

Wellbeing Economy in the EU?

A comparative thematic analysis of policy objectives and agendas
in relation to Wellbeing Economy

Master's Thesis

Christine Hussmann Christensen

Supervisor: Anne Grethe Julius Pedersen

Culture, Communication & Globalization

Aalborg University

Fall 2024

Number of characters: 136.232

Abstract

This thesis partly explores the concept wellbeing economy (WE) in relation to the current economic system based on economic growth, and partly explores EU politics incorporation of a WE framework. This provides an assessment of future prospects of WE in the EU.

WE is an economic framework emerging in 2017 and works as a response to social and ecological crises. It is built on critiques of a growth-oriented economic system e.g. ecological economics and other critiques denying a correlation between wellbeing and GDP-measures.

WE promotes an agenda that values human and planetary wellbeing over economic growth. Social and ecological objectives should not be a means to achieve economic aims. Rather the economy should *serve* life and wellbeing for people and planet.

The WE framework suggests that human life and wellbeing depends on and increases with ecological wellbeing. Further, ecological wellbeing is a right of nature and all life-forms. It rests on ideas of planetary boundaries, the value of nature, and the movement from economic growth values to values of equality, happiness, social connection and belonging for all.

This theoretical perspective provides the framework for a mainly deductive thematic analysis, where the European Green Deal (EGD), the 8'th Environmental Agency Programme (EAP), the Greens' Resolution of wellbeing economies (Res.) and the Greens' Manifesto (Man.), mainly their Green and Social Deal, are explored and compared in relation to WE.

This analysis is built on three main themes: the role of economic growth, the role of planetary wellbeing, and the role of people's wellbeing. The four documents are explored, discussed and compared within each theme.

It is found that the EGD and the 8'th EAP value economic growth as well as planetary and human wellbeing. Lack of clarity and double-sided framings are apparent in the agendas. It provides a perspective where economic growth is a main priority, as well as a perspective where economic growth must be conditioned by sustainable and social objectives at the centre of policies. It recognizes human wellbeing as an unquestionable aim while also suggesting social objectives as a means to reach other political objectives rather than for the sake of human wellbeing. Further, planetary wellbeing is recognized as necessary for social and economic objectives, and it is questioned whether planetary wellbeing would be an aim if it was not related to societal development.

On the other hand, the Greens' documents show a critique of economic growth, and an articulated move from a growth-paradigm to a prioritization of human and planetary wellbeing. The incorporation of nature's value is apparent in the description of planetary wellbeing. Further, an articulation of a social cohesion and community-based framework for wellbeing and policy strategy is apparent. However, an us-vs-them discourse is also generated, suggesting that this social objective is not incorporated.

I suggest that future prospects of WE in the EU are beginning to have support, however, they also face challenges in regard to valuing nature and all life for their own sake; to the devaluing of continuous economic growth that does not regard social and ecological objectives; as well as valuing social connectedness across political and societal polarization as necessary for human wellbeing.

Table of content

Abstract.....	2
1 Introduction.....	6
1.1 Problem formulation.....	8
2 Literature review	9
3 Theoretical framework	13
3.1 Defining wellbeing economy	13
3.1.1 Planetary wellbeing	15
3.1.2 People's wellbeing	16
3.1.3 Distance to economic growth and GDP	18
4 Methodology	20
4.1 Interpretivist paradigm	20
4.2 Research design	22
4.3 Method of data selection	23
4.4 Method of data analysis.....	27
4.5 Research quality and limitations	30
5 Analysis and Discussion of Findings	32
5.1 Theme 1 – Role of economic growth.....	33
5.1.1 European Green Deal & Environmental Action Programme.....	33
5.1.2 The Greens' Resolution & The Greens' Manifesto	37
5.1.3 Comparison.....	39
5.2 Theme 2 – Role of planetary wellbeing.....	41
5.2.1 European Green Deal & Environmental Action Programme.....	41
5.2.2 The Greens' Resolution & The Greens' Manifesto	44
5.2.3 Comparison.....	47
5.3 Theme 3 – Role of people's wellbeing	48
5.3.1 European Green Deal & Environmental Action Programme.....	48
5.3.2 The Greens' Resolution & The Greens' Manifesto	52
5.3.3 Comparison.....	55
6 Concluding remarks.....	57
Bibliography	60

1 Introduction

This thesis investigates the concept and future prospects of Wellbeing Economy in a European political context. Wellbeing Economy (WE) was institutionally founded by the Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll) and the Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership (WEGo) in 2017 as a reaction to the crises of the world (Abrar, 2021: 163). The arguments behind WE are not new, but they have not been organizationally established and defined as an economic approach until the emergence of WEAll and WEGo. The belief in WE is that many of the world's crises are emerging or being intensified by the current economic system. Some of the crises, which are argued to be caused by the current economic system, directly or indirectly, are of a social, ecological, or health-related nature. Recently the world faced the health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, which not only caused social and economic crises. It also exemplified existing challenges such as injustice, inequality, and environmental degradation as the cause of disease (Fioramonti et al., 2022: 1; Laurent, 2021: 1; Abrar, 2021: 157). It exemplified the connectedness between crises. The economy is related to the health and well-being of people, and the health and well-being of people is connected to the environment (Fioramonti et al., 2022: 1). The ecological crisis is not only a threat to wellbeing and health through the higher risk of diseases. Human health is dependent on clean air, fresh water, and ecological conditions that allow us to produce food (Bansal, 2020: 1). The impact of the ecological crisis is emphasized by the WHO Director-General simply stating that “the climate crisis is a health crisis”. WHO calls for a change that “make human health and well-being the top measure of climate success” (World Health Organization, 2024).

The health crisis as well as the climate crisis further exemplify and increase inequalities of the world. “Economic, social and health inequalities within and between countries are wide, and on some measures continue to diverge”(McCartney et al., 2023: 2). Further, inequalities are apparent in diverse wellbeing challenges such as worsening mental health and an increasingly polarized and distrustful political system (McCartney et al., 2023: 2). For example, it has been found that many people do not trust their governments and institutions “to do what is right”, believe that they “only serve the interests of a few”, and “that capitalism, in its current form, is doing more harm than good” (Abrar, 2021: 157)

In WE the concerns about the capitalist system are shared and capitalism is found to be the driver of ecological and inequality crises through the pursuit of continuous economic growth which promotes overproduction and -consumption without concern for planetary boundaries as well as complements the rich without solving wellbeing issues (Feola et al., 2021: 1; Coscieme et al., 2019: 5-6). In an

effort to address the crises and issues supporters of WE want to change the focus toward the wellbeing of the people and the planet rather than economic growth (Abrar, 2021).

This perspective is gaining support across Europe, as Wales, Scotland, Iceland and Finland have joined the WEGo partnership (Wellbeing Economy Alliance, 2022b). In relation, the EU are collaborating with OECD and UN, who have committed to broader frameworks for wellbeing focusing on indicators beyond GDP in policymaking. As an example, the Sustainable Development Goals, a set of 17 holistic goals aimed at ensuring peace and prosperity for people and the planet were adopted by all UN member states in 2015 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, n.d.; United Nations, n.d.).

Europe is experiencing rising political polarization, often a result of increasing inequality and a following decrease in trust for the governments and the political system. Polarization can be an expression of a feeling of lack of power and impatience for change (Brückner & Larsen, 2024). In this regard an alternative to the current economy is called for in Europe. As Europe also is experiencing health and wellbeing issues such as rising mental health issues and more extreme weather conditions (recently damaging drought in Southern Europe and floodings in Austria, Czechia and Valencia), a wellbeing economy perspective might be a future prospect (Maach, 2024; Danmarks Radio, n.d.; Klinge & Andersen, 2023; World Health Organization, 2022).

A collecting policy actor on the European and global scene is the EU, which has been argued to lead by example on climate politics and which has seen “policy and institutional innovations in many areas” (Rayner et al., 2023: 2). WE advocates for policy and institutional innovation, and address climate change as well as other issues the EU faces. As such the EU can be a relevant actor for exploration of the implementation of WE.

In 2019 the European Union agreed upon the long-term policy strategy the European Green Deal (EGD) which is set to address climate change as the main issue and faces this as “an opportunity to build a new economic model”. It claims that “many benefits” will follow including the improvement of “our health and wellbeing” (European Commission, n.d.-b). The EGD is providing a framework for policies across sectors in the EU and can be indicative of a new, alternative future political direction of the EU. However, while the objectives in the EGD seem to address the same concerns as a wellbeing economy, the new economic model in the EGD is a green growth model, promoting continuous economic growth while ‘green’.

This focus has been challenged by the European Greens (the Greens, a European political party bringing together national parties from the EU) who confronted the growth narrative and addressed other weaknesses focusing on justice, rights and planetary boundaries (Toussaint, 2021: 232). The Greens' challenge of the EU policy strategy marks a proposal for a more radical change and addresses some of the same concerns as a WE concept. A comparative investigation of these two political ideas can further the understanding of the WE concept, considering wellbeing aspects in a growth narrative and beyond. As the agendas are oriented towards the future and broad systemic changes an exploration can indicate the possibility of a future implementation of WE on a European policy scale.

This thesis aims to provide insights into how the European Green Deal objectives and the European Green Party's agendas align with the concept of WE and explore future prospects of WE in Europe from the perspective of these political agendas.

1.1 Problem formulation

What does Wellbeing Economy offer compared to the current economic system and to what extent is Wellbeing Economy articulated and incorporated in the European Green Deal objectives and the European Green Party's agenda? Based on this what are the perspectives of Wellbeing Economy in the EU?

More specifically, these questions will be explored and discussed based on documents on the European Green Deal published by the EU (the EGD and the 8th EAP) and documents on the European Green Party's agenda published by the European Greens (the 2024 Manifesto and the Resolution on wellbeing economies adopted at the 37th EGP Congress, Vienna, 2-3 June 2023). These documents are presented in the methodology chapter.

2 Literature review

Wellbeing and sustainability concerns are emerging in different fields such as population medicine and health, service, marketing, and education research and literature (Carlsson, 2024; Russell-Bennett et al., 2024; Kelleci & Yıldız, 2021; Souza et al., 2023). It has long had its own field within economics, where degrowth and post-growth approaches have considered ecological boundaries as well as people's wellbeing's relation to economic growth. In this literature review, I will focus on the historical background of wellbeing and sustainability approaches influencing WE.

Ecological economics and planetary boundaries

In 1972 the Club of Rome's report "The Limits to Growth" was published. The Club of Rome began with a meeting between a group of thirty people from different countries and fields, some scientists, educators, economists, humanists, industrialists, and civil servants in 1968 (Meadows et al., 1972). They intended "to examine the complex of problems troubling men of all nations" including poverty, equality and other economic disruptions and degradation of the environment (ibid: 10). The problems studied had in common that they occur in all societies, contain a variety of technical, social, economic, and political elements, and they interact (ibid: 10-11). The study resulted in a report with the message that the global system of nature probably reaches a limit in year 2100 where present rates of economic and population growth cannot be sustained. However, the report states that with societal and political action it is possible to stay within the planetary limits (Club of Rome, 2024). This report shows that holistic and interdisciplinary approaches examining economic growth have been considered already in 1972.

The concerns were also apparent in economic research. In the 1970's the neoclassical economist Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen found that the economic system was not accounting for the planet's limitations and therefore the aim of continuous growth was not sustainable. This thinking was picked up by Herman Daly who developed the beginnings of *ecological economics*. His concerns were that there would be consequences of unlimited economic growth ultimately resulting in decreasing human wellbeing. He argued that economic growth in the beginning did more good than harm, securing e.g. better nutrition, sanitation, and medicine. However, with time the harmful effects of economic growth grew. At some point the social and environmental harms would have higher impact than the growing economy resulting in decreasing wellbeing. His alternative became the steady-state economy. Instead of focusing on economic growth, the aim should be maximizing wellbeing within the limits of natural resources over the long term (Hensher, 2023).

This research was followed in 1993 by Richard Douthwaite (sustainability economist) who published the book *“The growth illusion: how economic growth has enriched the few, impoverished the many, and endangered the planet”*. The title sums up the main points in the book as well as the main critique of the economic growth system. Douthwaite connects economic growth to damaged national health, family and community life: an increase in chronic illness, unemployment, crime, divorce and a decrease in other indicators of quality of life. He argues that due to the political goal and the overall acceptance of economic growth, actors such as politicians and company owners are forced to act, invent and consume fast, and thus lose sight of the necessity of maintaining the world’s climate and ecology. The economic system fosters a lack of concern for climate change and ecological degradation, and instead increases climate and ecological issues with short-term, money-making inventions and priorities (Douthwaite, 1993). Research in ecological economics has thus long connected both human and planetary issues to economic growth.

The concerns about planetary limits and their impact on people’s wellbeing was also picked up by the international society. The United Nations called for “a global agenda for change” resulting in the Brundtland Commission’s definition of sustainable development published in the report “Our Common Future” in 1987: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (UN. Secretary-General & World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987: 54). This definition builds on the need for long-term strategies that consider the connection between the present and the future, and the interrelationships between people, resources, environment, and development (ibid: 11). Further, it contains the concept of ‘needs’ referring to “the essential needs of the world’s poor”, and it contains a consideration of the environment’s ability to meet these needs depending on the state of technology and social organization (ibid: 54). This definition and report show that it is not only in research literature there has long been a concern for planetary and human wellbeing and sustainability.

Economic growth, GDP, and the lack of relation to societal and ecological wellbeing

GDP and economic growth are in today’s economy used as an indicator of societal success. This has been contested since the 1930’s.

GDP (gross domestic product) is an indicator of economic activity and has become the standard measurement of national development and prosperity. Dan O’Neill (ecological economist) describes GDP: “It measures the total value of all final goods and services that are newly produced within the

borders of a country over the course of a year” (O’Neill, 2015). GDP is a measurement of economic growth, and thus economic growth has become the standard indicator of success. The problem with GDP is multifaceted. There is no difference between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ economic activity in the system. It measures the economic income in the country no matter where it comes from or goes to. Thus, the production of sustainable technologies can contribute the same to a GDP-score as the clean-up after an oil-spill. The same way money spent on divorces as well as weddings contributes to an increase in GDP. Further, GDP does not account for inequalities as it does not provide information on income distribution. It also does not count activities with no money exchanges. Thus, household work, the raising of children or caring for family members or friends will not be included in a country’s GDP, even if this contributes to a functioning and thriving population. Environmentally sustainable solutions such as sharing or recycling products will also not be included in GDP. On this ground the use of GDP as a societal indicator for success has been criticized. The inventor of GDP Simon Kuznets already in 1934 warned that “the welfare of a nation can scarcely be inferred from a measurement of national income” (ibid: 104). He followed this warning with a critique of the common use of GDP as an indicator for societal development in 1962: “goals for ‘more’ growth should specify more growth of what and for what” (ibid: 104). GDP should not be used as an indicator for societal development, because it is only an indicator for economic growth and nothing else. By using it as the common indicator, it promotes economic growth without any concern for fatalities along the way. The common use of societal ‘growth’ based on GDP refers to economic growth, and Kuznets’ critique illustrates that this use can be a problem, as we forget to specify that ‘growth’ does not necessarily equal growth in wellbeing for people or planet.

Some arguments for using GDP and economic growth as indicators are economic assumptions that increasing economic income over the long run will decrease inequalities through a general rise in economic wealth, and that ‘money equals happiness and wellbeing’ (Coscieme et al., 2019: 5, 8-9). These assumptions have, however, been questioned.

Though it is recognized in “Our Common Future” as well as in economics that economic growth up to a specific level can increase wellbeing, there is no evidence that continuous economic growth correlates with wellbeing. In 1974 the economist Richard Easterlin published research suggesting that above a certain level of income subjective wellbeing no longer correlates with wealth. This research suggests that when basic needs are met, the supposed link between income and wellbeing (on which the economic growth system rests its argument) is no longer concurrent (illustrated on Figure 1) (Coscieme et al., 2019: 5-6).

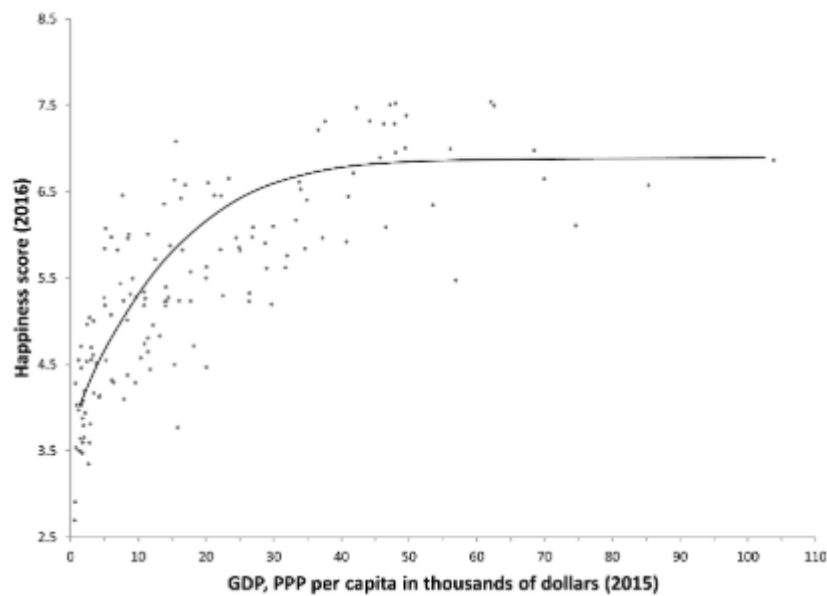


Figure 1: Illustration of the Easterlin Paradox (Coscieme et al., 2019: 6)

Research inspired by this paradox illustrates that some factors of human wellbeing, such as happiness, life fulfilment, life satisfaction, do not grow at the same rate as GDP per capita, indicating that raising GDP will not guarantee human wellbeing (Coscieme et al., 2019: 5-6).

Further, it has been shown that inequality between and within countries over the last 200 years have risen simultaneously with GDP, and thus economic growth does not seem to decrease inequality (Coscieme et al., 2019: 8-9). The arguments for economic growth and the use of GDP have thus been contested over a longer time, and a new focus on planetary and human wellbeing is relevant in today's policies and research.

3 Theoretical framework

This thesis aims at understanding Europe's strategies for approaching ecological and wellbeing concerns. In other words, it investigates Europe's sustainability transition. Feola et al. (2021) argue that many of the dominant theories of sustainability transitions take capitalism for granted. This limits "the scope for imagining alternative futures, policy options and strategies for transformative change" (Feola et al., 2021: 3). Rather Feola et al. describe sustainability transformation as a "multifaceted, multilevel process that entails the deconstruction of capitalist modernity or elements thereof as well as the construction of post-capitalist realities" (ibid: 10). One recent attempt at creating such a transformation might be found in the Wellbeing Economy. It is an economic approach that refocuses the objectives of societal success. It emphasizes wellbeing for people and planet rather than economic growth. Lately this economy has gained more focus in both theoretical exploration and practical implementation. In this chapter I will explore some of these contributions and present an overview of wellbeing economy (WE) which will be the theoretical frame for this thesis.

3.1 Defining wellbeing economy

When defining wellbeing economy there are concerns which seem relevant to raise awareness about. WE is defined broadly in an attempt to be easier adaptable and develop locally with a sensitivity to different societies and cultures (McCartney et al., 2023). However, the broad definition has resulted in different interpretations and alterations of wellbeing economy. In their article "How to measure progress towards a wellbeing economy: distinguishing genuine advances from 'window dressing'", McCartney et al. (2023) raise a concern that there is a risk of confusion and misuse related to the term:

"the term 'wellbeing economy' is increasingly in use and arguably is at high risk of misappropriation and capture by organisations and governments who either do not sufficiently understand the implications of making the change to a wellbeing economy, or who wish to present themselves as being in favour of more radical change than is intended." (McCartney et al., 2023: 3)

This quote illustrates that defining WE is a task that involves a thorough exploration of the concept. In this chapter I will thus first present an overall definition of WE, followed by an elaborate exploration of the three aspects: planet, people, and economic growth. The definition will be on a conceptual level rather than technical, as Fioramonti et al. (2022) argues that: "Overall, the WE

approach fundamentally alters our understanding of what creates value and when” (Fioramonti et al., 2022: 3).

When defining a wellbeing economy approach it is therefore necessary to note that WE is not just a row of policy changes, it is a change of values embedded in the policies. It is a move from valuing financial capital, individualization and constant growth and production, to valuing cohesion, connection with nature and each other, and personal empowerment (Fioramonti et al., 2022: 3). This notion contributes to the analysis as it deems that it is not simply the specific policy that must be considered but also the underlying values.

The Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll), an international network of collaborators working towards WE, has different ways of referring to the term wellbeing economy. In the literature’s definitions of wellbeing economy different authors reference WEAll’s definitions (Hensher, 2023; McCartney et al., 2023; Waddock, 2021; Abrar, 2021). In WEAll’s webpage headline, they refer to it as “an economy in service of life”, and elsewhere on their webpage it is referred to as “an economy designed to serve people and planet, not the other way around” (Wellbeing Economy Alliance, 2022a). These definitions are both broad but agree that the economy somehow ‘serves’. Including the last paragraph ‘not the other way around’ suggests that people and planet are not serving the economy. This definition can be interpreted as a prioritization of people and planet over the economy.

WEAll’s definition is directly followed by two different short explanations:

“In a Wellbeing Economy, the rules, norms and incentives are set up to deliver quality of life and flourishing for all people, in harmony with our environment, by default.” (Wellbeing Economy Alliance, 2022a)

“Rather than treating economic growth as an end in and of itself and pursuing it at all costs, a Wellbeing Economy puts our human and planetary needs at the centre of its activities, ensuring that these needs are all equally met, by default.” (Wellbeing Economy Alliance, 2022c)

The first explanation emphasizes that society should have a natural or obvious aim at quality of life for people and planet. Through the second explanation the objective gains further clarity. Here there is presented a distance to economic growth, which intends a distance to the current economic system. The economy in the current system has come to be prioritized under the pretense that economic growth equals societal success in all its meaning (Hoekstra, 2019: 4-7).

In WEAll's definition it is however indirectly suggested that when the current economic system treats economic growth as the highest priority there might be "costs". The definition tells that WE differs from the growth-aim by always prioritizing human and planetary needs, also over unnuanced economic growth. Accordingly, it can be interpreted that some of the costs of growth might be affecting people and the planet.

The literature on WE has similar differences in definitions as the two short explanations present: some emphasize the aim of human and planetary wellbeing, and some add a distance to economic growth (Waddock, 2021). Below each aspect will be elaborated and all must be considered important for the incorporation and understanding of WE.

3.1.1 Planetary wellbeing

One aspect of wellbeing economy is a focus on enabling conditions for a healthy planet (Abrar, 2021: 159). This focus is influenced by ecological economics and rests on the knowledge that "human actions threaten to cause irreversible changes in the Earth system" and that the human impact on the ecological system has "reached a point where the future of human societies and the flourishing of life, in general, are threatened" (Kortetmäki et al., 2023: 9; Hensher, 2023: 653; Fioramonti et al., 2022: 3).

Two factors are emphasized in this threat. First, nature and the planet are valuable for human survival and thriving. Human societies are dependent on the natural world, and changes in climate and loss of nature present a threat to human life, health and wellbeing (Hensher, 2023: 653-654; McCartney et al., 2023: 2). Second, nature and its beings have their own value. There is a "moral right for both humans and nonhumans to exist, to have their needs satisfied, and to realize their typical characteristics and capacities" (Kortetmäki et al., 2023: 12). The safety of "all life" needs to be restored and maintained (Abrar, 2021: 160).

To ensure all life and wellbeing, it is thus important to act in ways that do not impact the ecological system to a degree where irreversible changes threaten life and wellbeing. In a wellbeing economy it is suggested that long-term sustainability objectives must be in focus, that future impacts of all actions and decisions are considered, and that there is a focus on "meeting the needs of all citizens now, without compromising our ability to meet the needs of future generations" (Waddock, 2021: 160; Hensher, 2023: 654; Kickbusch et al., 2022: 2). This objective is directly seen in the Brundtland Commission's definition of sustainable development: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (UN.

Secretary-General & World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). This emphasizes that WE rests on existing ideas shared by worldwide institutions.

Wellbeing economy works under the assumption that it is possible to ensure wellbeing for all within planetary boundaries. This requires new approaches to production and consumption, in some ways a limit to growth, and greater equality in income and wealth (Fioramonti et al., 2022: 2). As well as long-term objectives and sustainable development are not new ideas, neither are limits to growth and planetary boundaries. These ideas have been presented by the Club of Rome's in the report "The Limits to Growth" in 1972 and in various ecological economics and degrowth approaches. Fioramonti et al. (2022) argue that a WE framework differs from these approaches in terms of linguistic focus. Where degrowth approaches focus on limits to growth which can be interpreted as limits to development and a need for human restraint and deprivation, the wellbeing economy focuses on ensuring a good life for people and planet (Fioramonti et al., 2022: 3-4). This is exemplified by a focus on living in balance with nature: "balance between the needs and lifestyles of humans and the needs of all living things which in turn allows a mutual flourishing and the opportunity for every being to contribute what s/he/it has to offer the world" (Waddock, 2021: 160). Here there is a focus on ensuring the needs of nature, but it does not take anything away from people, rather it provides flourishing and opportunities. Thus, from the WE perspective the wellbeing of the planet is not simply seen as a chore necessary to maintain human life, but also as a strengthening and improvement of people's wellbeing as well as the rightful maintenance of all non-human life.

3.1.2 People's wellbeing

A second aspect of WE is the wellbeing of people. Here the connection between people and planet is also exemplified in the definition of wellbeing that WEAll works with. They present five universal human needs for a good life, and one of them is "Nature: A restored and safe natural world for all life." (Abrar, 2021: 160). Thus, the definition of wellbeing emphasizes that nature is an essential part of human wellbeing, and the preservation of nature thus provides wellbeing for people (rather than taking from people). This can be explained by the ecopsychology and ecosocial approaches to wellbeing, which argue that "human beings are simply a part of nature. From this perspective, nature and humanity are ineradicably linked and high levels of well-being can only be achieved through the experiential realization of nature connectedness and exposure to nonhuman nature" (Kortetmäki et al., 2023: 11).

People's wellbeing is thus partly defined by people achieving a connection with nature and partly by the necessity of a safe natural environment where people can live. Further, wellbeing is presented by WEAll through the four remaining needs for a good life.

First there is "connection: A sense of belonging and institutions that serve the common good" (Abrar, 2021: 160). This can be interpreted as people need a sense of belonging and to feel connected and thus institutions must serve the common good to achieve (and represent) connection between people. Fioramonti et al. (2022) have described key features of WE and note that medical research has found that "the quality of human relations is a fundamental determinant of a person's health" (Fioramonti et al., 2022: 2). This can explain why WEAll note connection and belonging as universal needs for wellbeing.

Further, WEAll present "dignity: Everyone has enough to live in comfort, safety, and happiness" (Abrar, 2021: 160). Wellbeing in social sciences is often described nonsubjectively and through satisfaction of basic human needs, including the need for "material subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, and autonomy" (Kortetmäki et al., 2023: 11). Thus, WEAll's need for 'dignity' can be understood as e.g. the need for food, water, protection from weather as well as discrimination and violence. People need to be able to live their life being safe from hunger, cold, and other threats to their health and lives as well as safe to be who they are and able to make their own choices. However, the notion of 'happiness' indicates that WE also builds on a subjective measure on wellbeing, where people's own perception of their wellbeing must be considered.

This also relates to WEAll's need "participation: Citizens are actively engaged in their communities and locally rooted economies" (Abrar, 2021: 160). When citizens participate, they become able to influence choices, and might thus achieve a sense of purpose, empowerment and ownership or autonomy of their lives and surroundings. Further active engagement in communities can strengthen a feeling of connection and belonging. Thus, the universal needs that WEAll present are connected.

Lastly, they present that a good life include "fairness: Justice, in all of its dimensions, at the heart of economic systems, and the gap between the richest and poorest greatly reduced" (Abrar, 2021: 160). Here the focus is on the system and equality. Fioramonti et al. (2022) describes that inequality negatively influences personal and collective health, and oppositely greater equality seems to increase wellbeing by e.g. influencing child development, life expectancy, violence rates, social cohesion and trust (Fioramonti et al., 2022: 2). Strong relationships have been demonstrated between "increasing income inequality and worsening wellbeing in a long list of social indicators including social capital

(i.e., how much people trust each other and engage in social or civic participation), happiness, stress and anxiety, life expectancy, mental illness and obesity, infant mortality, violent crime rates, social mobility, and education scores, among others” (Coscieme et al., 2019: 9). The focus on equality thus relates to the achievement of the other presented needs for wellbeing.

People’s wellbeing is thus defined from a needs-based perspective including objective and subjective measures of wellbeing. The needs are described as the need for social connection and belonging, safety, happiness and comfort for everyone, achieved through equality, active participation in communities and the service of the common good as well as the service of and connection with nature and all life.

3.1.3 Distance to economic growth and GDP

WE further have a focus on transformation and creating a distance to the current system. This focus has two different approaches. One where the growth-objective and GDP as an indicator is abandoned, and the other where additional indicators and objectives are added. Both approaches rest on the critique of GDP and economic growth as presented in the literature review. Fioramonti et al. (2022) shortly describes the critique of the growth-system:

“From a WE perspective, continuous material growth is not only unsustainable in so far as it takes a heavy toll on natural resources and ecosystems, but also because it has a detrimental impact on social cohesion as well as psychological and physical wellness. Indeed, over the past few years, production chains may have become marginally more sustainable, but more production has also meant more working hours and more waste. Inequalities have also grown, particularly within countries, while psychological distress has increased exponentially, especially at times of accelerated growth. Modern societies are increasingly plagued by anxiety, depression, narcissism, reduction of empathy and other mental disorders.” (Fioramonti et al., 2022: 2)

The economic growth system thus contradicts both dimensions of WE – the wellbeing of people and planet. Accordingly, the distance to the current system is a part of the WE framework.

Waddock (2021) has researched narratives within WE and found that there is a focus on transformation. A critique of the current system emphasizing that it is necessary to start “measuring what matters and what actually helps to build that economy” bringing wellbeing for all and shift away from the measurement of GDP and continual growth as the main objective (Waddock, 2021: 159-

160). This focus has been nuanced by Mason & Büchs (2023) who have compared narratives put forward by WEAll and WEGo's in relation to "GDP as a social and economic indicator, economic growth as a political priority, and the nature of capitalism" (Mason & Büchs, 2023: 5). They found that WEAll overall had a more progressive narrative compared to WEGo's. Where WEAll tended to argue in favor of replacing GDP with social and ecological indicators, WEGo's tended to argue for adding supportive measurements to GDP. For the narrative surrounding economic growth "WEAll sources explicitly criticized economic growth as the dominant policy goal and gave examples of social and economic problems that come with prioritizing economic growth in policymaking" (Mason & Büchs, 2023: 9). "In contrast, WEGo representatives tended to emphasize that economic growth should not be the *only goal* in policymaking and advocated alternative versions of growth such as "inclusive" and "green" growth" (Mason & Büchs, 2023: 9). When discussing capitalism they found that WEAll sources argued for a "fundamental change of the economic system" while WEGo representatives argued that "capitalism needs to be reformed, not overcome as such" (Mason & Büchs, 2023: 9). Based on this I suggest that WE encompass a difference to the current economic system and a distance to economic growth as the ultimate and only goal. The difference between the degrees of critique shows that WE can be understood broadly.

Here I suggest that WE can be understood and incorporated on a spectrum, where one end represents a focus on planetary and human wellbeing simultaneously with a focus on economic growth. The other end presents a clear critique of economic growth as objective, and only uses the wellbeing of planet and people as objectives. Across the spectrum it must be emphasized that wellbeing of people and planet are aims on their own rather than means to reach economic goals (McCartney et al., 2023: 4).

4 Methodology

In this section the ontology, epistemology and methodology of this thesis are presented. This includes the presentation of research design, method of data selection and analysis as well as research quality and limitations.

4.1 Interpretivist paradigm

This thesis is conducted through an interpretivist paradigm where ontology and epistemology are intertwined. Ontology and epistemology describe two dimensions of a scientific paradigm. Ontology is the question of the degree to which social phenomena (such as e.g. class, gender, ethnicity or in terms of this thesis value, wealth, societal success) are regarded as real and objective or socially constructed by perceptions, interpretations and actions of social actors (Bryman, 2016: 28) (Della Porta & Keating, 2008: 22). Epistemology is “the question of what is regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline” (Bryman, 2016: 24). The two are connected in the sense that our perception of reality (objective and/or subjective) influences what we can accept as credited knowledge. Consequently, this will influence which methods are available for creating and accessing the desired knowledge. The methodological choices in this study are presented in the following sections.

From an ontological perspective, the interpretivist paradigm argues that social phenomena exist in a link between objective and subjective reality. Human beings are ‘meaningful’ actors that credit meaning to social phenomena and only through this meaning does social reality exist (Della Porta & Keating, 2008: 23-24). As mentioned above, the interpretivist approach regards “objective and subjective meanings as deeply intertwined” (ibid: 24). This means that reality is understood through subjective meanings, and historical and social events can only be understood by examining “the perceptions individuals have of the world outside” (ibid: 25). It is argued that the world consists of social actors and that their perceptions are shaped by “complex cultural and social influences” combined with “a degree of free will and judgement” (ibid: 25). Della Porta & Keating (2008) argue that interpretation works at two levels, one at which people interpret and make meaning of the world, and one at which the social researcher interprets and makes meaning of people’s interpretations. Accordingly, “the world can be understood not as an objective reality, but as a series of interpretations that people within society give of their position; the social scientist, in turn, interprets these interpretations” (ibid: 25). In terms of this thesis, I will interpret the interpretation in the EU

documents and the Green Party's documents in relation to the interpretations in the WE-theoretical framework.

A hermeneutic process

The knowledge I produce as a researcher will be contextual in terms of my prior interpretations of reality shaped by cultural and social influences, as well as my interpretations of the documents and of the theoretical framework of the study. This process can be explained through the hermeneutic process.

According to German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer known for his work on hermeneutics, the first condition in hermeneutics is our pre-understanding or pre-judgment. Prior to any research or meaning-making we (as people and researchers) will always have previous experience, opinion, knowledge, etc. shaping our interpretations and understandings of the phenomenon (Gilje, 2017: 135). A condition for social research is thus that the researcher interprets the phenomenon from their 'horizon'. When the researcher aims at understanding another point of view a 'fusion of horizons' can occur (ibid: 136-137). It is in the fusion of horizons realization occurs and the researcher produces new knowledge and begins to understand the studied object from a new point of view (Kristiansen, 2017: 158-159).

This process can be illustrated through the analytical concept of the hermeneutic circle (Figure 2). This concept is also often illustrated through a spiral, as it indicates that a new point of view is achieved through every new interpretation (Kristiansen, 2017: 163-168). Here the hermeneutic process is understood as a circular structure where the researcher constantly acquires new understandings through the analysis of the different aspects of the phenomenon. The

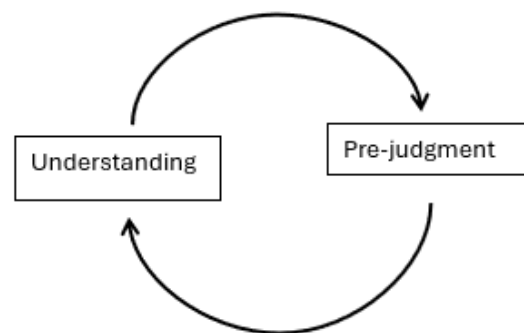


Figure 2: Hermeneutic process as the researcher constantly makes understanding through their pre-judgment which again shapes a new pre-judgment. Own figure, inspired by Fredslund (2012:79).

researcher is thus deemed to constantly understand the studied objective from a new horizon with a new pre-judgment. The researcher might begin to interpret the data differently than they first did (Kristiansen, 2017: 159-160). This creates a circular process, where the researcher must reread, reconsider and reinterpret continuously. As I later will present these considerations are embedded in the selected method of data analysis.

A key task in hermeneutic studies is to actively reflect upon one's pre-judgments about the studied object. Through this process, realization and understanding of the object can develop, and the fusion of horizons can occur, and the researcher produces new knowledge and moves their horizon (Kristiansen, 2017: 158-159). As part of this process, I will shortly present my previous study experience and understandings about the world related to wellbeing economy.

As a history and psychology bachelor I have worked critically with issues of injustice, inequality and challenges in wellbeing, economic and ecological means. I must reflectively state that my analysis is conducted from a pre-understanding that societal structures and values continuously influence each other, and all have a large impact on people's wellbeing and actions. From this pre-understanding I recognize that I see great need for and value in a wellbeing economy as the aim is to change structures as well as beliefs in order to change people's and the planet's wellbeing. My pre-judgment about the EU as an institution is that it is a rather conservative institution where progress and change only occur slowly. I expect that the EGD and the 8th EAP are not as progressive as the WE-framework or the Greens' Manifesto and Resolution. This pre-judgment has been confirmed during my initial research (Toussaint, 2021: 232; Samper et al., 2021). By adopting the interpretivist approach, I acknowledge that this pre-judgment will shape my understanding of the analytical findings in the data. However, through the hermeneutical process I open myself to new knowledge and understandings, and I will revise my initial findings throughout the analysis holding myself responsible to reflect upon and re-interpret the data and add to my understandings of the material. This process will nuance my understanding of the political documents, EU as institution, the European Greens, and wellbeing economy and its future prospects in Europe.

4.2 Research design

Building on the interpretivist paradigm outlined above, this thesis employs a qualitative research strategy. Qualitative research aims at understanding phenomena in context of the studied object rather than from an objective, generalizable point of view (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2017: 10-11). A qualitative strategy often aims at creating contextual descriptions of arguments for and narratives about specific phenomena (Tanggaard & Brinkmann, 2020: 660). It is concerned with the exploration of *how* something is understood or presented. A quantitative approach rather aims at exploring quantities and understanding phenomena from a statistic and objective perspective (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2020: 15-16). In the context of this thesis a quantitative approach could contribute to an exploration of WE concepts in the EU objectives and agendas through e.g. statistics of word-

frequencies. This could provide an understanding of whether the EU uses terms and concepts relating to or contradicting WE. With this approach a larger data set would be possible and thus a more general understanding of WE's future perspective in the EU could be provided. A qualitative approach rather provides an understanding of the (interpreted) meanings and intentions behind words and arguments (Karpatschhof, 2020: 568). It provides a reflected and deeper understanding of how WE is incorporated in the EU documents, and enables an exploration of whether the terms and concepts are used and framed with the same intent in the EU and WE. The qualitative approach includes considerations of the context of the data and analysis, and thus the analytical findings must be considered in terms of the purpose of the documents and my interpretations as researcher (Karpatschhof, 2020: 568). As this thesis is placed in an interpretivist paradigm, the aim is interpretation and contextual understanding rather than objectivity and generalizability, and thus a qualitative approach providing a contextual, deep understanding of WE in specific EU documents is chosen.

This thesis employs a mainly deductive line of inquiry as the study of phenomena in EU and Green Party documents is guided by the theoretical framework of WE. When working deductively the theoretical concept must be "translated into researchable entities" and the researcher must specify "how data can be collected in relation to the concepts" (Bryman, 2016: 21). Within a deductive research process the theory thus guides the research both in terms of analysis and the gathering of data. In the theoretical chapter of this thesis the theory has been explored, laying the groundwork for the interpretation of data in the analysis chapter.

In addition, the thesis incorporates a comparative dimension into the document analysis. The comparison includes both WE-theory compared to political documents and a comparison of the two sets of political documents. A qualitative comparative study focusses on understanding differences and similarities. The advantage of this is that the comparison can reveal "unique aspects of a particular entity that would be virtually impossible to detect otherwise" (Aurini et al., 2021: 49). A comparative study thus allows an in-depth exploration of wellbeing economy in a European context and can reveal new aspects or considerations of the phenomena in a political context.

4.3 Method of data selection

In this section I will present the process of data selection. In a research study it is important that the data reflects the problem formulation in order to gain a relevant answer (Aurini et al., 2021: 55). As the aim of this thesis is to understand theoretical concepts in a European political context, the data has been selected through a theory-guided purposive sampling (Aurini et al., 2021: 58). Some

researchers within WE-literature calls for an exploration that adds details to the framing of economies that abandons GDP-centered economic growth and focuses on goals for human and ecological wellbeing and regeneration (Shrivastava & Zsolnai, 2022: 393). Thus, it is relevant to examine contemporary policies concerning economy, climate and wellbeing in an effort to gain knowledge of the current understanding and implementation of WE-related concepts. Further, it is relevant to examine policies with a long-term strategic approach to consider the future prospects of WE. Four documents have been selected. An overview of the four can be found in Table 1 pg. 25. In the following the four documents will be presented including the process of selection.

The search for influential policies with a potential focus on long-term sustainable development and wellbeing showed that the European Green Deal (EGD) would provide a relevant data set. It has been stated that the EU is a “leader by example” in the political climate agenda (Rayner et al., 2023: 2). It can thus be expected that EU climate politics represent new and innovative points of view. Further the EU has been experiencing rising political polarization, effects from climate change, and a greater concern for (mental) health and wellbeing has been promoted (see 1 Introduction). Political polarization can represent a need for new strategies, and concerns for climate change and wellbeing call for holistic strategies. Further, the EU has the third largest economy in the world (Rao, 2023), and from a WE-theoretical perspective continuous economic growth over a certain threshold will not influence people’s wellbeing (Coscieme et al., 2019: 5-6). A transition towards WE is also seen in the EU-member country Finland as well as EU-neighbor-countries Wales, Scotland and Iceland (Wellbeing Economy Alliance, 2022b). It can thus be expected that ideas related to the WE-framework will be relevant in EU politics. Following this argument, the European Green Deal (EGD) is a long-term, transformative strategic policy that frames political action plans and other sector’s policies and agendas until 2050. The EGD represents a policy calling for economic and societal change through a holistic approach with concerns for climate, health and wellbeing (European Commission, n.d.-b). The EGD thus classifies as data that can provide insights into future prospects for the EU as well as insights into themes related to the WE-framework.

Table 1 The four selected documents of data				
<i>Document and abbreviation</i>	The European Green Deal (EGD)	8th Environmental Action Programme (EAP)	The Greens' Resolution (Res.)	The Greens' Manifesto (Man.)
<i>Official title</i>	“COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS The European Green Deal”	“DECISION (EU) 2022/591 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 6 April 2022 on a General Union Environment Action Programme to 2030”	“EGP Resolution adopted at the 37th EGP Congress, Vienna, 2-3 June 2023: Sustainable and Just Wellbeing Economies for People and Planet”	“Courage to Change: European Green Manifesto 2024”
<i>Publishing date</i>	11.12.2019	12.4.2022	2/3.6.2023	2024
<i>Author</i>	European Commission	The European Parliament and The Council Of The European Union	The European Greens	The European Greens
<i>Link</i>	https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2019%3A640%3AFIN	https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=ELEX:32022D0591	https://europeangreens.eu/resolutions/sustainable-and-just-wellbeing-economies-people-and-planet/	https://europeangreens.eu/old-courage-to-change-our-message-to-voters/
<i>Appendix</i>	Appendix I	Appendix II	Appendix III	Appendix IV

During the exploration of EU documents and the EGD I encountered the 8th Environmental Action Programme (EAP). It sets the EU’s common agenda for environment policy until 2030 and priority objectives for 2030. It is a programme building on the EGD and the long-term priority objective “Europeans live well, within planetary boundaries and in a well-being economy” (European Commission, n.d.-c). This introduction explicitly expresses the term “well-being economy”, and from

the perspective of exploring the WE-framework in the context of EU politics, this document is a valuable addition. An examination of priority objectives in the EU can contribute to the interpretation of what the EU determines as having value and societal success, and the use of the term well-being economy lays the ground for exploring how a well-being economy is defined by the EU. On this ground I chose to expand the data set, aiming for a broader analysis and understanding of WE in contemporary politics. The EGD and the 8th EAP are both drafted by the EU as an institution and the analysis will be a joint interpretation of the two documents representing the EU.

To add a layer to the understanding of WE's future prospects in the EU, I was open to a second data set for comparison. The European Greens' Manifesto 2024 and Resolution "Sustainable and Just Wellbeing Economies for People and Planet", were chosen as a comparative data set through a mixed sampling strategy. While reading literature on the European Green Deal it appeared that the European Greens had criticized EU's approach to wellbeing. Their critique suggested that they were critiquing aspects that could be imagined to also be questioned by the WE-framework. They proposed an alternative to the growth narrative and argued for a recognition of the rights of nature and the environmental rights of people (Toussaint, 2021: 232). Following this critique, I explored some of the Greens' different policies and agendas. The Greens has in 2023 adopted a resolution committing to "an economy that emphasises human and ecological wellbeing in measure and pursuit" (Res.: 1). This resolution rejects GDP as an indicator for societal success and rejects indiscriminate economic growth as societal development. It suggests that a change of priorities is needed, because the system currently neglects the wellbeing of people and planet (Res.: 1). This resolution was followed by their 2024 manifesto for the EU elections. Here they call for "change" and "courage" and offer "an alternative" (Man.: 2-4). The manifesto includes their "Green and Social Deal: The courage to put planet and people first", which will be the main data in the analysis of the Man. (Man.: 8). Considering this wording in the light of their critique of the EU and their resolution, they seem to suggest radical changes in priorities aligning with the WE-framework. These documents can jointly provide a possibly alternative and extreme interpretation of WE in the EU and nuance the findings in the analysis and understanding of WE in a European context. The documents have thus firstly been selected through an opportunistic sampling strategy as I have taken "advantage of unforeseen opportunities as they arise during the course of fieldwork" and secondly as they represent an extreme aspect of the topic (Aurini et al., 2021: 55-57).

Lastly, I will note that not all aspects of the documents will be analyzed. The analysis will be limited through a criterion sampling mixed with theory-guided sampling approach (Aurini et al., 2021:58).

Relevant aspects of the documents will be determined based on predetermined criteria for inclusion/exclusion of data. As this thesis is working from a deductive theory the criteria can be defined from the theoretical chapter. The specific criteria will be laid out at the beginning of the analysis chapter. Overall, the analysis will not include interpretations of whether the specific strategies or approaches to reach them will have effect, but rather interpretations of overall priority objectives and societal success.

4.4 Method of data analysis

In the data analysis the aim is to “reduce the large body of information that the researcher has gathered so that he or she can make sense of it”, the data is interpreted for the purpose of answering the problem formulation (Bryman, 2016:11). In qualitative methods this includes a move from the particular to the abstract, a move from the descriptive to the conceptual. In other words, qualitative methods move from the description of what is read in text to an exploration and explanation of the ‘underlying’ or ‘broader’ meanings (Rapley, 2010). There are different methods of analyzing the data and the selection of the method depends on the aim of the study. This study aims to explore specific concepts within a data set, and for this purpose qualitative content or thematic analysis is a relevant choice. The overall aim of both qualitative content and thematic analysis is to break the data into different categories or themes, reducing the data, allowing the researcher to understand the data in patterns of meaning (the abstract) relevant to the problem formulation rather than explaining the data set (the particular) passage for passage (Schreier, 2014: 2). Content analysis differs from thematic analysis, as content analysis is often an approach where the systematic and mechanical aspects are emphasized to a higher degree than it is in thematic analysis which instead is more flexible and interpretative (Selvam & Collicut, 2013: 88). Qualitative content analysis is described as “highly systematic” and “consists in a bundle of techniques for systematic text analysis” (Schreier, 2014: 2; Mayring, 2000: 1). As opposed to this, thematic analysis (as presented by Braun & Clarke) is clarified as not simply “recipe following”, but a process where reflected decisions are made considering the ontology, epistemology and methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2019: 591). It emphasizes “an organic approach to coding and theme development and the active role of the researcher in these processes” (Clarke & Braun, 2017: 297). Thematic analysis is thus specifically relevant within an interpretivist, qualitative framework. The ‘active role of the researcher’ demonstrates that the product is a result of the researcher’s interpretations and choices. The ‘organic approach’ places the method in a hermeneutical approach. The codes and themes are constantly under review as the researcher gains more knowledge.

This is also reflected in the deductive strategy of this thesis. The theory drives the development of relevant criteria for exploration before the analysis is conducted, however inductive findings can contribute to the reformulation of the theory-developed criteria, so they reflect the data and the researcher's new knowledge better. The analytical approach of this thesis thus reflects the hermeneutic process, where the wellbeing economy framework guides analysis of EU documents, while data analysis also guides the understanding and possible reformulation of theoretical aspects.

The stages of analysis in this thesis can be split into the iterative steps outlined in Table 2. Inspired by Braun & Clarke (2006) the analysis will be conducted as an iterative process (see Figure 3 below) and under active consideration of contradictions in the data as well as the possibility for different interpretations of data.

Table 2 The stages of analytical method*	
	<i>Iterative steps in theory-driven thematic analysis (inspired by Braun & Clarke, 2006)</i>
<i>Step 1</i>	Generation and description of main themes from the theoretical framework. These main themes are guiding for the analysis of the documents but can also be influenced by findings and be changed as part of the hermeneutic process.
<i>Step 2</i>	Familiarization with the data: Reading the four documents with the pre-determined themes in mind.
<i>Step 3</i>	Identification of relevant units of text in each document and generation of initial codes from the data. Each document has its own coding document, where units of text are copied into tables of codes.
<i>Step 4</i>	Generation of patterns of meaning (sub-themes) from the data: Codes are grouped into patterns of shared meanings. In this process mind-maps are used. The sub-themes are evaluated in relation to the pre-determined themes.
<i>Step 5</i>	Comparison of findings across documents: The analysis is written, structured by the pre-determined main themes under which the sub-themes from each document are presented, discussed, and compared across documents and theory, allowing an exploration and discussion of the main theme across documents and theory.

**the stages are worked in a hermeneutic process (see figure 3)*

In step one, the articulation of the main aspects of wellbeing economy is identified and generated as pre-determined themes which works as guidelines for which aspects of the EU documents are relevant for the analysis (see Table 3, p.32). This step is revisited during the analysis as new information shapes my understanding and interpretation. In step two the sets of data are read with the pre-determined themes in mind. Here ideas for coding are noted down and there is generally made an effort to understand the different sets of data as a whole in relation to the WE framework and each other. Step three involves the generation of initial codes; codes being “the smallest units of analysis that capture interesting features of the data relevant to the research question [in this thesis: problem formulation]” (Clarke & Braun, 2017: 297). As this thesis mainly follows a deductive line of inquiry, the pre-determined themes from step one are guiding for which features of the data are relevant to code around.

In step four the generation of sub-themes based on the data begins. A theme presents “(larger) patterns of meaning, underpinned by a central organizing concept – a shared core idea” and a sub-theme presents patterns of meanings within the themes (Clarke & Braun, 2017: 297; (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 82). In the generation of sub-themes patterns of meanings are thus found across codes

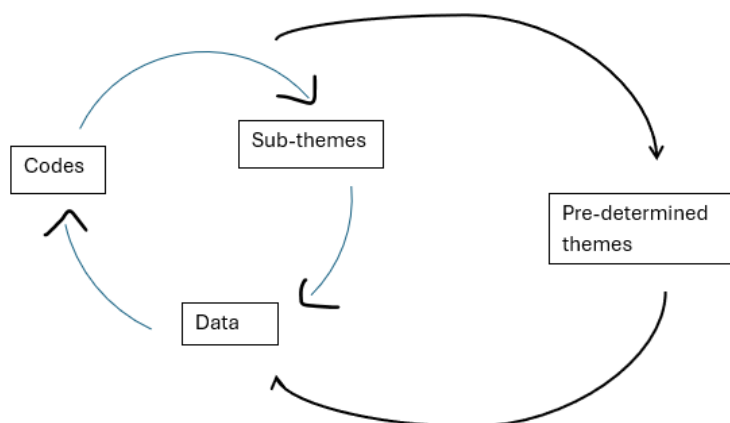


Figure 3: Hermeneutic process on two levels. Pre-determined themes shape the understanding and analysis of data, which again is understood through an analytical process, that might alter the understanding of the pre-determined themes. Own figure, inspired by Kristiansen (2017: 160).

within each pre-determined theme. In this process a sub-theme is deemed relevant if it represents an important aspect of the data in relation to the problem formulation and the pre-determined themes rather than its representation of the data set on its own (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 82). Through the generation of sub-themes the pre-determined themes will take shape in the context of the data, and it can be assessed whether the data articulates and incorporates the same patterns of meanings as the WE-framework.

In the generation of sub-themes, they are continuously reviewed. This happens on two levels. The sub-themes must be consistent within, meaning that the codes and potentially data are re-read to determine if there is a coherent pattern representing the data. If they do not represent a coherent

pattern of the data, they are reworked or potentially new sub-themes and possibly codes are created. On the other level, the sub-themes are considered in relation the pre-determined themes (illustrated in Figure 3). In this deductive approach some sub-themes might not be found relevant within pre-determined themes generated from the theoretical framework and are thus reworked or deleted. However, they can also be determined to represent a significant aspect of the EU documents, adding a contrast to the theoretical framework and thus be relevant for the comparison of EU documents and wellbeing economy.

After the generated sub-themes have shaped the pre-determined themes across the two sets of data, they are compared to each other and the theory. This process might foster another round of generation of sub-themes and interpretation of themes as nuances occur and change understandings of the data sets and theory. This process exists simultaneously with the writing of the final analysis, where the pre-determined themes are described through the generated sub-themes from the EGD and 8th EAP as well as the Greens' Manifesto and Resolution and discussed and compared to each other and Wellbeing Economy. The final product is thus included in the hermeneutic process, and new understandings can continuously change previous interpretations, leading to codes as well as themes being reworked.

4.5 Research quality and limitations

In qualitative research quality can be increased through transparency and reflexivity. As argued the product of a qualitative study in an interpretivist paradigm is dependent on the researcher's interpretation of data and theory and of choices made regarding the methodological process. The aim should therefore not be to find quality in objectiveness or representativeness for a general phenomenon. Rather the researcher must aim for making reflected choices and interpretations of data and be explicit and transparent in this process. This ensures that others can follow the researcher's arguments for their conclusions.

Braun & Clarke (2019) emphasize the importance of acknowledging that the themes in thematic analysis are 'generated' by the researcher. Therefore, the research quality in this thesis will be ensured by explicit reflections and argumentations about the generation of sub-themes and presentation of themes. This will include explicitly considering alternative interpretations of data and discussing the impact these differences can have on the overall understanding of the themes. Also, the hermeneutic process is a marker for quality as this ensures that the researcher continuously questions their own previous choices and interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2019: 594).

Further, the aim has been to maintain transparency and reflexivity in the methodological considerations and selection of data and theory, allowing others to follow the process and assess the consistency. Braun & Clarke (2006) highlight this as important in a thematic analysis approach as the approach is flexible (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 96). They argue that the approach is flexible only to a degree where there needs to be consistency among the epistemological, theoretical and methodological choices and they must all connect to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

This thesis is limited in its ability to cover the EU's and the Greens' agendas and priorities as whole institutions. The data set consists of only two documents from each, and thus it will not be a representation of the EU or the Greens in their entirety. The analysis is thus by no means exhaustive and other documents might reveal different ideas of worth in the EU shaping policies and priorities.

Further the analysis does not represent the data on its own terms, only in its relevance to the WE-framework and problem formulation. Thus, the thesis does not necessarily represent the most prevalent themes in EGD, the 8th EAP, the Res. or the Man. It only considers themes pre-determined from WE. Further, the thesis is mainly focused on politics within the EU and thus aspects relating to global aspects of WE are not considered.

5 Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The analysis of the four documents of data is guided by the WE perspective. Three main themes have been developed from the theoretical framework. These themes are the role of economic growth, the role of people's wellbeing, and the role of planetary wellbeing, presented in Table 3. Through these pre-determined themes questions about economic, human, and nature relations are explored, such as:

- Does the EU and the Greens want to abandon the current economic system, or do they want to make changes within? What kind of change is proposed?
- How do they prioritize planetary and human wellbeing in relation to the economic system? Does the economic system serve the planet and people? Is planet and human wellbeing valued because it provides productivity and monetary wealth or because it is the planet and people's moral right?
- What is a good life and human wellbeing? Does citizen engagement increase life quality? Does collectiveness, togetherness and belonging increase life quality? Who deserves a good life? Are people connected to nature, and in which way? Does nature have a right to life and existence for its own value?

The exploration of themes will provide an opportunity to explore whether the strategies and agendas incorporate the underlying values presented in WE or holds on to the current economic system valuing economic growth above human and ecological wellbeing.

Table 3 Theory-based themes guiding the analysis	
<i>Pre-determined themes</i>	<i>Description of themes</i>
Role of economic growth	How is economic growth described, what does it provide, what value is it given, to what degree does it influence (policy) strategies? Related concepts: growth/degrowth, monetary value/wealth, (industry), GDP, competitiveness
Role of people's wellbeing	How is people's health and wellbeing described (what is wellbeing), what does it provide, what value is it given, to what degree does it influence policy strategies? Who is wellbeing for? Related concepts: disease, food, water, needs, quality of life, happiness, fairness, equality
Role of planetary wellbeing	How is planetary health and wellbeing described, what does it provide, what value is it given, to what degree does it influence (policy) strategies? Related concepts: sustainability, green, climate, environment, planetary boundaries, ecological system

5.1 Theme 1 – Role of economic growth

In this section the role of economic growth is explored and discussed. It is explored whether it is an aim in the economy. Further it is discussed if and how economic growth should be continued as it is today, and how it relates to other objectives.

5.1.1 European Green Deal & Environmental Action Programme

From the EAP and EGD the sub-theme *growth objective* has been generated. This theme covers an aim in both the EAP and the EGD for creating growth as part of the policy strategy. The European Green Deal is continuously introduced as a ‘new growth strategy’:

“It [the EGD] is a new growth strategy” (EGD: 2)

“The European Green Deal launches a new growth strategy for the EU” (EGD: 23)

“‘The European Green Deal’, a new growth strategy” (8th EAP: 2).

This claim frames the deal, making an incentive to ensure growth throughout the green transition. It is supported by statements such as “well-designed tax reforms can boost economic growth” (EGD: 17) and “in order to build resilience and create growth” (8th EAP: 2). The focus on ‘boosting economic growth’ and ‘creating growth’ shows that growth is an aim in both the EGD and the EAP.

Considering the *growth objective* along with the sub-theme *competitiveness*, it highlights that the EU economy must be able to compete with other growth economies. The sub-theme *competitiveness* has been generated from statements marking a “competitive economy” as well as “competitiveness” in general (EAP: 2,3,8; EGD: 2,3,6,15,18). The EGD’s “new growth strategy” has been described as partly aiming for a “competitive economy” in a “prosperous society”:

“a new growth strategy that aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy” (EGD: 2).

This sentence marks an ambition to gain economic wealth as part of the policy strategy. “Prosperous” is defined as “successful, usually by earning a lot of money” (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2024a). With this definition the theme *competitiveness* can be understood as the EU competing about economic wealth with other economies. The sub-themes *competitiveness* and *growth objective* thus enhance each other defining an aim for economic growth as part of the EU strategy. It

is, however, relevant to note that both sub-themes are more apparent in the EGD than the EAP. In the EAP “competitive” have only been used in collaboration with other adjectives such as:

“The 8th EAP aims to accelerate the green transition to a climate-neutral, sustainable, non-toxic, resource-efficient, renewable energy-based, resilient and competitive circular economy” (EAP:8).

Competitiveness thus becomes part of a broad strategy with multiple influencing factors and appears to be less dominant in the EAP. In the EGD “competitive” is rather used in different contexts, and often singled out without nuancing additions:

“To keep its competitive advantage in clean technologies, the EU needs to ...” (EGD:18)

“All parties including industry should work together to combine better health and environmental protection and increased global competitiveness” (EGD:15)

“It [the EU] also recognises the need to maintain its security of supply and competitiveness” (EGD:2)

“The policy response must (...) seek to maximise benefits for health, quality of life, resilience and competitiveness” (EGD:3)

“The decarbonisation of the gas sector will be facilitated, including (...) via a forward-looking design for a competitive decarbonised gas market” (EGD:6).

Here competitiveness is seen as a direct aim in the EU. It is sometimes used in combination with other aims (such as health), but it is marked as an aim on its own or as one single adjective and not as one of many adjectives as in the EAP. In the EGD the term competitive is thus easier to recognize as it is not melting into several describing adjectives. This can be a sign that competitiveness is more of an aim in the EGD than the EAP or it can be a sign that the EAP might be trying to ‘mask’ this aim, in an effort to present itself as aiming for a wellbeing economy.

The growth objective is similarly smaller in the EAP. The focus on creating growth is when referring to the EGD (EAP: 2). Otherwise, the term growth is used when the economy is referred to as a “well-being economy” (EAP: 4,8,9), where it is explicitly noted that “growth is regenerative” (EAP: 4,8,9). Regenerative in this context can be understood as the improvement of the system (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2024b). By stating that growth is regenerative it is thus implied

that economic growth must improve the system. In this interpretation growth becomes a tool to improve the objectives of the (well-being) economy, and not necessarily an aim of its own.

However, the EAP states that “the 8th EAP should support the objectives of the European Green Deal” and “the priority objectives of the 8th EAP set out a direction for Union policymaking, building on, but not limited to, the commitments of the strategies and initiatives of the European Green Deal” (EAP: 3). Accordingly, the EAP must be understood in the context of the EGD but can add extra aims. It can thus be discussed if the EAP’s aim for well-being economy objectives rather than growth on its own are limited if the frame is the growth objective in the EGD. Further, the EAP presents a focus on measuring economic progress as part of a new monitoring framework. The framework is described as “monitoring frameworks and processes at Union level measuring social, economic and environmental progress” (8th EAP: 10). Thus, there is a focus on economic progress as a value on its own also in the EAP. However, this monitoring framework also marks other aims in the EU strategy: social and environmental progress, indicating that economic growth is not all that matters. This creates an indirect distance to the current system, where economic growth is the main indicator of societal success.

Also the EGD indicates a distance to the current system, as it presents a focus on a *new and transformative approach*. This sub-theme is defined by statements explicitly framing the economic strategy as new and different from the current (my emphasis):

“It is a **new** growth strategy that aims to **transform** the EU **into** a fair and prosperous society, with a **modern**, resource-efficient and competitive economy” (EGD: 2)

“The EU must be at the forefront of coordinating international efforts towards **building** a coherent financial system that supports sustainable solutions” (EGD:2)

“The EU will also remain at the forefront of efforts to **set up** a financial system that supports global sustainable growth” (EGD:22).

The use of ‘transform into’, ‘set up’, ‘building’ indicates that the new economic system and strategy is something different than the current, it does not exist yet and must be build first. These quotations and the use of “new” in terms of strategies, policies, actions etc. as part of the Green Deal approach more than 30 times and “transform/-ation/-ative/-ing” in some shape 13 times suggests that the EGD is presenting a new, different economic system and strategy. This sub-theme distances the EGD from the current economic system and strategy. However, from a wellbeing perspective the sub-theme

growth objective and *competitiveness* fosters discussion about whether it is transformational change. WE proposes community, social connection and the service of the common good rather than competition (see section 3.1.2). Further, the EGD states that the new system and strategy is different from the current economic system by using keywords about it being “more” sustainable and ambitious (EGD:2,4,5). When using the wording “more” it indicates that what they are building towards already exists in some shape, and thus the new financial system might not be that different from the current.

This sub-theme is also present in the EAP but from a different perspective. Use of the terms ‘transform, new, change’ are apparent, but not on the same scale. The EAP presents a strategy towards a ‘wellbeing economy’ rather than a ‘new’ economy. “The transition to a well-being economy, where growth is regenerative, is embedded in the 8th EAP and enshrined in both the 2030 and 2050 priority objectives” (EAP:4). The sub-theme is therefore more implicit. Also here it can be discussed whether the strategy actually enables a WE, or whether it is a matter of framing or (un)intentional misuse of terms. By using the term ‘wellbeing economy’, the EAP does however present a more explicit and decisive aim, compared to the EGD. The EGD rather refers to the ‘new’ economy as a “modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy” (EGD:2), an “economy (...) on a more sustainable path” (EGD:2), a “circular economy” (EGD:7), and a “green economy” (EGD:19). While some of these explanations of the economy are also used in the EAP (EAP:2,3,9), there is a more continuous use of a long-term aim of a ‘wellbeing economy’. However, in both there must be said to exist multiple aims, terms, and phrases, and no explicit explanation of what is different to the current economy indicating that the ‘new and transformative’ approach is vaguely defined.

To further clarify whether the EGD and EAP incorporates the WE framework the description of economic growth is relevant. According to the theory economic growth should not be an objective prioritized over social or ecological objectives. Both the EGD and EAP also shape the growth objective as influenced by other objectives. In the EAP growth has been referred to as “regenerative” suggesting that growth is conditional, this leads to the sub-theme *conditional growth* which is also apparent in the EGD. Here growth is presented as “sustainable and inclusive growth” and “a sustainable model of inclusive growth” (EGD:2,7). This can be interpreted as conditional economic growth, where economic growth is only allowed if it is supporting planetary or people friendly objectives. However, it can also be somewhat empty wording, that suggests that planetary and human objectives *also* exist but are not determining requirements for economic development. Summarily, economic growth in the EGD and EAP can be described as an objective in the suggested economic system. Economic development is important because it helps the EU to stay competitive, which is

another aim in the EU strategy. It is however also a system where economic growth is not the only aim, where economic growth is defined by a ‘new’ strategy, and where economic development might be limited by social and ecological objectives. It can be implied that the EAP is trying to distance itself (more) from the growth objective, but remains under the frame of the EGD, and thus does not succeed in creating a (complete) distance.

5.1.2 The Greens’ Resolution & The Greens’ Manifesto

In the Res. and the Man., the role of economic growth is partly described through the sub-theme *critique and consequences of a growth paradigm*. In both the Res. and the Man. it is presented that “the outdated growth-at-any-cost paradigm” have furthered crises and neglected human and planetary wellbeing e.g. by having “led to cuts in public services in several countries and limited public investments, undermining social cohesion” (Man.: 31). There is made a direct connection between the pursuit of growth and the wellbeing-crises of people and planet:

“In the pursuit of constant economic growth and development, we have come to neglect the wellbeing of not just the people, but of nature, of our planet and all life and non-life within it. As humanity and nature alike face unprecedented crises, we need to change our priorities, so that we build an economy that works for all” (Res.: 1).

This sub-theme presents a distance to the current economic system. Also, the use of GDP is criticized in the Res.: “GDP is not designed to measure social and ecological wellbeing, yet it is the most commonly used indicator of a country's overall prosperity.” (Res.:1).

Here it is also relevant to discuss the connotations and definition of ‘prosperity’. As shown above, ‘prosperity’ is commonly defined as successful in terms of money. From this quotation it becomes clear that this definition is connected to the common use of GDP. However, the Res. advocates a change of definition of ‘prosperity’. Rather than accepting the common connotation, it is suggested that prosperity equals social and ecological wellbeing. This is relevant as the sub-theme *prosperity* exist in the Res. and the Man.

In both the Man. and the Res. prosperity is presented as a societal aim, so it is relevant to discuss how prosperity is defined. In the Res. the definition of prosperity is explicitly *not* relating to economic success measured by GDP. It is rather suggested that “true” or “overall” prosperity is related to wellbeing:

“shifting the manner of measuring prosperity to one that centralises wellbeing ensures better decisions will be made to truly enhance prosperity in the EU and worldwide” (Res.:2).

In the Man. the meaning of prosperity is not as clear. Statements such as “we choose prosperity. Our Green and Social Deal will build a dynamic and competitive economy, creating millions of green jobs at the cutting edge of industry” (Man.: 3) suggest a connection between prosperity and economic development for society, indicating that the common meaning of prosperity is valid. However, different paragraphs open for different interpretations.

“Our societies can only be healthy and secure if we respect planetary boundaries. (...) The future of our planet and our relatively peaceful and prosperous societies depend on us acting now. Protecting the climate and environment is about protecting people.” (Man.: 11)

Here prosperous societies are indirectly connected to “healthy and secure” societies that are “protecting people”. Thus, a link between the protection of people and prosperity is established rather than a link between the protection of the economy and prosperity.

It can also be suggested that prosperity is related to the individual rather than societal prosperity:

“We are convinced that everyone, everywhere deserves a safe, secure, and prosperous future.” (Man.: 3)

“The Green and Social Deal is our plan for a greener, healthier Europe where lives are secure, prosperous, and full of opportunity.” (Man.: 10)

Here it is “everyone” and “lives” that are connected to prosperity. This might indicate that it is not the public economy that must be successful in terms of money, but the individual that must be. This difference might suggest that the individual or the people are in focus rather than society’s economy.

The sub-theme *prosperity* can accordingly be interpreted differently in the Man. and the Res. Prosperity is considered an aim in both, but in the Res. it is clear that the definition of prosperity relates to wellbeing, and in the Man. a broader interpretation is possible, perhaps suggesting that economic growth can be an aim in itself in the Man.

However, the sub-theme *an alternative system* marks a transformation, which suggests that the aim is a system that has different priorities than the system of today. In the Man. the present system is referred to as “failed” and the Greens offers an “alternative”:

“We offer an alternative for Europe. Your choice is not between the failed status quo or far-right backlash. You have the choice of hope.” (Man.: 4)

From the sub-theme *critique and consequences of a growth paradigm* it is indicated which part of today’s system that the Greens refer to as “failed”. It is also made explicit what the alternative is:

“Instead, we will introduce a new wellbeing-based macroeconomic governance that prioritizes quality investment in public goods and the green transition over the outdated growth-at-any-cost paradigm to avoid further crises and their social consequences.” (Man.: 31).

The sub-themes overall thus mark that the Greens suggest a move from prioritizing economic growth to prioritizing wellbeing. They also mark a more defined critique and distance to economic growth in the Res. than the Man., however the critique is occurrent in both.

5.1.3 Comparison

Economic growth does not have the same connotations or priority in the EGD and EAP as it does in the Res. and the Man. Firstly, it is possible to point out that the Res. and the Man. present an explicit critique of a growth-at-all-costs paradigm, while the EGD and the EAP rather promotes a growth paradigm through a focus on creating growth as well as maintaining a competitive economy. The EGD and EAP present a paradigm of conditional growth, where growth is defined and influenced by sustainable, regenerative, and inclusive aims. However, in comparison to the Res. and the Man. explicitly denying growth as a main priority, it is visible that ‘conditional growth’ can operate within a growth paradigm maintaining economic growth as priority goal and measure of societal success.

Further, there is a focus in all documents on creating a new approach for the economic system and strategy. However, also here it is shown that this approach can exist within and maintain a growth paradigm in the EGD. The EGD presents ‘new’ and ‘transformational’ strategies but without a distance from economic growth, the strategies can (from a WE perspective) only be defined as transformational within capitalism. Comparatively, the Res. and the Man. presents ‘an alternative’ and a focus on the current economic growth paradigm as ‘failed’, ‘outdated’ and the cause of crises.

Here the Res. and the Man. open for a possibility to be placed on the WE spectrum as critiquing economic growth and allowing a fundamental change of the economic system.

The EAP suggests a change that aims for a ‘wellbeing economy’ however, as the EAP builds on the EGD’s growth-narrative it has been suggested that this aim also must work within the current economic system. The EAP suggests monitoring frameworks that measure social, economic and ecological progress. The EAP suggests a ‘beyond GDP’ framework (EAP: 10). This framework is defined by the EU as the use of other indicators to ‘complement the use of GDP’ (European Commission, n.d.-a). Accordingly, there is a focus on other measures than economic progress, which suggests that a change is advocated. However, in comparison the Res. explicitly denies GDP as indicator and measurement for societal progress and instead “advocate for the adoption of alternative indicators to GDP, prioritising human and ecological wellbeing” (EAP: 2). Here the comparison shows that new indicators for societal progress can either be ‘complementary’ or ‘alternative’ to GDP. In a complementary framework the indicators of today are maintained, while in an alternative framework the indicators of today can be replaced. This comparison reveals that while the EAP suggests a wellbeing economy it mainly suggests additional measures indicating that economic growth should not be the only goal, however, it does not explicitly criticize growth as an aim.

All documents further aim for prosperity, however, also here differences within the aim can be revealed. The Res. explicitly frames societal prosperity as wellbeing for people and planet instead of economic growth. This aligns with the other indications in the Res. framing the document’s theme of economic growth as a critique and de-prioritization of growth. In comparison the Man. does not explicitly define prosperity, and open for an interpretation that economic growth is wanted in a prosperous society. However, the Man. also explicitly criticizes economic growth and gives examples of problems related to economic growth. Thus, an interpretation of economic growth in the Man. can be that uncontrolled economic growth is not valuable, and economic growth should not exist as aim in the same way as it does today. This interpretation relates to the interpretation of prosperity and economic growth in the EAP and the EGD. However, as economic growth is not critiqued or framed as cause of problems in today's society, the EAP and the EGD allows an interpretation of economic growth as a valuable aim that must continue but must be complemented by other aims.

5.2 Theme 2 – Role of planetary wellbeing

In this section the role of planetary wellbeing will be explored and discussed. This includes a discussion of whether planetary wellbeing is a political aim, why it is, and how it relates to other objectives.

5.2.1 European Green Deal & Environmental Action Programme

In the EGD and EAP different sub-themes shape the main theme the role of planetary health and wellbeing.

One sub-theme is *ecological action is important*. In the EGD “tackling climate and environmental-related challenges” are referred to as “this generation’s defining task” (EGD: 2). A ‘defining task’ can imply that solving ecological challenges is the task that this generation will be measured on whether they succeed or not. It can also imply that the outcome of this task will be crucial for future prospects. Ecological action is thus important for the success of current politics and the future. The same sub-theme is generated in the EAP, where “striving for excellence in environmental performance at Union, national, regional and local levels” is noted as important (EAP: 9). The importance of ecological action is further supported by statements about “mainstreaming” ecological action across sectors (EAP: 9,10,11; EGD: 15) and by the implication that there is a time-pressure on ecological action: “decisions and actions need to be taken in the next five years” (EGD: 7) and “immediate and ambitious action is crucial” (EAP: 2).

The following sub-themes explain different perspectives on why ecological action is important.

For one *ecological action is an opportunity*. Both the EGD and the EAP present ecological action and the sustainable transition as an “opportunity” (EAP:2; EGD: 2,7). In the EGD the opportunity is presented as “opportunity to expand sustainable and job-intensive economic activity” (EGD: 7). Further it is an opportunity to develop innovative techniques which will allow EU to use the “significant potential in global markets for low-emission technologies, sustainable products and services” (EGD:7,11). The transition is presented as an “upfront investment to put Europe firmly on a new path of sustainable and inclusive growth” (EGD:2). This suggests that ecological action will be an opportunity for economic and technological gain as well as supporting sustainable and inclusive aims. This sub-theme in relation with the sub-theme *competitiveness* (presented in section 5.1.1) suggests that ecological action will be an opportunity for the EU to achieve a competitive economy that is also beneficial for the workers, industry, and environment. The focus is different in the EAP

where it is rather presented as an opportunity to “show global leadership on sustainability by tackling the urgent sustainability challenges that require systemic solutions” and to “accelerate the pace of transition towards climate neutrality and the protection of the environment” (EAP:2). Here ecological action presents an opportunity to be in the lead of the sustainable transition without comments on potential economic gains. It rather becomes an opportunity to act for the sake of planetary health. However, ‘showing global leadership’ also indicates that there can be a competitive goal, which can lead to questions about whether the opportunity is for the planet or for the EU’s competitiveness. The two documents thus both can be interpreted as aiming for sustainability as well as advances leading to global competitiveness. The double-sided focus might be explained by a focus on ‘convincing’ and ‘compromising’ between different stakeholders, particularly in the EGD. The EAP seems to position itself more in favour of and working for planetary health for the sake of planetary health. This might be a result of the type of document, the EGD is a broad deal accepted by the EU majority and must appeal to politicians with different beliefs and focus areas as well as guide multiple policy sectors (European Union & The Council of the EU, 2024). The EAP is instead a programme developed to guide European environmental policy (European Commission, n.d.-c).

Another sub-theme, supporting the importance of ecological action, is *planetary degradation threatens health and wellbeing for people*. The EGD and EAP articulate a connection between planetary health and the health and wellbeing of people. “The health and wellbeing of people” must be “protected” from “environmental risks and impacts” (EAP: 2,9; EGD: 2). Here it is illustrated that the environment can be a threat to people’s wellbeing and health. By using the term ‘protect’ which has connotations of something/-one attacking or harming, the EGD and EAP signal that action against the threat is crucial. There is further made a connection between “a response to challenges posed by climate change and environmental degradation” and the “improvement of the quality of life of current and future generations” (EGD: 23-24). This connection demonstrates that the breakdown of the planetary system challenges people’s quality of life. Both examples imply that the flourishing of the planetary system can improve people’s health and wellbeing. However, it is important to note here that these statements do not articulate that the ‘response’ must be the improvement of planetary wellbeing. The objective here is to secure the health and wellbeing of people, rather than the health and wellbeing of the planet.

The sub-theme *people’s wellbeing and the economy depends on planetary wellbeing* nonetheless does establish that planetary flourishing is important. This can be seen as a contrast to or framing of the

sub-theme *planetary degradation threatens health and wellbeing for people* where it was indicated that actions to save people did not necessarily include the preservation of nature.

In the EAP there is an aim for a system that “recognises that the well-being and prosperity of our societies depend on a stable climate, a healthy environment and thriving ecosystems” (EAP: 3). It is articulated that “economic growth and social well-being depend on a healthy natural resource base” (EAP:1). Here the EAP recognizes that people’s wellbeing and societal prosperity and development are not just threatened by climate and environmental challenges but also requires that the planet thrives. In the EGD there is also awareness of this, as it is noted that “ecosystems provide essential services such as food, fresh water and clean air, and shelter” and that “forests provide” “many services” (EGD: 13). In this sub-theme the objective referred to above thus changes, as the priority must be to ensure planetary health in order to achieve wellbeing for people and the economy. Here there is an acknowledgement of a relation between nature and society, where nature’s value is enhanced, as people depend on its thriving.

The sub-theme *the health and wellbeing of the planet is valuable* further frames the improvement of planetary wellbeing as an objective. In both the EGD and the EAP there is a focus on “protecting”, “restoring”, “improving” and “enhancing” planetary systems, implying that the health and wellbeing of the planet is an objective in both the EGD and the EAP (e.g. EAP:2,4,11; EGD:2,4,13). In the EAP there is further a recognition of “actions which work with and enhance nature to restore and protect ecosystems” (EAP: 5). By using the term ‘work with nature’, this statement indicates that actions should be a cooperation, and that nature accordingly can be interpreted as someone ‘worthy’ of cooperation. The suggestion that planetary flourishing is valuable is also seen in the EAP as it is articulated that there is an aim for achieving an economic system “that gives back to the planet more than it takes” (EAP: 3+9) and that the system operates “within planetary boundaries” (EAP:3). The planet must ‘receive’ from the economy rather than the other way around, and planetary boundaries are a framing factor for systemic development. This resembles the definition of WE where the economy ‘serves’ the planet. Here it is relevant to note that planetary boundaries are mentioned in the EAP a total of eight times while not once mentioned in the EGD (EAP: 3,6,7,8,11,12). This suggests that the health and wellbeing of the planet is more valuable and determining for action in the EAP than in the EGD.

These statements also shape the sub-theme *planetary health and wellbeing as guiding for the economy*. This sub-theme describes that planetary health and wellbeing must be prioritized and must

guide economic activity: “Economic activity should develop in a sustainable way that does no harm but, on the contrary, reverses climate change, protects, restores and improves the state of the environment” (EAP:3-4). This sub-theme is more apparent in the EAP than in the EGD. However, the EGD does to some degree shape the economy to planetary objectives. Across the EGD and EAP the economy is referred to as ‘sustainable’, ‘circular’, ‘climate-neutral’, ‘non-toxic’, ‘resource-efficient’, ‘renewable energy-based’, ‘resilient’, ‘clean’ and ‘green’ (EGD: 2,4,7,9,10,12,14,19,21; EAP: 3,4,7,8,9). When using these adjectives in relation to ‘economy’ it suggests that the economy must be shaped by the meaning of the adjectives. Similarly, the use of adjectives is describing economic growth in both the EAP and EGD: ‘regenerative’, ‘decoupled from resource use’, ‘sustainable’ (EAP: 3,4,8,9; EGD: 2,22). In this use the EGD and EAP indicate that different planetary objectives guide economic activity as suggested in the sub-theme *conditional growth* (section 5.1.1).

In the following phrase from the EGD the influence of planetary objectives is articulated:

“As part of the Green Deal, the Commission will refocus the European Semester process of macroeconomic coordination ... to put sustainability and the well-being of citizens at the centre of economic policy” (EGD: 3).

Putting sustainability and the well-being of citizens at the centre illustrates that the well-being of citizens and sustainability should be the main objectives of economic policy rather than economic growth. However, when stating that this sub-theme is more supported in the EAP than the EGD, I refer to the framing of economic objectives in the two documents.

As presented in the above section 5.1.1 the EGD is framing itself as a “new growth strategy” with the objective of a “competitive economy” and a “prosperous society” *supportive* of “sustainable growth”. Here the focus is on economic growth rather than a healthy planet. Also, higher support to the sub-theme *the health and wellbeing of the planet is valuable* from the EAP rather than the EGD, suggests that the EGD might not fully incorporate that economic activity must be guided by planetary wellbeing. To conclude, the sub-theme *planetary health and wellbeing as guiding for the economy* must be seen in relation to the remaining sub-themes across the main themes, as both documents presents multiple aims and guidelines for economic activity.

5.2.2 The Greens’ Resolution & The Greens’ Manifesto

One sub-theme describing the role of planetary wellbeing in the Res. and the Man. is *prioritizing the planet*. In this sub-theme there is articulated statements framing the planet as a priority objective in

the economic system: “an economy that emphasises human and ecological wellbeing in measure and pursuit” (Res.: 1) and “macroeconomic governance that prioritizes quality in public goods and the green transition” (Man.:31). There is also indirect indications supporting this sub-theme, as seen in section 5.1.2 where a de-prioritization of economic growth is apparent. By distancing from economic growth, the Res. and the Man. makes space for another priority objective. The sub-theme *an alternative system* from the same section also suggests the prioritization of the planet rather than economic growth. The role of planetary wellbeing thus becomes a guideline and priority for the economic system. To further explore and understand the priority of planetary wellbeing it is relevant to explore the reasons behind the priority objective.

The sub-theme *climate as an urgent crisis* describes that the planet must be prioritized in human actions as the climate crisis is overshadowing other crises in urgency: “The climate will not wait for other crises to pass.” (Man.: 31). The climate crisis’ current state is described as “a turning point in history” (Man.: 11), which suggests that it is now the future will be decided. This sub-theme is more elaborate in the Man. than the Res. There is a general aim of prioritizing ecological wellbeing in the Res., however the argument for this priority is not obviously occurrent. It is suggested that our current society has “neglected” the wellbeing of “nature, our planet and all life and non-life within it” and that nature “face unprecedented crises” (Res.: 1). From these statements a sub-theme about planetary crisis can be generated, however it lacks the urgency and the insistency found in the Man. This might be explained by the document type, as the Res. is an internal document focused on presenting an agenda and commitment to action rather than on declaring political aims for voters.

A similar tendency can be seen in the sub-theme *our society is at fault* generated from the Man. Here arguments frame planetary wellbeing as the reason for systemic change. The system of today exceeds planetary limits, so we as people and society ruin the planet, and must thus change our system:

“Decades of climate denial and delay have left us vulnerable to extreme weather and the rising anti-climate backlash will make the situation even worse.” (Man.: 14)

“Our societies can only be healthy and secure if we respect planetary boundaries.” (Man.: 11)

“The burden of inaction grows heavier by the day.” (Man.: 2)

This sub-theme frames inaction as a burden and the reason for a negative situation and thus also presents planetary wellbeing and the respect of planetary boundaries as the opposite: a wanted situation and an opportunity or relief.

Further the role of planetary wellbeing is described through the sub-theme *people depend on planetary wellbeing* where planetary wellbeing has the role of enabling people's wellbeing. This sub-theme can also mainly be generated from the Man. However, under this sub-theme it can be noted that people and planetary wellbeing are often referred to as one, which is also an occurrence in the Res.

In the Res. it is found that “social and ecological wellbeing” often appear in joint constellation, also seen as “socioecological measures” and “measures of human-nature wellbeing”. This suggests that the two are connected. It is not clear how they are connected in the Res., however they are framed as a joint priority aim: “prioritise human-nature wellbeing over economic development and neoliberalisation conditionalities” (Res.: 3).

In the Man. this sub-theme is more clearly defined, as it appears that people's wellbeing is connected to planetary wellbeing because people depend on the planet: “Protecting the climate and environment is about protecting people” (Man.11). There are examples of “damage to lives and livelihoods” caused by ecological crisis such as flooded homes, bankrupted farms, threats to human health through heat waves and other extreme weather events as well as pollution (Man.: 9,15-16).

This sub-theme thus describes that planetary wellbeing is not necessarily an aim in its own right, but it is a necessary aim to reach the ultimate aim: people's wellbeing. However, the framing in the Res. is open to interpretation as it can also be understood as an aim and priority on level with people's wellbeing. This interpretation can also be supported in the Man. from the sub-theme *planet as home for all life* describing the role of planetary wellbeing as important for all life forms including the planet itself. This sub-theme suggests that not just people's wellbeing is valuable but all life is valuable on its own. There is an aim of creating “a liveable future for our planet” (Man.: 4). Here the articulation “for our planet” rather than ‘a liveable planet for us’ suggests that the planet deserves a future for its own sake. Further, there is a focus on protecting EU's natural areas “so we can live in harmony with nature” and on “brining nature back” which is “the basis for life on this planet” and the home of “one million species (...) threatened with extinction” (Man.: 16). Here value is given to nature and other life-forms rather than people, suggesting that planetary wellbeing is not only an aim

for the sake of people. This is also seen in the Res. as there is a focus on the neglect of “nature, our planet and all life and non-life within it” (Res.:1).

Thus, planetary wellbeing might be interpreted as equal in priority and influence on systemic action as people’s wellbeing. This can be summarised by the following articulation in the Man: “Everything we put forward combines improving lives with protecting the climate and environment.” (Man: 10)

5.2.3 Comparison

When it comes to the portrayal of planetary wellbeing, it is in different shapes presented as an aim in all documents. All documents frame the state of the climate and environment as a crisis that urgently needs to be acted on. However, there are differences to point out.

Firstly, there is a question about why action needs to happen. Here all documents agree that people’s health and wellbeing depend on planetary wellbeing. The EGD and the EAP further agree that planetary wellbeing and ecological action will enable global competitiveness and economic growth. Thus, ecological action is important because it is necessary to reach partly social and economic aims. The focus on enabling economic aims in the EGD and the EAP supports the above section on economic growth as objective, and distances from the WE framework, as planetary aims here ‘serve’ the economy. This reasoning in all documents exemplifies that planetary wellbeing is important because people and society benefit from it.

In a WE perspective it was further suggested that planetary wellbeing is important for the sake of the planet. This perspective is not as dominating in the documents; however, it has been illustrated that the EAP presents statements that state that human society must ‘give back to the planet more than it takes’, and that the Res. and the Man. presents a focus on benefits for nature and other life-forms, and not only people. However, planetary wellbeing for the sake of the planet was not found in the EGD. This can indicate that people and the economy are projected as most valuable in the EGD, compared to people and planet as valuable in the Res. and the Man. and all three valuable in the EAP. When people and the economy are the most valuable it is possible to suggest that planetary wellbeing is mainly viewed as a necessary burden in the EGD, and that if it was possible to maintain society without it, the EGD would not propose ecological action. This interpretation devalues the planet and other life-forms, which contrasts with the WE framework where ‘all life’ has value.

Further it is relevant to note that the Res. and the Man. explicitly states that our current system has neglected the nature, denied climate change, and not acted. It is thus our societies’ fault that planetary

wellbeing is in crisis. This framing resonates with the WE perspective, and marks people as responsible, emphasizing that action is not just necessary, it is also a moral duty. The lack of this perspective in the EGD and EAP can enhance the interpretation that the EGD mainly suggests action due to necessity.

Further, the findings from the EGD are vague and contradictory, as it suggests putting sustainability at the center of economic policy, but simultaneously, suggests a growth objective aiming for a competitive economy and prosperity while supporting sustainability. Here the importance of the ecological objective is questioned as it is both presented as main objective and as a secondary objective. Comparatively, the Res. and the Man. explicitly state that ecological and social aims must be prioritized over economic development.

The EGD also suggests that ecological action is an opportunity, it is an opportunity for economic development and global competitiveness. In contrast the Man. rather presents ecological action as an opportunity to leave a negative situation. This comparison can be interpreted as an indication that the EGD is built on a framework, where economic growth and global competitiveness are main goals, and the Man. is rather built on a framework that suggests that the current state of society and planet is undesirable.

5.3 Theme 3 – Role of people's wellbeing

In this section the role and definition of people's wellbeing and health will be explored and discussed. It includes a discussion of who people are and what wellbeing is. It also includes a discussion of whether people's wellbeing and related concepts are aims in the political documents, and if so why.

5.3.1 European Green Deal & Environmental Action Programme

As presented above in the section on economic growth, there is a focus on social objectives influencing economic growth. This relates to a general focus on people's wellbeing and health in the EGD and EAP, shaping the sub-theme *people's wellbeing as an objective*.

The sub-theme is apparent in the EAP for instance as seen in the aim that “people live well (...) in a wellbeing economy” (EAP: 8), and the implied distance to economic growth as main objective (section 5.1.1).

The EGD's strategy aims to:

“protect, conserve and enhance the EU's natural capital, and protect the health and well-being of citizens from environment-related risks and impacts. At the same time, this transition must be just and inclusive. It must put people first, and pay attention to the regions, industries and workers who will face the greatest challenges” (EGD: 2).

Here it appears that the approach in the EGD aims to ‘put people first’, suggesting that this aim has highest priority. The structure of the paragraph suggests that putting people first sums up the former sentences, indicating that putting people first is synonymous with protection of health and wellbeing as well as with a just and inclusive transition. Accordingly, the health and wellbeing of people becomes an aim and a priority in the strategy.

However, it is worth noting that the protection of people is followed by “from environment-related risks and impacts”. This addition can be interpreted as only the environment that is important to protect people from. Thereby people’s protection from other threats might not be important. The question is whether this means that risk-factors related to the economic system (such as a focus on growth and the following neglect of wellbeing) are not considered a threat, or if the economic system is worth more than people’s wellbeing. The last interpretation contradicts the articulation “put people first” as it suggests that the economy is put first. Thus, the sub-theme is defined as people’s wellbeing as *an* objective, and not decisively the main objective. The same discussion is relevant in regard to the EAP where it is presented that economic activity should develop in a way that amongst other objects “protects health and well-being from negative environmental risks and impacts” (EAP: 3-4).

However, when discussing the focus on protection from environmental risks (and not general protection) in this sub-theme it is also relevant for both the EGD and the EAP that it is strategies concerned primarily with a green transition, and thus the focus on protection from environmental risks might also be a result from a limited reach of the two. This interpretation can indicate that the EGD and EAP are located in a system that works sector-based rather than holistic. This is also a point made in the EAP, where a shift from “a silo- and sector-based policy focus to a systemic approach to policy coherence” is suggested as part of enabling the priority objectives (EAP: 12).

The focus on protection from environmental risks (and not general protection) can also be a result of building an argument for why ecological action is necessary, as illustrated by the previous sub-themes *planetary degradation threatens health and wellbeing for people* and *people’s wellbeing and the economy depends on planetary wellbeing*.

These sub-themes not only advocate ecological action but also point to the importance of people's wellbeing. In both, the wellbeing of people is used as an argument for a different aim, and thus it is possible to derive that wellbeing of people is such an obvious or natural aim that it can be used as an argument. Thus, the two sub-themes enhance the importance of *people's wellbeing as an objective*, in the same way that the sub-theme *people's wellbeing as an objective* enhance the importance of planetary wellbeing as an objective. In the EGD and the EAP there is thus an objective of wellbeing for people, however the impact of this objective can be discussed as it might primarily be related to environmental issues.

To understand the role of people's wellbeing in relation to the WE framework it is also relevant to discuss what wellbeing is in the EGD and the EAP and who 'people' are.

The above focus on protection of health and wellbeing indicates that health and wellbeing are related but not necessarily synonymous. If they were synonymous only one would need to be specified. However, people's health is a focus that can be attributed to the description of the theme of people's wellbeing. Further, the term "quality of life" and "live well" is used in the EGD and EAP (EGD: 3; EAP: 2, 8). These terms suggest that there is more to people's wellbeing than simply 'being alive' and healthy. Some social objectives such as fairness, justice, and inclusion, can suggest that wellbeing is about how people are treated in both the EGD and EAP. This is nuanced as the EGD describes that approaches can be "perceived as fair" (EGD: 16). This suggests that wellbeing relates to people's own perceptions of their life rather than an objective standard. However, there is also a focus on a "basic standard of living" (EGD: 6), suggesting that there is a standardized minimum criterion for wellbeing. This basic standard of living is nuanced more in the EAP, where there is focus on the "need for a healthy environment, clean air and affordable, accessible and high-quality food, water, energy, housing, green infrastructure and mobility" (EAP: 10). In the EGD there is also a focus on affordable prices, a healthy and clean environment as well as prosperity, which can suggest that basic standard of wellbeing relates to one's health, physical needs and economic ability. Wellbeing might thus be understood as people being objectively healthy and able to maintain a basic standard of living enabled by economic wealth and a healthy environment, while also perceiving their life as fair, just, and of quality.

However, it is worth noting that the focus on perceived fairness and justice often attained by being included in decisions, might not come from an aim of creating wellbeing for people, but rather from an aim of creating successful politics. The following statements illustrate the sub-theme *inclusion for*

political success. There is a focus on including and empowering the public because it is necessary to achieve political aims in both the EGD and EAP.

“Consumer policy will help to empower consumers to make informed choices and play an active role in the ecological transition.” (EGD: 8)

“Since it will bring substantial change, active public participation and confidence in the transition is paramount if policies are to work and be accepted.” (EGD: 2)

“The involvement and commitment of the public and of all stakeholders is crucial to the success of the European Green Deal.” (EGD: 22)

“Moreover, access to environmental information, public participation in environmental decision-making, and access to justice, including transparent engagement with and between public authorities at all levels of decision-making, non-governmental actors and the broader public, (...) are important for ensuring the success of the 8th EAP.” (EAP: 6)

These statements thus bring awareness that the focus on inclusion, fairness and justice might not come from a place of believing that people deserve it because they are valuable in their own right, but rather from a practical place that values the success of the policies.

Considering who the ‘people’ are, it can be relevant to refer to some of the social terms above. The economy, society, policies, and approaches in the EGD and EAP are often described as “fair”, “just”, “inclusive”, “affordable” and “leaving no one behind”. These terms tell the story that the approaches must consider ‘all’ and ensure that everyone benefits. This is e.g. illustrated as the EGD claims to support a transition to a society that will be “improving the quality of life of current and future generations” (EGD:23-24), and the EAP also having a focus on “ensuring the prosperity of present and future generations globally” (EAP: 9). Here people of this generation and future generations are in focus, suggesting that wellbeing must be for ‘all people’. Further examples of ‘all’ are “households that cannot afford key energy services to ensure a basic standard of living” (EGD: 6), “the most vulnerable” (EGD: 16), “vulnerable and marginalised groups” (EAP: 6), “citizens” (EGD: 2; EAP: 12), “consumers”, “businesses” (EGD: 6; EAP: 12), “regions, industries and workers who will face the greatest challenges” (EGD: 2), “the public and all stakeholders” (EGD: 22), “other stakeholders” (EGD: 17; EAP: 12). These examples address that there is a focus on people who struggle, indicating that wellbeing is about ensuring some equality and a “basic standard of living”.

These examples also show that it is not only ‘people’ that must be ensured fairness and justice but also businesses and industries. This could create a potential struggle as e.g. consumers and businesses might have different opinions on what a “fair” price is. In the EAP it is specified that it “in particular [are] small and medium-sized enterprises” that businesses refer to (EAP: 12). This nuance calls attention to the lack of so in the EGD, suggesting that big enterprises are a stakeholder here. Big enterprises represent a domination of the market and a value of economic growth and wealth for the few rather than a more distributed economy for all. Further, there is a vague use of “stakeholders”, indicating that the approaches must consider anyone relevant, but not specifying who is relevant or who must be prioritized. The EGD accordingly does not specify on what terms fairness and justice must be considered, or whose right must be secured or prioritized. Thus, there is a risk that it is the people and businesses in power that will get to determine what is fair and what it means that ‘no one must be left behind’, or that “trade-offs” dominate, resulting in no one being happy (EGD: 4; EAP: 6). However, the EGD and the EAP also present a view, that “synergies” between economic, environmental and social aims can be maximized through the political processes, and thus the broad scale of stakeholders might also entail an optimism that it is possible to ensure everyone’s well-being across different aims (EGD: 3; EAP: 6).

5.3.2 The Greens’ Resolution & The Greens’ Manifesto

In section 5.1.2 and 5.2.2 it is shown that wellbeing of people is the priority rather than economic growth and equal or perhaps higher in priority than planetary wellbeing in the Man. and the Res. This leads to the sub-theme *wellbeing as guideline and priority in the economy*. In the Man. it is suggested to “introduce a new wellbeing-based macroeconomic governance” (Man.: 31), while the title in the Res. suggests “wellbeing economies” (Res.: 1). These citations both show the economic focus but are also interesting in relation to the theoretical framework. The quotes suggest that wellbeing influences the economy, however neither directly use the term ‘wellbeing economy’. The distinction in the Res. is minor, as it is a matter plural, however throughout the document, the title is the only place that makes this reference. This might suggest that the aim in the Res. and the Man. are different from that of WE, as they use similar but not exact terms. Accordingly, while wellbeing is a main priority in the Man. and the Res. there might be differences to WE. However, the phrasing can also be a result of a choice to not misuse the term WE while it is still new, a matter of not knowing the exact concept, or it can be a choice to frame the suggestions as their own rather than as a theoretical concept.

To explore how WE might be incorporated in the Res. and Man. the following will explore what is meant by wellbeing and for who wellbeing is important.

In section 5.2.2 a focus on people as dependent on planetary health occurred. This dependency covers e.g. people's health, economy, homes, survival. An aim is to ensure "a habitable planet" as well as "the most liveable future", which suggests that there is a minimum focus on keeping people alive (Man.: 11, 12). It also shows what is at stake, that it is not simply a matter of increased wellbeing but of survival.

In the Man. there is an aim to "fight the cost-of-living crisis by investing in the essentials we all need" (Man.: 3). This suggests that there is a focus on 'necessary essentials' as part of the wellbeing aim, and that this aim has not been attained yet by classifying it as a crisis. By classifying the crisis as 'cost-of-living' there is also the suggestion that wellbeing is related to a 'cost' which not all people can afford currently. There is a focus on securing "more affordable lives", "affordable prices", and "affordable energy" (Man.: 9, 13). By aiming at solving this 'crisis' the Man. suggests that wellbeing is about being able to afford life. It is about "protecting living standards, especially for the most vulnerable" (Man.: 11). Here there is a focus on "the most vulnerable" leading to a consideration about who wellbeing is for. Throughout the Man. there is taken a distance from "the ultra-rich" and "the wealthiest", it is suggested that they need to pay more in tax (Man.: 9,23,27,33). This distance to the rich and concern for the most vulnerable and a focus to "support access to energy, food, and housing for the poorest" (Man.: 27), indicates that wellbeing is about having enough, but not about having a lot in material terms. Wellbeing as a societal aim thus can be described by the sub-theme *essentials for all*. This sub-theme is also illustrated by the phrase: "Today, transport systems are stacked in favour of the wealthy and against people and the planet" (Man.: 23). Here "the wealthy" is seen in opposition to "people", and it is seen that focus should be on people as a whole rather than the wealthy.

However, this also indicates that 'the wealthy' are not part of 'people'. This distinction creates an *us-vs-them* sub-theme in the Man. which is in contrast to the sub-theme *social cohesion and communities*. The *us-vs-them* sub-theme consists of the creation of two groups in the Man. One group is actors such as the wealthy/iest, the ultra-rich, the conservatives and the far right, and the other group is actors such as workers, small and medium-sized businesses, people, the poorest and the vulnerable (see e.g. Man.: 2,3,9,10,21,23,27,33). By including people in the second group the Man. classifies the other group as not-people, which partly dehumanize and partly discriminates against this group of actors. This is in

sharp contrast to another aim in the Man. where social cohesion, community, social and collaborative economies, listening, connectivity between people and anti-polarizing, -hate and -discrimination is in focus (see e.g. Man.:2,25,26,36). However, the sub-theme *us-vs-them* also illustrates that compromises need to be made to change the system, and that compromises always affect some groups. By explicitly naming this group the Man. thus shows a clear direction in terms of what ‘wellbeing for all’ means, and in terms of where the compromises must be made. Thus wellbeing is framed as ensuring *essentials for all* directly in opposition to ‘wealth for the few’, and the use of terms such as ‘fairness, justice, and equality’ has a defined meaning (e.g. Man.: 2-4).

The sub-theme *social cohesion and communities* illustrates that “social cohesion” and “social and collaborative economies” are seen as valuable (Man.: 26,31,36). It focuses on “communities” and emphasize that e.g. public transport and sports “connects people” (Man.: 23,26). Further, it distances to polarization, hate, and discrimination (e.g. Man.: 2-3). This sub-theme thus suggests that an aim is for people to be in social communities and be connected to each other, and thus this aim must be part of the strategy to reach the overall goal; wellbeing of people. Accordingly, wellbeing is about being connected to other people and living together in collaboration and unity. This emphasizes that people are seen as a joint group, where wellbeing for all is in focus rather than wealth for the few.

In both the Res. and the Man. there is an aim to create higher value for care (Res.: 2,4; Man.: 21,25-26). This partly illustrates the focus on the second group from the *us-vs-them* sub-theme. In the Res. it is stated that today the care-workers and the recipients of care are often part of the more vulnerable group, and thus by creating higher value for care, these groups can be prioritized more (Res.: 2,4). Secondly the aim of valuing care illustrates that people are dependent on care from others, and that this is a part of life and society worth valuing, thus the focus on social connection and communities are strengthened by valuing care higher. Thirdly the value of care is connected to the sub-theme *essentials for all* as it illustrates that receiving care is an essential: “while protecting everyone’s right to proper care” (Man.: 26). When referring to care as a right, it suggests that care is something that everyone deserves and is entitled to. Thus, a right, and therefore care, can be interpreted as part of the essential needs for life and wellbeing.

Here it is also relevant to note that the Man. refers to rights in relation to protection and peace, as well as inclusion and democracy, and the ability to live ones live in “full self-determination” (2-4). It states that “everyone everywhere deserves a safe, secure and prosperous future” (Man.: 3). Wellbeing in the Man. can thus also include the ability to be included, live in safety, as well as being able to be who

and act how one wants to. This aspect of the Man. can be interpreted as limited, as it has also been suggested that one should not be supported to live in material wealthiness or supporting conservative or far right perspectives.

5.3.3 Comparison

In the documents there is agreement on healthiness and basic living standards as minimum determinations of wellbeing enabled by economic ability and a healthy environment supporting the theoretical frame of WE. There is a specific focus on the poor and the vulnerable across the data, however, the Man. also denounces the wealthy and ultra-rich. This denunciation partly emphasizes wellbeing as basic living standards rather than material claims; however, it also creates a contrast in the claim of self-determination for all as part of wellbeing for all. In the documents, wellbeing for *all* is marked as an aim as well as fair and inclusive policies. Thus, when the Man. denounces a group of people and their right to ‘full self-determination’ it contradicts their statement. However, it also enables a discussion of whether fairness and self-determination for all is possible. As presented in the discussion of fairness in between the EGD and EAP, fairness for all might lead to inconvenient compromises. However, compared to the Man. it becomes visible that excluding some stakeholders might also be contradicting to fairness. On the contrary not ‘excluding’ stakeholders currently in power might result in changes mainly benefiting the rich: “Doing nothing will only serve the wealthiest” (Man.: 9).

The task might lie in the understanding of social cohesion, connectivity and communities as part of wellbeing. In the theoretical chapter it was emphasized that social cohesion and human relations are paramount for the achievement of wellbeing. Considering this aspect of wellbeing, there is a natural aim of caring for other people. Thus, wellbeing might only be achieved through the consideration of other people’s necessities. When the Man. thus promote social cohesion as well as critique of the wealthy, it might be interpreted as an accusation of putting own wants ahead of others’ needs, and thereby not achieving social cohesion. However, with its rhetoric the Man. also complicates the achievement of social cohesion, and thus it can be discussed whether the Man. incorporates a WE perspective. Also, in the EGD and the EAP the WE perspective is lacking in this regard. The consideration of social cohesion and connectivity between people lacks in the EAP and the EGD and this shows that the EAP and the EGD’s definition of wellbeing does not align with WE. Across the documents there is thus a focus on wellbeing for all as there also is in WE, however there is a difference in the incorporation of what ‘for all’ entails. There are understandings interpreted such as

everyone deserves full self-determination (without any nuances), everyone deserves full self-determination except the rich, everyone deserves full self-determination in the regard that they also consider other's self-determination and thus enables and is enabled by a feeling of social cohesion and belonging which leads to wellbeing.

Further, a comparison of the necessity of inclusion can be relevant. In WE participation and inclusion is part of human wellbeing, and relates to belonging as well as self-determination and achievement of individual dignity and happiness. However, in the EGD and the EAP inclusion is partly framed as necessary for the sake of political success, and thus not an aim related to wellbeing. This indicates that while inclusion is considered in both, it does not necessarily incorporate the WE perspective. Further, the Man. presents inclusion as a 'right', which can be considered as an incorporation of the WE perspective as a right suggests an entitlement and thus can be interpreted as something necessary for wellbeing. However, this presentation of inclusion can also be understood as something not questionable, and thus it does not really consider why it is important. This leads to vagueness about what the aim of an inclusive policy and strategy is and entails, on those grounds it can become questionable whether and how it will be attained. It might thus not incorporate the same aim as WE.

6 Concluding remarks

This chapter answers the problem formulation based on the theoretical and analytical findings. It also discusses the future prospects of wellbeing economy in EU.

Wellbeing Economy (WE) can be viewed as a change of values and priorities in the economic system. Where the current economic system values economic growth as societal success, WE values and prioritizes human and planetary wellbeing. In a WE framework, wellbeing and thereby societal success is consistent with equality, cohesion, and fairness for and among all living beings. The main priorities are that everyone enjoys a safe, comfortable, and happy life on a healthy and thriving planet. From a WE perspective human relations and social connectedness are an essential part of achieving wellbeing. From this argument the economic focus is ensuring enough for everyone, rather than wealth for the few, as equality rather than inequality is consistent with trust, active engagement and participation as well as happiness and health. Further, WE values the planet, nature and other life-forms with equal right to health and flourish as people, while also acknowledging a connectedness between people and nature, necessary for people's survival as well as increased wellbeing. Thus, planetary wellbeing is consistent with and nourishing for human wellbeing and societal success. Based on this value system WE proposes an economy where economic development *serves* the planet and people rather than the other way around.

When considering this in the perspective of the European Green Deal (EGD), the 8th Environmental Agency Programme (EAP), the Greens' Resolution (Res.) and Manifest (Man.), it has been shown that all four value planetary and human wellbeing in terms of health and basic living standards for people. However, the EGD and the EAP value economic growth where the Res. and the Man. rather denounces it. The EGD and the EAP are presenting views where planetary and human objectives seem to guide the economy, and perspectives where economic growth seem to be the guiding priority. This places the EGD and the EAP in a spectrum between the current economic system and WE, while the Res. and the Man. seem to align with WE.

However, it is also relevant to note that WE's focus on social cohesion, connectedness, and equality is questioned in the analytical findings. The Man. promotes social cohesion, connection, and diversity, however, creates an us-vs-them discourse where the wealthiest, conservatives, and big corporations are excluded from the us. This discourse partly supports the notion of equal distribution, as 'the wealthy' and 'ultra-rich' in contrast to 'the poor' do not fit into an economically equal society. However, it also shows that while the Man. articulates social cohesion, they do not incorporate it, as

they linguistically create two groups of people and polarization rather than a connected whole. In contrast, the EGD promotes wellbeing and fairness for all, including the big enterprises and rich, and thereby they seem to incorporate a suggestion of the whole. However, this inclusion might affect the possibility of equal distribution and thus the meeting of basic needs for all.

To address this contradiction, it can be suggested that WE requires a change of values, and thus it is a long process. It is necessary that everyone believe that they do not need continuous economic growth to feel happy and fulfilled, and at the same time it is necessary to break down us-vs-them thinking, and rather incorporate connection, belonging, and togetherness as values and needs for wellbeing. It might require a shift from understanding individual happiness as separate or competing with collective happiness, to understanding individual happiness as dependent on collective happiness and social connection.

This relates to a discussion of whether the connection between objectives is seen as synergies or compromises. In WE synergies are advocated among human and planetary wellbeing, and there is a belief that wellbeing for all (people and non-people) brings flourishing. However, in the EGD and EAP, terms such as “trade-offs” as well as “synergies” are used to describe the connection between economic development, nature and people (EGD:3,4; EAP:6). Similarly, competition as well as international coordination and coherence is promoted (EGD:2). This double-sided framing might be a result of not being determined about whether all objectives can be achieved simultaneously and support each other. In the current economic system, economic growth entails a competitive market, however, in WE collaboration is in focus and fosters societal success for all. Thus, the EU might currently begin to incorporate WE perspectives, but still exist in a growth paradigm, where different objectives are seen as competing, and happiness and success are achieved by growing and ‘winning’, rather than through collaborative measures for the collective good.

Further, WE incorporates the valuation of nature and planet on its own terms as well as positively contributing to people’s wellbeing and societal success. This valuation includes nature and the planet in the collective good and places planetary aims equal to and beneficial for social objectives. However, in the EGD planetary objectives are mainly themed as necessary for people’s health. It has been questioned whether planetary objectives would be aims, if there was no connection to people’s wellbeing, as the planet has not been assigned value on its own. Further, it can be questioned whether planetary objectives are merely valued as necessary compromises rather than synergetic development. These questions present some vagueness in the framing of priority aims of the EU, and thus

inconsistency might lead to the de-prioritization of ecological objectives, rather than the clear priority and value WE contributes these aims.

However, WE prospects in the EU do have some support as both planetary and social objectives are incorporated in the economic strategies proposed by both the EU and the Greens. I suggest that the challenge lies partly in the devaluation of economic growth as consistent with wellbeing and societal success, and partly in the incorporation of planetary and human wellbeing as equal, deeply connected and nourishing for each other rather than a compromise, as well as the incorporation of social connectedness and equality as unquestionable needs for human wellbeing.

Bibliography

- Abrar, R. (2021). Building the Transition Together: WEAll's Perspective on Creating a Wellbeing Economy. In *The Well-being Transition* (pp. 157–180). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67860-9_9
- Aurini, J. D., Heath, M., & Howells, S. (2021). *The How To of Qualitative Research*.
- Bansal, A. (2020). Planetary health underpins an economy of wellbeing. *BMJ*, 369, m3080. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m3080>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. In *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* (Vol. 11, Issue 4, pp. 589–597). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Brinkmann, S., & Tanggaard, L. (2020). Kvalitative metoder, tilgange og perspektiver: en introduktion. In S. Brinkmann & L. Tanggaard (Eds.), *Kvalitative metoder: En grundbog*. Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Brückner, C., & Larsen, H. F. (2024, June 12). *FN-direktører om et splittet Europa: Menneskeheden taber, når polarisering vinder*. <https://www.altinget.dk/artikel/fn-direktoerer-polariseringen-i-europa-skal-loeses-med-investeringer-i-udvikling>
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods* (Fifth Edition). Oxford University Press.
- Cambridge University Press & Assessment. (2024a). *Dictionary: Meaning of prosperous in English*. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/prosperous>
- Cambridge University Press & Assessment. (2024b). *Dictionary: Meaning of regenerative in English*. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/regenerative>
- Carlsson, M. (2024). Schools addressing health, wellbeing and sustainability challenges: a literature review of perspectives on social justice, equity and agency. In *Health Education*. Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HE-12-2023-0121>
- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. In *Journal of Positive Psychology* (Vol. 12, Issue 3, pp. 297–298). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613>
- Club of Rome. (2024). *The Limits to Growth*. <https://www.clubofrome.org/publication/the-limits-to-growth/>

- Coscieme, L., Sutton, P., Mortensen, L. F., Kubiszewski, I., Costanza, R., Trebeck, K., Pulselli, F. M., Giannetti, B. F., & Fioramonti, L. (2019). Overcoming the myths of mainstream economics to enable a new wellbeing economy. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 11(16). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11164374>
- Danmarks Radio. (n.d.). *Tema: Oversvømmelser i Spanien*. Retrieved November 28, 2024, from <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/udland/tema/oversvoemmelser-i-spanien>
- Della Porta, D., & Keating, M. (2008). How many approaches in the social sciences? An epistemological introduction. In D. Della Porta & M. Keating (Eds.), *Approaches and methodologies in the social sciences : A pluralist perspective*. Cambridge University Press.
- Douthwaite, R. J. . (1993). *The growth illusion : how economic growth has enriched the few, impoverished the many, and endangered the planet*. Council Oak Books.
- European Commission. (n.d.-a). *Beyond GDP: delivering sustainable and inclusive wellbeing*. Retrieved December 26, 2024, from https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-activities-z/beyond-gdp-delivering-sustainable-and-inclusive-wellbeing_en
- European Commission. (n.d.-b). *Delivering the European Green Deal*. Retrieved October 28, 2024, from https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal_en
- European Commission. (n.d.-c). *Environment action programme to 2030*. Retrieved November 27, 2024, from https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/environment-action-programme-2030_en
- European Union, & The Council of the EU. (2024). *European Green Deal*. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/green-deal/>
- Feola, G., Vincent, O., & Moore, D. (2021). (Un)making in sustainability transformation beyond capitalism. *Global Environmental Change*, 69. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2021.102290>
- Fioramonti, L., Coscieme, L., Costanza, R., Kubiszewski, I., Trebeck, K., Wallis, S., Roberts, D., Mortensen, L. F., Pickett, K. E., Wilkinson, R., Ragnarsdóttir, K. V., McGlade, J., Lovins, H., & De Vogli, R. (2022). Wellbeing economy: An effective paradigm to mainstream post-growth policies? *Ecological Economics*, 192. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2021.107261>
- Fredslund, H. (2012). Den filosofiske hermeneutik - fra filosofi til forskningspraksis. In C. Nygaard (Ed.), *Samfundsvidenskabelig analysemetoder* (2.udgave). Samfundslitteratur.

- Gilje, N. (2017). Hermeneutik - teori og metode. In M. Järvinen & N. Mik-Meyer (Eds.), *Kvalitativ analyse - syv traditioner* (1.udgave). Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Hensher, M. (2023). The economics of the wellbeing economy: Understanding heterodox economics for health-in-all-policies and co-benefits. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 34(3), 651–659. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hpja.764>
- Hoekstra. (2019). Replacing the Most Influential Indicator in the World. In *Replacing GDP by 2030* (pp. 3–26). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108608558.001>
- Järvinen, M., & Mik-Meyer, N. (2017). Kvalitative analysetraditioner i samfundsvidenskabelig forskning. In M. Järvinen & N. Mik-Meyer (Eds.), *Kvalitativ analyse - syv traditioner* (1.udgave). Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Karpatschhof, B. (2020). Den kvalitative undersøgelsesforms særlig kvaliteter. In S. Brinkmann & L. Tanggaard (Eds.), *Kvalitative metoder: En grundbog*. Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Kelleci, A., & Yıldız, O. (2021). A guiding framework for levels of sustainability in marketing. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 13(4), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13041644>
- Kickbusch, I., Demaio, S., Grimes, A., Williams, C., De Leeuw, E., & Herriot, M. (2022). The Wellbeing Economy is within reach - let's grasp it for better health. *Health Promotion International*, 37(4). <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daac055>
- Klinge, T. L., & Andersen, K. S. (2023, July 21). *Ekstrem tørke har startet en krig om vand i Spanien*. <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/viden/klima/ekstrem-toerke-har-startet-en-krig-om-vand-i-spanien-nu-truer-ulovlige>
- Kortetmäki, T., Puurtinen, M., Salo, M., Aro, R., Baumeister, S., Duflot, R., Elo, M., Halme, P., Husu, H.-M., Huttunen, S., Hyvönen, K., Karkulehto, S., Kataja-aho, S., Keskinen, K. E., Kulmunki, I., Mäkinen, T., Näyhä, A., Okkolin, M.-A., Perälä, T., ... Kotiaho, J. S. (2023). Planetary well-being¹. In *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Planetary Well-Being* (pp. 9–25). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003334002-3>
- Kristiansen, S. (2017). Fortolkning, forforståelse og den hermeneutiske cirkel. In M. Järvinen & N. Mik-Meyer (Eds.), *Kvalitativ analyse - syv traditioner* (1.udgave). Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Laurent, É. (2021). The Well-being Transition. In É. Laurent (Ed.), *The Well-being Transition: Analysis and Policy*. Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67860-9>
- Maach, M. L. (2024, September 15). *Gader, huse og biler står under vand i Østrig og Tjekkiet*. <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/udland/gader-huse-og-biler-staar-under-vand-i-oestrig-og-tjekkiet-situationen-er-virkelig>

- Mason, N., & Büchs, M. (2023). Barriers to adopting wellbeing-economy narratives: comparing the Wellbeing Economy Alliance and Wellbeing Economy Governments. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*, 19(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2023.2222624>
- Mayring, P. (2000). Qualitative Content Analysis. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 1(2). <http://www.zuma-mannheim.de/research/en/methods/textanalysis/>
- McCartney, G., Hensher, M., & Trebeck, K. (2023). How to measure progress towards a wellbeing economy: distinguishing genuine advances from ‘window dressing.’ *Public Health Research and Practice*, 33(2). <https://doi.org/10.17061/phrp3322309>
- Meadows, D. H., Meadows, D. L., Randers, J., & Behrens III, W. (1972). *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome’s Project on the Predicament of Mankind*. Universe Books. https://collections.dartmouth.edu/xcdas-derivative/meadows/pdf/meadows_ltg-001.pdf?disposition=inline
- O’Neill, D. (2015). Gross domestic product. In G. D’Alisa, F. Demaria, & G. Kallis (Eds.), *Degrowth: A vocabulary for a new era*. Routledge.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (n.d.). *Well-being and beyond GDP*. Retrieved November 28, 2024, from <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/well-being-and-beyond-gdp.html>
- Rapley, T. (2010). Some Pragmatics of Data Analysis. In D. Sliverman (Ed.), *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method & Practice* (pp. 273–291). Sage.
- Rayner, T., Szulecki, K., Jordan, A. J., & Oberthür, S. (2023). Chapter 1. The global importance of EU climate policy: an introduction. In T. Rayner, K. Szulecki, A. J. Jordan, & S. Oberthür (Eds.), *Handbook on European Union climate change policy and politics*. Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Russell-Bennett, R., Rosenbaum, M. S., Fisk, R. P., & Raciti, M. M. (2024). SDG editorial: improving life on planet earth – a call to action for service research to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs). *Journal of Services Marketing*, 38(2), 145–152. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-11-2023-0425>
- Samper, J. A., Schockling, A., & Islar, M. (2021). Climate politics in green deals: Exposing the political frontiers of the european green deal. *Politics and Governance*, 9(2), 8–16. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v9i2.3853>
- Schreier, M. (2014). Qualitative Content Analysis. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

- Selvam, S. G., & Collicut, J. (2013). The Ubiquity of the Character Strengths in African Traditional Religion: A Thematic Analysis. In H. H. Knoop & A. D. Fave (Eds.), *Well-Being and Cultures*. Springer Science+Business Media.
- Shrivastava, P., & Zsolnai, L. (2022). Wellbeing-oriented organizations: Connecting human flourishing with ecological regeneration. *Business Ethics, Environment and Responsibility*, 31(2), 386–397. <https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12421>
- Souza, L., Truell, R., Borisch, B., & Pavanelli, R. (2023). Co-building new partnerships, policies and practices for health, social wellbeing, and sustainability. *Population Medicine*, 5(Supplement). <https://doi.org/10.18332/popmed/165597>
- Tanggaard, L., & Brinkmann, S. (2020). Kvalitet i kvalitative studier. In S. Brinkmann & L. Tanggaard (Eds.), *Kvalitative metoder: En grundbog*. Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Toussaint, M. (2021). Integrating Environmental Justice into EU Policymaking. In É. Laurent (Ed.), *The Well-being Transition: Analysis and Policy*. Springer International Publishing.
- UN. Secretary-General, & World Commission on Environment and Development. (1987). *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development : note / by the Secretary-General*. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/139811?v=pdf#files>
- United Nations. (n.d.). *THE 17 GOALS*. Retrieved November 28, 2024, from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- Waddock, S. (2021). Wellbeing Economics Narratives for a Sustainable Future. *Humanistic Management Journal*, 6(2), 151–167. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41463-021-00107-z>
- Wellbeing Economy Alliance. (2022a). *For an economy in service of life*. <https://weall.org/>
- Wellbeing Economy Alliance. (2022b). *Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGO)*. <https://weall.org/wego>
- Wellbeing Economy Alliance. (2022c). *What is a Wellbeing Economy?* <https://weall.org/what-is-wellbeing-economy>
- World Health Organization. (2022). *WHO European framework for action on mental health 2021–2025*.
- World Health Organization. (2024, November 7). *WHO demands urgent integration of health in climate negotiations ahead of COP29*. <https://www.who.int/news/item/07-11-2024-who-demands-urgent-integration-of-health-in--climate-negotiations-ahead-of-cop29>