

## SESSION Three:

### Regenerative Development at a Neighborhood Scale

Stone Soup: A Regenerative Development Allegory

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If you fail to trust people, they won't turn out to be trustworthy.  
Therefore, guide others by quietly relying on *Tao*.  
Then, when the work is done, the people can say,  
'We did this ourselves.' - Lao Tzu

While reading the old story of Stone Soup to my children I realized that it is an excellent example of regenerative development. It illustrates the use of all of these principles of regenerative thinking outlined by Carol Sanford:

1. Work with Whole Systems
2. Work from Potential Not Problems
3. Develop Capacity
4. Build a Collaborative Field
5. Work with Nested Systems
6. Find Nodal Interventions
7. Work from the Uniqueness of Each Place

My first hint at this was noticing an important aspect of regenerative development that is not explicit in these principles, the need to regenerate the spirit of a place, community, or organization. This idea is embedded in the concepts of Potential and building a Collaborative Field, but it stands out clearly in this traditional tale.

You know the story. Three travelers enter a traumatized village where the people are frightened of everything including one another. Hungry, cold and unwelcomed, the travelers commence to fill a pot with water, drop in a few stones, and place it over the fire to cook. The villagers find this curious, and gather slowly to investigate and learn how they too can thrive through lean times, fed on only water and common stones.

Offering at first easy asks, like a bigger pot and eventually salt and pepper, the people get swept up in the vision of delicious soup. Each holds their own vision of the common theme of feast. Motivated by this ideal, the villagers bring forth hidden morsels they have tucked away – an onion, a few carrots, some noodles. The community actualizes their shared vision by each member contributing what s/he can and feels called to give.

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Guided by this shared image, they self-organize a feast to remember. The meal extends beyond the soup, and inspires gathering other necessities of celebration: tables, chairs, decorations, music, stories, laughter and dance. They all feast into the night on their combined wealth, welcoming their new-found friends into their homes for the night and their hearts forever. The travelers, now well-fed and rested, are equipped to continue their homeward journey. Their visit revealed a deeper potential in the town and townspeople than the residents had considered for many years, and seeded a hunger to continue to develop their coherence and as yet unique unrevealed potential.

These travelers, or regenerate bums, began by considering the state of the whole town, both what they imagined lay hidden and the current state of affairs. They did this within the context of the wars and famine that had swept the region, understanding better the challenges they faced and why. Sensing an abundant community lay beneath the apparent physical and spiritual poverty, they searched for a nodal intervention to unleash that potential. Using the shared experience of famine to attract and easily obtain nourishment was the key. They never begged, beseeched, exhorted, or argued. Rather they simply acted in a way that helped them realize the unique, covert opportunity that suited them all.

Rightly reading the generous community spirit frightened into self-protection, the travelers created an opening that called it back to life. A collaborative field was realized through gentle suggestions of ingredients and each contributing villager served a role. Looking at the end state of not only soup but a regenerated community, they realized what was possible and made it actual. The idea of stone soup revealed a whole different world, a different way they could be, both individually and together. Maybe the wanderers were seeding the whole kingdom with provocative possibilities, dropping stones into soup water, expecting the subtle but powerful waves to ring out through the entire region.

The story never tells what happens after they continue on their journey, but clearly the villagers will need to continue to aspire to realize new levels of who they can be, or the village will fall back into the inevitable gravity of entropy. Rules, laws, arguments, or standards cannot prevent this. Only continued growth and development and continual unfolding can keep us ahead of the tides that pull us apart and back into the refuge of closed hearts and minds. If they remember the pattern of this effective intervention, the villagers can find new seeds that, at first look like plain old stones, help them unfold into an ever-brighter, continually regenerative future.

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