

SESSION 3

MEDITERRANEAN DIET AND SUSTAINABILITY

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UPDATES ON THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET AS A CASE STUDY FOR SUSTAINABLE DIETS

The Mediterranean diet, scientifically well-characterized as a healthy dietary pattern and acknowledged by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage, became also in the last years object of increasing studies on its sustainability, particularly on its lower environmental impact. The importance of the Mediterranean diet as an example of a sustainable diet lies not in its specific foods and nutrients but in the methods used to characterise and analyse it and in its philosophy to be a lifestyle and not just a dietary pattern.

An updated overview of selected studies conducted recently on the sustainability of the Mediterranean diet shows the need of further cross-cutting interdisciplinary approaches to define the most appropriate metrics to assess the sustainability of the Mediterranean diet by taking into account all its cross-cutting health/nutrition, environment, economic, and socio-cultural sustainability dimensions.

The Mediterranean diet, recognized as being one of the healthiest diets in the world, is presently under an increasing process of erosion of its adherence among Mediterranean populations which is undermining the identity of millions of people whose food traditions are so intimately linked to the diversity of their Mediterranean food cultures.

[Therefore, the increased scientific interest on the Mediterranean diet as a model of sustainable diet should be also foreseen as a contribution to the development of safeguarding measures for the Mediterranean diet, as requested for its UNESCO acknowledgment as an intangible cultural heritage.

The complexity of the multi-dimensions of the sustainability, within the radical transformation of the contemporary global scenario and the changes of its food consumption and production patterns, requires a rethinking capable of generating new forms of dialogue, at different specialist levels. Connecting the nutritional well-being of the individual as well as of the community to the sustainability of our everyday living is the today challenge for the Mediterranean diet for the benefit of present and future generations.