

JYU Wisdom Evaluation Report 4 June 2026

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1) Summary

The evaluation assesses JYU.Wisdom's progress midway through its Profi7 funding period, focusing on achievements, challenges, and future development. It examines how effectively the community advances interdisciplinary research on planetary well-being and sustainability, while also generating societal impact. The evaluation draws on documents, interviews, and visit to University of Jyväskylä.

Progress and Key Achievements

Despite receiving only around 30% of the requested Profi7 funding and reduced university support, JYU.Wisdom has made strong progress:

- **Strategic implementation:** Both focus areas—(1) transition to planetary well-being and (2) methodologies facilitating the transition—have been actively developed, though unevenly due to funding constraints.
- **Recruitment and capacity building:** Key tenure-track positions have been partly filled, and additional hires secured through external funding.
- **Research output growth:** Publications and international collaborations have increased significantly, especially since 2022, with strong contributions from natural sciences and social sciences.
- **Educational impact:** Wisdom has expanded interdisciplinary education, including MOOCs, a doctoral program, and a sustainability course mandatory for all JYU students.
- **Research excellence:** Notable achievements include innovations in biodiversity accounting, ecological restoration models, and an ERC grant in sustainability research.

Interdisciplinary Community

Wisdom's most distinctive success is building an inclusive and vibrant interdisciplinary community:

- Low barriers to participation have attracted a large network (hundreds of affiliates), with a core of ~50–80 highly active researchers.
- Researchers across career stages strongly identify with Wisdom and value its collaborative environment.
- Interdisciplinary dialogue has improved competitiveness in international research funding.

However, engagement levels vary, and maintaining a balance between disciplinary excellence and interdisciplinary work remains a challenge as is typical for any interdisciplinary research community.

Funding and Structural Challenges

- **Limited core funding** constrains recruitment, coordination, and long-term planning and creates uncertainty on decision making.
- Most projects are small to medium-sized, with funding levels stable rather than growing.
- Heavy reliance on external funding creates vulnerability and limits strategic flexibility.
- Cross-faculty collaboration is hindered by traditional university structures, leading to administrative and financial inefficiencies.

A more stable funding and governance model is needed to sustain growth and reduce dependence on short-term solutions.

Societal Impact

- Strong impact in **biodiversity research**, influencing national policy and international discussions (e.g., biodiversity accounting, science panels).
- Broader societal impact is more localized, with limited visibility in national and international policy beyond biodiversity.
- Opportunities remain to expand engagement with policymakers, businesses, and municipalities across all focus areas.

Overall Assessment

JYU.Wisdom is highly aligned with the goals of the Profiling Programme and has achieved impressive scientific, educational, and societal outcomes under constrained conditions. Its interdisciplinary community is a major strength and positions it well for future success. However, its current operating model is fragile and dependent on continued external funding and individual commitment.

Key Recommendations

To strengthen impact and sustainability, the evaluation recommends:

- Stabilize funding and governance: establish reliable core funding and clearer administrative structures.
- Strengthen weaker areas: strategically invest in underrepresented disciplines and research fields.
- Enhance policy impact: expand engagement beyond biodiversity to broader sustainability domains,
- Deepen interdisciplinarity: build stronger links with law, economics, and policy-oriented fields.
- Leverage synergies: connect with other strong JYU research areas (e.g., security).
- Improve visibility and infrastructure: provide attractive shared spaces to support collaboration.

JYU.Wisdom has successfully built a dynamic, interdisciplinary research community with growing academic and societal impact. To fully realize its potential as a leading force in planetary well-being research, it now requires more stable institutional support, stronger strategic focus, and expanded policy engagement.

2) Purpose of the evaluation

By the instructions of JYU to the evaluation team, the purpose of the evaluation is to provide a comprehensive assessment of the successes and points of improvement and to provide recommendations for further development of the activities. The evaluation should serve at the same time as a mid-term assessment of the Profi71 'planetary well-being' profiling area (2023-2028) and the core activities of JYU.Wisdom research community. The aim is to see how well Wisdom is meeting its objectives that were determined for the Profi period. An equally important task is to give JYU.Wisdom feedback on how it is proceeding on its way towards a research community that excels in multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary research on planetary well-being, sustainability, and in making research impactful in the society.

The evaluation team bases its assessment on official documents, interviews and personal contacts (Appendix A provides list of interviewed groups and documents).

3) Key Themes & Discussions

3.1 What progress has JYU.Wisdom / Planetary wellbeing profiling area made halfway through its Profi funding period?

In its application for Profi7 funding, Wisdom has positioned themselves in the Profiling area 'planetary wellbeing' by organizing its work in two focus areas with the following goals:

Focus area 1: Transition to planetary wellbeing. Wisdom aimed to clarify wellbeing implications of the worldwide sustainability transitions and build to this end a critical mass of interdisciplinary expertise on how the conceptual framework of sustainability can be adopted as guiding principle in human cultures and societies. Wisdom combines interdisciplinary competence from natural sciences, humanities, social sciences and business studies. Three tenure track professors were planned to be hired on the topics planetary boundaries, sustainability studies, and sustainable business studies.

Focus area 2: Methodologies facilitating the transition. Wisdom aimed to build new mathematical, statistical and computational methods as well as quantitative methods to find novel ways utilizing their multidisciplinary potential. This was built on Wisdom's initial strength in sensor-based methodology for mapping biodiversity from local to global scales. Two new key areas were modelling approaches to link theory and data in community ecology and biodiversity impact accounting through organizations financial accounts. Two tenure track professors were planned to be hired on topics of statistical methods and community ecology and biodiversity data analysis.

The Evaluation Team notes first that out of the 4 M€ funding Wisdom initially applied from the Profi7 program, it received only 30 %. Also in parallel, there has been a significant reduction in University's funding from 0.3 M€ to about half the amount. This has obviously implicated, and slowed but not hindered Wisdom's work and development due to Wisdom's ability to attract additional funding.

Wisdom has successfully started to work on Focus area 1 and two of three tenure track professors have been recruited (Teea Kortetmäki funded by Profi7 and Marileena Mäkelä by other external funding) and the process to recruit the third tenure track professor is ongoing. As part of the activities, Wisdom has developed education on sustainability issues, for instance new MOOC courses that are available for all students, one of them having become mandatory for all students at JYU. Furthermore, WISUSTRAN Basic multidisciplinary studies in sustainability transitions (25+ cr) provides multidisciplinary studies in sustainability transitions and introduces students to the needs, barriers and opportunities of sustainability transitions from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Wisdom now provides a doctoral program and collects PhD students and postdocs in several multidisciplinary ongoing projects. Parts of these activities are funded by other sources than JYU or Profi7.

Because of the substantially reduced funding, recruitments in focus area 2 have been challenging. Nevertheless, Nerea Abrego started as Associate Professor in community ecology and biodiversity data and two Professors of practice, Kaisa Mustajärvi and Saara Vauramo, have started to work on the methodologies facilitating transition with external funding. Research in this focus area has been active and, especially biodiversity accounting (both business and footprint) has been widely noted not only in international academia but also among businesses and relevant stakeholders nationally and internationally. These initiatives deal with the urgent need to find policy relevant and workable metrics for biodiversity and their use for policy making.

The international evaluation team finds that Wisdom has consistently followed the profiling plan and has also been successful in overcoming the financial constraints, although they delayed the planned progress. The evaluation team applauds the intent to find ambitious approaches that serve the whole world, like an attempt to define a measure of biodiversity equivalents, as counterpart for CO₂-equivalents.

The Wisdom school which started as a bottom-up initiative of a number of active researchers is showing a clear progression since its kick-off in 2018 (with the first coordinator hired in 2020). The number of affiliated researchers has doubled over the years, as have publications associated with the Wisdom area. Especially, since 2022, the number of publications from the area is substantially higher than in the years before, which is the case in almost all involved disciplinary units. Most of the publications are from the faculty of Mathematics and Sciences and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, which together stand for about half of the production of Wisdom, whereas the rest of the faculties and centres contribute to a lesser degree. Also the amount of publications co-authored with international partners has increased. Hiring of the Wisdom professors through Profi7 and from other sources (see above) has certainly contributed to this steep increase in Wisdom affiliated publications. It has to be taken into account, though, that as per now, all researchers at JYU can affiliate themselves with Wisdom of their own choice and list Wisdom in their affiliations on publications which then are counted into Wisdom's production.

In general, Wisdom aims to have low thresholds for researchers of all career stages to join the community, which they very successfully achieve. Several hundred people are registered on the Wisdom mailing list, and many participate in Wisdoms different types of activities (from seminars to doctoral schools, book projects, joint papers, etc.). The downside of this approach is that it is unclear how many researchers actually participate more actively in Wisdom

activities. In our interviews with the different groups, it appeared like a core number of 50-80 researchers are more actively participating, which is a great achievement.

Regarding the funding situation, it remains a bit unclear how many projects are directly affiliated to Wisdom, as they are usually placed in the institute and faculty of the researcher who has acquired them. In the interviews, both professors and postdocs report that they happily credit Wisdom for the projects that are within the area of Wisdom. Some of the externally funded projects would likely have been funded also without Wisdom, but others are a direct outcome of the Wisdom activities. The researchers point especially to that the interdisciplinary dialogues in Wisdom have contributed to them being more competitive in international competitions for interdisciplinary project funding as they are very used to taking different disciplinary perspectives of sustainability into account. The number of projects active in the last years varies a bit in number and financial size, but it appears that around 30 externally funded projects are in every year affiliated with Wisdom. The number does not seem to increase over the last years, and also the total amount of funding seems to be stable.

Looking a bit deeper into the distribution of funding and publications, it is very clear that single strong research environments (mainly from the natural sciences, especially within biodiversity research) drive the success of the Wisdom area. However, more recently, research projects outside these areas have also been funded, and for these, the researchers especially credit the Wisdom activities. *Thus, strengthening the areas that are less represented in the overall output and funding acquisition further may be a strategic focus for the future.*

The Wisdom area is strongly involved in teaching, via an interdisciplinary doctoral school (which also contributes substantially to funding Wisdom activities), multidisciplinary studies in sustainability transitions, and interdisciplinary massive open online courses. There is also a collaboration with the Open university. One of the Wisdom courses has become a mandatory course for all students at JYU. Thus, the number of credits taken has increased substantially every year, and was about ten times as high in 2024/25 as in 2021/22 (but also based on a larger portfolio of courses). However, also looking at the development of the course that already started in 2021, the number of credits increased about five-fold.

Apart from its strongly nationally and internationally acknowledged work on biodiversity accounting, Wisdom's societal impact, has for the most part focussed on the local area (contributions to local well-being, coupling with the local retail market, greening projects with the University of Jyväskylä). Impact on the national or international policy domain is overall weaker, with exception of the biodiversity area, which is well represented in central science panels such as in the nature panel and expert panel for sustainable development. Within this area the policy impact at the national is strong (as one of the center directors is leading the national science panel for biodiversity in Finland), and also the impact on governmental and party programs in the area of biodiversity management can be directly traced back to Wisdom activities like the Wisdom letters (which are collections policy briefs based in Wisdom research). Wisdom's impact on policy making is less traceable (but the work was included in an UNEP report), very little is also mentioned about collaboration with local municipalities and authorities which is the area that could be worthy of further exploration, in terms of joint policy dialogues, for example. Especially, strengthening the societal impact of areas other than biodiversity should be a priority for Wisdom (without sacrificing the strong work done in this area, obviously).

3.2 What research outputs and achievements are worth highlighting?

What makes the Wisdom community special is the focus on planetary well-being. The concept is discussed prominently in the research community at the moment, and Wisdom has the potential to contribute to these discussions and become an international driving force. This, however, requires strengthening of the disciplines engaged in Wisdom that are not excellent, yet, and work further on the integration of the different disciplinary perspectives. Moreover, also the engagement of Business school and economic sciences has been successful, as private initiatives linked these activities to Wisdom.

Some specific research highlights the advisory board want to point out are the following:

- The BOOST project, led by JYU, has provided canonical equations of restoration for ecological compensations for multiple habitats to be used in practical applications. For instance, they help the implementation of the Nature Restoration Law.
- The Work on biodiversity footprint – this line of work is innovative and impactful. Already now, some of these calculation methods are applied by companies when defined their science based nature target and writing their sustainability reports
- The bold and challenging initiative to provide a global universal metrics for biodiversity impacts, nature accounting, as the probability of actions to increase extinction of species
- WISUSTRAN Basic multidisciplinary studies in sustainability transitions (25+ cr)
Basic multidisciplinary studies in sustainability transitions introduces students to the needs, barriers and opportunities of sustainability transitions from a multi-disciplinary perspective
- Wisdom researchers have a strong contribution to the work of the Nature Science Panel and to the Forest Bioeconomy Science panel
- ERC grant by Tea Kortetmäki - social science ERC grants are very challenging to get, Kortetmäki has innovatively combined different disciplines and been able to build a project that both has scientific excellence and societal relevance for sustainability

It should also be noted that one of the biggest achievements of Wisdom is to create a community that representatives of all career stages experience as welcoming and easy to interact with (taking into account that the ones who do not share this view likely have not volunteered for the interviews). From PhD students, via postdocs, associate and full professors, all interviewed stated that they identify as Wisdom researchers and that an important part of their academic activities are connected to Wisdom. *The advisory board sees that as an extraordinary achievement, which many similar initiatives in other universities do not achieve.* Many of the researchers we talked to named also the Wisdom house, which had to be abandoned, was experienced as a very welcoming meeting space, which especially the

PhDs liked to use for informal exchange with other researchers. The new Wisdom offices with locked doors and less space do not fulfill these functions in the same way. Initiatives like Wisdom live of having a physical space that people like to go to and meet other people, so reconsidering the use of the old building might be a measure to sustain Wisdom's position as a lively and visible network at JYU.

How does JYU.Wisdom align with the goals of the Profiling funding scheme (planetary well-being and sustainability solutions)? JYU.Wisdom operations / how, compared to the Profiling area goals?

The work aligns extremely well to the goals of funding. *The evaluation panel finds that the work has been very determined and all planned actions have been taken concerning opening new research lines and filling the planned posts even if funding was not provided to the extent that was anticipated. This needs to be fully credited to the creativity and dedication of the Wisdom community and their leaders who found alternative funding opportunities.*

3.3 How does the resourcing look like and is the lack of financial support affecting

The overall amount of funding in the Wisdom area is good, but not excellent. As described above, there are about 30 projects connected to the area at each time, but the overall funding lies around 6-7 million Euros, which makes most of the projects small to medium size. The Wisdom funding itself has been cut substantially in relation to what was applied for which limits the amount of coordination and interdisciplinary activity Wisdom can afford to implement. So far, Wisdom has been able to find solutions for these cuts by acquiring other external funding sources from companies or educational initiatives. However, this should not be taken for granted for the future. The advisory board clearly sees a need for the core administrative staff of Wisdom to be transferred to more stable funding schemes. This is especially relevant as uncertain basic funding limits the strategic "wobble room" of the Wisdom area leaders: awarding PhDs or establishing permanent staff positions in areas that need strengthening is difficult. Lack of funding limits the activities of Wisdom to organize meeting arenas (like workshops), a Wisdom conference, joint book projects, or coordinated teaching activities. Furthermore, such activities have an impact, but cannot match the impact permanent or temporary research positions have that can be strategically assigned. So far, Wisdom has compensated for cuts in funding by dedication of its team, creativity, and acquiring financial sources, however, for the future, this puts Wisdom in a vulnerable position and it prevents Wisdom from taking important next steps (as there always is a struggle to fill the holes in the financing of the ongoing activities).

3.4 How has the promotion of interdisciplinary research succeeded and what should be done better?

There are indications that Wisdom contributed to changing the practice of research at the University of Jyväskylä: The number of researchers affiliated to the Wisdom area has

increased over the years, and this has also led to more, and more interdisciplinary publications. However, there is a clear difference in engagement and success of the different research groups under the Wisdom umbrella.

Doctoral and postdoctoral students identify themselves with Wisdom and describe it as their mental home irrespective of where their funding comes from. Wide interaction with students and researchers from other disciplines is found to increase a broader understanding of the challenges of and solutions to sustainability transition which helps the Wisdom researchers also in collaborations within other interdisciplinary projects. Several researchers reported that while some of their projects would probably have also been funded without Wisdom, some are the clear outcome of the interdisciplinary Wisdom activities. They also feel that this has impacted and helped their own research. At the same time, doctoral students note that they need to ensure having strong competence in their own major science to maintain the respect and ability to focus also on the “narrower” problems relevant for their own discipline. Thus, there is a need to find and maintain a good balance between interdisciplinary work and the research requiring top competence in the field on their own primary science.

3.5 How has cross-faculty engagement succeeded and what should be done better?

As with most similar initiatives at universities, Wisdom’s cross-faculty engagement is partly hampered by the strongly disciplinary organisation of universities. JYU is no exception, also here the organisational structure is in institutes within faculties, and the scientific staff is clearly assigned to one of these institutes. This makes cross-cutting initiatives like Wisdom falling between chairs, especially with respect to budget questions: Research projects are assigned to an institute, which then benefits from overheads, teaching is organized in institutes and faculties and debates about where the teaching obligations of Wisdom researchers lie occur. Being part of such struggles is a barrier for the further development of Wisdom. Making the deans of the involved faculties in Wisdom to the Board of Governors only partly solves this problem.

While professors (and to a larger degree also PhDs and postdocs) want to have their positions assigned to one of JYU’s institutes, the advisory board clearly sees that there needs to be negotiated a sustainable future financial and administrative model of how Wisdom also financially benefits from the activities they initiate (research and teaching projects). The agreement with the teaching unit seems to be working to the benefit of Wisdom in this regard. To enable that Wisdom takes the next steps and the involved key actors do not “burn out” of engagement due to consistent struggles for relatively small amounts of money and internal personnel resources, the advisory board recommends to negotiate stable agreements on resource distributions and an administrative structure that secures reliable basic funding sustaining a robust administration of Wisdom activities for longer time periods. The advisory group sees Wisdom as one of the flagships of JYU and the university should make even better use of the extraordinary level of activities in this group.

3.6 What was the advisory board’s overall impression of JYU.Wisdom’s research and impact?

Despite a demanding resource situation, *Wisdom has managed to grow and produce highly relevant research output in its focus area, establish large-scale educational programs, and have (at least in some areas) strong impact on national and international policy. It is impressive how Wisdom managed these achievements even if some of their core funding has been much lower than anticipated.* This has been compensated by dedication and successfully acquiring alternative funding sources. In addition to the scientific output and societal impact, Wisdom has succeeded in creating a welcoming community that many researchers of all career stages at JYU acknowledge and like to contribute to.

4) What recommendations does the advisory board make for improving JYU.Wisdom activities to reach the Profiling area goals?

Within the Profi7, Wisdom is on an excellent path to achieve their goals, even if funding was substantially reduced. For the second half of the profiling area, the advisory board recommends:

- Focus especially on areas that are developing slower and still have less impact in Wisdom, channel activities and funding (if available) to these areas
- Strategically align with research environments outside JYU to cover areas not represented, yet (law, economics). Partly, this is already happening, but it can be intensified
- Explore possible synergies with other well-established research areas at JYU (e.g., security and cyber-security research) can make Wisdom even more relevant in the changing funding situation with a growing focus on such issues. The nexus of sustainability, biodiversity and security is still underexplored.

5) What suggestions does the advisory board give for future directions and collaborations in research, education, and societal impact?

The advisory group recommends the following priorities for improving Wisdom further:

- Improve the strategic leadership, strengthen strategically weaker research perspectives further
- Improve the policy engagement for other sustainability areas than biodiversity such as societal transformation and climate adaptation.
- Widen the connections to disciplines closer to policy making, such as political science, law, and economics
- Explore synergies with other strong JYU research areas to find new avenues for funding and breakthrough ideas (such as security research)
- Find a reliable administrative solution for the demanding cross-faculty work that Wisdom is doing; this includes a model for securing basic funding for the core staff and a viable model for distributing financial benefits (overhead) from acquired projects in research and teaching.
- Consider a more visible and open solution for the location of the Wisdom community on the campus.

6) Conclusions

The Wisdom program and within it the Profi7 activities have resulted in an impressive community with strong academic outputs and high impact in society. It has resulted in clearly more interdisciplinary work and positioned the involved researchers in excellent positions for achieving national and international funding in interdisciplinary calls. The Wisdom community is attractive and researchers like to participate in its activities. Wisdom has also achieved impressive educational activity making an impact on JYU and beyond. That being said, Wisdom is in a vulnerable position, as core funding has been reduced and a lot of the activities rely on enthusiasm and project funding. For enabling Wisdom to take the next steps in its developments, it needs a more stable administrative framework.

Appendix A

List of documents used for the report:

- JYU Wisdom annual report 2024
- JYU Wisdom annual report 2025
- Profi7 Wisdom report 2023
- Profi7 Wisdom report 2024
- Profi7 Wisdom report 2025
- Profi7 Planetary Wellbeing application 2022

Interview meetings (all 90 min)

- Wisdom coordinator (04.06.2026)
- Selection of professors in Wisdom (05.06.2026)
- Selection of PhD students in Wisdom (05.06.2026)
- Wisdom directors (06.06.2026)
- Selection of Postdocs in Wisdom (06.06.2026)
- Research council of JYU (06.06.2026, 60 min)