



# NATIONAL INVENTORY OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF GREECE

## FORM OF THE ELEMENT

### Mediterranean Diet

**Name of Intangible Cultural Expression:** Mediterranean Diet

**Brief presentation:** Mediterranean Diet refers to knowledge and practices related with the gathering, preparation and consumption of food. They constitute a common basis of Mediterranean traditional/local nutritional systems, especially those of olive-growing areas.

#### **Domain of Intangible Cultural Heritage**

**Oral traditions and expressions:** Ethnobotanic knowledge, ways of cultivation, diverse techniques of gathering, preparation and consumption of food, various practices related with the food that are part of the collective experience and memory of the Mediterranean societies. These intangible values are passed down orally from the older to the younger generations.

**Social practices, rituals and celebrations:** Food is interwoven with all hallmark events of life-cycle and is employed so that cultural messages are conveyed (for instance food as a present). The celebrations that end up in common feasts and the ample use of food in the religious rituals, make evident the importance of food in forging social relations.

**Knowledge related with the nature and the universe:** The management of natural resources in order to secure adequate food supplies, livelihood and ecological balance is intrinsic to the way that Mediterranean societies are adapted to the environment.

#### **Place (region, prefecture, municipality)**

Every traditional/local dietary pattern of Greek rural space could be regarded as a local variation of a more or less common Mediterranean way of eating. However, in olive-oil producing regions, both in the mainland and the isles, the principles of the Mediterranean diet are exemplified par excellence. The Mediterranean diet is one of the more popular modes of healthy eating in Western societies, as it is believed that it can contribute to the longevity, health and well-being of modern people.

**Key-words:** embedded communal economies, traditional economic structures self-sufficient economies, Mediterranean Diet, ethnobotanic knowledge, feasts, traditional/local products.

## **Description**

### **1. Short description**

The Mediterranean basin is identified by common climatic and ecological features. Common historical experiences contributed to the formation of certain common characteristics that all traditional/local nutritional systems of the Mediterranean used to share until the middle of 20th century. The most important of these common features is the widespread use of olive oil. Nowadays, all these common features of the Mediterranean traditional/local nutritional systems, including the knowledge and the practices related with the gathering, preparation and consumption of the food, are known as the Mediterranean Diet.

### **2. Description**

Fernand Braudel, expressing the unity of the Mediterranean landscape, pointed out that “everywhere you can come up with the same triad, daughter of the climate and history: wheat, olive tree and vine”. Despite the fact that the unity of the Mediterranean basin as a cultural area is a highly controversial issue, it is evident that the Mediterranean is dominated by certain common ecological features: Hot summer, mild wet winter and a common topography of coastal locations closely backed by rugged mountains create a common geographic and climatic framework within which Mediterranean populations should organize their living. Common patterns of dwelling and similar ways of managing natural resources in agriculture, pastoralism and fishing stem from common ecological conditions. The Mediterranean cultural landscapes are closely intertwined with the ways that the Mediterranean societies secure their foodstuff sufficiency.

Like every traditional/local dietary pattern in the world, the Mediterranean nutritional systems incorporate mentalities and collective practices regarding the gathering, preparation, distribution and consumption of food. Among these practices variant customs that cloak the need for energy with cultural meanings are included. These cultural meanings render food and abstention from food as a means for the expression of human relationships, as a vehicle of social relations and as an integral part of religious practices (e.g. feasts, Holy Communion).

All these dietary patterns were closely connected with the ethos of traditional societies and the ‘embedded economy’ that was based on the household mode of production and on the ideal of food self-sufficiency. According to this ethos, production is oriented first and foremost towards household reproduction rather than individual profit. Nevertheless, this historical and cultural framework of the Mediterranean societies has collapsed by the middle ’60s due to the rapid expansion of the market economy, the ongoing urbanization of peasant population, and the green revolution.

The term Mediterranean Diet, which was coined in the ’70s in the field of medical and nutritional sciences, stands for all these common features that unify the different traditional Mediterranean dietary patterns. The most obvious common denominator is the widespread consumption of olive oil. Besides, the plentiful

consumption of fruits, vegetables, handpicked greens, legumes and cereals, the moderate consumption of wine, fish and dairy products, and the low consumption of red meat and saturated lipids are essential elements of the Mediterranean Diet. Updated medical and epidemiological researches have shown that the Mediterranean Diet may contribute to the extension of life expectancy and the improvement of the quality of human life of human life quality.

### **Where the performance of the expression of Intangible Cultural Heritage is taking place?**

Despite the fact that in traditional communities both production and consumption are oriented to the household, foodstuff and the practices related with it embrace many places and spaces of different climaxes. For instance, vegetables, legumes and cereals, used for the feeding of humans and animals are not only cultivated in isolated pockets within the community but occupy a wider area around it (ploughland, vineyards etc.) Fruits, vegetables, herbs and other foodstuff could be handpicked from an even wider area (e.g. a nearby forest), while flocks of sheep and goats, especially in the case of transhumant pastoralism, are moving seasonally from mountains to plains and vice versa in a range of several kilometers.

As far as the preparation of food is concerned, the fireplace is not just a part of the house, but its symbolic center, a shibboleth of family unity and coherence. The devotion to kinship ties, that is believed to be a distinctive mark of the Mediterranean societies, is one of the common values that are interwoven with the food as it is consumed in everyday family meals, in celebrations and religious festivals (e.g. patron saints' celebrations), in mourning meals etc. Religion festivals and feasts are usually taking place in spots of paramount importance for the spatial structure of the village (e.g. the square, the church etc.).

Taking into account that modern Western societies consume food in radically different ways, the Mediterranean Diet has been rendered as one of the more popular 'local cuisines' that could be tasted in dining-out sites.

### **Instruments, utensils, tools related to the preparation and consumption of foodstuff.**

Many material objects are related with nutrition. Apart from the different equipment that is used for the preparation, consumption, storing and conservation of food, there is an amazing variety of devices that are used in order for food to be measured. Many different kinds of furniture are employed in order to facilitate the consumption of food in different circumstances. The adoption of new food-related instruments and equipment is part and parcel of wider transformations concerning the social and cultural aspects of eating (e.g. the transition from the low round table to the kitchen table).

### **Transmission**

The transmission of the element is achieved through oral traditions, participation in customary practices, observation. Parents and grandparents passed down to the younger members of the family a great deal of the knowledge and practices that are associated with food. The transmission of this experience usually takes the form of

initiation in the shared cultural meanings being conveyed by food that is part of the collective identity and memory of the Mediterranean societies.

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