The Eco-Systemic Flourishing (ESF) Evaluation Methodology

A Framework for Assessing Integrated Wellbeing Across Systems

Abstract

This paper presents the formal prototype methodology underpinning the Ecosystemic Flourishing (ESF) Evaluation process, developed to assess the degree of integrated thinking within wellbeing frameworks, policies, and initiatives. The ESF methodology responds to a recognised limitation in conventional wellbeing measurement approaches, which often isolate social, economic, environmental, and human dimensions rather than understanding them as interdependent systems. Drawing on interdisciplinary research in systems thinking, ecological science, developmental psychology, and cultural theory, the ESF evaluation provides a structured yet adaptive tool for analysing how effectively a framework supports holistic, long-term flourishing. The methodology operationalises four core domains - Natural Environment, Circular and Regenerative Economics, Cultural Values and Identity, and Human Capacities and Potential - alongside a developmental understanding of human motivation. This paper outlines the conceptual foundations, evaluation criteria, scoring system, and application process used in ESF assessments, offering a rigorous yet practical approach for policymakers, researchers, and institutional leaders.

1. Introduction: The Need for Integrated Evaluation

Contemporary wellbeing frameworks have made significant progress in broadening policy beyond GDP-based metrics. However, most approaches remain **structurally fragmented**, treating environmental sustainability, economic performance, social cohesion, and human wellbeing as parallel domains rather than deeply interdependent systems.

The ESF methodology emerges in response to this limitation. It is grounded in the premise that:

- Human wellbeing is inseparable from ecological health
- Cultural values and worldviews shape systemic outcomes
- Economic systems must be regenerative rather than extractive
- Human development unfolds across interconnected motivational levels

This reflects a broader shift in global research toward **relational and systems-based understandings of flourishing** .

2. Conceptual Foundations of the ESF Methodology

2.1 Systems Integration and Interdependence

The ESF framework is built on the principle that flourishing arises through the **dynamic interaction of multiple systems**, rather than isolated indicators. It integrates insights from:

- Systems theory and ecological science
- Developmental psychology and human motivation
- Cultural and worldview studies
- Regenerative economics and sustainability science

This integrative approach positions flourishing as a **relational and ecological process**, not merely an individual or economic outcome .

2.2 The Four Core ESF Domains

The ESF Evaluation methodology assesses frameworks across four interdependent domains:

1. **Natural Environment (NE)**
   Recognises ecological health as foundational to all forms of wellbeing, including biodiversity, climate stability, and ecosystem integrity.

2. **Circular and Regenerative Economics (CRE)**
   Evaluates the extent to which economic systems promote regeneration, equity, and long-term resilience rather than extraction.

3. **Cultural Values and Identity (CVI)**
   Assesses the role of cultural narratives, ethics, trust, identity, and meaning-making in shaping societal wellbeing.

4. **Human Capacities and Potential (HCP)**
   Examines holistic human development across physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual dimensions.

These domains form a **systemic architecture of flourishing**, aligning human development with ecological and societal conditions .

2.3 The Seven Levels of Human Motivation

A distinctive feature of ESF methodology is its integration of developmental psychology through seven universal human needs:

- Security
- Relationship
- Independence
- Engagement
- Fulfilment
- Contribution
- Growth

These levels represent **dynamic, lifelong dimensions of human flourishing**, influencing behaviour, values, and societal outcomes.

3. ESF Evaluation Framework and Criteria

The ESF methodology uses a structured evaluation tool, defined in the **ESF Integrated Wellbeing Evaluation Form** .

3.1 Domain-Based Assessment

Each framework is assessed across the four ESF domains using qualitative and quantitative indicators.

Natural Environment Indicators

- Biodiversity and ecosystem health
- Climate resilience and emissions
- Access to natural spaces
- Environmental stewardship

Circular and Regenerative Economics Indicators

- Circularity and resource efficiency
- Equity and wealth distribution
- Regenerative industries
- Local economic resilience

Cultural Values and Identity Indicators

- Social trust and cohesion
- Cultural diversity and inclusion
- Ethical and spiritual dimensions
- Participation and representation

Human Capacities and Potential Indicators

- Physical and mental health
- Relationships and belonging
- Agency and participation
- Meaning, creativity, and growth

These indicators provide **evidence-based proxies for systemic integration** rather than isolated performance metrics.

3.2 Scoring System

Each domain is scored on a **scale of 1 to 5**:

- 1 = Not integrated
- 2 = Minimally integrated
- 3 = Partially integrated
- 4 = Well integrated
- 5 = Fully integrated

The total score (out of 20) determines overall ESF alignment:

- 17–20: Highly Integrated

- 13–16: Moderately Integrated
- 9–12: Partially Integrated
- Below 9: Poorly Integrated

4. Methodological Process

4.1 Evaluation Steps

The ESF Evaluation process follows a structured methodology:

1. **Framework Identification**
   Define the initiative, policy, or index being evaluated.
2. **Evidence Collection**
   Gather relevant documentation, indicators, and datasets.
3. **Domain Analysis**
   Assess each of the four ESF domains using defined criteria.
4. **Scoring and Synthesis**
   Assign scores and calculate overall ESF alignment.
5. **Interpretive Analysis**
   Identify systemic strengths, gaps, and integration patterns.
6. **Recommendations**
   Provide targeted guidance for improving integration.

4.2 Mixed-Methods Approach

The ESF methodology combines:

- **Quantitative scoring** (for comparability)
- **Qualitative interpretation** (for depth and context)

This ensures both **rigour and nuance**, avoiding reductionist measurement while enabling cross-framework comparison.

5. Distinctive Features of the ESF Methodology

5.1 Integration Rather Than Aggregation

Unlike conventional frameworks, ESF does not simply aggregate indicators. It evaluates the **degree of integration between domains**, recognising that:

- Economic growth without ecological health is unsustainable
- Social wellbeing without cultural coherence is fragile
- Individual wellbeing without systemic conditions is limited

5.2 Developmental Depth

By incorporating human motivational levels, ESF captures:

- Internal drivers of behaviour
- Cultural and psychological conditions

- Long-term developmental trajectories

This adds a **vertical dimension of analysis** often missing from wellbeing frameworks.

5.3 Worldview Sensitivity

The methodology recognises that:

- Metrics are shaped by underlying worldviews
- Cultural narratives influence policy priorities
- Meaning-making systems affect societal outcomes

This aligns with emerging research highlighting the role of worldview in shaping systemic coherence and flourishing .

5.4 Applicability Across Scales

The ESF methodology is designed for use across:

- National wellbeing frameworks
- City and regional strategies
- Educational systems
- Organisational and community initiatives

This scalability reflects the nested nature of human and ecological systems.

6. Policy and Research Applications

The ESF Evaluation methodology supports:

6.1 Policymakers

- Identifying gaps in existing wellbeing frameworks
- Designing integrated policy architectures
- Aligning national indicators with long-term flourishing

6.2 Researchers

- Comparing global wellbeing models
- Advancing interdisciplinary wellbeing science
- Developing new indicators of systemic integration

6.3 Institutions and Cities

- Evaluating strategic coherence
- Aligning programmes with regenerative principles
- Supporting cross-sector collaboration

7. Limitations and Future Development

While robust, the ESF methodology is evolving. Key areas for development include:

- Longitudinal validation across multiple contexts
- Integration with large-scale datasets and dashboards
- Refinement of indicators for cultural and spiritual dimensions
- Expanded participatory evaluation processes

Future work will strengthen its empirical base while preserving its systemic integrity.

8. Conclusion

The ESF Evaluation methodology represents a significant advance in wellbeing assessment, shifting the focus from fragmented measurement to **integrated systemic understanding**. By combining ecological, economic, cultural, and human dimensions within a single evaluative architecture, it provides a powerful tool for navigating the complex challenges of the 21st century.

At its core, the methodology recognises that:

- Flourishing is relational, not individual
- Systems must be regenerative, not extractive
- Human development and planetary health are inseparable

As such, ESF offers not just a method of evaluation, but a **framework for transformation**.

The Flourish Project is a global initiative dedicated to advancing the Ecosystemic Flourishing (ESF) Framework - an integrative approach to wellbeing that recognises the deep interdependence between human development, cultural values, regenerative economies, and the natural world. Rooted in systems thinking, relational practice, and emerging research on flourishing, the project seeks to support the development of compassionate, resilient, and ecologically conscious individuals and communities through education, policy innovation, research, and cross-sector collaboration.
A global multidimensional framework designed to complement GDP through the measurement of equitable, inclusive, and sustainable wellbeing across present and future generations. The framework integrates wellbeing, inclusion, sustainability, resilience, institutional quality, and environmental conditions into a unified dashboard architecture for national and international policy application.