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Flourishing briefing

Central to Åland's sustainability work is the concept of flourishing as the main policy goal. This brief gives an introduction to the flourishing idea and connects it to sustainability.

Flourishing goes beyond material well-being and happiness. It encompasses a sense of meaning and purpose, health, character, virtue, and deep social relationships.¹ To flourish also means that one feels connected to the community and to the surrounding nature, and able to marvel at existence, in a way similar to what is often called mindfulness. Flourishing also includes a form of contentment with what we have, while still striving to improve. Complementing wonder and contentment is reconciliation with oneself and the past, completed by the ability to with integrity address wrongs and injustices.²

As a society, we can promote flourishing through the structures we create: education, healthcare, security and participation; and the values we promote. But each individual is also responsible both for their own flourishing, and for enabling the flourishing of others. It requires introspection, courage, tolerance, and openness.

Flourishing paves the way for sustainability and development. Flourishing people are better equipped to contribute to their societies, form social connections, innovate, and create common solutions. Achieving sustainable societies requires us to frame the transformation in terms of increased human well-being and individual capabilities to avoid the backlash a focus on austerity is creating. The key to sustainability lies in understanding that our well-being and capacity to flourish is inextricably linked to the well-being of the ecosystems of the planet. Our material and spiritual well-being ultimately depend on nature, and failing to effectively mitigate climate change and reverse biodiversity loss will cause unprecedented decreases in well-being for all of us.

Switching to societies that places flourishing central is no easy task. It requires a fundamental cultural transformation shifting away from a culture valuing material consumption into societies focusing on human well-being and respect for planetary boundaries.

For flourishing to become a concrete policy goal monitoring is necessary. Åland applies a Harvard-developed instrument measuring life-satisfaction, mental and physical health, meaningfulness, characteristics, social relationships, and financial security to create a flourishing index with which flourishing over time and across different groups can be monitored.³

Focusing on flourishing as the main policy goal forces us to critically review existing legislation and policies. Policies enabling flourishing would also ensure apt conditions in the future, as an important determinant of flourishing is our sense of well-being over time and possibilities to live healthy, secure and meaningful lives. Policies promoting flourishing are therefore by definition sustainable.

¹ VanderWeele, 2017. [On the promotion of human flourishing](#). PNAS. 114:31, 8248-8156.

² Bärkraft.ax, 2022. The Flourishing Age. [Status report 5, chapter 5.2.](#)

³ ÅSUB, 2022. [Tillitsstudie för Åland.](#)