The Wellbeing Economy and the Fish on Your Plate



What would our food system look like if we measured success not only in profit margins and market share, but in ecological health, social equity, and community resilience? This is the central question of the wellbeing economy movement — and it turns out that forgotten fish are a surprisingly instructive case study.

The Nordic Wellbeing Academy has spent years working at the intersection of health, policy, and social transformation. Our work with the European Health Futures Forum, the Nordic Health 2030 Movement, and the European Health Union Initiative has consistently pointed to the same conclusion: the metrics we use to define value determine the choices we make. That goes for food systems as well as health systems. So when industrial fishing systems measure success in volume and price per kilogram, small species with rapid reproductive cycles fall through the cracks. They are bycatch - a cost to be minimised, not a resource to be celebrated.

Yet these same species, when viewed through a wellbeing economy lens, represent remarkable value. Their rapid reproduction means they in principle are far less vulnerable to overexploitation than slower-growing commercial fish. Their nutritional density makes them ideal candidates for healthy, affordable diets. Their presence in local waters, and their traditional place in artisanal fishing practices, connects them to cultural heritage and community identity. The problem is not the fish. The problem is the framework through which we have chosen to see them.

The Forgotten Fish project is, in a quiet but determined way, an act of framework change. By training catering professionals to value and cook with underutilised species, by fostering direct relationships between restaurateurs and small-scale fishers, and by embedding marine sustainability into vocational education across Europe, the project is building a different kind of evidence. Evidence that what is good for the ocean, good for coastal livelihoods, and good for public health can also be good for a restaurant's menu.

This is the logic of the wellbeing economy applied to the dinner table. And at the Nordic Wellbeing Academy, we believe it is one of the most compelling — and most delicious — arguments we have yet encountered. The sea does not need to be exploited to be valued. It

needs to be understood, respected, and given a place in the training, culture, and policy choices we make as a society. Forgotten fish, it turns out, have a great deal to teach us.

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