

The Strategic Proposal for the Candidacy of the Mediterranean Diet for Inclusion in the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage

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2007 witnessed the launch, promoted by the Mediterranean Diet Foundation, of a strategic proposal for a multi-national effort driven by the governments of Spain, Italy, Greece and Morocco and open to all other Mediterranean countries, to put forward the Mediterranean diet as a candidate for inclusion on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage

On 20th February 2007, in Ibiza, the Ministers of Agriculture from Italy and Spain presented a joint declaration to promote internationally the Mediterranean diet. On 16th July 2007, in a document presented by Spain to the European Union Council of Ministers of Agriculture and Fisheries, the Mediterranean diet was highlighted as *“a very important component of the cultural, social, territorial, environmental and gastronomic heritage of the countries and peoples in the region, historically forming part of a way of life.”* For the Spanish Minister Elena Espinosa the Mediterranean diet *“is neither a recipe nor a recipe book, [but rather] an enormous capital enriched over thousands of years, in which tradition and innovation coexist in perfect harmony to create a healthier way of eating.”*

Then, on 4th February 2008 in Zaragoza, the Spanish proposal to have the Mediterranean diet included on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Intangible Cultural Heritage List received the full support of the 7th Conference of Mediterranean Ministers of Agriculture and Fisheries.

The Mediterranean Diet as a Lifestyle in Itself as Well as an Intangible Cultural Heritage

This strategic proposal to put forward the Mediterranean diet for inclusion on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List is intended to identify and carry forward a set of common objectives and actions aimed at creating the critical mass of awareness, expertise, resources and political goodwill necessary for the development of joint activities to reduce the increasingly rapid erosion of the Mediterranean lifestyle by raising public understanding and awareness of the health, social and cultural benefits of the Mediterranean diet as an expression of a whole cultural system.

The Mediterranean diet as a lifestyle in itself makes our cultural identity and diversity visible, providing a direct measure of the vitality of the culture in which it is embedded.

The Mediterranean diet is an expression of a Mediterranean style of life that has undergone continuous evolution throughout history. The Mediterranean diet as an intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation, and it is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to changes in their environment and their history. It provides a sense of identity and continuity for the Mediterranean people.

Therefore, it was thought that the diversity of Mediterranean food cultures, expressed by the wide variety of food that makes up the Mediterranean diet, should be preserved and enhanced as a resource for effective, sustainable development in the entire Mediterranean region.

The Need to Preserve the Cultural Heritage of Mediterranean Food Cultures through Safeguarding the Mediterranean Diet as an Outstanding Sustainable Resource

The diversities of Mediterranean food cultures as well as many elements of the Mediterranean diet are currently at risk of extinction due to the effects of globalization, the homogenization of life styles, the loss of awareness, meanings, understanding and appreciation, which will lead to the erosion of the Mediterranean heritage and to a lack of interest among younger generations about their own heritage.

In the Mediterranean Basin there is a shared awareness of the social, cultural, health and economic di-

mension of 'food', shared by all Mediterranean people. The Mediterranean Diet is an outstanding resource, not yet fully acknowledged and harnessed within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, for the achievement of an effective sustainable development in the Mediterranean. As it was pointed out in the report *Mediterranean Strategy on Sustainable Development*, issued in 2005 by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP): "*Mediterranean agricultural and rural models, which are at the origins of Mediterranean identity, are under increasing threat from the predominance of imported consumption patterns. This trend is illustrated in particular by the decline of the Mediterranean dietary model despite the recognized positive effects on health. The prospective sce-*

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Reaffirming the 1996 Barcelona Declaration on the Mediterranean Diet that expresses both the consensus of the international scientific community on the health benefits of this diet, as well as the need to preserve its historical and cultural qualities for future generations;

Assuming its role as an independent and expert consulting body, for all those matters that require a scientific opinion, and reaffirming its intention to investigate and disseminate the values of the Mediterranean Diet and support all initiatives that contribute to its safeguarding and promotion;

Taking into account all the worldwide scientific contributions dedicated to the knowledge of the Mediterranean Diet, and reaffirming its importance for the health promotion of the population and its preventive properties against cardiovascular diseases, some types of cancer and other non communicable diseases;

Acknowledging that the traditional Mediterranean Diet has been recognized as a healthy and nutritionally balanced diet, based on a broad variety of locally produced and palatable foods;

Considering what the Mediterranean Diet represents for all Mediterranean countries' culture and wellbeing;

Taking into account that the Mediterranean Diet promotes local production and consumption of traditional Mediterranean foods, and encourages sustainable agriculture and enables food security;

Considering the Mediterranean Diet's contribution to intercultural dialogue, to the transfer of knowledge and technology and to the social and economic revitalization of Mediterranean communities;

Recognizing the role of the family, school, and the community in transmitting cultural values and practices surrounding food;

Considering that, despite its increasing popularity worldwide, the Mediterranean Diet is endangered in all countries of the Mediterranean region;

Recognizing that the Mediterranean Diet is an extraordinary cultural heritage, that is expressed in a diversity of food traditions, landscapes, culinary creativity, gatherings and celebrations;

Referring to the 2005 Rome Declaration, where the Mediterranean Diet was highlighted as a whole lifestyle pattern which urgently required preservation and promotion; and where it was also agreed to prepare a

proposal for the inclusion of the Mediterranean Diet in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of the UNESCO, under the coordination of the Mediterranean Diet Foundation, in collaboration with most Mediterranean countries;

Considering the importance that surrounds the Intangible Cultural Heritage as emphasized in the UNESCO Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional and Popular Culture in 1989, in the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity in 2001 and especially in the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, approved by the UNESCO General Conference in 2003;

The Scientific Committee, on the occasion of the World Food Day 2007, issues the following

DECLARATION

1. That the Mediterranean Diet is a living heritage that is still being transmitted from generation to generation.
2. That the Mediterranean Diet is continuously recreated in response to the environment in the diverse communities of the area through their respective local shades, which surround them with a feeling of identity.
3. That the abandonment of traditional healthy habits and the emergence of new lifestyles associated with socioeconomic changes pose important threats to the preservation and transmission of the Mediterranean Diet to future generations.
4. That the Mediterranean Diet deserves and requires multiple and diverse scientific and cultural initiatives, focused on its preservation, promotion and transmission.
5. That it is unanimously agreed to give full support to the candidacy of the Mediterranean Diet to be included on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of the UNESCO, understanding that this initiative will determine the safeguarding of the Mediterranean Diet, with its consequent benefits for the wellbeing of the population.
6. That Governments, Institutions, NGOs, Professional Associations, International Agencies and Organizations are urged to subscribe to the Declaration and to support our initiatives directed towards the UNESCO candidacy of the Mediterranean Diet.

nario for the expected impacts of trade liberalization, climate change and the lack of efficient rural policies offers a gloomy picture in some southern and eastern Mediterranean countries, with the prospect of aggravated regional imbalances, deeper ecological degradation and persistent or accrued social instability....[helping to create] a conducive regional environment to help countries develop policies and efficient procedures for the labelling and quality certification of Mediterranean food products and to promote the Mediterranean diet."

The proposal to include the Mediterranean diet on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List could be useful in trying to reduce the increasing erosion of the Mediterranean food cultures under the pressure of the globalization process, and in particular with the upcoming creation of the EuroMediterranean Free Trade Area.

The 2007 Barcelona Declaration on the Mediterranean Diet as Intangible Cultural Heritage

On the occasion of World Food Day 2007, on 16th October 2007 in Barcelona, the Mediterranean Diet Foundation's Scientific Committee issued the 2007 *Barcelona Declaration on the Mediterranean Diet as Intangible Cultural Heritage*.

Towards a Common Definition of the "Mediterranean Diet" More Than as a Diet, as a Cultural System

On 4th-5th December 2007 at the University of Tuscia, Italy, as part of Italy's Official Celebration of World Food Day, the international Conference "New Frontiers in the Mediterranean for Food Security" was held. It was co-organized by the International Inter-University Centre for Mediterranean Food Cultures Studies (CIISCAM), and Department of Ecology and Sustainable Development of the University of Tuscia, in cooperation with National Research Institute on Food and Nutrition (INRAN), Forum on Mediterranean Food Cultures, Bioversity International and the Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The CIISCAM was established at the University of Rome "La Sapienza" by the University of Calabria, the University of Gran Canaria, the University of Parma, the University of Tuscia and "La Sapienza" itself, with the aim of studying and pro-

moting Mediterranean food cultures, in all their manifold variety, as an outstanding cultural heritage to be recognized and enhanced as the essential resource for the achievement of balanced, nutritional wellbeing for everyone in the Mediterranean region. In addition CIISCAM aims to reduce the increasing erosion of the diverse heritage of Mediterranean food cultures.

At the CIISCAM conference, to reinforce support for the Mediterranean diet's candidacy for inclusion in the UNESCO Intangible Heritage List, The 2005 *Rome Call for a Common Action on Food in the Mediterranean*, issued on 1st October 2005, was re-launched as the final document of the 3rd Forum on Mediterranean Food Cultures, "Dialogues between Civilizations and Peoples of the Mediterranean. The Food Cultures", held from 29th September to 1st October at the University of Rome "La Sapienza." On this occasion, a specific session was held on the possible recognition by UNESCO of the Mediterranean diet as an intangible cultural heritage, during which the Mediterranean diet was agreed by all participants to be understood as a cultural system and not just a diet. There was also progress towards a strategic consensus on a common definition of "Mediterranean Diet" and on the political need to share its "benefits" equally among all Mediterranean countries.

In the *Rome Call*, among other recommendations, the following key points were emphasised:

- To fully acknowledge "food" as a pivotal element in the development of the future actions of the EuroMed Partnership, for its central and strategic cross-cutting dimension through the Declaration of Barcelona, with particular regard on the three social, cultural and human dimensions of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.
- To fully acknowledge "food" as a vehicle for learning about diversity and transmitting knowledge of the other.
- To act together to revitalize local capacities to reduce the increasing erosion of the diversity of Mediterranean food cultures heritage as well as to reinforce the sustainability of the agro-food systems of all Mediterranean countries and the food security in the entire region.
- To remember that the ancient Greek word "diaita" means equilibrium, lifestyle. Therefore, the traditional Mediterranean diet is more than just a diet; it is a whole lifestyle pattern with physical activity playing an important role.
- To establish as a priority a cohesive definition of the traditional Mediterranean diet (so as to be

equivalent to Mediterranean food or food culture) in order for all Mediterranean countries to present a shared perspective and strategy. The definition should refer to the traditional Mediterranean diet as a means of preserving cultural heritage. Main foods included in the common food basket are: an abundance of olive oil and olives, fruits, vegetables, cereals (mostly unrefined), legumes, nuts and fish, moderate amounts of dairy products (preferably cheese and yoghurt) and low quantities of meat and meat products. Wine in moderation is acceptable when it is not contradictory to religious or social norms. But the idiosyncrasy of the pattern is not only a list of foods (some traditional) but that it also refers to sustainability (mostly fresh, seasonal and locally grown products) as well as preparation techniques following traditional recipes and the way and context of eating them, which are also key components of the Mediterranean diet. It is emphasised that the Mediterranean diet is complete and usually does not need any kind of supplement or enrichment unless recommended for health reasons and for a few nutrients (folic acid and iodine).

- To take into account that the traditional Mediterranean diet has health implications besides cultural and economic implications. Therefore, all Mediterranean countries need to agree and contribute to the process of preservation and promotion. To start the process, obtaining UNESCO backing for the recognition of the Mediterranean diet as a part of Food Cultural Heritage is an initial and shared common objective to be coordinated from the Barcelona counterpart as an extension of the 1995 Barcelona Declaration, in collaboration with all the Mediterranean country representatives.
- To consider that the global scenery in which is placed the complex reality of the Mediterranean, with its interdependent issues, requires an interdisciplinary and intercultural rethinking able to express a new paradigm of development for the Mediterranean.

A Preservation Strategy at National and International Levels

The preservation strategy developed in this multi-national joint effort by Spain, Italy, Greece and Morocco, should take the measures necessary to ensure the safeguarding of the diversity of the Mediterranean food cultures' heritage as a critical base for the safeguarding of the Mediterranean diet, understood as a whole, non-separable, cultural system. These safeguarding measures should have internal and external coherence and provide a permanent trans-sector and inter-cultural channel of open dialogue through which the Mediterranean diet's benefit should be mutually shared by all people living in the Mediterranean region. It should encourage scientific and artistic studies and research for the effective safeguarding of the Mediterranean diet as an intangible cultural heritage. This preservation strategy should strengthen education initiatives, awareness-raising and capacity-building projects and training in the management of intangible cultural heritage, in order to preserve effectively and to promote the transmission of the Mediterranean diet heritage during the present, difficult, period and on into the future.

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