



INSIDE INNOVATION PODCAST EPISODE 5: INNOVATING FOR A WILDER, NATURE POSITIVE, FUTURE

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

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Welcome back to Accenture's *Inside Innovation* podcast and thank you so much for joining this special bonus episode. My name's Lotte Beekenkamp, most people call me Lotte. I'm an Innovation Analyst at ?What If! – part of Accenture's innovation network. Additionally, I'm also part of one of the winning teams from Accenture's Sustainability Challenge, formally known as the Eco Innovation Challenge. I'm joined today by Frans Schepers, co-founder and Managing Director of Rewilding Europe, and Lisa Neuberger-Fernandez, a Managing Director at Accenture, leading Strategy and Innovation within Corporate Citizenship.

In this episode, we'll be exploring how we can use innovation to tackle some of the world's greatest environmental challenges, combining human ingenuity and technology to build a more sustainable future for all.

But first, let's set the scene on one of our greatest opportunities – nature restoration. Frans, you've been working in conservation for quite some time already and it must be interesting to see people now awaking to the fact that the climate and biodiversity emergencies are two sides of the same coin, with nature recovery providing a key solution for both.

Can you tell us a little bit about what Rewilding is and why it's such a great example of a nature-based solution?

Frans Schepers

Yes, thank you Lotte...It's something that we see emerging recently, after the Paris Agreement. So as Rewilding Europe, we're working on such innovative nature-based solutions, we are quite happy that this is now happening. Rewilding is basically the process of letting nature heal itself in sort of popular terms, of course there are scientific definitions for it. But it's really about allowing nature to take its role again in many landscapes, particularly in Europe. People are controlling and managing and are very dominating how landscapes develop. But in particular, as there is more space coming due to rural depopulation, land abandonment, there's now a historic opportunity to allow nature to take back some space and have those natural processes coming back. So, yeah, rewilding is that process of moving up a scale of wildness and you can apply it at any scale and at any type of landscape, from your back garden to city parks, from big landscapes to even oceans. So, it is a positive, empowering way for people to become active in contributing to both those emergencies.

Lotte

It sounds like there's a lot of positivity to come out of rewilding. What other benefits are there to surrounding ourselves with green spaces and being in those wilder landscapes for like, us as individuals, for our mental and physical wellbeing?

Frans

Well I think during Covid and all these lockdowns I think people realised how important it is to have nature around you and that you can make a walk in the forest or in the park and we saw huge pressure on the little green spaces that we have in particular, of course, in urban areas. But even the national parks in Europe were flooded with people because nobody could take a plane to all sorts of far destinations and there were people living from cities that had never been in nature taking risks, I heard from park managers. So it shows the real need of having this around us for all sorts of reasons, for health, for well-being, for recharging batteries, for so many things so we should not underestimate the importance of green spaces.

Lotte

But do you feel that collectively we're already doing enough, or have we still got quite a far away to go?

Frans

No I don't think so... We need to act and that's what we're doing in Rewilding Europe. We're working on the ground, we're trying to restore these systems and maybe also to mention that from these doom and gloom stories that everyone is hearing every day, seeing nature recovering quickly and fairly quickly in many different ecosystems gives a lot of hope and perspective and we can say that nature is in fact our best ally for resolving these, these big challenges that we face and the resilience and the power to recover in nature is just amazing.

Lotte

That's really fascinating and it sounds like restoring those natural ecosystems is also critically important to humanity and our health and well-being. Also to our economies and more than people have realised, it's important for business. And what I mean by that is that protecting nature isn't just good for the planet because it also makes economic sense. And businesses need to take urgent action to address that loss of biodiversity that we see around us and the climate crisis that we see in the news every day. So let's talk a little bit about action then. Lisa, what can businesses like Accenture do in this space?

Lisa Neuberger-Fernandez

When I think about this, I come back to what Frans just said – that nature is our best ally. We know that we cannot reach the Paris Agreement without

restoring nature but on the other hand, we can't halt nature loss without a stable climate and we're asking the question what is the role of business in all of this? We can see that expectations are changing really fast coming from multiple places, from governments, from multilateral institutions, from investors, from NGOs who ask companies like Accenture to sign all kinds of different commitments and pledges. And we see that this momentum is building for companies to go beyond carbon and to take action on nature. We take this very seriously and we're thinking long and deeply about what is our role and what can we do. The Council for Sustainable Business is an organisation that Accenture has been working closely with for a long time and together with the CSB we've just come out with this initiative called Get Nature Positive which you can find online and it's a toolkit that's filled with actions that businesses can take to become more nature positive and it's organised from an industry perspective. So if you're in the water industry or if you're in the financial services industry, here are steps you can take. At Accenture we believe that if we can harness many of our people and our clients and our suppliers and our ecosystem partners to step up and tackle these twin crises of climate change and nature loss that you know maybe, just maybe, we can make a difference. And the Sustainability Innovation challenge is one of the ways we bring together our ecosystem partners, in fact that's how I met Frans and that's how I met you Lotte, as you were one of the winners in last year's innovation challenge and Frans was with us on the brain trust that we had...

Lotte, I'd love to hear from you Lotte about your experience in the innovation challenge and why did you join? And what did you get out of that experience?

Lotte

Yeah, great questions. How did I end up participating? I was relatively new to Accenture and completely new to technology consulting, because actually before I started working here I worked for a climate action NGO that focused on sustainability and leadership training for young people. So sustainability was already a topic that was very close to my heart and I was super pleased to see that Accenture was making this commitment to nature through the challenge and I knew that that was a good opportunity for myself to get involved in and a great chance to upskill in my innovation skillset but



also to tackle a meaningful challenge and so far it's been one of the most rewarding experiences that I've had here.

Lisa

So Lotte, which challenge were you trying to tackle, you and your team, and how have you gone about that?

Lotte

So there were 7 different challenges in total and we chose to tackle the Rewilding of Land challenge and that made complete sense for my team because all of us are based out of Scotland and Scotland, as some of you might know, is known for its beautiful natural landscapes... but what a lot of people don't know is that those empty hillsides were once home to an ancient Caledonian forest. So centuries of farming and sheep grazing and timber felling have all meant that lots of that forest is lost at the moment. So people can't imagine that that is what it once looked like... So this is where our idea, 'Reimagine, Rewild' comes in. We are leveraging augmented reality to bring to life the opportunity for rewilding. So what could that look like in practice? We've developed a mobile app that allows you to use the camera function on your phone and have a look around your surroundings and see them in a whole different light. So let's say I'm on a walk in the Scottish hillside, I can see a grassy patch in front of me. What this app allows me to do, is actually see what it would look like if there was lots of different plants and trees appearing. So it could be a Scots Pine tree or a whole bunch of heather. And we've created these really realistic looking artificial 3D objects that the app places all around the user, and that really gives a super realistic picture of what that landscape could look like if we allowed nature to thrive and reclaim that space. And what it then helps us to do, is first of all get excited about the possibility of rewilding but we've also incorporated a lot of really interesting reading materials about what different species can do for their ecosystem, lots of information about what rewilding is all about. We've incorporated elements into the app where people can find out more about rewilding initiatives that are happening near to them and what they can do to get involved. And that way, we're really hoping to increase awareness, enthusiasm, and support for rewilding.

Lisa

And Frans, when the jury picked Reimagine, Rewild to win the innovation challenge prize last year, do you remember what stood out for you from this team?

Frans

Yeah it was an interesting experience. The ideas were quite different from each other... And I think what is interesting, is that, although rewilding is a bit of an open ended ideology – you know, the problem with conservation is that people want to define exactly what should be there and how many and how big and nature is not like that. So what I like a lot is that this task that Lotte and her team took on is really about imagining how the future could look like and communication and sharing these views and ideas with people is absolutely critical; we always say that rewilding is 90% people and 10% nature. I mean, that's really what it is. And so changing the minds of people, bring new narratives, opening the eyes for those people who have an open mind, or don't have an open mind, try to open it – this is so critical because ultimately it's a paradigm shift in thinking for many of us and with tools like this, I hope it will all work out well Lotte, no pressure. This could be a game changer. If this could work for Scotland, then it could also work for other big landscapes in Europe, so it has this scaling up potential.

Lisa

That's great. When we select the winning teams in the challenge, what we're looking for are scalable solutions that can address real world problems and have an impact and Lotte's team was able to do that.

Lotte

Yeah we've made quite a bit of progress since we pitched it to Frans earlier in the year... So the first version of the app, we've got a prototype of that on a few devices already. We worked with rewilding experts like Frans' team to learn about the rewilding principles and when we were creating those 3D plants and elements, we wanted to make sure that we basing that off real native Scottish species and that we were creating an accurate picture of what it could look like in the future...So we're really excited to be allowing the participants to really get a better vision of what rewilding means in practice, what it can look like and learn about different species and



their ecosystem functions, yes we're hoping to wow people [laughs] and hopefully also to land the powerful message around the opportunity for rewilding.

Lisa

At the company level, Frans what do you see as the main outcomes that you would ask companies to drive vis-a-vis nature and the main outcomes that you would ask companies to push for.

Frans

I think the nature positive agenda is definitely important and actually we see more and more companies approaching us, not to ask how they can compensate for carbon emissions, but we see more and more companies that are looking at sort of broad positive impact, so it's nature recovery, it's addressing climate change but also socioeconomic things. So just compensating for emissions is, at least with the front runners and many more I think, it's just not enough anymore and people see that there's a way to, apart from reducing the ecological footprint as much as possible from any company, you can actively contribute to restoring nature and that doesn't need to be somewhere far away but it could actually be in your own country or nearby so that companies also can associate with landscapes or places for their employees and we see that more and more happening. And I think the private sector has to come in. We cannot leave the large scale recovery of nature to the public sector only or to grounds and charities. There is a huge opportunity for new business models that address these challenges and that is what we should look for. I think there are lots of investors, financial institutions and banks that are very much interested in this.

Lotte

I'm wondering, what can each of us do then to tackle that, and to become more nature positive and encourage that restoration?

Frans

Well I would say, rewild your garden. Take out the stones and the concrete and allow wild plants, make sure that you don't get very artificially grown plants with a lot of herbicides in there, but take wild plants and rewild your garden and make a nice pool. And rewilding your garden is becoming a trend already. I see that in the UK and the Netherlands and get rid of all the stones and everything. So that's on the small

scale but of course there's other ways to help greening your environment. There's a lot of about urban rewilding and you can of course support and become involved in all sorts of rewilding activities. So when it comes to helping nature to recover, you can this on the small scale and on the large scale – there's lots of opportunities there. And there will be, in the near future, some books coming out and publications and there are already, that answer exactly that question, so what is it then, that I can do myself? And yeah, I think this is why people like rewilding so much, because it shows that there is a perspective, that you can do things and the results are great because as I told you, nature will bounce back, if you don't manage your garden then it will become a big wilderness by itself isn't it so that's the beauty of rewilding I would say and that's what keeps me going, despite all of those negative stories. There's always a plan B I would say and that's nature itself.

Lotte

Amazing. Frans, Lisa, thank you both so much for your time today – I've learnt a lot and I've really enjoyed the conversation. As we've already explored, there are huge opportunities to leverage the power of innovation to make meaningful change and to tackle some of these global environmental challenges. You can find lots of great content about this on our website: [Accenture.com](https://www.accenture.com), and you can also find information about the sustainability challenge.

Also if you're interested in learning more about biodiversity, and the role that businesses play in restoring it, you can check out the Nature Handbook for Business that was mentioned earlier in this episode at [getnaturepositive.com](https://www.getnaturepositive.com).

Finally, if you haven't already, make sure to check out all the other episodes from the Inside Innovation series, where we talk about emerging technologies like AI and cybersecurity, and how they can be leveraged to change our world for the better. If you want to help build a better tomorrow, head to [Accenture.com/careers](https://www.accenture.com/careers) to find out how you can get involved.

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