; our company is transforming.” The benefits have been:

- Reduced time and cost
- Support of the community and a likelihood of a reduction in years of legal battles and cost
- The collaboration and unity of interest groups to harmonize formerly fragmented issues and problems
- Identification of leverage points to bring back a dynamic, healthy and vibrant city such as water, mobility, ecological system connectivity and enhancement, re-gardening the city, new business vitality, and neighborhood connectivity–
- Inspiration for how the master plan can influence and catalyze the social and ecological systems in the community and how the community can inspire the master plan
- The Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce for Construction and Development observed to our client – ten months after initially refusing to collaborate - “I don’t know how you are doing it, but this is the first time this city has been able to dream in 30 years. Count us in.”
- Two years into the project the neighborhoods and city are coalescing around actively engaging the issues of mobility, ecological connectivity, coastal restoration, and restoring the Margamarga Estuary – currently 80% filled as a multiple kilometer long parking lot.

There is new potential when we come together to learn from each other about the way life can thrive in our communities. The Master Plan design work is now evolving from this new understanding in a collaborative and harmonious fashion. True **re**-generation is now progressing in Viña del Mar with the continuous and on-going rebirthing of renewed and mutually beneficial relationships and new discoveries about how all of us can participate in the evolutionary processes of this place.

Lions Gate Waste Water Treatment Plant, Vancouver, BC

Community-Supported Infrastructure Development



For decades large-scale infrastructure projects such as water and wastewater treatment plants have been largely invisible to the public they serve. They are engineered to provide the necessary treatment technologies but then are too frequently hidden behind a chain link fence, with the only connection to the public being at the other end of an underground pipe. Recently, however, these projects are seen as much more - a way to relate to the communities they serve, a way to demonstrate an agency's commitment to sustainability and an opportunity to educate the public about the vital services these facilities provide.

The \$750,000,000, Lions Gate Secondary Wastewater Treatment Plant on the north shore in Vancouver, BC wanted to take this different approach. Regensis worked with a complex team that integrated over 20 design firms of architects, engineers, landscape architects and other supporting disciplines, working with over 24 communities in the district of North Vancouver, BC. Regensis principal, Bill Reed, led a powerful and co-creative process that engaged the Project Definition Team in expanding the potential of the Lions Gate Secondary Treatment Plant beyond the site boundaries. Through this process, the project team developed a range of diverse concepts that expand the potential for the project to be transformational with respect to how secondary-treatment, sustainability, community development and resource recovery can truly be integrated.

The project is considered by the architects, engineers, and the client to be the most effective design process they have participated in over their entire careers. It has become a world famous example of reconciling conflicts between agency and stakeholders and the plant is currently considered to be a community amenity with added value, as opposed to an undesirable neighbor. The public came out of the process willing to pay higher rates because they valued the values that the project embodies.

Additionally, the design process was 25% faster than anticipated by the client, resulted in an 18-month faster permit approval, and an unbelievably low 2% of expected change orders. The plan

received unanimous approval (very rare in BC) based on strong community support, as naysayers became supporters.

Benefits:

- Considered by the architects, engineers and client to be the most effective design process and outcome they have ever participated in
- Become a world-famous example of reconciling conflicts between a public agency and stakeholders
- WWTP is considered as a value adding amenity to the community
- Naysayers became supporters
- 18-month faster permit approval
- Public willing to pay higher rates – valued the values
- Unanimous approval (very rare in BC) – based on strong community support
- Metro Vancouver created a new model and new leadership role for the agency
- Despite the engineer's cynicism of needing a 'facilitator' to work on a straightforward waste water treatment technology – nine new systems types evolved out of the process.
- 98% reduction in expected change orders
- Design Phase completed with a 25% reduction of time

Mahogany Ridge Resort Community

Driggs and Victor, Idaho

Reconciling the health of the whole Ecological System (the Community, 'Nature', and the Developer)

Mahogany Ridge Resort was planned as a 1,000-unit resort community within a 3,500 acre site at the top of the Teton River Valley (see Figure 1). Located on an alluvial fan at the base of the Big Hole Mountains, the site was comprised primarily of economically unviable farmland. Despite the struggling farm community's support of the project, local opposition to any development or changes to the site was strong. Many

of those opposing the project treasured the viewshed it offered as farmland during the 3-4 months when it was not covered in snow; others feared it would disrupt migrating sand hill cranes. The project as initially proposed did not meet conventionally endorsed 'green' planning practices: farmland was lost, golf courses were planned, and despite a large percentage of open space preserved, it did not fit Smart Growth criteria. What the opponents (most of whom were relative newcomers to the area) did not realize was that this was an increasingly deteriorating landscape



that hosted much less than its former biological richness. Unless the existing pattern of use was changed, this landscape would be less and less able to support life. This was due to the intense irrigation and farming practices that had broken the connectivity between the mountains and the river: the stream had become intermittent, the water table became lowered, ground and surface water was polluted, wildlife corridors were broken due to impeded migratory patterns, and fish were no longer able to spawn in the upper reaches of the streams.

An Integral Assessment of the whole valley identified the role this land and habitat had once performed in the larger ecosystem before farming and other nearby developments degraded its various ecological functions. The Story of Place depicted how the land's former role had created the rich diversity and productivity that had once existed. It also explained the benefits of restoring that role for all the communities, human and natural.

One of the core patterns of this alluvial fan revealed by the assessment was that of a “living bridge” supporting multiple nutrient and wildlife flows and exchanges between the mountains to the west and the Teton River to the east. It further revealed how the imposition of monoculture agriculture on the alluvial fan had severely disrupted this core pattern and nearly destroyed the original ecological abundance of all three distinct ecological systems: the mountain, alluvial fan, and river system. Preservation of the existing farmland would continue the degenerative cycle, which raised the question: what nature of development would serve as a regenerative force?

A new project concept for Mahogany Ridge emerged out of the understanding of the core place pattern. The new concept used the development of the land to restore the living bridge through regenerating severely simplified and destabilized ecosystems. Principles, goals and opportunities addressing community planning, material flows, energy, community, buildings, wildlife and a place-sourced economy were developed from the Integral Assessment and Story of Place as guides for the design, construction and ongoing engagement of homeowners and neighboring community residents. These were key in shaping the revised masterplan which called for the development of homes in tight clusters, producing additional revenue that would pay for the restoration of the stream and habitat corridors that originally connected the Teton River and the mountains while providing wildlife corridors as well as many ecosystem services for community residents.

Existing farming practices were using all surface water, and pumping significant amounts of groundwater. When the project is fully built out (a highly unlikely outcome), its ecological impacts on the local water system would be significantly less than the previous agricultural practices: community surface water use would cease, ground water use would be 30% of the amount being used by agriculture, and use of pesticides would cease. The golf courses were re-envisioned with all of the roughs becoming habitat and forage during the brief growing season, and both links and roughs serving as wildlife corridors throughout the year. Opportunities were identified for integration of the local community and project residents into the development and management of these systems, toward growing a more diversified local economy. A Community Stewardship Organization and active Home Owners' Association education and action programs would engage the homeowners in developing, managing and re-designing the reconnection of these nutrient and wildlife flows through time, becoming sources for the ongoing regeneration and development of potential of the site while insuring the provision of ecosystem services for the community. (Biohabitats et al, 2008)

¹ These Smart Growth criteria were primarily developed and employed in other places with different inherent qualities, different population pressures, different economic and social constraints, and entirely different potential.