



Experience



Transform. Regenerate. Engage - for sustainable communities
Live it, to believe it!

HOW TO BUILD A SUSTAINABLE, REGENERATIVE, ENGAGED COMMUNITY ?

1st draft : Community's founder & developer roles
"The art of building engaged communities"



Delphine GIMAT 
+10 years International Researcher
International communities co-founder & developer
Strategist - Immersive coach

experience-once-coaching.com

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1. What is the difference between a community and a network ?
2. What is the difference between collaborative and participative systems?
3. Social exchange + Collective intelligence = Engaged community
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What is the difference between a community and a network ?

◆ Community

- Shared values (with same definition)
- Members actively take part in the co-creation of a project, service, or ecosystem.
- Strong collective commitment,
- Shared responsibilities,
- Often a common long-term vision and goal
- People naturally ambassador

Characteristics:

- Everyone has a voice and contributes to decision-making directly or indirectly (ex: survey).
- High level of engagement: members are actors, not just consumers
- People can be interviewed before joining and sign a code-of-conduct document /agreement

Examples:

- All The Elements (UK) community
- Blabla Walks 3 Borders (Switzerland, France, Germany)
- Creative Sessions in Colmar(France)
- Blabla Exchanges
- ASEYA community (International)
- Transformational Travel Council
- Visorando, Outdooractive, Alltrails, Komoot
- PVTistes

◆ Network

- Building and maintaining professional or social relationships, with a view to exchanging resources, opportunities, or visibility.

Characteristics:

- Individual or strategic approach: the goal is often to expand one's contacts or seize opportunities.
- Less structured: interactions can be occasional or informal.
- Lower collective commitment: people exchange, but do not necessarily co-create.

Examples:

- World Trails Network
- ENOS
- Le Bo Résé
- Professional events (conferences, trade shows)
- LinkedIn or WhatsApp thematic groups
- Networking drinks or coffee meet-ups for entrepreneurs

It's about creating meaningful connection, trust, and value.



What is the difference between participative and collaborative ?

Both approaches involve stakeholders in the modeling process and ensure they are exposed to the same information and problems (1)

Participation is about having input, while collaboration is about sharing the work and the result.

The distinction is based on two dimensions:

- 1.Level of participation
- 2.Type of cooperation

Participative : “We have a say together.”	Collaborative : “We do it together.”
The act or state of participating, or sharing in common with others. Fair trade.	To work together, especially in sharing intellectual effort.
• Working together to produce or achieve something. • People share responsibility, contribute actively, and usually have interdependent roles. • Implies teamwork and joint creation. • Stakeholder participation empowers individuals, increases transparency. Can involve stakeholders at any level, from simple awareness to active discussion. (Some stakeholders may have limited roles.) • Focuses on including stakeholders to inform decisions, build understanding, and sometimes resolve conflicts.	• People have a voice, can contribute opinions or ideas, and their input is considered: but they may not share full responsibility for execution. • Some people can participate in the discussion, but leadership may make the final decision. • Implies inclusion and involvement, not necessarily co-ownership of the outcome.

(1)(Voinov & Bousquet, 2010; Castelletti & Soncini-Sessa, 2007).



Social Exchange + Collective intelligence = Engaged community

Social Exchange (Theory) :

People engage in relationships when the benefits outweigh the costs, aiming for reciprocal, balanced exchanges. Resources can be tangible (money, gifts) or intangible (time, emotional support, knowledge, respect).

+

Collective Intelligence:

Groups can think, learn, and solve problems together more effectively than individuals alone. It thrives on shared knowledge, diversity of perspectives, and collaboration.

=

Individuals contribute resources (time, knowledge, skills, money, etc.) because they see **value in the collective outcome**. The group's intelligence grows as members share and exchange in a balanced, fair, and purposeful way.

Costs can include effort, emotional strain, or risk of conflict.
Relationships are maintained when the perceived rewards outweigh the costs.





Here are some basic rules to ensure the right dynamics:

Reciprocity + Shared Knowledge:

People expect that giving something (help, advice, support, money) will eventually be reciprocated. This creates a self-reinforcing loop of learning and support.

Balance + Collective Contribution:

Healthy communities distribute contributions fairly.
Healthy relationships strive for equitable exchanges; both parties feel satisfied with what they give and receive. Everyone's expertise is valued, and collective intelligence emerges as the group integrates diverse input.

Motivation + Group Intelligence:

Social exchange ensures members feel their contributions are worthwhile.
Collective intelligence ensures their contributions have greater impact, solving problems or generating solutions that no single individual could achieve alone.

Conflict Prevention + Effective Collaboration:

Awareness of costs vs. benefits reduces frustration, tensions and disengagement.
Clear rules, shared goals, and transparent exchanges amplify collective intelligence without overloading or exploiting members.

Note :

- **Comparison Level** : Individuals have expectations about what they deserve in a relationship, based on past experiences and social norms.
- **Comparison Level for Alternatives**: People evaluate whether they could get better rewards elsewhere; if alternatives are better, they may leave the relationship.

(Source : 2015, International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition), Karen S. Cook)



Why people seek for communities?

Need for belonging, purpose and real Human connexions

Experience



1. Counteracting social disconnection

- Modern life and increasing individualism leave many feeling isolated.
- Communities offer a sense of belonging and shared identity.

2. Overcoming geographical boundaries

- Online communities allow people to connect regardless of location and background. New technologies are an ideal tool for people to connect, start conversations.
- They bring together individuals with common interests, values, or visions.

3. Having a voice and being heard

- Communities give everyone an opportunity to express opinions and emotions.
- They foster open dialogue and shared experiences.

4. Seeking trust and authenticity

- People look for spaces where relationships feel genuine.
- Safety, security, and mutual respect are essential for trust to grow.



How It Works in Practice? 6 Steps toward a sustainable community

Step 1: INITIAL ECOSYSTEM REALISTIC GOAL & KEY METRICS

Who are you? Why are you here? What's your reality?

Define your actual ecosystem and the one you wish to evolve in such as the profiles you wish to surround yourself, attract, the money you need to survive, the environment. Situation, context, resources, key issues, challenges, dream goal, motivations. Then trust the flow of the process.



Step 2: IDEATE STRATEGY

Explore your thoughts, raise self-awareness of your own development strategy, resources, ideas and mechanism. Go with the flow.

Request for external support : ICF certified coach, mentor, friends, etc.



Step 3: ACTION PLAN - COMMIT

1. Define SMART action plan + metrics
 2. Analyse and share what you learned with others
- + assess your level of commitment



Step 4: RESEARCH - IMPLEMENT - TEST

OPTION 1 : Implement, test your actions, learn and exchange with the potential community. Test your product/services, request feedback, build trust and directly engage with people

OPTION 2 : Collaborate, seek for external support to brainstorm, get professional advises and feedback. Co-create & take actions together or request to be connected with the right network.



Step 5: REFLECT - LEARN - GROW MOVE FORWARD

Prepare the next phase where you will create your community's foundations.

What did you experience ?

What did you learn?

What project do you want to explore to move forward?



Step 6: STRUCTURE YOUR COMMUNITY & GOVERNANCE

Create your community's foundation with a core team development. Then start from step 1 again with them. In the process think about the community growth & leadership transition.





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Who are you? Why are you here? What's your reality? "why" do you want to do this project?

Clarify a clear purpose, vision, mission (a reality that will attract members will agree upon).

- What are your values ? **(Suggested exercise: Values)**
- What problem do you wish to solve?
- What are your personal resources ? **(Suggested exercise : Retrospective life journey)**



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Define and know your audience. The more specific, the better : **(Suggested exercise : who do you attract?)**

- Demographics,
- Interests,
- Challenges, needs
- Goals.

Create a value proposition: **(Suggested exercise: Value proposition)**

- Why should someone join your community and stay active?
- What does your community stand for?
- What could be the common goal?
- What message do you wish to spread, which legacy do you wish to leave behind ?

Clearly define a first draft of the community's core principles, rules, limits. (Suggested exercise ANNEXE 5)

It's important to develop a moderating process with a clear framework. They are essential to set your comfort zone, foster freedom while minimizing risks such as spam, the entry of malicious individuals.



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- Immerse : take part in trainings, similar jobs, ask questions, interview others, etc.
- Build an audience first to eventually create a more sustainable long-term community. (An audience can raise initial awareness, but it is not sustainable on its own.)
- Engage with people, contribute to others communities; encourage to share knowledge, skills, and resources. Use social exchange to structure fair exchange and collective intelligence to leverage group problem-solving.
- Build meaningful connections, trust and seek for common values. Join professional networkings, workshops, etc. seek for mentoring, connexions, insights, potential collaborations
- Establish basic communication channels. Early community tools include discussion and exchange spaces, email lists, and forums for interaction. For instance you can launch a WhatsApp group and a Google Drive for sharing tools, documents, and contacts.



Step 5: REFLECT - LEARN - GROW - MOVE FORWARD

Prepare the next phase where you will create your community's foundations. What did you experience ? What did you learn?
What project do you want to explore to move forward?



Step 6: STRUCTURE YOUR COMMUNITY & GOVERNANCE

Create your community's foundation with a core team development.

Then start from step 1 again with them. In the process think about the community growth & leadership transition.

- **Identify a natural core group to help** with the project (administration, organisation, specialised skills, etc.) Form a leadership core member to ensure sustainability and dynamism.
- **Clear definition of member's roles and responsibilities.** Distribute responsibilities fairly to respect everyone's resources. There are varying degrees of ownership and responsibility. They're distributed based on involvement within the community. It's important to define leadership by community moderators as they are community "teachers" ready to guide members and facilitate conversations.
- **Present your strategy and co-adjust it** with the community's members : name, logo, official "Rules" and code of conduct (to be signed by all members). Start the process to co-establish the identity, shared values (with the same definition), share ambition, profile requirement process and operating framework of the community. Ensure alignment on values, goals, and engagement principles.
- **Choose the right status** (not for profit, club, private business, etc.)
- **Choose the right platform to communicate and manage the community :**
 - Social media groups (Facebook, LinkedIn, Discord) for accessibility. Explore alternatives to Facebook such as Slack, Discord, Reddit, or Telegram. Tip: Go where your audience already spends time.
 - Forums or membership platforms (Mighty Networks, Circle) for deeper engagement.
 - Email newsletters or private chat channels for intimacy and regular updates.

Note at this stage, it is important to insist on writing the procedure when someone is exclusively passive or harmful.

Sources :

- <https://livingmaples.com/mag/9-reasons-why-you-should-join-an-online-community/>
- <https://officeparty.medium.com/how-do-you-encourage-digital-contribution-in-online-communities-1a69466bb556>



Step 4 : COLLABORATIVE ACTIONS



- Foster active participation and mutual growth.
- Develop online and in person events that strengthen a member's sense of belonging within the community. Letting members feel connected to one another through online events that allow for digital public speaking.
- Encourage mutual recommendations.
- Facilitate skills exchanges to strengthen the collective.
- Participate in events and create content outside the virtual world. Creating content is important.
- Collaborate with partners from different businesses, platforms, communities.
- Respond to questions (forum, social media, face to face). Start discussions. Respond to users who have given feedback. Important: when there is negative feedback, privately contact the author to inform them and ask if they have ideas to improve.



Stage 5 : COMMUNITY GROWTH & LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

- Allow the community to scale sustainably while maintaining quality and engagement.
- Once the community is active and growing organically, hire or elect one or more facilitators / mediators / leaders. Form and coach the person(s) to take the lead, ownership and become independent. It is a strategy to free up founder time and energy to develop additional thematic communities under the same vision and connect them together.



A few tips to keep community engagement



One of the key strengths lies in the quality of human relationships.

- The core team must stay close to the community members who suggest content. It is important to encourage them (private messages, goodies, events, follow up with them...), recognise their contributions, and make them feel that their time is valuable. They should perceive value and meaning in their investment and in the connections they create.
- It is important to remember that the community is the best on-the-ground relay, whether for promoting the brand or covering a larger geographic area in terms of content generation. Members are natural brand ambassadors, which represents the strongest moment for communication and recognition.

Why content and members' curation and moderation is important?

Online content shared by community members naturally attracts visitors, much like word-of-mouth recommendations and live experiences. Similarly, member-driven moderation plays a vital role.

Content moderation and curation serve two key purposes: protection and promotion. They help ensure compliance with site policies, local customs and norms, or even legal requirements, while also enhancing the user experience through high-quality, engaging content and experiences.

Today, **leading curation platforms go beyond simply gathering the best content, they add a unique human perspective.** This often blurs the line between curation and creation. Both content curation and moderation operate under defined assurance rules, which ensure that a community's policies are consistently followed. These rules stem from moderation and curation policies, themselves guided by a governance model built around the community's standards.

(Source : <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/apsipa-transactions-on-signal-and-information-processing/article/new-frontiers-in-cognitive-content-curation-and-moderation/DF4AAE1F2052DF784E52B7882208AF15>)



Why participative - community-based projects are part of the future ?



- Communities create a moat and make the business untouchable. Anyone can replicate a product, but no one can recreate a community.
- Experts predict that soon, we'll be seeing communities that charge \$5,000 a month to gain access.
- A community's success is contingent on participation from its members. Active communities deliver excitement, better content, and more value to all other members.

Keep in mind :

- Yet for many online communities, most people aren't participating: like, 99% of people.
- The 90–9–1 Rule for online community engagement states that:
 - 90% of people lurk on virtual communities, consuming yet never contributing
 - 9% edit or respond to content, but do not create their own
 - 1% of community members create new content consistently

Certain studies share that these numbers have gotten even worse, saying it skews closer to 95–4–1.

- In a community people are seen as an investment in your personal development, where you can feel heard, listened to, and connected with.
- It is important to make sure all the exchanges are fair. **In exchange for the experiences contribution is key; respecting people's resources. Contribution can be time, skills, knowledge, money, contacts, feedback, recommendations...**





Focus : Why community Founder & Developer & SEO strategist are important roles ?



Community founder & developer (ex: Business founder & developer)	SEO Strategist
The role directly shapes the growth, engagement, and sustainability of a community, which can have a huge impact on a brand, platform, or organization. ◦ Passionate about creating meaningful connections, fostering engagement, and building thriving online and offline communities. ◦ Creates barriers to entry for competitors because strong community bonds are hard to replicate • Building Connections: They create spaces where members feel valued, heard, and connected, fostering loyalty and long-term engagement. • Driving Growth: By attracting and retaining members, they help grow the community, which can amplify reach, awareness, and influence. • Shaping Culture: They set the tone, values, and norms of the community, ensuring a positive and inclusive environment. • Content and Collaboration: They encourage user-generated content and collaboration, increasing the community's value and relevance. • Feedback Loop: They act as a bridge between the community and the organization, collecting insights, needs, and feedback to guide product, service, or policy improvements. • Conflict Management & Trust: They mediate conflicts, maintain trust, and ensure a safe, authentic space for interaction. • Brand Advocacy: Members often become natural ambassadors, spreading awareness and enhancing the organization's credibility. It turns a group of individuals into a thriving, engaged ecosystem, which can be a powerful asset for any organization.	◦ Drives visibility by ranking high in search results. ◦ Generates predictable inbound traffic if well executed. ◦ Easier for competitors to imitate but highly scalable if you dominate niche keywords. ◦ If there is an issue with the online system, the community disappear.



Focus : Why community Founder & Developer & SEO strategist are important roles ?



Community founder & developer (ex: Business founder & developer)	SEO Strategist
Slow to start, but builds deep, lasting engagement that can sustain growth even if marketing budgets drop.	Faster to get results if technical SEO is solid and content is optimized, but dependent on algorithms and ongoing content production.
◦ Converts members into long-term advocates who contribute content, feedback, and promotion. ◦ Particularly powerful for participatory concepts (crowdsourced data, co-creation).	◦ Excellent for lead generation and awareness. ◦ Works best for products/services where search intent is strong and competition is manageable.
AI can make community building faster, more personalised, and more scalable: • AI can adapt content, tone, and engagement strategies for different cultures and languages instantly, ideal for export. • AI can analyze community data to identify emerging leaders, trends, and potential issues before they escalate. • 24/7 engagement: AI chatbots can handle basic questions, freeing the human community manager to focus on relationship building and strategic partnerships. • AI can help community members create better, more relevant content (e.g., enhancing photos, summarizing trail reviews). Future Outlook: Community Developers will become community architects, designing frameworks and culture, while AI handles repetitive, operational tasks. The human trust element will still be irreplaceable.	AI is already transforming SEO; both optimizing it and disrupting it: • AI can produce keyword-optimized articles, FAQs, and meta descriptions at massive scale. • With AI-driven search (e.g., Google's AI Overviews, ChatGPT-style answers), traditional keyword competition may become less relevant, and brand authority + unique insights will matter more. • AI can anticipate search trends before they peak, letting brands produce content earlier. Future Outlook: SEO will shift from purely keyword ranking to experience optimization; AI will reward websites and communities that provide unique, high-trust, and high-engagement content.



Focus : Why community Founder & Developer & SEO strategist are important roles ?

Community founder & developer (ex: Business founder & developer)

Community Developer ROI : impact often translates into:

- Brand advocacy: Loyal community members act as ambassadors and content creators.
- User-generated content: This fuels SEO, marketing, product development.
- Feedback loops: Insights gathered from engaged communities can shape product, policy, and strategy.
- Trust & resilience: Established communities better sustain crises or shifts in platform algorithms.
- More Intangible, But Crucial
- While hard ROI statistics are few, the value of strong communities is supported by behavioral and social research:
- Social capital benefits: Communities foster mutual support, knowledge exchange, resilience, and economic cooperation [Wikipedia](#).
- Emotional & health impact: Belonging to a community builds social trust, well-being, and reduces isolation [VoxWikipedia](#).
- Career and brand leverage: Engagement in community work can enhance networking, open new opportunities, build visibility, and even develop leadership skills [TIME](#).

SEO Strategist

Strong, Quantifiable ROI

- Massive long-term returns: Strategic SEO delivers an average 748% ROI over 3 years [epicedits.co.uk](#).
- Significant payback: On average, businesses report \$22 back for every \$1 spent on SEO [ayilar.netSagapixel](#).
- High lead quality: SEO conversions close at 14.6%, compared to only 1.7% for outbound leads [keystaragency.comSagapixel](#).
- Dominates traffic: Organic search accounts for 53% of all website traffic [Website Builder ExpertSagapixel](#).
- Sustainable growth: Local SEO, especially for small businesses, can drive up to 700% ROI within 6–12 months [digitalworldinstitute.com](#).
- B2B impact: B2B SEO campaigns often see ROI ranging from 500% to 1,200%, with some industries like real estate seeing as high as 1,389% [digitalworldinstitute.comayilar.net](#).



Focus : Why community Founder & Developer & SEO strategist are important roles ?

Community founder & developer (ex: Business founder & developer)	SEO Strategist
For long-term retention, market loyalty, and user-driven content → Community Developer export is stronger. Community development excels in building long-term relational capital, harder to quantify, but crucial for brand loyalty, advocacy, and sustainable growth. More resilient long-term, because human connection and trust are hard for AI to replace.	For short-term acquisition → SEO can be more powerful with hard ROI and scalability; highly measurable and cost-effective for acquisition. Will remain important but face constant disruption as AI changes how people search. Its value will shift toward driving people into communities or brand ecosystems where retention happens.

Together, they are extremely complementary:

- **SEO attracts people, community makes them stay and participate.**
- **AI-powered SEO brings people in. AI-augmented community development keeps them engaged and loyal.**



3 dynamic pillars to develop an Human-centered sustainable & participative community

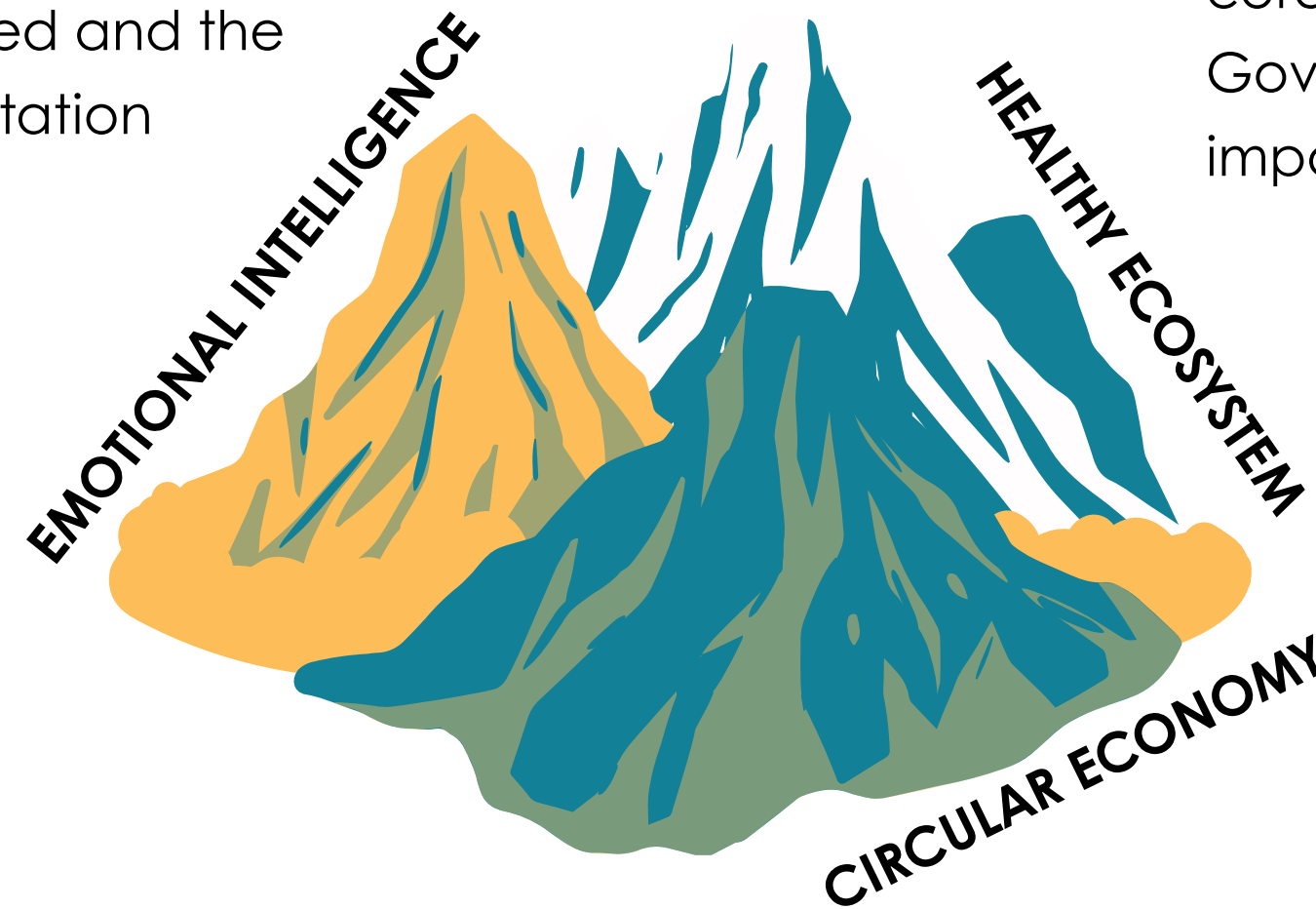
PRODUCT-SERVICES

Offer matched with the community needs. It is approved, developed by regular community members feedback.

There is no gap between what is promoted and the real life-experience = integrity, trust, reputation

COMMUNICATION

Online and offline experience strategy : website, SEO, social medias, external and internal community members' content (Admin core-members and the team hired). Governance with a mediation/facilitation role is important.



ENGAGED COMMUNITY - ORGANIC AMBASSADORS

- Community feedback is important to build and adjust the product/services
- Curated and qualitative content created by community members themselves
- Community members' organically spread the words strengthening the reputation and SEO ranking
- The core-team is well-supported, engaged, committed, valued with fair exchanges



5 capitals for toward regenerative communities : Matt Sykes Australian approach

The five capitals can influence everything from organisation culture and business strategy, right through to impact reporting and stakeholder communication.



Source : Matt Sykes https://regenprojects.earth/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Regen-Roadmap-A4-Digital-Flyer_Autumn-2022-1.pdf



Experience



Transform. Regenerate. Engage - for sustainable communities
Live it, to believe it!

Beside every hero stands one (or several) caring allies who offer support and with whom they can recharge, transform, and regenerate.

Why not you?
Let's have a chat.



Delphine GIMAT 
+10 years International Researcher
International communities co-founder & developer
Strategist - Immersive coach

experience-once-coaching.com

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