

Trust, Transformation, and the Sea: Why Changing Food Habits Requires Systemic Change



Ask most people whether they would like to eat more sustainably, and the answer is almost always yes. Ask them whether they bought certified sustainable fish last week, and the picture becomes more complicated. The gap between intention and behaviour is one of the most studied — and most persistent — challenges in public health and sustainability research. It is also, we would argue, one of the most misunderstood.

The dominant response to this gap has been information. Tell people the facts about overfishing, show them the statistics on ocean biodiversity loss, explain the difference between a species at risk and one that thrives in artisanal nets. If people only knew, the reasoning goes, they would choose differently. But the evidence for this approach is, at best, mixed. Information is necessary but rarely sufficient. What matters more is the environment in which choices are made — the systems, cultures, and relationships that make some choices easy and others invisible.

This is where the Nordic Wellbeing Academy brings a particular perspective to the Forgotten Fish project. For years, we have worked on the challenge of transformation — not just in health behaviour, but in organisational culture, professional identity, and social norms. The common thread in everything we do is trust. Change happens when people trust the source of new information, trust the relevance of a new practice to their own context, and trust that others around them are making the same shift.

Forgotten fish, viewed through this lens, is not primarily a supply chain challenge or a marketing challenge. It is a trust and culture challenge. A chef who has never cooked with a particular species, whose customers have never asked for it, and whose supplier has never offered it, faces a system of interlocking habits and assumptions that makes the new behaviour feel risky. The Forgotten Fish project addresses this at multiple levels simultaneously — building skills, creating new supplier relationships, generating visibility through food events and public engagement, and connecting professionals across borders who are navigating the same transition together.

This is what systemic change looks like in practice. Not a single intervention, but a web of reinforcing shifts that gradually make the new choice feel normal, accessible, and even exciting. The Nordic Wellbeing Academy is proud to contribute to that web — and we have yet to encounter a more compelling case study for the power of good food to drive it.

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