



# The excellence of the Mediterranean Way

  
**Fondazione  
Barilla**

*il tuo cibo, la tua terra*

people, environment, science, economy



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# The future of food is growing with us



The Barilla Center for Food & Nutrition is a think tank with a multi-disciplinary approach whose goal is to gather the most authoritative thinking on an international level regarding issues linked to the world of food and nutrition. Its areas of study and analysis include culture, the environment, health and the economy, and - within these areas - it intends proposing solutions to take on the food challenges to be faced over the coming years.


Specifically, the Barilla Center for Food & Nutrition intends to provide a forum for the current and future needs of our society in terms of major themes tied to food and nutrition, identify key issues, bring together and examine the most advanced, cutting-edge experiences, knowledge and competencies available today on a world level. Its end-purpose is to develop and make available considerations, proposals and recommendations aimed at promoting better living and general, sustainable health and well-being for everyone.

Interpreting such complex phenomena requires a methodology which goes beyond the confines of individual disciplines and this was the approach adopted for the four thematic areas - *Food for Sustainable Growth*, *Food for Health*, *Food for All*, *Food for Culture* - in which, in its first year, the Barilla Center for Food & Nutrition prepared and circulated five Position Papers, providing a reasoned overview of the available scientific findings and an original analytical perspective on the phenomena covered. Through these documents, the BCFN not only expressed its own position, but also proposed a series of recommendations for individuals, the business world and the public sector.

In each area, at least one specific advisor was named, selected for his or her expertise and professional experience in the field: **Barbara Buchner** (expert in energy issues, climate change and the environment) for the *Food for Sustainable Growth* area; **Mario Monti** and **Jean-Paul Fitoussi** (economists) for the *Food For All* area; **Umberto Veronesi** (oncologist), **Gabriele Riccardi** (nutritionist) and **Camillo Ricordi** (immunologist) for the *Food for Health* area; **Joseph Sassoon** and **Claude Fischler** (sociologists) for the *Food for Culture* area.

For the realization of the present document the BCFN benefited from the valuable inputs, comments and review of **Nancy Harmon Jenkins**, food writer, journalist and historian with primary expertise in Mediterranean cultures and cuisines, and **Franco Cassano**, Sociologist, Writer and Professor at the University of Bari.






# 1. The Mediterranean Way: an extraordinary fount of cultural wealth for today's lifestyle

*Mediterranean Way is about light and colors, flavors  
and scents, eras and trends, history and daily life,  
ideas and ideals, but, above all, culture and cultures.*



A photograph of a coastal town, likely in Italy, featuring a church with a large dome and a yellow bell tower. The town is built on a hillside, with colorful buildings and a harbor filled with boats. The scene is bathed in warm, golden light, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. The water is a deep blue, and the sky is a soft, hazy blue. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and picturesque.

*That which has been – and remains today for a significant segment of the world's population – the most problematic aspect of life (search for food with which to nourish oneself), has also been the point-of-departure for an incomparable journey of intelligence, creativity, love of beauty and social relations.*



## *Commensality and the Mediterranean Way in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*

Over the course of human evolution, commensality has been central to social life. In its literal sense, the word means eating at the same table (from medieval Latin *commensalis*, from *com-* ‘sharing’ + *mensa* ‘a table’ according to the Oxford American Dictionary). In an extended sense, it conveys the notion of sharing food habitually, possibly with an assumption of dependence of one or several of the commensal parties upon another.

In all cultures, eating the same food is equated with producing the same flesh and blood, thus bringing commensals closer. Similarly, in most if not all cultures, meals regulate social life and individual behaviour both at a symbolic and biological level. Not all cultures eat around a table, far from it; but many cultures eat in a circle around the food and all cultures have rules and customs regulating distribution and sharing.

Hunting progressed on the basis of cooperation, particularly when it came to killing or capturing big animals. Cooperation, in turn, implies retribution and redistribution: hunter-gatherers redistribute resources extracted from the environment, particularly animal protein, beyond the immediate circle of the hunters and their kin, in accordance with often complex rules.

With the acquisition and control of fire, the hearth and cooked food literally became the center of social life. Religion ruled over sacrifice and offerings and had its say about what was to be eaten by various people and what they should abstain from. After the emergence of agriculture, social organization became more complex. Institutions such as church, clergy, army developed. Society became divided into casts and classes. Food became all the more central in how it both distinguished and united individuals in families and groups.

In ancient Greece, then in Rome, one particular type of meal was central to the social order: the sacrificial banquet. No meat from domestic animals was eaten outside of a religious sacrifice. The animal was slaughtered by a priest-butcher (*mageiros*) and the meat was then divided and eaten in a banquet. Only full-fledged citizens of the City (*Polis*) took part in the feast. Historians of Greco-Roman Antiquity reveal that much of our political vocabulary derives from that of the sacrificial meal in its Roman version. The word “participate”, for instance, comes from the latin *pars capere*, which means literally to have one’s share of a sacrificial meal, to take part, hence to be part of, to have one’s place in, a group, an institution or an event.

Commensality, thus, is not specifically Mediterranean. However, in some of the cultures that developed around the Mediterranean, it acquired a degree of institutionalisation and political meaning that contributed to essential further developments. Historians have shown that, in the wake of the sacrificial banquet, public meals actually became an essential factor in the emergence of Athenian democracy. In monotheist religions that emerged in the Mediterranean world, the set meal and its rules acquired both a high degree of ritualisation and symbolic meaning (e.g. the Jewish Sabbath meal and the Christian commemoration of the Last Supper in the Eucharist).

Recent comparative research shows that, within the Western world, among countries with relatively similar levels of development, striking differences in eating patterns and the general relationship to

food and eating can be observed. In the United States and to a certain extent Britain, for instance, eating has become increasingly individualised and medicalised. It is considered a form of private consumption. In Italy or France, in contrast, it is more structured around mealtimes and commensality, with an essential social (public) dimension.

Until very recently, medical nutrition had failed to fully take into account the social and cultural dimension of food and eating. Much of the effort to improve people’s nutrition was based on the implicit assumption that information about nutrients, energy and exercise delivered to each and every individual should be able to optimise behavior. Thinking of food and eating in terms of nutrients and responsible individual choice does not seem to help enough. On the other hand, one can observe that some of those nations that show attachment to commensality generally seem to fare better in terms of obesity and related health problems.

Commensality should be considered an essential concept and object of research in nutrition.

Those cultures of the Mediterranean which fare best in terms of nutrition are those who seem to care most about foods rather than nutrients; about origin, not just composition; about total quality, not just nutrition and health; about social occasions, not just individual choice, responsibility and body management; about the sacred importance of food rather than its triviality.

Conversely, obesity, diabetes and the associated health conditions are most prevalent not where, in culture and society, food and eating are considered important, enjoyable social occasions on a daily basis, but rather where food is pervasive, cheap in price but also in quality, readily available for constant, quasi-mindless consumption, commodified, trivialised, voided of its meaning, desecrated as it were. The great German sociologist Max Weber wrote about the “disenchantment” (*Entzauberung*) of the world associated with the rise of modernity: Where food has become disenchanted, we should look to the Mediterranean way for helping re-enchant it.

*Claude Fischler*

### 1.1 Why a position paper dedicated to Mediterranean Way?

The history of man's relationship with food represents one of the most fascinating social and cultural epics and search for meaning in the history of mankind. Just the universal nature represented by the act of eating would deserve to be investigated and comprehended as an intimately defining element within the life of human beings and one without equal in nature. That which has been – and remains today for a significant segment of the world's population – the most problematic aspect of life (search for food with which to nourish oneself), has also been the point-of-departure for an incomparable journey of intelligence, creativity, love of beauty and social relations.

In fact, whether we are aware of it or not, eating is an **act of refined cultural significance**. From the moment in which human beings were able to work with the raw materials that nourished them, utilizing ever-more sophisticated means of transformation starting with the cooking of foods, the preparation and consumption of dishes has taken on increasingly articulated and complex meanings and values.

Where should we begin in order to get an adequate in-depth understanding of this amazing patrimony of values? If there is one special point-of-synthesis from which to appreciate the wealth of this reservoir, it would certainly be that of the **world's great cuisines**, which represent its apex.

It is from here, from the desire to fully understand the origins and breadth of the life experience they narrate (or even better, "incarnate"), and from a tradition, that this paper draws its inspiration. As will be discussed in more depth in this paper, the interpretation of Mediterranean Way we intend using relates to a particular attitude and original way of interpreting and experiencing the act of eating – not reduced to mere nourishment, but as the synthesis of a range of its own elements and values specific to that extraordinary geographical, historical, ethical and cultural location represented by the Mediterranean basin.

It is an initiative born, above all, from a sense of **amazement**, from the recognition of a frugal, yet intense, beauty which it seems our own era (too often "crushed" into an overwhelmingly technological and merely functional view of life), is not always able to render justice. It is amazing how **beneficial for the well-being and quality of life** of individuals the pairing of food preparation *times* and *methods* skillfully handled by man as part of the Mediterranean tradition can be.

Of course, not everything is worth keeping. The effort must be made to identify those elements which can be usefully updated and co-opted on the basis of the conditions of contemporary life.

*The attempt to update the key aspects of the Mediterranean Way so that they may be profitably experienced and adopted today is, therefore, the primary goal of this position paper.*

While this is the **motivation** behind our initiative, something must also be said about the **state of mind** with which we have approached our work. In fact, what has urged us in the direction of taking a new look at the concept of the Mediterranean Way is not only a desire to sing its praises and make use of all possible concepts of taste and gratification, but also the existence of a major element of preoccupation.

As Claude Fischler (author of the "Commensality and the "Mediterranean Way" in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" comentary presented at the beginning of this document) recently emphasized, the Mediterranean approach to food – **the so-called Mediterranean Diet – is today unexpectedly fragile**.

Unexpectedly, because in the past it was the Mediterranean Diet which showed itself to be uniquely capable of uniting absolutely new elements (for example, "American" foods, the tomato, above all), without upsetting its basic identity and, in reality, enriching it. Following in the path of a well-defined identity, innovative elements were taken on to complement and enhance an even-more complete alimentary structure.

Today, on the contrary, within Mediterranean countries themselves, the traditional living and eating styles of recent periods tend to be easily lost, leaving the way open to habits, styles and ways of consuming food from other traditions which are often poorer in actual food content, not to mention aspects of social relations and significance. What's more, this seems to be occurring in regions which, more than others, in the past represented those areas considered the home of the Mediterranean Way.

The consequences – not only social but also in terms of health – are there for all to see.

What seems to have become obstructed is the mechanism for transmitting tradition, placing the peoples of the Mediterranean at the risk of losing a legacy of food-related practices unique in the world.

*It is for this reason that this position paper is born of an urgent need. It is a forceful appeal for the need to **safeguard this inheritance** from the past which, today, we perceive as being at-risk, but whose relevance to the presence would seem undeniable.*

### 1.2 Position paper concept and structure

In light of the comments and goals presented above, the methodology adopted is one of a **rigorous, yet pragmatic** analytical approach. The concept is to create a type of *reference manual* not only for those looking to understand the essential elements of the Mediterranean Way, but also those who want to adopt them and attempt to introduce them into their own approach to food.

Therefore, on one hand, this paper will present "state-of-the-art" of thinking on the Mediterranean approach, bringing together all the major contributions in the field and, on the other, an attempt will be made to **translate these into concrete terms** through practical suggestions and examples.

We will attempt, first of all, to introduce readers to a rediscovery of the Mediterranean Way through an understanding of its cultural aspects, expressed in terms of the relationship to **space, time, relationships**, and **culture** (Chapter 3). Towards the same end, we have invited one of the most insightful and clear scholars of contemporary food issues to provide the preface to this document (Chapter 1).

We will then outline the **situation with eating styles** in Italy today in order to provide a critical evaluation and understand the problem areas and potential for improvement (Chapter 4).

Chapter 5 is the core of this paper, the point in which the conceptual analysis is paired with an invitation to translate these values into behavior. This will be done through presenting the **words** that most fully characterize the Mediterranean tradition and outlining the actions and choices which can provide a positive orientation for eating styles found in Italy today.

For the most positive habits of the Mediterranean Way to continue and, in some cases, make a return to this way of living, the **agrifood industry** must embark upon a process of rethinking its strategic choices and manufacturing processes in order to support a healthier way of eating than the one we are seeing spread (with tremendous preoccupation) throughout the Western world. This will be the area of focus of Chapter 6.

To conclude, in Chapter 7, we will trace the main consequences of what has been analyzed, attempting to synthesize **what has been learned** over the course of the study.

Our hope is that this journey will not only be an interesting one, but also an invitation to call into question habitual behavior and ways of doing things, so that **eating** may once again be what *it must be*: a source of **joy** and an opportunity to **share with others**, while contributing to safeguarding our **health**.



## 2. The key dimensions that define the Mediterranean Way

*Mediterranean Way describes a special way of interpreting and experiencing the oldest social act known to mankind: eating which constitutes the synthesis of a set of elements and values of a particular geographical, historical, ethical and cultural area: the Mediterranean basin.*





*In the Mediterranean, eating is eating with someone. Sharing bread or food signifies establishing and rendering sacred unions, ties, and relationships.*



2.1  
What do we mean  
by “Mediterranean  
Way”?

“Mediterranean Way” is not a fixed concept. But like many neologisms, there is no doubt that it is a real part of the daily lives of millions of people.

Mediterranean Way describes a certain attitude, a special way of interpreting and experiencing the oldest social act known to mankind: **eating**. Which, in this case, far from being reducible to merely a nutritional question, constitutes perhaps the **richest and most complex possible synthesis of a set of elements and values of a particular geographical, historical, ethical and cultural area: the Mediterranean basin**.

Mediterranean Way is a neologism with an incredible wealth of meanings and facets. It includes the Mediterranean Sea, but above all, the lands which surround it. It is about many peoples who are both very different from each other, but also very similar in their habits and life styles. Because there exists, even in the general feelings of those who live in this area, a “Mediterranean way of life”. And this is the very essence of the Mediterranean Way which filters the sociological categories through the lens of eating habits and the relationship between human beings and food.

Mediterranean Way is also about light and colors, flavors and scents, eras and trends, history and daily life, ideas and ideals, but, above all, culture and cultures.

Mediterranean Way is an expression whose origin can be traced to two basic roots. On the one hand, its roots lie in characteristics (both traditional and contemporary) of the food of the countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. This is the definition of *what* is eaten, in other words, the range of foods which characterize the specific Mediterranean diet.

On the other, the term synthesizes and expresses the continuous interaction between the peoples of the Mediterranean region and the food they eat. This is the aspect of *how* to eat which encapsulates the overall range of habits, rites and behavioral schema – both

*The peoples of the Mediterranean, without exception, have an attention for and awareness of the importance of diet that has little equal anywhere in the world.*

individual and collective – associated with the preparation and consumption of food.

**What** is eaten and **how** are variables which are intimately connected, to the point that they virtually become one-and-the-same.

If we fail to take each of these aspects into consideration conjointly, we would be hard put to comprehend the characteristics of the extraordinary diet that has flowered on the banks of the Mediterranean over the centuries, fruit of a millennia-long history that has become consolidated in unique practices following cadences and stratifications dictated by time, the course of events, the nature of the places and people and environmental circumstances.

Let’s start from *what* that is – of the two aspects – the one more immediately decipherable. As has now been universally recognized, the concept of the Mediterranean diet – the idea that there is a style of diet of the countries which border on the Mediterranean Sea – comes from medicine. It was, in fact, the physician-nutritionist Lorenzo Piroddi who, in the 1930s, was the first to intuit the existence of a very strong connection between diet and diabetes, bulimia and obesity,<sup>1</sup> suggesting the existence of a dietary model – that of the regions facing on the Mediterranean Sea – which was outstanding in terms of its wholesomeness.

Subsequently, Ancel Keys<sup>2</sup>, a medical-scientist from the University of Minnesota

1 *Cucina Mediterranea. Ingredienti, principi dietetici e ricette al sapore di sole, Mondadori, Milano, 1993*  
2 *Ancel Benjamin Keys (1904-2004). American physician and physiologist, is famous for having been one of the main advocates of the benefits of the Mediterranean diet for combating a large number of widespread diseases in the West, particularly cardiovascular diseases*

School of Nutrition, further developed study of this area. In the 1950s, he was struck by a phenomenon which, at first, he was not able to fully explain. Despite all expectations, the native population in small towns in southern Italy was much healthier than the wealthy citizens of New York and relatives who had emigrated to the United States in previous decades.

Keys hypothesized that this was due to diet and attempted to prove his original hunch by concentrating attention on the foods found in the diet of this population. Through his famous “seven countries study”<sup>3</sup> he was able to show scientifically the nutritional value of the Mediterranean diet and its contribution to the health of the populations adopting it. What emerged clearly from the study was that the population of Montegiorgio (Marches) and, more generally, the inhabitants of Campania, had a very low level of cholesterol in the blood and, as a consequence, a low percentage of coronary disease. This was due primarily to their diet, based on abundant consumption of olive oil, bread, pasta, vegetables, herbs, garlic, red onions and other foods of vegetable origin, as well as a moderate consumption of meat.

Starting from Keys’ studies, many other scientific studies were undertaken analyzing the relationship between diet and onset of chronic disease<sup>4</sup>. Generally speaking, it may be affirmed that there is a convergence of views that fully recognizes the beneficial qualities of the Mediterranean diet<sup>5</sup>.

We have already mentioned which foods comprise the Mediterranean diet and define its unique “personality”. We will now outline them very briefly in a more structured manner. According to Trichopoulou, “the Mediterranean diet can be characterized, in brief, by:

- high level of consumption of **vegetables, legumes, fruit, nuts** and (primarily whole) **grains**;
- a significant use of **olive oil**, against a modest use of saturated fats;
- moderate consumption of fish, also given the distance from the sea;
- low consumption of dairy products (primarily in the form of yogurt and cheese);
- modest consumption of meat and poultry;
- regular, but contained, assumption of alcohol, primarily in the form of wine consumed with meals.”

But, as Nancy Harmon Jenkins<sup>6</sup>, one of the authors most dedicated to the study and concrete promotion of a Mediterranean-style diet, has affirmed, the Mediterranean diet “*is above all a way of thinking about food*”, even more than a selection of specific foods. Despite the diversity in their dietary choices, the peoples of the Mediterranean, without exception, have an attention for and awareness of the importance of diet that has little equal anywhere in the world. In addition, one could say paradoxically, the awareness of this relevance is translated – almost magically – not into something that is annoying, but rather into an explosion of *joie de vivre*. As Igor de Garine noted in the conclusion to his research, “*what is confirmed, in my view, is the existence of a Mediterranean model which, conceived in its totality, excludes anxiety and a sense of guilt, and rehabilitates a way of eating that is innocent, joyous and impregnated with authentic culture*”.

3 *Keys A, Aravanis C, Blackburn, H, Buzina R, Djordjevic BS, Dontas AS, Fidanza F, Karvonen, MJ, Kimura N, Menotti A, Mohacek I, Nedeljkovic S, Puddu V, Punsar S, Taylor HL, Van Buchem FSP, Seven Countries. A Multivariate Analysis of Death and Coronary Heart Disease, 1980. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA and London. 1-381; Toshima H, Koga Y, and Blackburn H. Lessons for Science from the Seven Countries Study. 1995. Springer Verlag, Tokyo*  
4 *World Cancer Research Fund. Food, nutrition and the prevention of cancer: a global perspective. Washington, D.C.: American Institute for Cancer Prevention, 1997*  
5 *Willett WC. Diet and coronary heart disease. In: Willett WC, ed. Nutritional epidemiology. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998*  
6 *For more information, please refer to the “Food and Health” Position Paper published by the Barilla Center for Food & Nutrition in 2009*  
6 *“The New Mediterranean Diet Cookbook. A Delicious Alternative for Lifelong Health”, Nancy Harmon Jenkins, 2000*



We do not want to give the impression of underestimating the indissoluble tie existing between what foods are actually consumed and the styles, habits and behavior adopted by individuals. Without “this” food, the cultural aspects we are investigating would probably not even exist. Without “this” diet (the Mediterranean Diet) there would be no customs and rituals typical of the Mediterranean Way.

In this paper, however, we have specifically chosen not to concentrate on this second aspect tied to *how*. For a more complete discussion, please see the section in the

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appendix entitled “Major Characteristics of the Mediterranean Diet”, which provides a general outline of the food-related characteristics typical of the Mediterranean basin according to studies undertaken on this question by the scientific community.

And this brings us to the question of *how*, perhaps the true element which characterizes and differentiates this dietary approach, without which there would be no explanation for the equilibrium and perfect geometry of food choices

which led Marion Nestle to say, “the best reason for following the Mediterranean diet is the way in which taste and health are united”. It is the cultural dimension associated with the consumption of those foods, dictating the dietary choices and modes of preparation and consumption, that constitutes the **unifying element** and **point of convergence** of a rich and diversified patrimony of recipes and gastronomic traditions in the various countries of the Mediterranean. Countries often marked by other and more profound ruptures which contemporary history, unfortunately, shows.

If the history of man’s relationship with food has been an extraordinary social and cultural epic encompassing a search for meaning, the Mediterranean cuisine represents one of the most exceptional proofs of this.

However, to get beyond the ambiguity that often accompanies statements of a cultural and sociological nature, the nature of these affirmations should be detailed further.



Gianluca Colla/National Geographic Image Collection

In our opinion, there are **four main dimensions constituting the typical personality of the Mediterranean way of eating: space, time, relationships and culture.**

The **space** of Mediterranean cuisine is local in orientation, in which each country offers its own unique nature, often tied to a specific product or crop. A warning: the Mediterranean is a place of diversity that cannot be reduced to a cliché for economic or commercial purposes.

However, from the standpoint of personal experience, the space for cooking and the places which allow this learning experience and passing on of valuable knowledge to be developed are decisive. The love of cooking, seen as an (often social) experience providing gratification and involvement, is perhaps one of the strongest elements of Mediterranean identity. A cuisine that is normally entrusted to women, but in which men do not hesitate to take part on special occasions (for example, for guests or male-only dinner parties).

And cooking is the basis of another characteristic typical of the Mediterranean Way: “preparing something to eat” often coincides with “offering something to eat”. Under hard living conditions, characterized by an era in which demands were great – when women were called upon to perform a number of functions, from raising what were often large families, taking care of the house and even working in the fields – it was not always possible to cook every day. However, when it was, especially on Sundays or holidays, the joy of being able to offer food overlapped that of cooking.

The second basic element in the dialogue between man and food typical of the Mediterranean Way is that of **time**. Time as physical, mental and social “space” dedicated to the complex relationship with food, in all its aspects.

Time as preparation of food. Time as consumption of food. Time as sharing of food.

The term Mediterranean Way expresses a relationship between man and food in which “the proper amount of time is dedicated” to food and man, i.e., the physical and social aspect of eating. Time dedicated to the selection of ingredients and their transformation, rediscovering the profound meaning of the concept of “cooking”: to create, starting from the raw materials, something that is more than just the sum of its parts. Time and human activity represent, therefore, the two essential elements in this transformation which, for thousands of years, has constituted one of the unique aspects of the human race and its various cultures and traditions.

Time also represents the central element of two social phenomena very closely connected in the concept of the Mediterranean Way: eating food and sharing food. At the heart of the Mediterranean Way is a fully “social” view of food as an essential element in individual and group dynamics that have had an indispensable role over time. The fact of dedicating the proper and significant amount of time to food and the rituals surrounding it represent a distinctive trait of the Mediterranean way of life that goes beyond the simple concept of “eating” to become a more general sociological characteristic. The Mediterranean Way is time dedicated to enjoying food that has been produced. The Mediterranean Way is time dedicated to sharing this sensory and cultural experience with other individuals, thus reaching the apex of the social nature found in the act of eating.

Again here, the Mediterranean Way is found in its fully tangible and physical nature, in the amount of time in life dedicated – making a precise choice – to touch, taste, smell and hearing. Time dedicated to oneself, first and foremost. And time dedicated to others.

But the temporal dimension of the Mediterranean Way does not stop here, in terms of the distinctive trait of the triple aspect of cooking-eating-sharing. The time associated with the Mediterranean Way is also that of the **seasons**. And of **memory**.



The term Mediterranean Way expresses a relationship between man and food based on the passing of time in a cyclical manner. And in the understanding of how this aspect can be real added value, both from a nutritional and social standpoint. The variety of “what” is eaten, an essential element of the relationship between man and food which the Mediterranean Way concept expresses, is also – and above all – the expression of an alimentary system which respects nature, the land where man lives and its rhythms.

But the Mediterranean Way is also memory. The very essence, *raison d'être* and uniqueness of the rituals and habits having to do with the preparation, consumption and sharing of food in the Mediterranean area are rooted in traditions and cultural elements which are often millennia-old, that have been passed down to our day and constitute an essential part of the Mediterranean way of life. The Mediterranean Way is also the time which, even when this is not evident, is “imprisoned” in the complex relationship people who live in the Mediterranean area have with food.

Because of its inherent intimacy, the Mediterranean has always been a crossroads, a

*The Mediterranean diet is above all a way of thinking about food, even more than a selection of specific foods.*

privileged point of encounter and **relationships**. Vito Teti effectively summed up this concept, stressing how “a plurality of points of view, voices, documents, dialogue and polyphony, in the end showed themselves to be fundamental in expressing an alimentary

*melting pot, a blend of experiences and knowledge, the fusion of history and traditions, of mixtures of products, foods, flavors, fragrances and colors*”. Without the aspect of relationships, neither the Mediterranean nor its cuisine can be explained.

As Teti states, the two ritual questions asked their children by Calabrian mothers (“did you eat?” and “with whom do you eat?”) express the nature of the affection they have for their offspring. “*Having eaten is confirmation of being well; having eaten in the company of someone is confirmation that one is not alone, and this gives a sense of security and tranquility*”. In the Mediterranean, eating is eating with someone. “*Sharing bread or food signifies establishing and rendering sacred unions, ties, and relationships*” (Vito Teti).

A further constituent trait of traditional diets – which contributes to making even fuller the concept of relationship alluded to previously – is that of “*the parsimonious and balanced relationship between man, the environment and foods*”. Characterized by toil and scarcity, the daily life of virtually all inhabitants of the Mediterranean area was marked for centuries by the need to pay meticulous attention to the natural balance of things as the precious aspect which guaranteed continuity for the future.

The relational attitude unique to the Mediterranean way of life and residents of the Mediterranean can even be seen in its diet. A dietary style that has not shied away from new foods coming from all corners of the Earth (a prime example – the tomato), making them an essential part of their own.

There is, finally, a trait of cultural wealth unique to the Mediterranean world. **Culture** of sobriety, simplicity and sacredness. It is the precariousness of reality itself that renders sacred foods essential to life, starting with bread.

It is also the culture of a religiosity which – for example in Christianity (but Judaism and Islam are also characterized by a strong and concrete attention to the aspects of eating) – exalts the aspect of eating, even making it essential to the relationship between man and God, as a sacrament in the Eucharist.

Therefore, in the Mediterranean region, food has taken on an importance unknown in other contexts, putting itself at the origin of unique cultural manifestations. For example, there is an entire relational aspect to the farming society which can be traced back to holidays that follow the unfolding of the seasons and would be unimaginable outside a

very close tie between food and eating. In some contexts, the work-related activity itself of the community, in some special moments (harvest, grape harvest, killing of a head of livestock), becomes an opportunity for encountering and sharing of experiences, evolving into shared practices and rites.

*There is, thus, a strong cultural trait in which the term culture refers to a common life experience that begets original conceptual and aesthetic processes which – in their diversity – have united and continue to unite the peoples of the Mediterranean. This is the concept of Mediterranean Way in which we intend rooting our observations. A mixture of foods (what) and ways of interacting with and through food (how) that create an indomitable cultural identity which, together with other factors (but not less than other factors) contribute to creating the basis for rich, articulated, constructive and serene social relations.*



Justin Guariglia/National Geographic Image Collection



### 3. The Mediterranean Way as a guide for today's living and eating styles

*The challenge lies, therefore, in finding the correct mode of reconciling the "Mediterranean Way" and contemporary lifestyles through identifying the actions, policies and social and individual choices which also make it possible to preserve "Mediterranean" values in the future social-economic context.*





*The social-economic factors significantly influence food consumption and eating habits.*



### 3.1 Social-economic factors and eating behaviors

Man is the only living creature “*who marvels at his own existence*” (Arthur Schopenhauer) and who, through “*thinking*” (Descartes), develops the desire to comprehend his own existence and utilize this knowledge of himself – together with his own cognitive ability – to delve into and discover the explicit and implicit mechanisms that regulate how nature and human society function.

As early as the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach stated that “*man is what he eats*”, alluding to the close connection between man, his mind and his body. Broadly speaking, therefore, the evolution of society and the gradual transformation of social relations (variations in the social-economic and cultural context, technological development, etc.) can bring about a change in eating and culinary styles.

The concept of “Mediterranean Way”, already introduced in the preceding chapter, does not represent an immutable status and one independent of the social-cultural dynamics in which it is “immersed”. On the contrary, it delineates the result of an affinity of culture and habits (both food- and non-food-related) that has united the peoples around the Mediterranean basin for centuries and from which they have benefited from the positive effects connected to following this way of life, especially in terms of eating.

Therefore, at least in part, the quality of the food has provided for enhanced well-being of Mediterranean peoples over the centuries. Yet, starting in the second half of the last century, these populations – and in particular the Italian population – have experienced major economic and social growth which has also had significant impact on eating habits. How then has the concept of “Mediterranean Way” changed in recent decades? Is the “Mediterranean Way” in Italy today the same as it was fifty or one hundred years ago?

The answer to these questions probably hides the problem area which, if not correctly communicated and handled, could threaten the continuation of a lifestyle that has represented in the past, and must continue to represent, one of the cornerstones of the prosperity and well-being that have always characterized Italian society.

The social-economic factors (as well as those connected to economic development) significantly influence food consumption and eating habits (including: make-up of the diet, time dedicated to preparation and consumption of food, where it is consumed, where it is purchased, etc.). In fact, food habits often appear to be stratified depending on the social and economic characteristics of individuals.

What also emerges is the existence of a number of obstacles to correct eating habits that are social/professional in nature, as well as economic (for example, a full-time office job necessarily affects the dietary model of an individual who is forced to dedicate only a limited amount of time to eating, normally at a coffee shop, snack bar, company cafeteria, etc.).

The changes that have occurred in Italy in recent decades could also have had an influence on the “Mediterranean” characteristics of the diet of Italians who today, in many cases, have modified when and where they eat over the course of the day. They are also more accustomed to mass-produced products and less careful about what they eat, sometimes exhibiting little knowledge about the relationship between mind, body, food and health.

*The battle for proper diet is fought and won around behavior, even more than on the choice of foods.*

### 3.2 The Mediterranean Way yesterday and today

In recent years, European society in general and Italian society, specifically, have changed considerably from a number of standpoints.

The size of the average family has decreased from 3.4 members in 1971 to 2.4 in 2007 and there has also been a gradual increase in the average age of the population. (It is estimated that by the year 2030, Italians over the age of seventy-five will be 5.2 million, a full 27% of the national population and 6 percent higher than the average for OECD countries as of the year 2050.) Added to this will be a progressive increase in the number of individuals working in old age (it is estimated that the ratio between active work force and retirees will increase by 2050 from 38% to 70%)<sup>1</sup>.

The traditional form of the family is evolving towards a concept of “extended family”. Marriage (in continuous decline since 1972) is no longer considered a defining characteristic of a couple, nor is it considered mandatory for having children; civil marriages are on the rise (+50% in 15 years), as are second marriages (13.2% of the total). In 2009, singles were approximately one-fourth of nuclear families included in the ISTAT census, while singles over 65 years of age are 13.4% of Italian nuclear families<sup>2</sup>.

The number of people with some form of academic qualification has significantly increased, with clear implications for the professional future of individuals and, as a result, on their lifestyle. (For example, between 2005 and 2008, Italians with some form of academic diploma/degree increased by 1.5 million individuals in just 4 years)<sup>3</sup>.

The information provided above is nothing more than the statistical evidence of a number of social trends – to which many more could be added – which are influencing the present and future of the Italian population, with significant impacts also on the eating habits of individuals.

Within this context, what is the actual extent of the phenomenon of “**de-Mediterraneanization**” of the diet and lifestyle of Italians? What are the numbers behind the make-up of the diet, time dedicated to preparation and consumption of food, where it is consumed, where it is purchased, etc.?

In Italy, every day, approx. 105 million meals are consumed, of which 76% in the home and 24% away from home.<sup>4</sup> Overall, lunches (53%) prevail over dinners (47%), while 71% of meals are eaten with family members, 16% with friends and colleagues and only 16% alone.



WinfieldParks/National Geographic Image Collection

<sup>1</sup> Source: The European House-Ambrosetti re-elaboration of OECD data, 2008

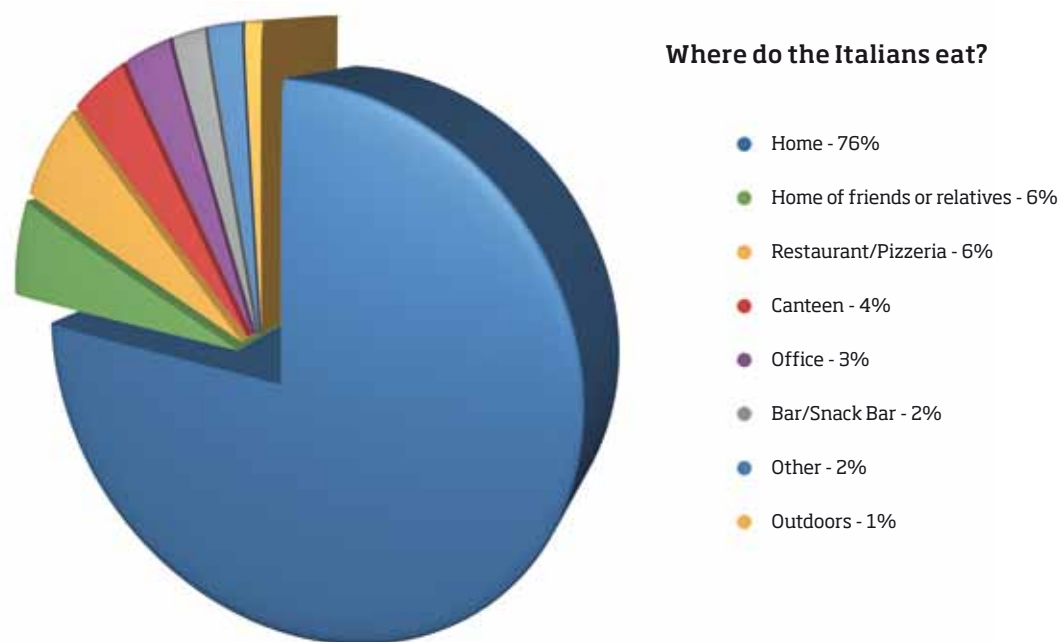
<sup>2</sup> Source: Eurispes, “Rapporto Italia 2010. Percorsi di crescita nella società italiana”, 2010

<sup>3</sup> The European House-Ambrosetti re-elaboration of ISTAT data as of May 2010

<sup>4</sup> Source: Nielsen-Barilla, 2009



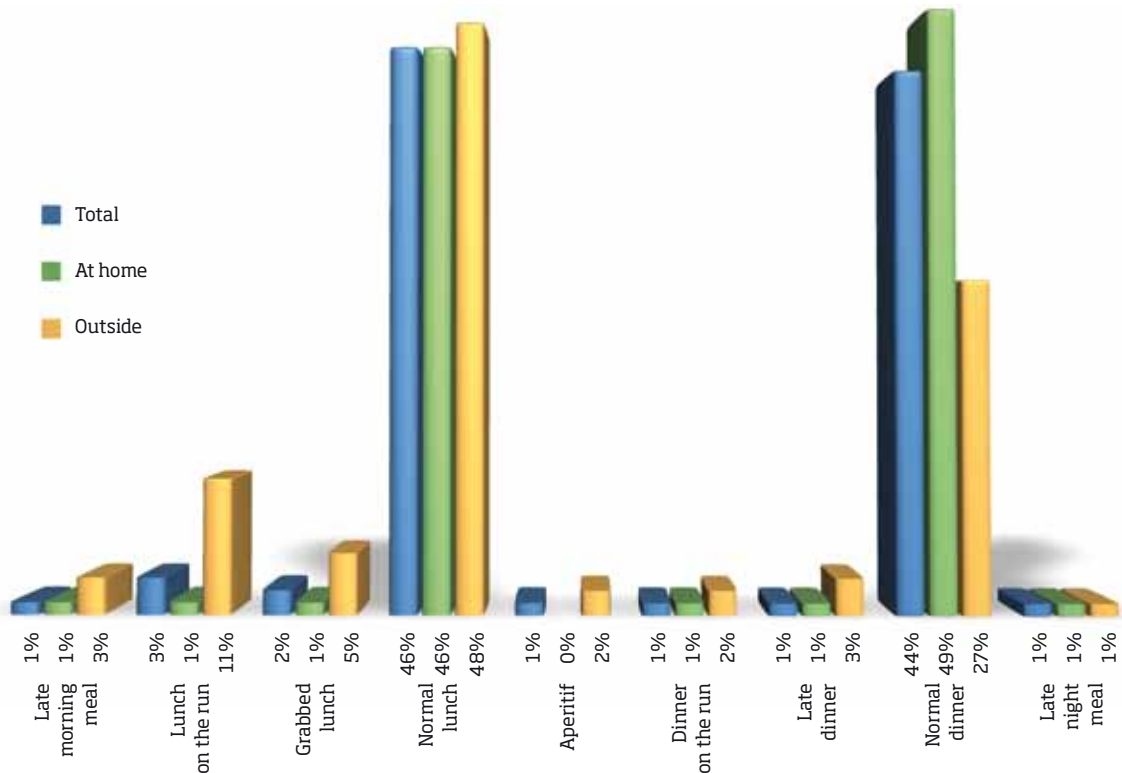
Figure 1- Subdivision of meals consumed daily in Italy by place of consumption



Source: The European House-Ambrosetti re-elaboration of Nielsen-Barilla 2009 data (In % - Base: 99,000 meals analyzed / 105 million meals daily)

Of the 25.5 million meals consumed outside the home, 67% are concentrated around lunchtime, which in only 30% of cases is eaten between 1 and 2 pm.

Figure 2 - Subdivision of the 105 meals consumed daily in Italy by mode of consumption



Source: The European House-Ambrosetti re-elaboration of Nielsen-Barilla 2009 data (In % - Base: 99,000 meals analyzed / 105 million meals daily)

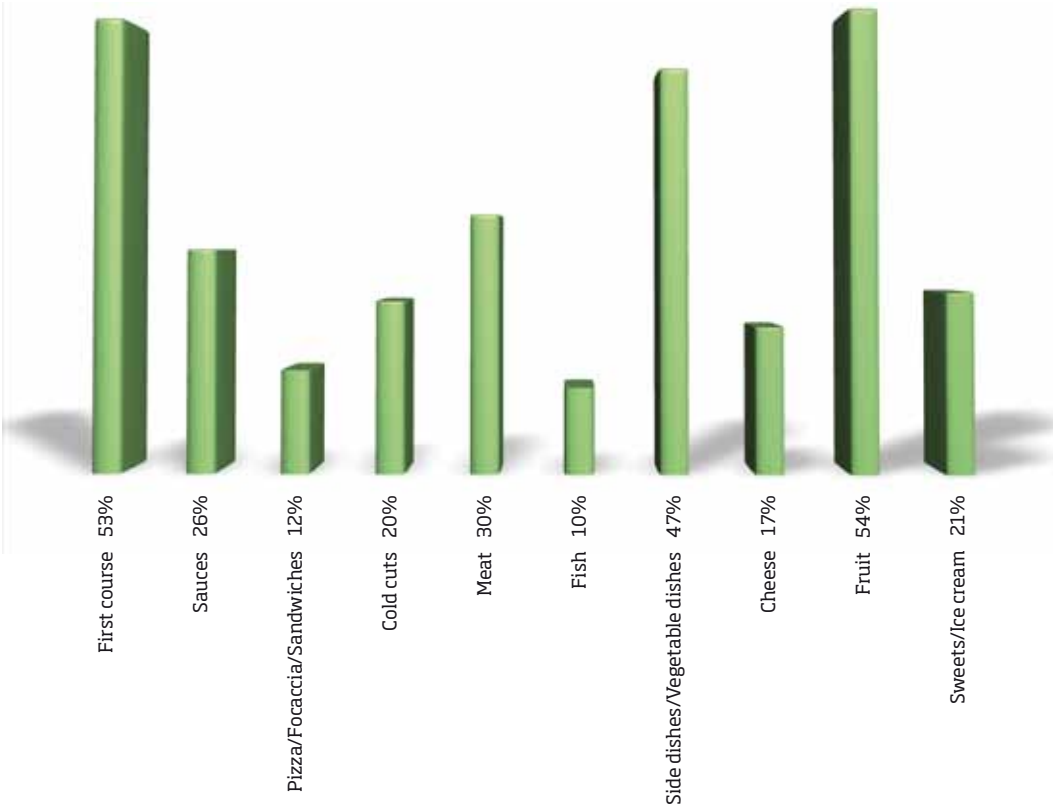
Observing the subdivision by mode of meals consumed daily in Italy (above and beyond the prevalence of “normal” dinners and lunches), among the meals consumed “outside the home”, the modes of consumption which emerge are “lunch on the run” (11%) and “grabbed lunch” (5%).

Lunches consumed in less than 10 minutes are 9% of all lunches consumed outside the home. In addition, 14% of meals outside the home are consumed standing up, and 15% while seated, but not at a table.

For lunches eaten outside the home, most consist of first courses (14%) and second courses (42%), with 1 million ready-to-eat first courses consumed each day (most at bars/ snack bars).

Meals eaten in the home are much more varied, on the other hand, as can be seen from the data below.

Figure 3 - Breakdown of foods included in meals consumed at home

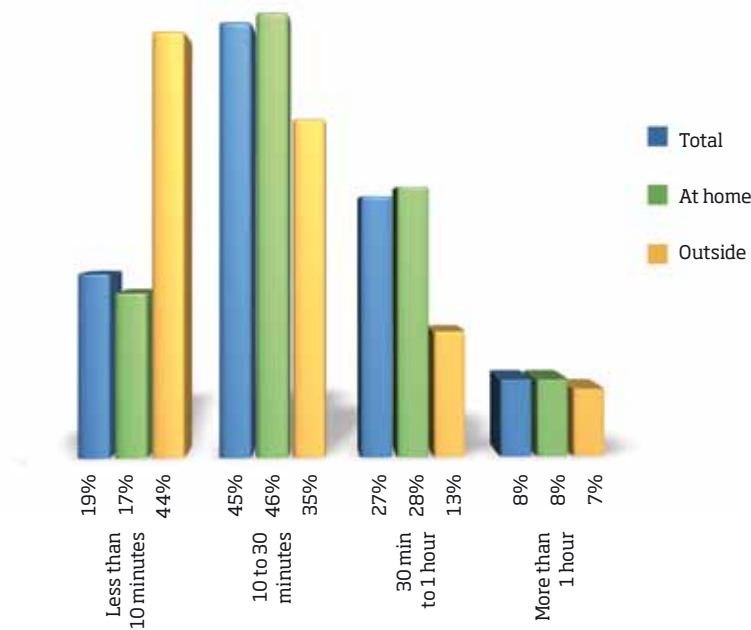


Source: The European House-Ambrosetti re-elaboration of Nielsen-Barilla 2009 data (In % - Base: 80 million meals daily in the home)

The meals consumed by Italians are predominantly prepared by someone other than the person eating it (62% overall). Most meals in the home (45%) are prepared in a period of time between 10 and 30 minutes and are consumed in 20-30 minutes. On the other hand, for meals consumed outside the home, preparation times drop, in most cases, to less than 10 minutes (see figures below).

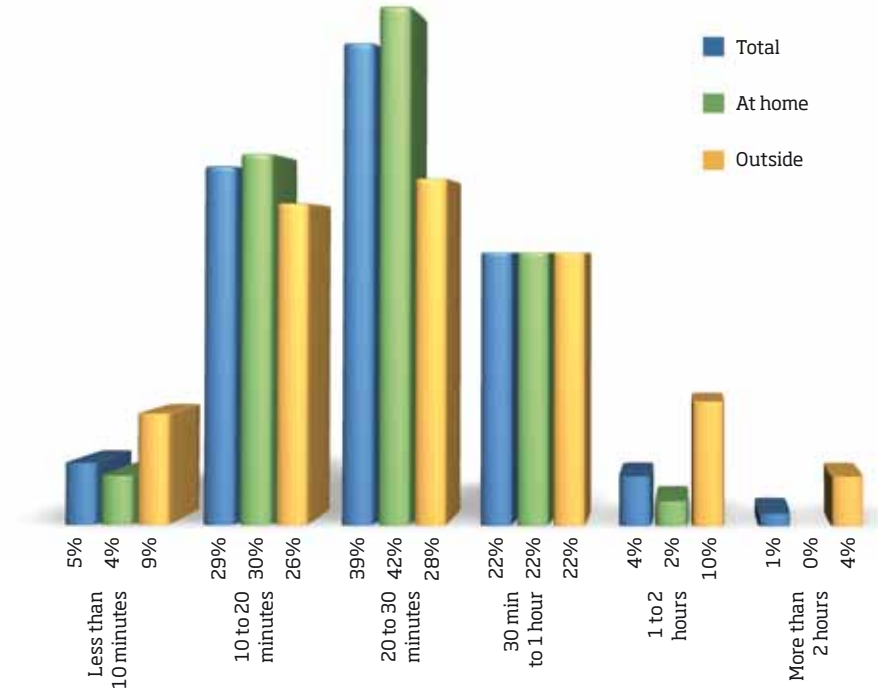


Figure 4 - Breakdown of preparation times for meals in and outside the home



Source: The European House-Ambrosetti re-elaboration of Nielsen-Barilla 2009 data (In % - Base: 80 million meals daily in the home)

Figure 5 - Breakdown of consumption times for meals in and outside the home



Source: The European House-Ambrosetti re-elaboration of Nielsen-Barilla 2009 data (In % - Base: 80 million meals daily in the home)

The picture painted by these statistics would seem quite clear: **the pace of Italian life is accelerating** (due to major changes in the overall context) **and eating styles are gradually following this trend.**

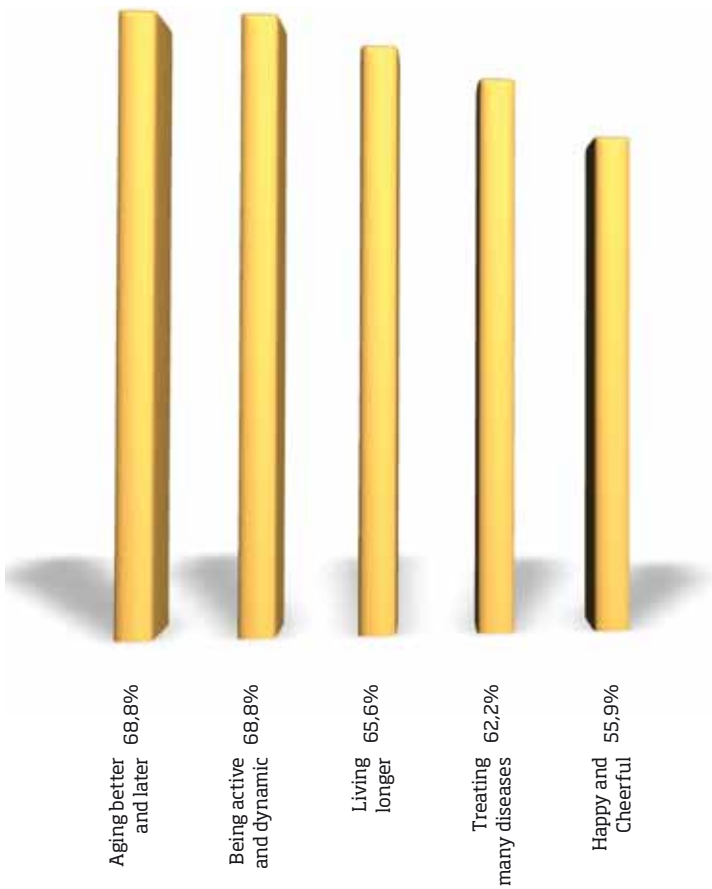
The result is that **the amount and quality of the time dedicated to eating during the day is today squeezed** between other daily commitments of individuals who are increasingly forced to sacrifice the quality of their eating habits.

*Numerous fast meals outside the home at increasingly varied times of the day, little time dedicated to food preparation, etc., are all indicators of a process of destruction of the Mediterranean concept, at least in terms of its tangible aspects and application in daily life.*

However, the fact that the “Mediterranean Way” is not always “practiced” does not mean that it is not firmly-rooted in Italian society and that it can represent a precious legacy to be built upon for sustainable growth in both individual well-being, as well as that of society.

In fact, as the statistics show, only 8.4% of Italians declare to eat “only to survive”, while the majority of the population declares it is convinced that regularly following a healthy and balanced diet is useful (to name just a few examples) for treating many diseases, living longer, being happy and in a good mood, aging better and later, being active and dynamic, etc.

Figure 6 - Percentage of Italians in agreement with the statement “Consistently following a diet is very useful for:



Source: The European House-Ambrosetti re-elaboration of Nielsen-Barilla 2007 data (survey involving a sample of 45.7 million Italians between the ages of 18 and 79)



The typical characteristics of the “Mediterranean Way”, with special emphasis on the tendency to attribute to the diet values which exceed the merely nutritional or functional aspect (although also taking into consideration this factor), would seem to represent a cultural heritage that continues to subsist in Italian society and seems to resist despite the pressure exerted on the lifestyle of individuals . What seems more difficult today is being able to **reconcile between this approach and the reality of daily living which makes its application increasingly more difficult.**

The challenge lies, therefore, in finding the correct mode of reconciling the “Mediterranean Way” and contemporary lifestyles through identifying the actions, policies and social and individual choices which also make it possible to preserve “Mediterranean” values in the future social-economic context so that all the positive spin-offs of this “cultural asset” can continue to generate collective well-being at all levels of society.

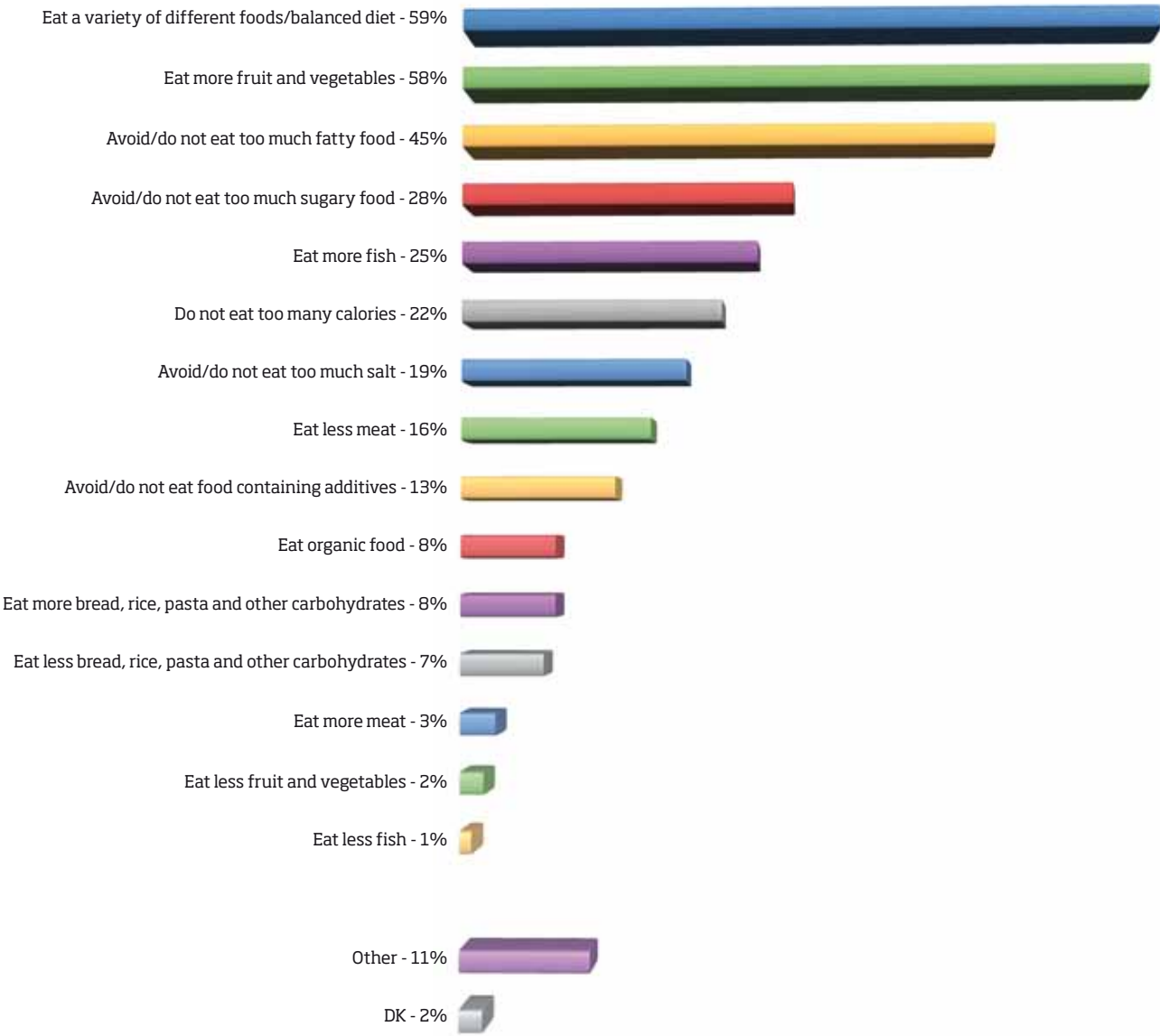
If we also broaden our perspective to include an analysis of Italy’s wider supra-national social-political context, the **European Union** (while only partially inserted into the cultural tradition cited here, is affected by trends of social change similar to those seen in Italy), there can be seen the same tendency towards fluidity and social movement that are structurally changing habits built over time. While on one hand (and this is a source of preoccupation), the same consumption-oriented model seen in other areas of the world—especially the United States—is tending to take hold (also reflected in the growing number of people affected by diseases directly connected to overweight and obesity ), on the other, it can be seen that some typically Mediterranean values have permeated the entire continent.

However, even more relevant is the emergence of a significant rupture between **ideal choices and conceptions** and **everyday habit**. While awareness of the role of proper diet in the overall well-being of an individual is on the rise at a fairly satisfying rate, the possibility of actually implementing this ideal lifestyle tends to face growing difficulty.

If we look at the survey conducted the Eurobarometer for the European Commission in 2006 with the goal of analyzing the eating habits of citizens resident in 25 European countries, it can be seen that the majority of European citizens believe that **eating healthily consists of adopting a balanced diet comprised of a variety of foods**. Specifically, **59% of citizens** believe that a diet comprised of a wide variety of foods and significant consumption of fruit and vegetables corresponds to the requirements for a healthy diet. European citizens (approx one in four) are aware that consumption of fats and excessive sugars is not healthy and is, therefore, to be avoided.

Figure 7 - “What does following a healthy diet involve?”

**We often hear people talking about the importance of eating a healthy diet. What do you think “eating a healthy diet” involves? (Spontaneous - Multiple answers possible)**



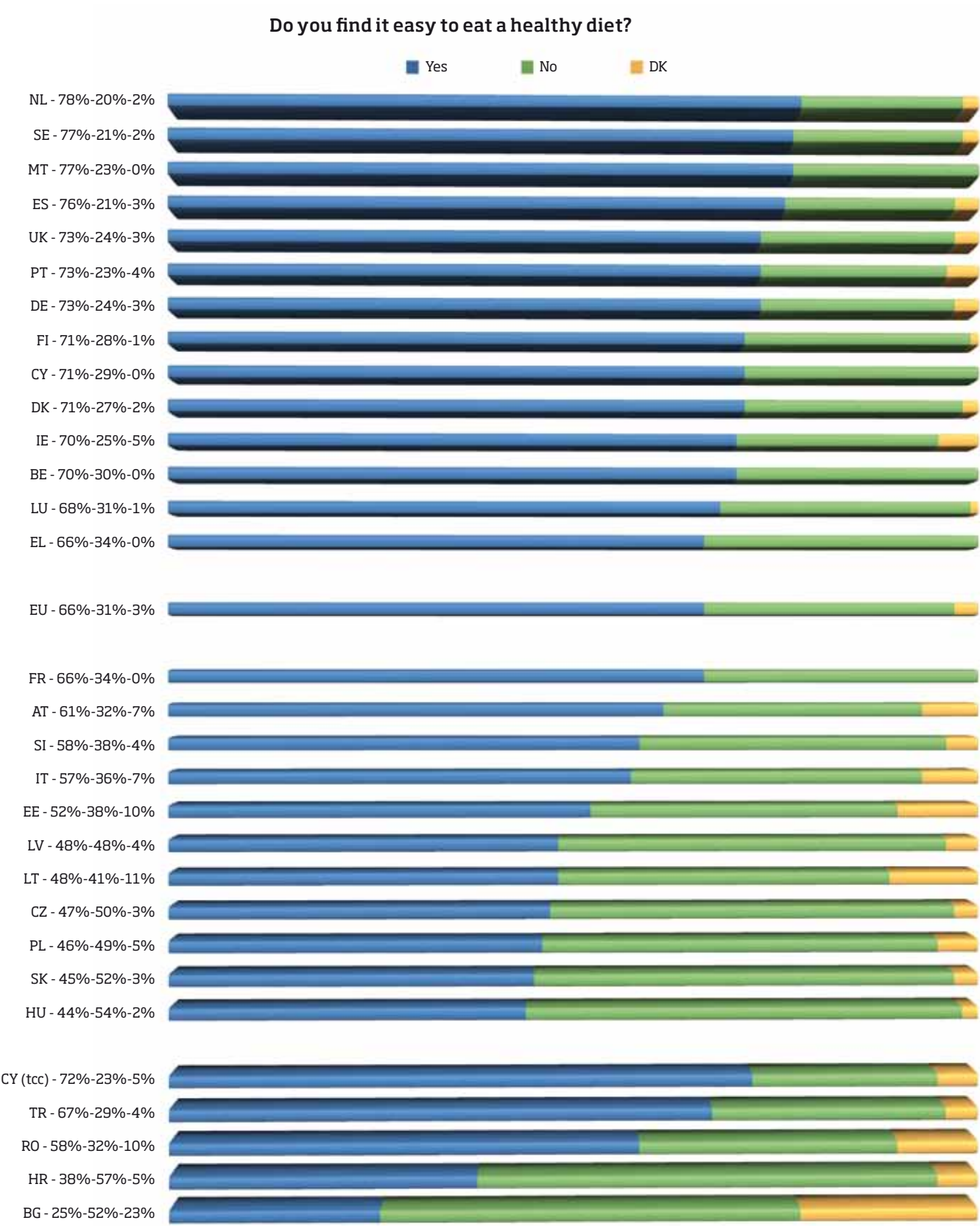
Source: The European House- Ambrosetti re-elaboration of Eurobarometer 2006 data

Aware of the importance of what a diet is composed of, the vast majority of European citizens (**83% of the total**) declare that they are aware of the importance of **what they eat in terms of their physical well-being**.

Despite the fact that the majority of European citizens declare that they follow a healthy diet, the number of people who have a difficult time feeding themselves in a healthy way in countries such as Hungary (54%), Slovakia (52%) and Poland (49%) is quite high. On the other hand, in countries such as The Netherlands (79%), Sweden (77%) and Malta (77%), a healthy diet would seem quite easy to follow. Italy is below the European average, with 57% of those surveyed stating that they believe it is easy to eat healthily, compared with the EU 25 average of 66%.



Figure 8 - “Do you find it easy to eat a healthy diet?”

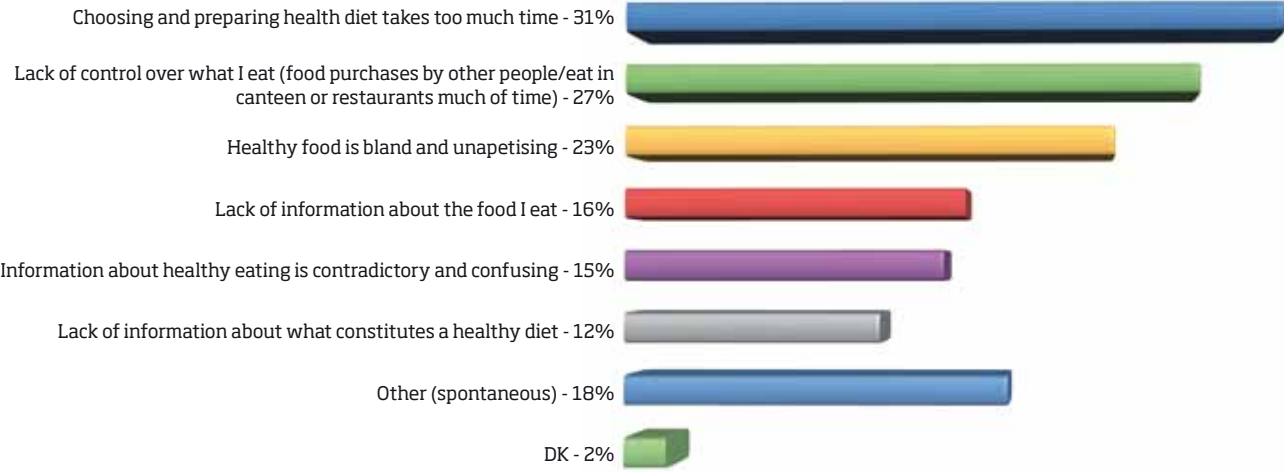


Source: The European House-Ambrosetti re-elaboration of Eurobarometer 2006 data

The lifestyle of European citizens seems to be the primary obstacle to eating in a healthy, nutritious manner. Specifically, there are two main obstacles: **excessive amount of time to be dedicated to selecting and preparing a meal** (31% of those surveyed) and **lack of control over foods consumed** because they are purchased or prepared by others (27%). And finally, a third reason given is that **healthy food is not that tasty** (23%). A point for reflection is also the lack of information about what a healthy diet consists of (12%) and confusion and contradictions generated by information about foods (15%).

Figure 9 - “Why do you believe following a healthy diet is not easy and convenient?”

**Why not?**  
**(Multiple answers possible)**



Source: The European House-Ambrosetti re-elaboration of Eurobarometer 2006 data

In conclusion, the study of European dietary habits conducted by the Eurobarometer would seem to indicate an increasingly wider **awareness about the importance of diet** for a healthy life. At the same time, however, it confirms the presence of a **difficulty of translating** theoretical information into concrete behavior.

To summarize, a sort of cultural mediation is lacking which would make it possible to naturally translate into concrete behavior scientific knowledge and dietary practice recommended by nutritionists (for example, the Food Pyramid guidelines, accepted universally for almost thirty years, but little followed in the world today).

*What emerges from this information is an initial indication of the challenge currently being faced. **The battle for proper diet is fought and won around behavior**, even more than on the choice of foods. It is decided on the basis of good practices that make it possible to attribute values and meaning to food. This does not mean making diet an obsession or a chore; on the contrary, it is a way to rediscovering oneself and others as part of the time dedicated to oneself.*

*In other words, the challenge is purely cultural. And Mediterranean.*



**"THE INNER MEDITERRANEAN", by Nancy Harmon Jenkins**

*From your privileged observation point of someone who brings together with her own Anglo-Saxon origins and traditions a profound knowledge of Mediterranean culture and ritual, do you think Mediterranean values can truly aspire to become global ones, going beyond boundaries and traditions different from those of the countries who border on the Mediterranean Sea?*

Yes, I do. Probably it is not (and will not be) easy to promote these values in developing countries, but certainly for more advanced economies, the Mediterranean Way represents a cultural model of excellence worth trying to follow.

If we just consider situations like those in the United States, Canada, Australia and numerous countries in South America, it is clear that a large part of the population descends, either directly or indirectly, from immigrants coming from the Mediterranean basin, primarily Italy, Spain, Greece and the Mideast. This tie-familial, historic, emotional-often generates an open "channel", a form of innate receptivity to the values found in products, methods and ingredients typical of the Mediterranean, irrespective of any geographical or cultural boundary. It is an attitude, a sort of "innate Mediterranean sense" that many people, throughout the world, carry within them their whole lives. Sometimes it may be dulled by the surrounding cultural context, but it can be reawakened, stimulated and nourished.

Taken together, Mediterranean values constitute a model that can and must be promoted successfully.

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*Looking over the long-term, which elements of the Mediterranean life style and dietary habits do you think could play a positive role (and therefore should be promoted) for future eating habits?*

First of all, I think the Mediterranean Way could be promoted efficiently through spreading those elements at the base of the Mediterranean diet, its most characteristic ingredients: the use of olive oil, consumption of vegetables and fresh fish and the importance of fruit. These are all aspects on which much attention should be focused.

But the ingredients in the Mediterranean diet are only one of the fundamental aspects of the Mediterranean Way that can be used to promote it more widely in the future. Other aspects include the "structure" of meals themselves, the way of conceiving, preparing and consuming them, the central role of complex carbohydrates within this structure, or the use of legumes as a main source of protein.

The Mediterranean Way takes on a multitude of "forms". And this is also because they are a "philosophy", a way of experiencing life and food, which goes beyond the strictly Mediterranean origin of the foods utilized. Fish or vegetables do not have to originate in the Mediterranean basin in order to constitute the basis of a way of eating inspired on the Mediterranean style. Just get whatever you have available, wherever you are, and adapt it-cook it, eat it in a "Mediterranean Way", if possible using fresh herbs, olive oil and lemon juice. Because, in truth, most food can be cooked in a "Mediterranean" way, even on the other side of the globe.

*In your view, how can the values of the Mediterranean Way be communicated and spread, not as strict rules, but as general guidelines for well-being, health and personal fulfillment?*

The best way to achieve this goal is to provide direct examples, teaching everyday people how to cook using Mediterranean methods-how to prepare things to eat simply, easily and even quickly within the family, keeping in mind especially families with small children.

Interest about learning how to prepare food for children that is healthy, complete and correct is, in my view, very strong today, especially in the United States and United Kingdom: it could be extremely useful to develop informational and educational programs in the schools (and for personnel who prepare the food served in school lunchrooms), with the involvement of nutritional experts and cooks who can spread the philosophy and "daily" aspects of cooking from a Mediterranean approach.

One possibility could be "mobile cooking schools", including on the streets, in local neighborhoods or during agricultural fairs, where everyday people can learn first-hand and easily how to prepare correctly and in a short period of time, a series of basic elements of Mediterranean cuisine: from pasta sauce to filet of fish or how to dress a salad. Seemingly small, but very important, concrete testimony to Mediterranean values that can actually acquaint those people who to-date are the most removed from the Mediterranean way of living and eating. The Mediterranean Way needs to be "brought to life", demonstrating its concrete relevance and goodness so that it becomes as widespread, inclusive and as much a part of "daily life" as possible.



James A. Sugar/National Geographic Image Collection



## 4. Characteristic features of the Mediterranean Way

*The Mediterranean culinary culture is, today, one of the most varied in the world. It has developed over the millennia in a melting pot of diverse cultural influences, being able to rely on a multiplicity of ingredients without equal and available in great abundance.*



*The Mediterranean Way is eating  
what nature produces according  
to well-defined time periods.*





#### 4. Characteristic features of the Mediterranean Way

What are, then, the conceptual cornerstones for recovering Mediterranean values today? What values, seen as factors of positive social progress, can be followed within a context of on-going change in which the concept of time, space and relations are changing significantly and often in an exclusively technical/functional context?

Our outlook manifests itself, first of all, through the proposal of a set of **key words** that encapsulate a conception of eating habits that are uniquely Mediterranean. In actuality, the terms proposed are “meta words” in that, through their unusually dense expressiveness, they bring together a nucleus of rich and articulated meanings. Offered below is merely a brief overview of this patrimony, described in a simple, straight-forward way.

Although the choice of these words and their descriptions represent a sensitive aspect of this study, it is by no means the sole goal of the work. In fact, the choice of the key words is a mandatory methodological step in order to provide a number of general **practical indications** oriented (to the extent possible) to overcoming the gap between what we know (proper dietary concepts) and what we do (on the basis of the conditions and constraints we are subject to).



James P. Blair/National Geographic Image Collection

#### Conviviality The table

**Conviviality:** *n.*; *convivial character of an individual; convivial nature of a situation, meeting, encounter, etc.*

**Convivial:** *adj.*; *fond of feasting, drinking, and good company; sociable.*  
**Feast:** *n.* banquet

**Convivium,** *ii, n.:* banquet

**Convivo** *v.:* *1. to cohabit, to live together; 2. to eat together*



Ed Kashi/National Geographic Image Collection

“Conviviality” is a term with age-old roots and which perhaps encapsulates most succinctly the spirit of the Mediterranean Way and the way of life of the peoples who have lived in this region from ancient times to the present day.

Conviviality is at the center – both ideal and “physical” – of the Mediterranean meta-society and its culture, which over thousands of years has become stratified and codified, day-after-day, in both small and major gestures and rituals.

In modern-day usage, conviviality is a term utilized to describe a situation in which there is a serene, joyous and open atmosphere among a group of people.

However, if we trace the term back to its original root, we find that, in reality, **conviviality is the sharing, in the broadest sense, of moments of life with other people; but, specifically, it is sharing of food.** In Latin, *convivium* is “banquet, feast” and the verb *convivo*, etymologically tied to it, means “to live together”, but also “to eat together”.

It is not surprising to note that the peoples of the Mediterranean connected (and still connect today) the fact of sharing a moment of serenity and happiness with other people with the act of eating together, at the *convivio*, at a banquet or feast. And vice versa.

The word “conviviality” conveys, therefore, food as pleasure and food as a social act. In this sense, conviviality describes one of the central aspects of the Mediterranean Way concept: the propensity to see **eating as a sensorial experience to be shared with other people.**

In general terms, sharing, “living together”, represents one of the most characteristic aspects of daily life of millions of people who spend their lives around the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Mediterranean culture is a **culture that exists in the plural.** Mediterranean lives are lives which – very much in the past, but also still today – are lived in the plural.

There are many settings for daily life which, directly or indirectly, can be traced back to this particular sociological trait of the Mediterranean peoples, although often they are not seen as such: roads, the square, the marketplace, houses of worship, taverns and cafés (and similar locales) are all central elements in Mediterranean culture, physical places for meeting and exchange, not only between individuals, but also of ideas, culture and ways of living and thinking. Places which are popular and central to everyday living and which



represent an essential part of history and the history of individuals and societies along the Mediterranean, including within the collective imagination.

The Mediterranean basin is a marketplace, and it has been so since ancient times. And along its routes followed by both people and goods, a *Mediterranean way of life* was created where **inclusion, mixing and curiosity** are its distinctive characteristics.

It is no accident, therefore, that throughout the world, Mediterranean cuisine is one of the most varied and “cross-fertilized” with a multiplicity of influences, cultures and sensations. The peoples of the Mediterranean succeeded in an undertaking which today, perhaps, would appear an amusing joke of destiny: transform one of the most successful “products” of the Americas—the tomato and its culinary derivatives—into one of the strongest and most deeply-entrenched symbols of the Mediterranean throughout the world.

Among all the social-cultural aspects traceable to the “convivial” trait of the Mediterranean way of life, the one that is perhaps most evident is the **special relationship between Mediterranean peoples and culture and food**, both in terms of how it is prepared and (above all) how it is consumed.

In Mediterranean culture, the preparation of food is, in itself, a moment of encounter and exchange, an experience of sharing something that is the fruit the skillful and often very slow and patient labor of man himself.

These moments of getting together, whether within a nuclear family or among non-family members are, in Mediterranean life, often tied to food and its use, to the fact of being “seated around a table” and the rite of eating. A rite which is inevitably strongly influenced and defined in terms of modes, time, sounds, colors, images, flavors and smells by the Mediterranean Sea and the natural and climatic characteristics of the lands facing onto it. Often in the Mediterranean, dining tables are large and the people seated around them numerous, sometimes even joyfully noisy. The fact of sitting down at the same table reinforces ties of family and friendship and facilitates social cohesion.

*Preparing food, exchanging it and eating it with other people, while sharing pleasant moments and secrets, represents one of the main manifestations of a way of living that places emphasis on relationships, on the time dedicate to others, on what is good and wonderful in sensorial experiences.*

Preparing food, exchanging it and eating it with other people, while sharing pleasant moments and secrets, represents one of the main manifestations of a way of living that places emphasis on relationships, on the time dedicate to others, on what is good and wonderful in sensorial experiences. It also represents care (today increasingly less-present) for **transmitting the culinary traditions** of the various locations and cultures of the Mediterranean from generation-to-generation.

The Mediterranean culture is slowly losing its bent for being open, accepting and “curious”. A social trait of **growing individualism** – in all aspects of daily life, including the relationship with food – is gradually emerging, especially in the younger generations.

Here, the Mediterranean Way manifests itself in all its extraordinary force as a set of shared values forming the basis for a positive relationship, not only between the individual and food, but also (and above all) among individuals. Mediterranean Way and the words which describe it – like conviviality – are not only part of an “eating sociology”, but become a tangible **positive proposal** for a broader “sociology for both the individual and society as a whole”. Of a way Mediterranean living to be rediscovered, updated and perpetuated.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Try never to eat alone.
- Share food with others (friends and family) and utilize mealtimes as an opportunity to exchange acquired knowledge/tradition.
- Combine the joy of food with the pleasure of conversation.
- Offer food as a gift more often.
- Rediscover the value, significance and wealth of food as celebration.

#### Art of senses Aesthetics

**Art:** *n.; mode of operating on the basis of given studies, methods, experiences, acquired skills; human activity organized towards its own end.*

**Artem:** *from the Aryan root AR, to go, start-off, join*



Taylor S. Kennedy / National Geographic Image Collection

*“The art of cooking has something in common with the art of loving.”<sup>1</sup>*

As can be seen clearly from its original meaning, by the word “art” is meant human activity in its broadest sense, to the extent to which it is tailored to a specific end. Therefore, it is not necessarily either a great work of art (which also represents one of the most extraordinary and complete forms of man’s creative expression and ability), nor is it something highly abstract, as we are too often used to thinking of it.

If something abstract gives rise to artistic expression, it is because of its ability to translate a concept into physical form.

Rather, the ability to organize action towards an end requires mastery—a range of practical skills that support and facilitate the development of a creative vein.

For this reason, pairing the noun “art” with cooking (culinary art) is not out of place and or without basis. Quite the contrary. The ability to combine even a vast range of ingredients, the raw materials of a cook’s actions, the variety of results made possible by his/her creativity, the objective difficulty of mastering this activity at the highest levels—all these factors taken together provide more than adequate justification for this means of identifying it.

Cooking requires memory, powers of observation, ability to calculate and creative programming, and sensorial perception: briefly stated, a developed and sometimes very sophisticated practical intelligence.

In addition, like all major art forms, cooking is based on the sometimes unforgivable experience of having been present at a “magical” moment that remains etched in the memory.

Denying gastronomy this practical experience means reducing its capacity to a purely nutritional one, thus reducing its profundity.

The word “art” also immediately calls up the concept of beauty. Food must not only be good – and this is already an aspect of beauty – but also lovely. To be able to speak of culinary art requires care, taste and a passion for the aesthetic aspect. This is also naturally connected originally to food and the selection process which accompanies its choice. In order to understand which foods are most suitable for his diet, man has always

<sup>1</sup> *The Nourishing Arts, Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard*



called into action a complex process requiring the use of all his senses: smell, sight, touch, taste and hearing. It is art—and therefore culture—not only culinary activity, but also the ability to be able to enjoy it fully.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enjoy cooking and preparation of food as something to make your day more enjoyable and precious.
- Draw on the art of cooking handed down from the past, but reinterpret it freely, with creativity and imagination.
- Enhance the taste and joy of living through food.
- Consider the act of cooking as an art (potentially on a level with music and painting).

Mare Nostrum  
The Mediterranean  
“macchia”

Sea: *n*; all the bodies of salt water which cover the majority of the Earth's surface and surround all dry land; any part of this body of water.

From the root *Mar*: to be infertile; sparkle, shine.



Tino Soriano/National Geographic Image Collection

The sea we will be “exploring” in this study is the Mediterranean Sea. Mediterranean derives from the Latin word, *Mediterraneus*, which means *in the middle of land*. Throughout human history, this sea has been known by variety of names, most of which made reference the concept of “sea between lands” or “sea in the middle” (in Hebrew: Hayam Ha-tiknon; in German: Mittelmeer, etc.) The ancient Romans, on the other hand, called it “*Mare Nostrum*”, i.e., “our sea” because it lapped all the areas affected by the Roman conquest.

*“I look out the window, and see the sea;  
I see stars pass by, waves pass by: a flash calls out, a throb responds.  
The water sighs, the wind breathes: over the sea a lovely silver bridge has appeared.  
A bridge cast over serene lakes, whom have you been made for and where do you lead?”*

(Giovanni Pascoli, *Myricae*, 1892)

The question posed by Pascoli, a perturbed spectator lost in a mare magnum whose shores he cannot see, does not lack for an answer. The Mediterranean Sea touches three continents—Europe, Africa and Asia—or, to borrow the words of Fernand Braudel,<sup>2</sup> “the Mediterranean stretches from the first olive trees encountered arriving from the North, to the first palm trees growing near the desert.”

*“The most evident characteristic of the destiny of the Mare Internum is that of being located in the middle of the vastest grouping of dry land”* taken together, i.e., “the gigantic unitary [Euro-Asian-African] continent”: “a planet” in which men and women have found “the grand scenario of their universal story”, and where “decisive exchanges have taken place”<sup>3</sup>.

The Mediterranean represents, in fact, a unique setting where over the centuries there has been continuous contact and exchange and in which diversity has melded to the benefit of all involved and creating a new reality. Languages, religions, traditions, eating habits, etc. have cohabited and influenced each other, generating that extraordinary melting pot today encapsulated in the term “Mediterranean Way”.

The principle of eternal movement which governs the sea – a theme that also characterizes the poetry of Pascoli cited above – has been the driving force of Mediterranean civilizations.

The epical phases of history in which the Mediterranean has been a mute protagonist involve immigration and emigration, invasion and conquest, arrivals and departures: from the Persians to the Mongols, Arabs, Turks, Germans and Franks, the Mediterranean has been a destination to be reached. For others, such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Marco Polo and Christopher Columbus, it was also a place from which to depart and then return after having discovered new worlds.

It is perhaps the closed aspect of the Mediterranean space that has fed curiosity about what lies beyond, a curiosity to search out what is new, the desire to go beyond the horizon and a sense of time bounded by the mythological Pillars of Hercules.

According to the myth, the Pillars were said to bear the inscription “*non plus ultra*”—indicating that beyond them was the unknown, a void. In Dante’s interpretation, this “*limits of knowledge*” represented the confine to be surpassed in discovering new worlds and new knowledge, and it became the *raison d’être* of Ulysses who, in the moment in which he decided to go beyond them, proclaimed: “*you were not made to live as brutes, but to pursue virtue and knowledge*”.

Beyond the Pillars of Hercules, Christopher Columbus searched for the route to the Indies, but instead he found the American continent and the agricultural and cultural riches that would significantly influence the economy and alimentary panorama of Mediterranean peoples. Potatoes, corn, beans, peppers, hot peppers and tomatoes represent the most characteristic elements of the American “cross-fertilization”. In particular, the tomato, “*exotic novelty, ornamental fruit which only later would be considered edible*”,<sup>4</sup> became the symbol of Mediterranean cuisine.

Starting in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, under the impetus of new routes to be followed, the internal equilibrium within the Mediterranean basin changed substantially and its strategic role was transformed from being economic-commercial in nature to one of identity and culture. The acquisition of new land provided the Mediterranean with its role of geographical and cultural hinge we know today and represents its outlook for the future.

<sup>2</sup> Fernand Braudel, [Lunéville-en-Ormois (Vosges), 1902 – 1985] is considered one of the great historians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and one of the main exponents of the *Annales School* which studies civilizations and changes over the long-term, as opposed to event-based history. He is the author of *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 1949

<sup>3</sup> F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 1949

<sup>4</sup> Capatti A., Montanari M., “*La cucina italiana*”, 1999. *storia, identità, scambi*”, 2002



This “sea between lands” – a melting point of identities – has profoundly affected the nature of the civilizations that sit around it, acting as an antidote to the more extreme ideological tendencies and creating a context that is “*more convivial, more social, more tolerant, more cultural, more lover of the family and art of living*”<sup>5</sup>.

It is to be hoped that this “Mediterranean identity” continues into future generations who will have the task of sharing and spreading the values of its cultural approach in time and space.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Be curious about gastronomic experiences as a way of knowing and exploring other cultures.
- Discover the tendencies, cross-fertilization, similarities and differences between the major Mediterranean food cultures.
- Assign fish and seafood an important and well-balanced role in your diet.
- Learn the myriad ways of cooking fish, enriching it with the herbs, spices and flavorings native to the Mediterranean.

### Culinary Tradition Recipes

Tradition: *n.*; transmission of historical facts, religious doctrine, legends, practical and theoretical knowledge, passed down from generation-to-generation.

From the Latin: *Traditionem* (*tradere*): to consign, to transmit



David Cupp/National Geographic Image Collection

Where there are no traditions, there is also no culture. Tradition is the heart of any real possible cultural development. Without tradition, or, in other words, without the ability to transmit knowledge from person-to-person and generation-to-generation, people would never get off the starting block. Each time, they would have to start from zero.

All human activity which involves significant cultural development (whether science, poetry, literature, etc.) exists according to the same dynamic: through receiving an inheritance from the past which – to the extent it undergoes a critical evaluation based on reason to be able to verify and comprehend what is of value and therefore should be retained – makes it possible to constantly update knowledge and create the bases for new, often extraordinary advances.

This is the dynamic governing the accumulation of cognizance in every area of knowledge. Every time the “chain” of tradition is severed – erasing what has been learned from the attempts and experience of those before us who, driven by an intuition, curiosity or mere necessity, attempted to blaze a new trail – a bit of knowledge is lost that can never be replicated.

This is true, above all, for that body of traditions which for so long were never written down and which are part of the area of gastronomy. It is only in recent decades that there has appeared a vast effort to recover knowledge and experience in this area, so long relegated to oral tradition.

*Culinary tradition is comprised of gestures which seem to be passed on slowly, almost as if by osmosis.*

As Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard so acutely noted in their wonderful work, *The Nourishing Arts*, culinary art is fed on competencies learned through watching and which sometimes we discover we possess only because, without paying attention, we shared for years the physical space where someone cooked. Culinary tradition is comprised of gestures which seem to be passed on slowly, almost as if by osmosis.

Previously mention was made of fragility. In the transmission of some forms of knowledge, especially those with a stronger component of practical skill and lower possibility of codification, even skipping just a single generation cause the loss of countless wealth. Today, more than ever, the Mediterranean approach to eating, together with its unique lifestyle, would seem to be at-risk, thanks to the driving pace governing our daily lives and the pressure of speed that often generates superficiality.

As would be expected, this does not only have consequences in food and eating habits. The repercussions are also felt in social aspects that are not of secondary importance, and among these must be mentioned the rupture of the cross-generational bridge. The familiar image of a mother who cooks with her daughter, or a grandmother with her granddaughter, in one of the most intimate and natural moments of inter-generational relationships in which the pauses in cooking offer opportunities for dialogue, risk becoming an exception, yet another reduction in those moments free of interference (including from television) which we experience.

There is also a final positive aspect in culinary tradition that should be underscored. In the past, teaching of culinary tradition constituted part of the broader educational task of parents. This was obviously tied to a system of gender roles that now no longer exist, in which the woman was, to a certain degree, the sole owner of culinary skills. Without remorse for societal models and lifestyles no longer relevant, the educational value of a discipline requiring concreteness, curiosity, creativity and tremendous passion, would need to be rediscovered.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Spread knowledge and traditions connected to food.
- Study the traditional roots of well- and lesser-known recipes, dishes and specialties.
- Ask yourself more often about where foods come from and the voyage (through space and time) they have made to get to your table.
- Take an interest in the story behind the food products you buy.

5 Serge Latouche



## Culture Rituals

**Ritual:** *adj.*; 1. Pertaining or conforming to a rite; 2. Habitual, usual;

**Ritual:** *n.*; 1. Series of standards or acts, prayers, etc. that make up each religious ceremony; 2. Body of habits and practices observed faithfully; specifically, in ethology, series of acts of set socially-significant behaviors

**Rite:** *n.*; 1. Prescribed form for a religious ceremony;  
2. Tradition, accepted practice;  
3. Procedure

**Ritus,** *us:* 1. rite, ceremony (religious); 2. use, usage, custom, habit, mode, manner



Sisse Brimberg/National Geographic Image Collection

Rite has a profound importance in the “Mediterranean” way of life. The life of Mediterranean peoples has always been traditionally articulated in a body of behaviors and actions preserved over time and characterized by a social, cultural and religious significance.

Not simply habits seen as automatic repetition of ways of behaving, or of a phenomenon, but **elements of direct expression of a culture, a tradition and a specific “way of being and doing things”** for which to maintain and perpetuate one is generally not disposed to make compromises, be influenced and affected by external social and cultural elements.

Ritual involves a number of key elements of the Mediterranean Way, encompassing an incredible array of meanings and connotations. Ritual is about **collective history and individual events**. It is about **origins**. About **values** and **traditions**. And **religiosity**, seen as a way of facing reality and respectful approach to human events, time and the fruits of the earth.

In fact, daily rituals constitute the **elements of an individual and collective equilibrium within a given historical/cultural context**. Human beings live immersed in a changing reality and one that is moving increasingly faster: the repetition of acts filled with significance, including on an emotional level and the awareness that these are an integral part of a story, a geographical area and a culture that have been handed down and are still alive despite the demands and volubility of modern day life, are all elements that allow human beings to remain “hooked into” their cultural, ethical and moral roots. To a body of values that are handed down, accepted, shared and, therefore, perpetuated in daily life.

In this sense, living within this dimension of rite is one of the central aspects of the Mediterranean Way: the **proclivity towards community**, to shared moments and gestures. The word “rite” is derived from the Latin *ritus* whose first definition is “ceremony”, grasping the fact that, etymologically, rite is tied to a sense of sharing and co-participation.

From time immemorial, within the Mediterranean culture (and Italian culture in particular), each week, the event which represents the clearest manifestation and one richest in meaning is repeated, providing an example of how ritual can constitute a

fundamental part of daily life. This event is **Sunday lunch**. Anything but merely a meal in which to serve good food and relax, Sunday lunch is an occasion that is looked forward to and carefully prepared, with everyone involved in it, irrespective of age, contributing their own time and effort. It constitutes one of the most profound and deeply-rooted moments of communication, of **transmission of knowledge and skills**, sharing of ideas, ideals and values, including—and above all—from a **cross-generational standpoint** (in many cases, with at least 3 different generations “gathering around the same table”).

The same time and care paid to the preparation of food for this central moment in Mediterranean culture represent characteristic elements of a rite of eating together, of **food as a central element for getting together**, at the end of days often spent apart and dedicated to daily activity. The individual and collective rites of Mediterranean “cuisine” express a sort of “**religious respect**” for food and towards those traditions considered to add value to daily life.

The rite of food—its preparation, consumption and sharing with others—within Mediterranean culture, thus becomes the key element of life, “*that which makes one day different from the other days, an hour different from the other hours*” to borrow the words so perfectly expressed by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Rediscover the ancient ritualistic and symbolic value of foods.
- Adopt those aspects of ritual which render special moments associated with consumption of specific foods and beverages.
- Enjoy the pleasure of impeccably setting an elegant table.
- Rediscover the value of food as fertile territory in the relationship between generations.
- Do not ignore the spiritual aspect of food and as a relationship to nature.

## Time Leisure

**Time:** *n.*; 1. Concept connected intuitively to becoming, duration, continuity (articulated into present, past and future) in which we place every thing, experience and event;  
2. Infinite and measurable succession of instants; temporal reference required for its measurement;  
3. Period of duration of variable length and defined;  
4. Epoch, historical age or of life



Tino Soriano/National Geographic Image Collection

One of the basic elements in the dialogue between man and food typical of the Mediterranean Way is that of time. **Time as physical, mental and social “space” dedicated to the complex relationship with food**, in all its aspects.



Time as **preparation** of food. Time as **consumption** of food. Time as **sharing** of food.

Mediterranean Way expresses a relationship between man and food in which “**the proper amount of time is dedicated**” to food and man, i.e., the physical and social aspect of eating. Time dedicated to the selection of ingredients and their transformation, rediscovering the profound meaning of the concept of “cooking”: to create, starting from the raw materials, something that is more than just the sum of its parts. Time and human activity represent, therefore, the two essential elements in this transformation which, for thousands of years, has constituted one of the unique aspects of the human race and its various cultures and traditions.

Time also represents the central element of two social phenomena very closely connected in the concept of the Mediterranean Way: eating food and sharing food. At the heart of the Mediterranean Way is a fully “social” view of food as an essential element in individual and group dynamics that have had an indispensable role over time. The fact of dedicating the proper and significant amount of **time to food and the rituals** surrounding it represent a distinctive trait of the Mediterranean way of life that goes beyond the simple concept of “eating” to become a more general sociological characteristic.

The Mediterranean Way is time dedicated to enjoying food that has been produced. The Mediterranean Way is time dedicated to sharing this sensory and cultural experience with other individuals, thus reaching the apex of the social nature found in the act of eating. Again here, the Mediterranean Way is found in its fully **tangible** and **physical nature**, in the amount of time in life dedicated – making a precise choice – to touch, taste, smell and hearing. Time dedicated to oneself, first and foremost. And time dedicated to others.

But the temporal dimension of the Mediterranean Way does not stop here, in terms of the distinctive trait of the triple aspect of cooking-eating-sharing. The time associated with the Mediterranean Way is also that of the **seasons**. And of **memory**.

The term Mediterranean Way expresses a relationship between man and food based on the passing of time in a cyclical manner. And in the understanding of how this aspect can be real added value, both from a nutritional and social standpoint. The variety of “what” is eaten, an essential element of the relationship between man and food which the Mediterranean Way concept expresses, is also – and above all – the expression of an alimentary system which respects nature, the land where man lives and its rhythms. The fact of **following and respecting the seasons and capitalizing on their distinctive characteristics**, is one of the most evident features in the relationship between man and food contained in the term Mediterranean Way.

Each season of the year has its own colors, flavors and scents: nature – central to a philosophy of living that is very different and much more profound and articulated than simply “environmentalism” – is “organized” in terms of time. It has adopted it as a unit of measure in order to offer (without excessive over-abundance, almost as if it were some great open-air market) its infinity of corollary products, varieties and culinary offerings for those people capable of seizing on this invitation. Each year, nature invites us to dine four times per year, each time offering a different menu and a different glimpse of the abundance of creation.

Historically, Mediterranean man has heeded and accepted these invitations. Nonetheless, in recent years, it seems that everything – from technology to the frenzy of daily life and models of consumption being proposed – is transmitting to man the principle by which time (and with it the fact of eating according to time and with time) was something to minimize, to condense as much as possible. Minimize as a value. Within a consumption-based society in which maximizing, on the other hand, seems to be the dominant imperative. At the very least, therefore, there has been and there continues

to be a sort of philosophical schizophrenia. The almost physical need for a different, more profound relationship with a temporal dimension explains the success of those movements which have the merit of having been the first to emphasize the importance of regaining this aspect, including in our relationship to food.

In the Mediterranean Way, this conundrum has been solved, and solved in favor of time. In favor of the seasons and against products that are the same throughout the year thanks to refrigeration and international trade agreements.

The Mediterranean Way is, then, eating what nature produces according to well-defined time periods that represents a value to be preserved.

And which is very relevant to the concept of variety and principle of the quality of food we eat.

But the Mediterranean Way is also **memory**. The very essence, *raison d'être* and uniqueness of the rituals and habits having to do with the preparation, consumption and sharing of food in the Mediterranean area are rooted in traditions and cultural elements which are often millennia-old, that have been passed down to this day and constitute an essential part of the Mediterranean way of life. Even where not immediately evident, the Mediterranean Way is also the time “imprisoned” in the complex relationship people who live in the Mediterranean area have with food.

Today, however, we are witnessing a veritable cultural loss. Traditions are not being perpetuated and we are progressively losing contact with the past and the historical and cultural memory of a people and a society. In many cases, the current generations no longer eat what their parents and ancestors ate, adopting conformist eating styles leading – in perspective – to the complete abandonment of culinary traditions, rituals and customs that have their roots in the history of the peoples and give them their distinctive cultural and social traits.

The theme of memory would thus appear to be as key as ever to the concept of the Mediterranean Way. Memory both of the culinary experience (also in terms of social experience), and of the culture behind it. If there is a word that can summarize the main critical aspects of the current relationship between man and food, the elements of his break with the past and the reasons for worrying about future developments, it may be none other than this word: “memory”. Both the scales of a present in which it is lacking and the hope for a future in which it will be found, once again, in abundance.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Think of food as a rite with its own value, not just a break between other activities.
- Eat slowly.
- Dedicate as much time to preparing food as you do to eating it.
- Choose foods according to the seasons.
- Learn how to cook the way your grandmothers did.
- Avoid having children eat quickly in front of a TV or computer screen.
- Be aware that each time of life requires a different diet.



## Territory The Marketplace

**Territory:** *n.*; Circumscribed  
expanse of land, terrain, region;  
Area an individual or group of  
animals defends against the  
entry of outsiders



George F. Mobley/National Geographic Image Collection

“Territory” is a term which, from ancient times, has expressed a number of basic values of a community, such as identity and a sense of belonging, associated with the resolve – often in a very determined way – of defending it. What is in play is not only the material aspect (the land as a physical entity which guarantees sustenance), but also the social and cultural development of a community settled on that land.

The term territory, therefore, has a significance that goes beyond the physical matter and economic relations, extending to the characteristics intrinsic to a social group. **Identity** is the concept which immediately flows from this: anything that renders an entity definable and recognizable because it possesses a set of qualities or characteristics which distinguish it from other entities. In social sciences, the concept of identity involves the way in which an individual considers and constitutes him/herself as a member of a given social group.

Within the term “territory”, taken in its broadest sense, there is, therefore, a **sense of belonging**, i.e., feeling oneself part of a group with which to share behaviors and ways of thinking and behaving. This is because, at the basis of the notion of belonging there is, in general, a process of identification which allows people to recognize themselves

and be recognized as members of a group, including through the use of a number of distinctive signs.

*Within an alimentary context, the concept of territory has taken on new-found strength since the modern-day agrifood sector has brought about a split, never before experienced in history, between where food products are produced and where they are consumed.*

The connection between territory and Mediterranean Way is a direct one. The origin of the name Mediterranean itself (*Medius* = *in the middle*; *Terraneus* = *land*; i.e., *in the middle of land*) contains the concept of territory. Within the term

Mediterranean can be traced the expression of a geographical area circumscribed by Europe, Africa and Asia. A territory with its own recognizable identity, comprised of elements common to the various populations living there. An identity characterized very strongly in the gastronomic sphere.

Foods such as olive oil, bread and pasta are elements which unite, corroborate and render similar the behaviors and habits of different peoples, and at the same time

differentiate the Mediterranean from other territories. Foods that are a tool for giving rise to a sense of territorial, popular and familial belonging. A diet that is a tangible characteristic sign and immediately identifies the peoples of the Mediterranean.

And not only. Within an alimentary context, the concept of territory has taken on new-found strength since the modern-day agrifood sector has brought about a split, never before experienced in history, between where food products are produced and where they are consumed. In addition, it has aggravated the sense of uprooting of production from those areas in which it traditionally occurred, thus rendering territory a commodity and depriving food products of the original, constituent connection with the land which gave them life.

In certain ways, this has broadened choice (new products, overcoming the concept of seasons), but at the price of losing authenticity and ties which today, in some manufacturing sectors, no longer seem sustainable. On the other hand, because of this split and in reaction to it, there has appeared the need to introduce legal measures to safeguard the indissoluble tie between food product and territory.

Today, in the Mediterranean basin, the relationship between “territory” and Mediterranean Way requires a concerted recovery effort, not just for reasons of alimentary well-being, but above all to rebuild those values of civilization, tolerance and dialogue that have made this area of the world “great” and attractive, as well as creating one of the social-environmental contexts that is the most culturally and economically extraordinary in the history of mankind.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote the tie between the foods you eat and the area from which they come.
- Develop a love of traditional, local products with their own special taste characteristics and identity.
- Maintain or revive the habit of buying fruit and vegetables in open-air markets.
- Revive the practice of purchasing food products directly from the producer.
- Prefer foods from nearby and avoid those that have traveled too many miles to get to you.
- Especially for fresh foods, prefer those produced locally or in your own region.



### **"MEDITERRANEANS", by Franco Cassano**

The Mediterranean basin is a geographical area that thrives on a multitude of differences. Fernand Braudel spoke of "Mediterraneans" explicitly to underscore the proclivity of this area of the world to keep together, link and mix cultures all very different from each other. Thinking about the Mediterranean means, in fact, thinking about a place in which three continents, three great religious traditions and two great "worlds" (the European coast - the Western world, and the "south east" coast - the South and East of the planet) all meet. The essential characteristic of the Mediterranean is, thus, that of constituting a multi-faceted unit, a great fluid boundary area which holds together a plurality of cultures. The physical theater of this crossroads is famous: it is that intersection of land and sea easily recognizable even in a photograph, an array of places trod by gods and heroes, creating the story known to us all. The Mediterranean has been on the stage for millennia, sometimes in the spotlight, at other times in the wings.

What are the traits that - despite their differences - link the populations who belong to this extraordinary geographical setting? First of all, there is the penchant to mix, to live in contact with others, and this depends on the nature of the sea itself: not overly-large as an ocean, but one which, with a bit of fortune, could be crossed easily and where, on a clear day, you could stand on the coast on one side and, in the distance, see the other. A sea much-travelled through history, but at the same time one that has left its own mark, fostering contact, trade, mutual acquaintance and tolerance. All the coastlines of the Mediterranean are studded with extensive tracts of shoreline along which, thanks to the favorable climate, it is often possible to remain outside even after sunset.

However, it goes without saying that although there does exist this long-standing habit of interchange, it should be noted that often the differences have flared up, canceling out the common traits of the Mediterranean and giving rise to entrenched conflicts lasting for centuries. From the wars between the Greeks and Persians, the conflict between Rome and Carthage, the Crusades, and even modern-day conflicts, it was not rare for the two coasts to took at each other with suspicion and fear, and each nursed the desire for revenge for the wrongs they had suffered. Sometimes this even meant that one side dreamed of being able to take the other over, eradicate its differences and make it like itself.

The traces of these colonial and imperial pretensions are still visible today on the two coasts, but they have never been so great as to cancel out the differences. Multi-faceted unit means this: the Mediterranean is hostile to any sort of extremism and any desire of one side to cancel out the differences of the other. It reminds us that it is never possible to reduce multiplicity into singularity: the diversity of the other is not an error to be cancelled out, but enhanced richness to be recognized and promoted.

Perhaps it is for this reason that Mediterranean culture has always rebelled against the extremism of the continents, each of which was often convinced that it had a historical mission and had to export its point-of-view to the other shore, thus canceling out its diversity. Those who live in border areas are always aware that there does not exist just one culture to take or leave, but rather an infinite series of contacts and exchange. People living in border areas have heard many tales, have seen many different aspects of humanity pass through, from the arrogance of invaders to the landing of poor refugees or the greed and spirit of adventure of merchants. They have never had abstract and often dangerous ideals of purity; they have always practiced cross-breeding, the mixing of genes, races, ideas and traditions. From the undertow of the sea, they have learned about continuous movement and change. Similarly, Mediterranean societies are complex societies in which extremely intense relations between family, friends, neighbors and political groups co-exist simultaneously.

The second essential characteristic of the Mediterranean Way lies in the fact that consumption is not subject to production-dictated time frames. Its name alone tells us what "fast food" is all about: a place of self-absorbed, rushed solitude, the "non-place" of food and the contrary of conviviality.

Every so often, our world which lives on the run (and uses its intelligence and creativity above all to produce and sell) should be reminded that consumption is not a phase in the production cycle, but rather is final goal. The Mediterranean Way proposes a pace of life that is not obsessed with speed, that does not see meal times and breaks as a crime of lost productivity. Those who consume must know how to command their time, how to draw it out and enjoy it. There are things which those who never slow down will never experience: Greek coffee can only be enjoyed if you wait, either sitting alone or with others, while the grounds settle slowly to the bottom of the cup. It is not just a cup of coffee. It is a series of relationships, of thoughts; it is a table that looks out over the sea, shaded from the sun.

Going faster may get you there sooner, but you eliminate all the breaks, and the joy of living often lies in exactly those moments of rest, when we stop to look at the life that has gone before and that which will follow. Those who run, on the other hand, mutilate their own experience. How can anyone know love if it is increasingly confused with its fastest form, the one that is paid for? And how can anyone ever feel comfortable with thinking if it is confused with some sub-brand that solves any problem and even lubricates your car, without ever asking how it does this?

In terms of the Mediterranean Way today's consumption-oriented world takes an ambiguous view: on the one hand, it is horrified by it as a world filled with backwardness and waste, constantly laid siege to by old and new dangers, from the mafia to extremism; on the other, it sees in it a new "brand" offering a more balanced and responsible concept of consumerism, but nonetheless yet another opportunity to broaden business opportunities and increase profits. And yet the Mediterranean Way is nothing more than this approach tripping over something else, its stumbling into a world that is aware of the measure and respect for others and, because of this, is wary of fundamentalists of any type, from turbaned clerics who incite followers to wage holy war, to those in their grey flannel suits who each day recite their rosary of stock market prices.

In this context of demilitarization of conflicts and the building of an extended area of peace and development, Italy can play a much more important role than it has to-date. Just take a close look at the map: the Italian "boot" is surrounded on three sides by the sea and it has always represented a great bridge extending from the southern heart of Europe, across Sicily, to Africa, connecting the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. But its position is actually much more than just a question of mapping - it is a practical suggestion, an indication for the future.

But to be able to shift from the more dilated time frames of geography to the more accelerated ones of history, requires that a country rediscover its own identity and translate this into political action, thus constructing for the Mediterranean a different image than that of an impoverished region and the "sick man" of Europe that, all too often, seems to invade the media today. Italy is both Mediterranean and European. If it does not want to disappear, its task is to make the Old World understand that the Mediterranean is not just a problem, but also the door to the future, to combat conflict between civilizations and build a great Euro-Mediterranean region in which friendship, both in the North and in the South, can pull the rug out from any attempt to demonize the other.



## Variety Memory and cross- fertilization

**Variety:** n.; The quality of being varied, having multiple aspects: v. of the landscape; v. of colors in nature; variety of tastes and ideas

**Varied:** adj.; different, multiple, comprised of elements different from each other, but not contrasting



Gervais Courtellemont/National Geographic Image Collection

The world “variety” derives from Latin (varius, -a, -um) and indicates a concept that has always piqued the curiosity of man and stimulated his thinking, which generally ascribes a decidedly positive connotation to “variety”. As early as the late 17th century, Leibniz (1646-1716) identified “variety” as one of the fundamental ontological principles. In fact, he saw the universe as the expression of the relationship between all the different elements comprising it. According to this conception, “things” are not perceived by man in terms of their ontological essence (as such), but thanks to the existence of “variety” which differentiates each object from every other. This is the principle of indiscernibles (known also as “Leibniz’s law”): *Eadem sunt, quorum unum potest substitui alteri salva veritate* (two or more objects or entities are identical if they have all their properties in common).

Given the profound significance of the concept of variety (including from a philosophical-ontological standpoint), how can it be applied to the “Mediterranean Way”?

A clear connection between the two concepts is the fact that the perimeter of a basin such as that of the Mediterranean (from the Latin *mediterraneus*, -a, -um: adj. “between the lands”) is characterized by significant variety (it is the point in which Europe, Asia and Africa come together, with all their unique characteristics and cultural social, historical diversity, etc.). Nonetheless, the Mediterranean nature is not merely one of occupying a “central” position with respect to all the various territories involved, but also (and above all) an opportunity for a variety of diversities to meet. It is no accident that it was in the Mediterranean that the foundations of the philosophy and politics based on democratic concepts of “mediation” and interaction between different cultures and peoples were first laid. The Mediterranean culinary culture is, today, one of the most varied in the world. It has developed over the millennia in a melting pot of diverse cultural influences, being able to rely on a multiplicity of ingredients without equal and available in great abundance, both thanks to the fertility of the local ecosystem, as well as the identity of the Mediterranean (and its coastlines) as a crossroads and place where products coming from the entire Earth, from the Indies to the Americas, Africa and Northern Europe could be exchanged (once again, an example is the tomato, one of the most famous symbols of the Mediterranean, which arrived from Central America).

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Structure your diet utilizing the greatest possible number of traditional ingredients from the Mediterranean culinary culture.
- Set yourself the goal of changing your menus and their composition frequently.
- Utilize the tremendous variety of Mediterranean ingredients available to try new tastes and sensations.
- Surprise your family and friends with unexpected dishes, drawing inspiration from a variety of Mediterranean cultures.

## Wholesomeness Frugality

**Wholesome:** adj. genuine, natural, something that is real and exactly what it appears to be.



Jim Richardson/National Geographic Image Collection

Wholesomeness is a characteristic which seems to embody many of the most unique aspects of the Mediterranean Way: from its cuisine – characterized by the naturalness of its foods and sobriety of its dishes – to the essentiality of its lifestyle, but also including the direct nature of social and interpersonal relationships based on mutual trust and sense of hospitality which from ancient times has characterized the inhabitants of the Mediterranean basin.

Starting with its food, we can see that the typical dishes of Mediterranean cuisine generally do not require elaborate preparation or long cooking times. The traditional ingredients are natural (because either produced fresh and/or preserved “according to nature” without additives or preservatives) and condiments are reduced to their essential.

This is because historically, but also in the recent past when sobriety was dictated by limited economic means, the daily meal was based primarily on foods that were cultivated (fruit, vegetables, grains and legumes) and produced locally (oil, wine), as well as fish that could be caught along the Mediterranean coast and (on a limited scale) on meat and dairy products from grazing and local livestock raising.

It is a simple, yet balanced cuisine because it supplies all basic and essential nutritional requirements and contains everything required to stay well and prevent many diseases that characterize the West today.

But the wholesomeness of the Mediterranean lifestyle seems to go beyond merely the characteristics of its traditional diet.

The essence of the Mediterranean lifestyle can also be seen in finding the right balance between work and free time, eating well and in the company of friends, in fully enjoying life, sharing fresh, healthy food with loved ones and properly dividing one’s time between business and pleasure and enjoying the pleasures of an active life.

It is these latter aspects, indispensable for finding an equilibrium in oneself, with others and with the environment, that are at greatest risk today in our society increasingly marked by complexity, frenetic activity and solitude.

For this reason, the Mediterranean Way offers itself as an alternative to the frenzy of a dazed, consumption-based society that produces solitude, egoism and depersonalized relationships between individuals. The rediscovery of these values can also be seen in the kitchen, where what is required is a return to nature, simple foods, traditions, diversity and quality.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strive for simplicity, recognizable ingredients and wholesome foods.
- Adopt the millennia-old tradition of simple/humble foods.
- Take advantage of the sobriety innate in Mediterranean cuisine to satisfy today’s need for a light, healthy diet.



## 5. The Mediterranean Way, food production and corporate responsibility

*Starting in the 1950s, the agrifood industry began to positively promote its special characteristics: food safety, process control, broad-ranging consumer choice and access to food.*



*The Mediterranean Way can be the cornerstone of a new alimentary paradigm, the specific aspects of which are still to be developed, but one that is more respectful of the individual and his or her overall well-being and health.*





## 5. The Mediterranean Way, food production and corporate responsibility

In this chapter we will be discussing the responsibilities, actions and desirable (and sometimes necessary) changes within the agrifood industry from three points of analysis:

- first of all, we will take a general, historical look at how the agrifood industry has interpreted the various phases of recent developments in food history;
- we will attempt to understand how the **issue of responsibility** regarding the future can be approached, given what has been said here regarding the Mediterranean Way;
- finally, although fully aware that there are no pat answers to be proposed to those active in this sector, we will attempt to outline some guidelines for further study of their **future role**.

*In essence, it is our conviction that the Mediterranean Way – as we have attempted to describe it in the preceding chapters – could be the cornerstone of a new alimentary paradigm, the specific aspects of which are still to be developed, but one that is more respectful of the individual and his or her overall well-being and health. It is for this reason that we have chosen to talk about the **Mediterranean Way** and not the **Mediterranean diet**. The Mediterranean Way is a reservoir of values which, in certain ways, are separate from some strictly nutritional aspects that are a consequence of them. Values which have the potential to cross-fertilize and stimulate the most common alimentary approaches in the West and allow them to return to an equilibrium that today seems to have been lost.*

As we have already noted in another context<sup>1</sup>, the **modern-day agrifood industry was created in the period following the Second World War**, thanks to an extraordinary round of technological innovations that gave rise to a highly-accelerated process of economic and social progress, especially in Europe. From a food-related standpoint, there was progress in the way foods were preserved and prepared, development in scientific knowledge in animal husbandry and farming and the spread of home appliances.

In addition, the widespread diffusion of the mass media gave rise to new **models of consumption**. Entire sectors of the population had access to the first types of modern-day food manufacturing. With television, the **modern-day advertising industry** was born which played a decisive role in changing the habits, including eating habits, of the population.

The agrifood industry – first in the United States, followed by Europe through the importation of its operating modes and approaches – seemed to develop quite quickly a formula for success based on aggressive advertising campaigns, maniacal attention to packaging and competition centered on price and convenience (also reflected in the offering of ever-richer and higher-calorie portions) capable of identifying modes of consumption coherent with an **increasingly fast and frenetic average lifestyle**.

Parallel with the birth of advertising was the revolution in **distribution** with the hegemony of large-scale chain stores throughout the Western world.

Despite all the contradictions that accompany innovation (among which should be noted an overall modest-level concern with the quality and nutritional aspects of products) it should be noted that, starting in the 1950s, the agrifood industry began to positively promote its **special characteristics: food safety, process control, broad-ranging consumer choice and access to food**.

The 1970s saw the trends seen in the previous decades definitively take hold: the characteristic traits of this new consumer world became the norm, with the emergence of extreme industrialization–tied to the new opportunities made possible by high-

technology, growing mass-production, further consolidation of supermarkets and chain stores, shifting of tastes increasingly towards **less cooking and more pre-prepared foods** (including frozen) and advertising with ever-greater impact on consumption trends.

The “consumption-based” approach, although called into question a number of times in the decades to follow (for example, the slow-food movement), remains today the **dominant paradigm** for food-related manufacturing on a worldwide level, and which has spread everywhere, also thanks to the trends in globalization during the last two decades of the 20th century.

It is only now – and this should be seen as a very positive sign in the food sector – that there appears to be a split between the Anglo-Saxon approach still strongly anchored in a consumption-oriented food model, and a “European” one which, although still influenced by the consumer trends of the previous decades, is beginning to make a critical return, especially in the Mediterranean countries of Europe, to the concept of daily life in which food is a cultural factor necessitating opportunities for it to be enjoyed. A model in which the amount consumed seems to begin to count less than its quality and where the variety of foods and their preparation are not constantly sacrificed to the overwhelming consumption of a single food (meat). **It is a model which attempts, perhaps with difficulty, to recover the social dimension of food.**

Given this brief digression, a general comment should be made about a specific aspect of the responsibility the agrifood industry has in the Western world today and which takes priority over any other: awareness of the need for serious re-thinking of the dominant food paradigms. Without **informed “involvement”** for the future from this sector, and in particular its key players, it is unlikely that new dynamics capable of basing themselves on the values of the Mediterranean lifestyle will ever be possible. In terms of the current situation, this means embarking on a process of change (certainly not easy) towards a shared vision of the future, starting from a reality conceived of utilizing all-new standards where the key themes of the Mediterranean Way can assume a central role.

However, without players willing to take this on with courage and generosity, there will be no change.

There are many other **areas of responsibility** of the agrifood industry. There are the traditional ones (**guarantee of food safety**) now viewed from the standpoint of new emergencies, such as the consequences of climate change<sup>2</sup> and the need to re-orient dietary habits towards a more natural approach in much of the Western world, which force the food industry to update and improve its food safety measures.

There is also a second, just as relevant aspect connected to the specific way the agrifood sector is organized on a world scale. Farming, by definition, is local, while the food industry, especially larger components of it, tend to be global. In addition,



Justin Guariglia/National Geographic Image Collection

<sup>1</sup> Barilla Center for Food & Nutrition, “The Cultural Dimension of Food”, 2009

<sup>2</sup> Barilla Center for Food & Nutrition, “Climate Change, Agriculture & Food”, 2009



farming is often performed as the primary source of sustenance by the most destitute sectors of the population in some of the world's poorest countries. This creates an imbalance that requires not only political action, but also enormous attention from all players in the agrifood sector to guard against making discriminatory choices or introducing **mechanisms of exploitation**.

In addition, new fronts have opened up. These primarily involve **consumer health**, types of **advertising** and request for enhanced awareness of the social and environmental **sustainability profile**, which should govern their actions.

In the final analysis, however, the general standpoint that allows all the other challenges to be placed in the proper perspective involves the increasingly urgent request to protect the cultural heritage linked to food through the demand to re-establish an **authentically natural approach** in which the individual person taken as a whole and his/her overall well-being are seen as the ideal convergence factor.

Eating habits are, in fact, the expression of the culture that generates them. Where this connection has been severed, there have been immediate, dramatic consequences. For this reason, **re-establishment of a true food culture** is the most powerful tool available to the food industry in order to serve man, his health, aspirations and social life.

If this were to become the point-of-departure for all thinking concerning the agrifood industry, we are convinced that the **concrete solutions** essential to enhancing the realization of more suitable eating and life styles could be easily identified and pursued. The examples are infinite and range from healthier recipes and portions that are more balanced in nutritional choices oriented towards greater consumption of fruit and vegetables from childhood, up to the rediscovery of cooking as a creative and fulfilling activity. With the agrifood industry, as a whole, capable of taking on a leading role in the spread of a new cultural outlook.

If our conviction about the central role played by culture as a **key driver** in redefining a structured manufacturing and economic sector is correct, it begs the question of how to concretely redirect food habits for the future. What should the most significant aspect of this movement be? It is a complex issue and this, on its own, would deserve special study. Therefore, here, we will limit ourselves to indicating what we believe to be a number of decisive points.

The first involves the ability of the agrifood industry to **place itself at the service** of a number of fundamental tendencies found in the Mediterranean Way. For a more detailed discussion, please refer to "The Cultural Dimension of Food" paper produced last year by our research center; listed below are the aspects we consider most important:

- promote the rich and varied reservoir of **conviviality** for our era, so lacking in social interaction;
- safeguard **local territorial variety** with a view towards expanding it, preserving the full richness of its identity while maintaining openness to cross-fertilization, thereby strengthening the emotional capital linked to the roots, the traditional aspects and geographical localization, but also exploring the humanly universal aspects;
- transfer **knowledge and know-how** connected with food preparation as extraordinary funds of cultural wealth;
- return to having a healthy relationship with the local territory regarding raw materials, aiming for **excellence in ingredients** and establishing a direct and respectful link to the context in which the raw materials are born;

- re-establish the value of food as a liaison in a **fertile relationship between generations** through the simplicity and clarity of its benefits, including with the goal to building (and re-building) a social fabric that contemporary life is weakening;
- recover **traditional flavors by adapting them** to contemporary taste through a process of critical selection which makes it possible to maintain the finest elements of the culinary past and reinterpret them in creative ways;
- lastly, **spread the culture of enjoyment of the eating experience and the taste for good living** through authentic food, because restoring the magic and wonder of food and its rituals and the delight of its carefree enjoyment – as existential and cultural fuel – are ways of rediscovering the central importance of people and their emotions.

The second major element involves how to activate this process of change. Towards this end, a **major alliance** between all the players in the alimentary sector, **including the public sector** (today increasingly concerned about the devastating consequences of improper eating choices made by its citizens) must be created in order to reorient lifestyles and eating habits towards modes of consumption which are more sustainable for health, the environment and social cohesion.

The scale of this challenge – that of educating about a new **food ecology** – is so great that it requires a capacity for intervention going beyond the efforts of individual players.

What is required is a shared effort, an alliance between a range of players who, while maintaining their traditional **competitive relationship** with others in the same sector, make themselves available for implementing **cooperative efforts** aimed at promoting a new food paradigm. This in the hope that in the not-too-distant future, it will become the prevailing one.

A perfectly "Mediterranean" food paradigm.



Richard Nowitz/National Geographic Image Collection



## 6. Concluding remarks

*The way in which we eat is the index of the culture to which we belong and the overall set of values that characterize it.*





*'Mangia, sangu meu! Mangia!' (Eat, my boy! Eat!), while between courses memories and family stories overlapped each other, in thick Sicilian dialect, with a spattering of 'chisto' and 'chiddu', with my father who, from the moment he realized that I was doing my best to tackle the dishes and the 'Mangia, sangu meu! Mangia', wanted to know how they were and what friends, relatives and even old acquaintances were up to."*

*Giuseppe Culicchia - Sicilia, o cara*



## 6. Concluding remarks

In conclusion to this journey of rediscovery of the Mediterranean Way and its benefits (carried out with the purpose of comprehend and examine its most inner and, in a certain way, less-obvious features) two points emerge most strongly.

The first derives from a renewed awareness of the importance of food within those socialization processes typical of human beings. Eating represents such a normal activity that we often find it difficult to perceive its significance and importance. And yet, the approach we take to food characterizes, and sometimes conditions, an extensive part of our social behavior.

The way in which we eat is the index of the culture to which we belong and the overall set of values that characterize it. To the extent that it is the result of a certain mentality, proper eating habits are also an educational factor: by following proper eating habits, seen in the broadest sense, we confer greater profundity to our lives.

And this forms the basis for an invitation to embark upon a process of self-examination in order to make it less obvious and, therefore, more intense, enjoyable and attractive the time spent eating. Attractive because it is a means for conviviality, measured use of time and aesthetic approach we sometimes have difficulty finding in our frenzied, anxiety-laden and superficial daily lives.

The second point involves a sense of gratitude for belonging to an **extraordinary cultural tradition** that has blossomed over the centuries within the Mediterranean basin. It is a true source of joy to rediscover the vitality and harmony of a tradition that is unique and has succeeded in making conviviality, respect for others and a sense of proportion the essential characteristics of a lifestyle we have a responsibility to preserve in order to positively enrich and render more liveable current society.



Taylor S. Kennedy/National Geographic Image Collection

In conclusion, here, once again, are the suggestions which have emerged gradually from an examination of the characteristic features of the Mediterranean Way.

They are not hard-and-fast rules, but rather a short list of brief reflections to accompany us in our daily lives.

**THE TABLE:** the wealth represented by sharing the pleasure of food and meals as an opportunity to exchange acquired knowledge.

**AESTHETICS:** cuisine and food preparation as the art of beauty and skillful stimulation of the senses.

**THE MEDITERRANEAN “MACCHIA”:** the gastronomic experience as an opportunity for cultural understanding and exchange with significant cross-fertilization of tastes.

**RECIPES:** understanding the historical, social and dietary roots from which combinations of ingredients, dishes and specialties are magically born.

**RITUALS:** the special nature of the moments of inviting, preparing and consuming food with others.

**LEISURE:** the leisureliness of food so beneficial to health, the pleasure of eating and being together.

**THE MARKETPLACE:** the seasons and territory as the roots, identity and tradition to be promoted in food.

**MEMORY AND CROSS-FERTILIZATION:** the joy and wholesomeness of a diet filled with a variety of ingredients, new discoveries and cross-experimentation.

**FRUGALITY:** simplicity and parsimony to capitalize on the identification and wholesomeness of ingredients and recipes.

*“Nuzzo invited us to sit around the table set outside, on the terrace. His wife began to bustle back and forth untiringly to the kitchen. Exactly like the previous evening, we were immersed in a series of appetizers, including breaded squid, octopus salad, baked squid, stuffed sardines, stuffed herrings, dried tomatoes preserved in oil and caponata, followed by four first courses—pasta with sauce and fried eggplant, baked pasta, pasta with sardines and couscous—then four main courses—baked bream, fried scampi, steamed mussels, steak and potatoes—followed by ficodindia, melon, watermelon, then cannoli, coffee ice cream and sesame seed torrone. Nuzzo and Pina kept saying to everyone, but especially to me, ‘Mangia, sangu meu! Mangia!’ (Eat, my boy! Eat!), while between courses memories and family stories overlapped each other, in thick Sicilian dialect, with a spattering of ‘chisto’ and ‘chiddu’, with my father who, from the moment he realized that I was doing my best to tackle the dishes and the ‘Mangia, sangu meu! Mangia’, wanted to know how they were and what friends, relatives and even old acquaintances were up to.” - Giuseppe Culicchia, Sicilia, o cara.*





## 7. Appendix: “Key characteristics of the Mediterranean Diet”

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*Many scientific studies, scientists and nutritionists, have indicated the Mediterranean diet to be absolutely one of the best diets as regards physical well-being and the prevention of chronic disease.*





*The adoption of a Mediterranean diet provides a protective factor against the most widespread chronic diseases and makes it possible to live better and longer.*



7.1  
Key characteristics  
of the Mediterranean  
Diet

If we simplify, three major food traditions can be identified throughout the world, each with its own specific traits: the Mediterranean model, the North American model and the Asian model (which includes a number of major subsets of tradition and culture, including Japanese, Vietnamese and Chinese).

The **Mediterranean Diet** could be defined as that nutritional model which draws its inspiration from traditional food models of those countries within the Mediterranean basin, in particular Italy, Greece, southern France, Spain and Portugal. Starting in the 1990s, this diet also became popular outside these countries and was widely adopted in South America (Argentina and Uruguay, in particular) and some areas of the United States and Canada.



Many international scientific studies, scientists and nutritionists, have indicated the Mediterranean diet to be absolutely one of the best diets as regards physical well-being and the prevention of chronic disease, especially cardiovascular disease, as well as one of the ones that most closely follows the scientific recommendations for prevention of chronic diseases.

The concept of the Mediterranean diet was developed, for the first time, in 1939 by doctor nutritionist Lorenzo Piroddi who saw a connection between diet and diabetes, bulimia and obesity.<sup>1</sup>

Subsequently, in the fifties, Ancel Keys<sup>2</sup>, a medical-scientist from the University of Minnesota College of Food who would later write the well-known book, *“Eat Well and Stay Well - the Mediterranean Way”*, spent a period of time in Italy and became aware of something that, at the time, seemed very strange.

The less affluent (the so-called poor) in the small towns of Southern Italy, who survived prevalently on bread, onions and tomatoes seemed much healthier not only than the citizens of New York, but also than their own relations who had earlier emigrated to the United States.

In successive studies, Keys observed a very low rate of coronary disease in inhabitants of the Cilento area and Isle of Crete, and hypothesized that this situation was due to the diet adopted in these geographical areas.

These initial observations paved the way



for the famous “seven countries study”<sup>3</sup>, based on a comparison of the dietary habits of over 12,000 individuals between the ages of 40 and 59 in seven countries around the world (Finland, Japan, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands, United States and former Yugoslavia) to verify their beneficial and problematic aspects.

From the results obtained from the “seven countries study” the associations between type of food diet and risk of onset of chronic disease were discovered<sup>4</sup>. As emerged from the results, the high level of saturated fatty acids and cholesterol in the blood represents a factor capable not only of explaining the differences in mortality rates, but also of predicting future rates of coronary disease in the populations analyzed<sup>5</sup>.

In fact, even today, death due to ischemic cardiopathy (heart attack) is much lower among Mediterranean populations than in those countries, such as Finland, where the diet is rich in saturated fats (butter, lard, milk and milk products, red meat).

The final result of the “seven countries study” indicated that the best dietary regime was that practiced by the inhabitants of Nicotera, in Calabria, who adopted the “Mediterranean” dietary regimen. The population of Nicotera (Calabria), of Montegiorgio (Marches) and the inhabitants of Campania had a very low level of cholesterol in the blood and a minimum percentage of coronary diseases thanks to the dietary regimen adopted, based on olive oil, bread and pasta, garlic, red onions, aromatic herbs, vegetables and very little meat<sup>6</sup>.

- 3 Keys A, Aravanis C, Blackburn, H, Buzina R, Djordjevic BS, Dontas AS, Fidanza F, Karvonen, MJ, Kimura N, Menotti A, Mohacek I, Nedeljkovic S, Puddu V, Punsar S, Taylor HL, Van Buchem FSP. Seven Countries. A Multivariate Analysis of Death and Coronary Heart Disease, 1980. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA and London. 1-381; Toshima H, Koga Y, and Blackburn H. Lessons for Science from the Seven Countries Study. 1995. Springer Verlag, Tokyo
- 4 Keys A, Aravanis C, Blackburn HW, Van Buchem FSP, Buzina R, Djordjevic BS, Dontas AS, Fidanza F, Karvonen MJ, Kimura N, Lekos D, Monti M, Puddu V, Taylor HL. Epidemiologic studies related to coronary heart disease: characteristics of men aged 40-59 in seven countries. Acta Med Scand 1967 (Suppl to vol. 460) 1-392
- 5 Keys A., Coronary heart disease in seven countries. Circulation 1970 (Suppl to vol. 41) 1-211 Kromhout D, Menotti A, The Seven Countries Study: A Scientific Adventure in Cardiovascular Disease Epidemiology 1994. Brouwer. Utrecht
- 6 In the years which followed, Ancel and other scientists who contributed to the realization of the “seven countries study” continued their studies in Pioppi, in the Cilento region. Forty years following publication of the results of the “seven countries study”, the Associazione per la Dieta Mediterranea, Alimentazione e Stile di Vita (Association for the Mediterranean Diet, Food and Lifestyle) was founded in Pioppi, at the Mediterranean Diet Conference held in Pioppi September 24-27, 2009, attended by leading scientists and luminaries from throughout the world. The Association was honored by Italian President Giorgio Napolitano for its cultural and social importance and the conference organized by it as an important source of divulgation of a correct lifestyle

1 Cucina Mediterranea. Ingredienti, principi dietetici e ricette al sapore di sole, Mondadori, Milano, 1993  
2 Ancel Benjamin Keys (1904-2004). American physician and physiologist, is famous for having been one of the main advocates of the benefits of the Mediterranean diet for combating a large number of widespread diseases in the West, particularly cardiovascular diseases



From the first “seven countries study” to the present day, many other studies have analyzed the characteristics and the associations between dietary habits adopted and the onset of chronic disease<sup>7</sup>. Since the mid-nineties, moreover, a current of thought has been developed investigating the association between dietary habits and longevity<sup>8</sup>.

In general, what emerges is that the adoption of a Mediterranean, or similar, diet, provides a protective factor against the most widespread chronic diseases and makes it possible to live better and longer.

As noted above, the Mediterranean diet calls for high consumption of vegetables, fruit, legumes, nuts, olive oil and grains (which in the past were prevalently wholemeal); moderate consumption of fish and dairy products (especially cheese and yogurt) and wine; low consumption of red meat, white meat and saturated fatty acids<sup>9</sup>.

This model is based, substantially, on an apparent paradox, at least from the standpoint of a traditional nutritional approach. Those populations who adopt the Mediterranean diet consume relatively high quantities of fats (similar to those consumed by people in the United States), but they have a lower rate of cardiovascular disease, compared with other North American populations.

The explanation lies in the fact that the large amount of olive oil used in Mediterranean cooking at least partially substitutes animal fats. In fact, it seems that olive oil contributes to maintaining blood cholesterol levels lower.

In addition to olive oil, grains also have a special place in the Mediterranean diet. Unlike what is normally thought, grains are not only bread and pasta, but also barley, spelt, oats, rice and corn. Whole grains are also key within the Mediterranean diet. These are different from refined grains which have the external part of the grain removed, reducing the grain’s fiber content as well as other important components, such as minerals, vitamins and antioxidants.

In the eating habits that have become popular in recent years, legumes have been gradually excluded from the diet. In the Mediterranean diet, on the contrary, their presence is fundamental. Legumes provide carbohydrates which are slowly absorbed (low glycemic index) and a hefty share of protein. Legumes also provide good amounts of minerals, some vitamins and fiber.



Taylor S. Kennedy/National Geographic Image Collection

In terms of fruit and vegetables, the international scientific community agrees that at least five portions of fruit and vegetables should be consumed daily. These foods contain essential vitamins (such as vitamin C) and provide a high sense of satiety compared with their low caloric content. This is largely due to the high fiber content and water which increase the volume of what is consumed, but not the calorie level.

In addition to fresh fruit, following a Mediterranean diet also calls for daily consumption

of nuts (in moderation). Nuts contain little water, a small amount of protein, little sugar and a high proportion of fats. And it is for this reason that it is recommended that they be eaten in moderation. However, nuts also contain a good amount of vitamin E, minerals and essential fatty acids, such as Omega 6.

Generally, the Mediterranean diet tends to recommend greater consumption of fish than meat. Aside from nutritional considerations, on a cultural level fish is a must on the Mediterranean table given the proximity of the sea which has shaped and determined the history of the countries surrounding it. Fish is an excellent source of protein, essential fatty acids and some minerals.

For meat, on the other hand, the Mediterranean diet tends to favor white meat (chicken, turkey, rabbit) over red meat. Rich in protein, vitamins and minerals, the fat content depends greatly on the animal the meat comes from, as well as the part of the animal.

Finally, it is thought that moderate consumption of red wine during meals (the equivalent of two glasses per day for men and one for women, in healthy, average-weight individuals) is another protective factor given the antioxidants contained in alcoholic beverages<sup>10</sup>.

Regarding this point, according to the study conducted by the American Heart Association, the Mediterranean diet reduces the death rate following coronary disease by 50%.

In general, studies performed on the Mediterranean diet not only showed a positive correlation between following Mediterranean eating habits and reduction in chronic diseases, but they also pointed up protective effects on the brain. It was found that those following this type of diet have less probability of premature cognitive decline. In addition, the Mediterranean diet is said to reduce the possibility of developing Alzheimers in those already showing signs of cognitive difficulty.

With the goal of quantifying the extent to which any given diet coincides or differs from the Mediterranean diet, a number of “Mediterranean adequacy” indicators have been developed.

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Trichopoulou<sup>11</sup>, after having created an index that quantifies adherence to the Mediterranean diet on a scale from 0 to 9 (where the maximum value means maximum adherence and vice versa), found an inverse association between the score obtained by a population and the mortality rates of the more elderly.

Also from the studies of Panagiotakosa<sup>12</sup> it emerged that the increase in the level of adherence to the Mediterranean diet was significant in predicting cases of hypertension, hypercholesterolemia, diabetes and obesity in adults. An increase of approx. 20% adherence to the Mediterranean diet<sup>13</sup> reduces the onset of cardiovascular disease by 4% over a ten-year period.

Other studies conducted by Trichopoulou<sup>14</sup> showed how adherence to the Mediterranean diet produces significant reductions in the overall mortality rates of the population, especially in deaths due to cardiovascular disease and tumors. The same results emerge also from the recent studies of Mitrou<sup>15</sup> conducted for ten years on a sample of over 380,000 Americans.

In the specific case of coronary disease, De Longeril<sup>16</sup> demonstrated how the Mediterranean diet reduces the risk of heart attack by 72%. The results of the studies of Fung<sup>17</sup> have confirmed, once more, the cardioprotective effects of the Mediterranean diet. In a recent meta-analysis study by Sofi<sup>18</sup>, it emerged that the Mediterranean diet provides a protective factor against all causes of mortality and, specifically, towards those connected with cardiovascular disease and tumors, but also towards Parkinsons and Alzheimers disease.

Notwithstanding the results of these studies indicate that the Mediterranean diet is the one to opt for to have a healthy life, since the Fifties, i.e., since the first study by Keys, the entire Mediterranean area, Italy included, has witnessed a gradual distancing from this diet in favor of less-healthy dietary habits.

In fact, with reference to Italy, the results of the Fidanza studies<sup>19</sup> have shown how the Mediterranean adequacy index in the two model cities has dropped dramatically: in Nicotera it was 7.2 in 1960, dropping to 2.2 by 1991, while in Montegiorgio where it was 5.6 in 1965, it had dropped to 3.9 by 1991. The rejection of the Mediterranean diet is clearly noticeable also in major Italian cities<sup>20</sup>.

Baldin<sup>21</sup>, in a recent study on conditions in Spain and Italy, observed how the younger generations seem to be moving away from the Mediterranean diet in a gradual but persistent manner, in favor of new dietary trends generally characterized by foods with a high fat content. Overweight and obesity in Italy and Spain seem connected not only to reduced physical activity, but also the rejection of the Mediterranean diet.

A recent study presented in July 2009 by the Associazione Italiana Dietetica e Nutrizione Clinica of the Osservatorio Nutrizionale Grana Padano, confirmed the trend in the decline of the Mediterranean diet. In Italy, in fact, the Mediterranean adequacy index is around 1.44, a far cry from the 7.2 of Nicotera in 1960 and 5.6 of Montegiorgio in 1965.

As shown in ISTAT statistics, for a number of years there has been a tendency in Italy to give up the traditional Mediterranean diet in favor of different dietary models. According to ISTAT, Liguria is one of the regions with the lowest rate of heart attack, and the reason for this is not difficult to explain given the diet in this region: high consumption of fish (especially fatty fish), predominant use of olive oil (one of the best in Italy) as a fat in condiments and widespread use of pesto in its cuisine.

In conclusion, it may be seen how the Mediterranean food model is close to and consistent with food guidelines for the prevention of the main chronic diseases published by the leading international scientific institutes and bodies, and therefore, when taken as a whole, offers a vast and consolidated scientific base. For this reason, the Mediterranean model has been taken as a reference point for the various studies conducted on the relationship between food and chronic disease.



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