



MEDITERRANEAN, THE SEA THAT UNITES

New Prospects
for the Agri-Food System

Desirée A.L. Quagliarotti, Elena Viganò (eds.)

EPHESO

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Business and Culture
Innovation and Development

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Mediterranean Diet as a Lever for Place Branding: Some Insights from the Italian Experience

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Abstract

This paper aims to outline briefly the multifaceted nature of Mediterranean Diet, starting from its original conceptualization and describing the long path towards an international appreciation not only for its well recognized implications for human health, but also for its cultural value. In the second part, Mediterranean Diet is depicted as a driver for tourism in Italy: thus, two examples of attempts to promote destinations based on the immaterial cultural heritage are discussed.

Keywords

Mediterranean Diet, regional development, local products, stakeholders, Marche region, Pollica.

Introduction

Around mid-1950s, given the lack of thorough research and attention on nutrition, some researchers felt the need to find the causes for it and try to provide appropriate solutions. The American biologist Ancel Keys carried out several studies and researches that helped to discover the benefits that the diet followed in some Mediterranean countries and known as the Mediterranean Diet could have on health.

Mediterranean Diet is definitely more than a simple diet, as it can be described as a lifestyle shared and developed by different populations and cultures, based on the consumption of three main food elements, the famous trio grains, oil and wine, on eating on moderation, conviviality, traditions and on economic and environmental sustainability. In 2010, UNESCO recognized and confirmed the Mediterranean Diet as an “Intangible Heritage of Humanity”, which belongs to the Mediterranean region and in particular to Italy, Morocco, Greece, Spain, Cyprus, Croatia and Portugal.

According to recent cross-country research, food and cooking have become one of the main factors affecting tourists’ decision in their choice of holiday destinations, which led to a type of tourism called “food tourism”. In some cases, tourists plan tasting sessions of local food products and wine as the main activity of their holidays. The new trend therefore represents an opportunity to leverage the promotion of local food and non-food products and, especially when considering this, it should be encouraged and developed in every aspect, be it cultural, environmental, artistic and gastronomical ones.

The Mediterranean Diet can become a tourist “magnet” and a driver to build value offers, in which food and cuisine represent the expression of the culture and lifestyle of Mediterranean countries, in particular of Italy.

In the Italian region of Marche, in the town of Montegiorgio, the Laboratorio Piceno della Dieta Mediterranea (Piceno Lab on the Mediterranean Diet) was established and started to develop its activities in 2014. It was in this small town that Ancel Keys first carried out his studies on the healthy benefits of the Mediterranean Diet and it is therefore

an area recognized as of high scientific importance. In the latest years, the Lab has developed projects to promote and add value to the region and to the Mediterranean Diet, thus turning the area of Fermo province into an increasingly more attractive tourist destination.

In other Italian cities, the Mediterranean Diet is actually used to develop local tourism and several experiments have been carried out which led to rewarding results and acknowledgements.

The aim of this paper is to describe the main characteristics of the Mediterranean Diet, linking them to the drivers for the tourist promotion and economic development of a region.

The Mediterranean Diet, Much More than a Diet: A Lifestyle Shared by Mediterranean Countries

The Mediterranean Diet can be defined as a lifestyle developed in the countries of the Mediterranean region, thus going beyond the meanings usually given to the word “diet”; it is a much more complex concept, rich in tangible and intangible values and aspects. The Mediterranean Diet is a typical way of living that communities, groups and individuals have in common or that makes them different from each other.

The pairing of the two terms “Mediterranean” and “Diet” has become increasingly more interesting in the eyes of researchers and institutions: the Mediterranean Diet has become an increasingly popular social and cultural icon mainly in the Western culture. The term “diet” comes from the Latin word *diæta*, which comes from the Greek *diáita*, which translates as “way of living”, “lifestyle”. According to the Greeks, *diáita* was the research for balance and it was not just a matter of food but above all of human relations. There are many added meanings that can help understand how this “lifestyle” was lived:

- “place”, “home”. It is therefore the place where we feel home, in our natural environment, and where we feel free to live and experiment;
- “rule”, thanks to which we can “rule” our body and manage our behaviour.

Despite the fact that the Mediterranean Diet is nowadays a lifestyle adopted in other countries, when we talk about the original Mediterranean Diet we mainly refer to the lifestyle patterns followed in the countries of the Mediterranean region. The adjective “Mediterranean” does not refer only to its geographical meaning as it has a broader meaning: it is an idea, a concept, a land full of representations including myths and reality, a word incorporating traditions and innovations [Reguant-Aleix, 2012].

An important part of the variety and richness of the Mediterranean Diet is due to the urban dynamics developed in Mediterranean cities, made of products, techniques, traditions and habits: small towns but gathering a multiplicity of cultures, each one marked by its own experiences and features. Today, more than ever, those cities owe their visibility and that of the region they belong to, to the Mediterranean Diet: a unique way of living that, on the one side, led local people to grow their self-esteem and develop a peculiar sense of identity, and, on the other side, helped to create a dialogue and therefore a better promotion of the manufacturing and service industry, thus improving the reputation of an area as a major tourist destination for travellers.

The Development of Research on the Mediterranean Diet, from Ancel Keys to Modern Days

For a strange coincidence in history, the Mediterranean Diet was “discovered” in 1951 by an American researcher, Ancel Benjamin Keys, who worked as a biologist and physiologist. Despite the fact that the dietary pattern was already widespread and known in the Mediterranean region, Keys made it famous, coining the definition “Mediterranean Diet” and acknowledging the importance it is given today.

He was not just among the first researchers to show the direct connection between dietary patterns and cardiovascular diseases, but discovered and devoted his personal and professional life to spread the lifestyle he was struck by. He studied the subject using an interdisciplinary approach, including sociology, anthropology, economics, agronomy and biology.

In 1951 Keys was invited by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to attend a congress in Rome on nutrition in Europe and nutrition conditions after World War II, resulting from the poor economic conditions and shortage of raw resources created by war. Here, he talked about his studies and compared them with those of a doctor from the University of Naples, Gino Bergami, an Italian physiologist, thus discovering a huge difference between the health conditions of an average American worker and a worker from Naples. The paradox was that the latter, even though not benefitting from the same economic conditions of an American worker, had a life expectancy far longer than the former. The diet of the Italian worker was mainly based on fruit and vegetables, in addition to bread, pasta, fish and very little meat, compared to the American's. The evidence was that the man's heart was clearly healthier thanks to those elements [Moro, 2014].

Those researches are part of the largest epidemiological study in history, the Seven Countries Study (SCS), that discovered the quality of the Mediterranean Diet.

The Seven Countries Study was one outcome of a prospective study started by Ancel Keys in Minnesota in 1947 including the following countries: former Yugoslavia, Italy, Greece, Finland, Netherlands, United States of America, Japan. Dr. Keys brought together researchers from all over the world to study their joint questions about heart and vascular diseases among countries having varied traditional eating patterns and lifestyles and to understand any connection between them.

As a result of some informal surveys carried out between 1952 and 1957, the first three stages of the study were developed:

- 1958-1983, epidemiological study on heart and vascular diseases;
- 1984-1999, epidemiological study on healthy aging;
- 1960-2000, was launched the Zutphen Study, a survey to collect yearly risk factor data for the inhabitants of the town of Zutphen, Netherlands.

The Seven Countries Study showed that high serum cholesterol levels, blood pressure, diabetes and smoking are major cardiovascular risk factors. Dr. Ancel Keys, together with his Italian colleague, Dr. Flaminio Fidanza, who helped him carry out several surveys and studies in the town of Montegiorgio, in the province of Fermo, as

well as other colleagues involved in the SCS played a key role in the acknowledgment, definition and promotion of the diet they studied in Italy and Greece between 1950s and 1960s, today known as the Mediterranean Diet. Later on, Dr. Keys coined the definition “Mediterranean Diet”, in 1960, in his lab at the University of Minnesota.

Keys is still considered a great scientist who had a great influence on the way of studying and thinking of physicians and scientists, but above all on the way of thinking of entire humankind on one of the most important everyday-life problems, the way and what we eat, what we call “diet”.

A Long Process towards an International Acknowledgement

Since 1950s, studies and surveys have been carried out about the connection between health and the dietary patterns followed by people. In 1960, one of the first large-scale studies [Cresta *et alii*, 1969], analysing the elements of the diet followed in the Mediterranean region, was carried out. In 1970, Ancel Keys published his book *Coronary Heart Diseases in Seven Countries*, in which he analysed the different dietary patterns followed in the seven countries that had been included in the abovementioned Seven Countries Study and highlighted the differences among them.

In 1988, as a result of some international congresses, the first official documents were released by journals such as the “European Journal of Clinical Nutrition” and the “American Journal of Clinical Nutrition”, which discussed and highlighted the connection between the Mediterranean Diet model and the average life expectancy of the people following it.

In the same years, a parallel European research project called Multinational Monitoring of trends and determinants in Cardiovascular disease (MONICA) discovered a connection between nutritional habits and cardiovascular conditions, highlighting a decrease in the death rate of people who followed the Mediterranean Diet model [Dernini *et alii*, 2012].

In 1996, the first international Congress on the Mediterranean Diet took place in Barcelona during which the *Barcelona Declara-*

tion on the Mediterranean Diet was written, a document stating objectives and goals for healthy eating and emphasizing its cultural and historical qualities. The Congress is now held every two years and selected contributions are published as supplements by the journal "Public Health Nutrition".

The First Forum on Mediterranean Food Cultures took place in Italy, in Lamezia Terme, in 2002: nutritionists and food anthropologists reached a new joint understanding of the Mediterranean Diet as a unique cultural heritage to be preserved among the people living in the Mediterranean region. In 2005, the Third Forum on Mediterranean Food Cultures was organized where the participants agreed a shared definition of the Mediterranean Diet: a concept going beyond the simple meaning of the word "diet" as it can be regarded as a balanced lifestyle, a life model in which daily exercise plays a key role.

In 2007, Italy, Greece, Morocco and Spain submitted a transnational application to UNESCO for the recognition of the Mediterranean Diet as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Almost four years later, on November 16, 2010, at the end of the long and complex application process managed by Professor Pier Luigi Petrillo, who was the author of the international report on the Mediterranean Diet, UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee recognized and included the Mediterranean Diet in the Representative List of Intangible Heritages of Humanity and as an heritage shared by four countries, namely Italy, Spain, Morocco and Greece. In November 2013, Cyprus, Croatia and Portugal were added to the group of countries that initially had proposed the inscription. Here following is the definition of this cultural heritage by UNESCO:

The Mediterranean Diet constitutes a set of skills, knowledge, practices and traditions ranging from the landscape to the table, including the crops, harvesting, fishing, conservation, processing, preparation and, particularly, consumption of food. The Mediterranean Diet is characterized by a nutritional model that has remained constant over time and space, consisting mainly of olive oil, cereals, fresh or dried fruit and vegetables, a moderate amount of fish, dairy and meat, and many condiments and spices, all accompanied by wine or infusions, always respecting the beliefs of each community [UNESCO, 2013].

Furthermore, in 2010, UNESCO recognized as emblematic communities setting the example for the Mediterranean Diet the town of Pollica, in the Italian National Park of Cilento, Vallo di Diano and Monti Alburni, the town of Koroni in Greece, the town of Soria in Spain, and the town of Chefchaouen in Morocco; in 2013, the village of Agros, in Cyprus, the town of Tavira in Portugal and the Dalmatian islands of Brač and Hvar, in Croatia, were added to the list. Since their inscription in the list of UNESCO Intangible Heritages of Humanity, the emblematic communities started a close collaboration with each other to safeguard the Mediterranean Diet by setting up an annual calendar for meetings to be held.

In the designated countries, the consumption and compliance with the lifestyle connected to the Mediterranean Diet do not actually follow a set of standard requirements. The countries show some differences in the consumption of oil, wine or wheat, etc, and daily consumption of some other foods compared to others, which are certainly due to their different cultural traditions. An example is the feminine figure linked to wine as not in all the cultures women are allowed to drink wine. Dissimilarities in the habits of genders in the different countries are therefore something common as there are many factors affecting an area that are also an essential part of it. However, this does not imply that the those countries cannot represent the Mediterranean Diet in all its aspects as standards and rules have not been fixed but only simple habits have been identified for a healthy life [González Turmo, 2012].

The Food Pyramid

On November 3, 2009, during the 3rd CIISCAM International Conference “The Mediterranean Diet as a Model of Sustainable Diet”, the “Food Pyramid” was conceived by the Mediterranean Diet Foundation (MDF) and the Forum on Mediterranean Food Cultures: it was the result of discussions and dialogues on the evolution of the Mediterranean Diet by scientists studying the Mediterranean area and the representatives of international institutions.

The Mediterranean Diet can be explained using a pyramid chart representing the traditional model for foods to be eaten and the

number of servings to be eaten each day/week. It is a model tailored to only a limited number of countries. Several pyramid diets for the Mediterranean Diet had been designed before this, but only for people living in Greece, Spain and Italy, according to their dietary habits. It would be incorrect or almost impossible to adjust the Mediterranean Diet pyramid to countries located in the Middle East and North Africa, mainly because they lack some of the typical foods used in the Mediterranean Diet as main ingredients.

The new Mediterranean Diet pyramid is meant as a food guide to all the people aged between 18 and 65 and takes into account the evolution of society and changes of the modern world; it highlights as vital elements daily exercise, the drinking of enough water, the consumption of local seasonal products, but above conviviality, sharing meals with others.

It is a diet characterized by a high consumption of unrefined cereals, fruit and vegetables at main meals. Daily consumption of olive oil is important, as it is the main added lipid. On the same shelf, there are spices, herbs, garlic and onion, which may replace salt thanks to their taste. At the centre of the pyramid olives, nuts and seeds represent the best food for a healthy, quick snack. Fish and seafood are recommended to be eaten less frequently while small quantities of eggs, poultry, legumes and dairy products (cheese and yoghurts) are to be eaten only a few times a week. The food pyramid shows a low consumption of red meat and meat products (only four times per month) and sweets (only on special occasions).

It is highly recommended a minimum amount of water of 1.5/2 litres per day and a moderate consumption of wine during meals, in particular red wine (3 glasses for men, 1.5 glasses for women), always in compliance with religious and social traditions.

Besides the abovementioned dietary guidelines, a healthy lifestyle is recommended with some key rules to follow [Dernini *et alii*, 2012]:

- Moderation: in order to fight and prevent obesity, it is necessary to make moderate servings, taking into consideration a sedentary lifestyle.
- Conviviality: it is a very important aspect for the social and cultural value of a meal; cooking and sitting together to dine helps to create a sense of community.

- Cooking: it is an important activity requiring time; it can be done with family and friends to make it a relaxing and entertaining activity.
- Seasonality, biodiversity, eco-friendliness and local, traditional foods: all these are at the bottom of the pyramid to highlight how the Mediterranean Diet is compatible with the development of a sustainable diet model for present and future generations.
- Physical activity: it is an activity complementary to the diet and made on a regular basis (for example, 30 minutes a day) in order to keep a healthy weight.

Mediterranean Diet as a Driver for Tourism

Despite of the fact that the Mediterranean Diet was recognized by UNESCO and other institutions as a cultural heritage to safeguard, we are slowly losing memory of it. It is therefore necessary to implement actions to promote the Mediterranean Diet and one way could be to turn it into a brand and a driver for tourism.

According to some statistical surveys carried out by the Italian Institute for Statistics, food consumption accounts for more than 33% of the money spent by tourists. This is the proof that food is becoming an essential element when choosing a holiday destination. "Food tourism" is a type of tourism that is actually becoming increasingly popular and its potential should not be underestimated, as it may help the promotion of a region that can exploit it.

The new habits of the average tourist and consumer therefore suggest that promoting a regional, traditional product or foods would certainly help to differentiate regions one from another, thus creating a niche "tourist attraction". This type of tourism attracts those tourists who choose one place and not another thanks to its cultural characteristics that may turn the place into an attractive destination for other tourists. The product or experience offered can become a sign of identity, a "brand" to market for a type of tourism based on authenticity.

When a dish that is typical of a region is served, it certainly rep-

resents the culture, the environmental and economic conditions as well as the traditions of its place of origin and of the people who lived and still live there, which affected the processes of transformation and local nutritional habits [Sfodera, 2014]. In order to make visitors understand all this, it is therefore necessary to go beyond the food theme, making them discover the peculiarities of a region that are not just food specialities.

Can the Mediterranean Diet become a driver for tourism in Italy?

Data collected by National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) show that 75% of the household expenditure on food of Italian families includes products belonging to the Mediterranean Diet, with a slightly higher percentage in Southern Italy compared to Northern Italy. This is a sign that families are willing to spend money for products included in the Mediterranean Diet. There is therefore a clear interest in the products of the Mediterranean Diet from the point of view of food consumption and it is worth understanding what relationship can be built with tourism [Barcherini, De Martino, 2015].

How it is possible to create a tourist offer connected to the Mediterranean Diet?

The starting point should certainly be improving the image of the Mediterranean Diet, as to make it immediately connected to Italy.

When taking into account the data on the increasing popularity of food tourism in Italy, it is clear that the promotion of the Mediterranean Diet as a brand, as a product identifying Italy, represents a great opportunity. However, in order to turn the Mediterranean Diet into a driver for tourism, a designed offer needs to be created, a tourist product including all the aspects characterizing the Mediterranean Diet.

What has been said so far has certainly to do with the Mediterranean Diet because it goes beyond dietary patterns and nutrition and because tourists are not attracted just by food, so it is worth going deeper into the matter.

The Mediterranean Diet can be described as including all the reasons that drive tourists to choose a particular destination: food, traditions, culture, wellbeing. All those are elements certainly representing Italy too, some of which (such as food and wine) certainly represent a competitive advantage over other countries.

The Mediterranean Diet, which represents a cultural experience

linked to local traditions, is a tourist “magnet” and a driving force to build value offers, in which food and cuisine represent the expression of the culture and lifestyle of Mediterranean countries [Sfodera, 2014].

It is made of traditions, culture, wellbeing, natural simple food typical of a region and it has the ability to preserve, express and create valuable stories.

When a product, in this case a food product, is enriched with its cultural aspect, it starts to be perceived as a brand.

The Mediterranean Diet, when turned into a unique cultural experience connected to local traditions, can therefore become an important tourist “magnet” and a driver for value offers. The “marriage” between the Mediterranean Diet and tourism may represent the realization of what many foreign tourists really love about Italy, the “Italian lifestyle”.

The “Italian lifestyle” is a group of factors that may help to create a complete tourist offer: and experience-based, travel-based tourist offer combining events and food fairs as well as environmental and cultural elements, with consumers being a part of it, and the expression of a healthy and wellbeing dietary model.

However, to set off the Mediterranean Diet in Italy, the value of the food tourism market and more in general of tourism must be recognized, using what is available, promoting it and balancing resources for the good of future generations.

However, some research [Da Silva *et alii*, 2009] discovered a peculiar oddity: some countries (Iran, United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Canada, Australia and USA), which are not Mediterranean countries, seem to be closer to the Mediterranean Diet when compared to the countries designated by UNESCO, which in time have moved away from their traditional dietary patterns. The research wanted to observe the average food consumption of some Dutch students compared to Greek ones.

This means that if products that usually come from Mediterranean countries are imported and used, any country has the opportunity to know the basics of the lifestyle proposed by the Mediterranean Diet and turn it into a tool creating tourism inflow, focusing on the exceptional nature of the phenomenon in this case, as it is something non-traditional [Palma, Padilla, 2012].

Case Studies on Linkages between Mediterranean Diet and Tourism

In this section we analyse two case studies that will help to understand how it is possible to turn the Mediterranean Diet into a brand to promote a particular region or geographic area and its characteristics.

The first case study is about an association operating in Italian region of Marche, whose aim is mainly to promote and spread the knowledge about the Mediterranean Diet, thus turning it into a driver for tourism. It is the Laboratorio Piceno della Dieta Mediterranea (Piceno Lab on the Mediterranean Diet), which the University of Macerata learned about thanks to the project called “Gastronomic Cities”: the University participated in the project as a part of the URBACT II program, which lasted from December 1, 2013 to March 31, 2015. The aim of the project was to transfer the good practices for the development of a cooking and food culture, implemented in the town of Burgos, to the four towns collaborating in the project: Fermo (Italy), Alba Iulia (Romania), Korydallos (Greece) and Hospitalet (Spain).

The attention was focused on the area of Fermo, more precisely on Montegiorgio, a town that played a key role in the discovery of the Mediterranean Diet. The town has a direct link with Professor Flaminio Fidanza, who worked in close collaboration with the American physiologist Ancel Keys: in 1950s, they together started the research that later lead to the aforementioned Seven Countries Study. To carry out their research they involved Montegiorgio and Marche region, the Italian region that have the longest average life expectancy in Italy¹. The Mediterranean Diet was therefore discovered and fully identified with the culinary culture, the lifestyle and the healthy environment of the valleys at the foot of the Sibillini Mountains [Siliquini, 2013].

¹ The MEV(i) 2017 report assigns to Marche region one of the lowest indices of avoidable deaths, both for males and for females, calculated as the average number of days per year extracted from longevity due to avoidable deaths with good primary prevention and secondary. At the first place in the national men's standings we can find Marche region followed by Trentino A.A.; in the female's one we can find Veneto at the first place followed by Trentino A.A. and Marche in third place. For further information see <http://www.mortalitaevitabile.it> (consulted: 21 July 2017).

The Piceno Lab on the Mediterranean Diet² is the fruit of the vision of some local experts and was established with the following purposes:

- promoting the foods that are the basic ingredients in the Mediterranean Diet, in particular with reference to the production chains related to fruit, olive and vegetable growing and herbaceous crops;
- developing synergies aimed at advertising the Mediterranean Diet;
- developing training courses for food service workers aimed at the acquisition of skills, good practices and traditions related to the Mediterranean Diet, in particular with reference to food cultivation, harvesting, preservation, processing and consumption;
- carrying out medical-scientific research on the adequacy index of Marche population to the Mediterranean Diet, on the cooking methods and the combinations of foods included in the Mediterranean Diet;
- promoting, informing and advertising the main characteristics and features of the Mediterranean Diet in the schools of any level;
- rediscovering, recovering and promoting old traditional dishes and recipes related to the Mediterranean Diet.

The founding members of the Lab are people working in different industries: they are town mayors, health care professionals specialized in medicine and diabetology, tourist entrepreneurs and workers, psychologists, restaurant owners and chefs, historians and archaeologists, journalists and researchers.

The first event the Lab organized was the First “Fiera delle Qualità” (Fair on Qualities) in Montegiorgio, on November 30, 2014, held inside an Augustian convent. Other events were later organized involving local agri-food producers as well as regional and national conferences for the promotion of the Mediterranean Diet. The Lab

² The first two founders were the journalist Adolfo Leoni with the hygienist Dr. Lando Siliquini, author of the book *Dieta Mediterranea, il Tempio della Sibilla*. Then, Paolo Fogliani, former Director U.O. of the Center for Diabetology and Clinical Nutrition in Fermo, added in the group, as well as Mario Liberati, a local historian.

also participated in regional fairs such as “Tipicità in the City”, and national fairs, such as Expo 2015, where it was hosted in the Slow Food pavilion.

Last but not least, it is worth highlighting the relation the Lab has developed with the University of Macerata, as already mentioned above. The dialogue between the two, which was developed as a result of the Gastronomic Cities project in 2014, led to a permanent collaboration with a group of stakeholders who have in common the fact of being members of the Laboratorio Piceno. Thanks to this close collaboration, in early May 2016, the first International Student Competition was held, with a new edition organized in 2017 in the areas of Fermo province (Campofilone, Fermo, Montegiorgio, Petritoli and Amandola). It is a competition among students aimed at developing the best communication strategies to communicate the genuineness of the land and traditions of Fermo area, using cutting-edge technologies. About 80 students and professors from Italian and foreign universities (Belgium, Czech Republic, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden) participated in both editions. Trattorias, restaurants, tourist resorts and B&Bs were involved as hosts for the participants. The competition week included lessons and conferences held by international scholars in several theatres, hands-on activities to know the area including visits to local food producers, entertaining and promotional activities based on the food and wine heritage of Marche region, tasting sessions, live cooking sessions, meetings and workshops with public and private local stakeholders, dinners with traditional dishes and folk events in old villages and towns.

It was therefore an event developed with the aim of studying the Mediterranean Diet and its benefits, studying place branding, becoming familiar with the region and learning how to promote it thanks to its food and wine traditions.

This case study is a model replicable in other places, in particular in those whose traditions and food culture can be identified with the Mediterranean Diet lifestyle.

Pollica, one of the seven towns recognized as an emblematic community of the Mediterranean Diet in the UNESCO list, is also a clear example of this. The town is located in the Southern province of Salerno, in the heart of Cilento area, and is actually regarded as the

world capital of the Mediterranean Diet as it was exactly there, in the fishing village Pioppi, that the American physiologist Ancel Keys lived and studied there for over 40 years. An eco-museum was established thanks to the Italian environmental organization Legambiente in collaboration with Pollica town council, the National Park of Cilento, Vallo di Diano and Alburni and other local stakeholders in order to tell and promote the special characteristics of the area linked to the Mediterranean Diet. The “extended museum” tries to link to each other all the tangible and intangible aspects included in the culture on which the Mediterranean Diet is based; it is a “territory characterized by traditional living environments, a very important natural, historical and artistic heritage that must be preserved, restored and promoted”. According to its creator, the archaeologist Hugues De Vareine, the Eco-Museum³ is based on three concepts very different from each other: heritage, territory and tourism. It is a cultural hub going beyond the physical building of a museum, as it includes the territory and the community thus leading visitors to have a first-hand experience of the Mediterranean Diet. Inside the Museum building there are rooms dedicated to Ancel Keys and his discovery, a sensory room and Key’s personal book collection. In addition to this, seven workshops are organized for both adults and children. Besides the activities directly linked to the Museum, a sustainable project for the promotion of tourism was implemented: there are trails (including some bike trails) inside the Park along which it is possible to observe indigenous and wild-growing plants used in the Mediterranean Diet. The Eco-Museum of the Mediterranean Diet is also a very creative hub for events: bills for events related to the Mediterranean Diet, meetings with specialized chefs; the participation in the week of the Mediterranean Diet; trips to UNESCO headquarters in Paris to spread the knowledge about the local excellences of Campania region; events organized in collaboration with the Italian association Slow Food; international events organized in collaboration with other emblematic communities of the Mediterranean Diet. Moreover, the Eco-Museum website is constantly updated with news about the activities organized, the

³ For further information see <http://www.ecomuseodietamediterranea.it> (consulted: 21 July 2017).

events and the bills to which it is possible to participate and general news to promote awareness on the Mediterranean Diet.

Those two case studies therefore show that the Mediterranean Diet can become a tool through which a region can promote itself, involving all the local stakeholders operating in the food and wine industry and tourism industry more in general. It can definitely become a brand through which the story of a place is told.

Conclusions

In the light of the foregoing arguments, the Mediterranean Diet, considering all its aspects, lifestyle characteristics, traditions, economic and environmental sustainability, can be directly linked to the countries of the Mediterranean area, their people and cultures. Italy in particular was the country where the first research was carried out to acknowledge and give a clear definition of this diet.

However, as it is a multidimensional concept including not only food, but also any aspect of reality, we have the privilege and opportunity to turn the Mediterranean Diet into a national brand, so that anybody can link it directly to Italy.

The identification of Italy with this brand can certainly boost tourism, above all in less-known areas of Italy that are not so often promoted on brochures and visited by tourists.

Tourism can be an essential tool to support the efforts made in Italy, both at political, social and economic level, to give greater national and international visibility to the Mediterranean Diet. It is also a way to relaunch the image of Italian tourism and of Italy more in general, without indulging on the clichés Italy is usually associated to. It is therefore essential to give credibility and support the tourism industry, making the most of all its potential.

In order to make this happen, however, initiatives and strategies must be designed and developed aimed at creating events that can promote and give value to all the aspects of the Mediterranean Diet, such as the creation of tours and travel packages including food and wine products, hospitality, culture and traditions, environment and any other aspect characterizing the region that is meant to be set off.

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