

Seaweed is a billion-euro industry in Europe, but inclusive, sustainable transition approaches are marginalized

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Seaweed farming in Norway. Credit: Moritz Albrecht

Interest in the seaweed industry is growing rapidly across Europe, and seaweed farming is viewed as a forerunner of a sustainability transition

with widespread local benefits. However, a new study from the University of Eastern Finland questions if the industry is able to deliver on its promises of an inclusive transition.

Conducted in Norway, the study found a mismatch between the [seaweed](#) farming industry's projected [development](#) pathways and the possibilities for an inclusive participation of coastal communities in this novel economy. The paper is [published](#) in the journal *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*.

"The current political-economic environment of the seaweed industry leaves little room for alternative, inclusive development pathways. While seaweed farming has high sustainable potentials to provide food, feed and biomaterials, the dominant focus on large-scale, techno-innovative, centralized processes, limits its social transformation capacities," Associate Professor Moritz Albrecht of the University of Eastern Finland says.

Sustainability scholars have been calling for a sustainability transition that focuses more on local value chains, small-scale approaches and new ways of production and consumption. The study explored how these demands are met by the Norwegian seaweed sector's current development and how it is aligned with the hopes and publicly portrayed policy aims.

Entrepreneur and stakeholder opinions on future developments and current practices and challenges in seaweed farming were investigated. In particular, the study compared how biophysical and sectoral challenges of seaweed farming and its markets are planned to be solved for future development.

Sustainable financing and investments are a central part of Norway's seaweed sector and policy aims. The study suggests that currently,

regional and local benefits through sectoral growth are based on a trickle-down belief yet are likely to be distributed unevenly. Therefore, in terms of regional policy and locally inclusive development, the role of the seaweed sector, its [policy framework](#) and investment instruments should be more diverse to enable also alternative development pathways that supplement the current techno-innovative solutions with social, innovative approaches.

Examples of measures supporting local development include decentralized seaweed processing plants as well as local value chains based on agro-ecological methods as a valid addition to the centralized biorefineries and other high-tech processing plants often with an export focus. The creation of local markets should be a key focus and politically rewarded approach as it best allows to transform local (food) culture to seaweed use but also support a socially supported sustainable transformation.

"Although the study was conducted in Norway, its findings also have implications on EU policy and the potential of its political framework to enable a just transition."

The study involved in-depth interviews with seaweed entrepreneurs, experts and institutional actors related to seaweed farming in 2019–2022, as well as an in-depth analysis of [policy](#) documents and other publicly available material, such as news reports and statistical data. The paper, available in [open access](#), is part of a special issue by members of the Green Economies Network on Sustainable Finances and Investment.

More information: Moritz Albrecht, A Billion-Euro Industry? (De-)territorialisation Processes of Norway's Seaweed Farming Assemblage, *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/tesg.12609](https://doi.org/10.1111/tesg.12609)

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