The CIISCAM - Interuniversity International Centre for Mediterranean Food Cultures Studies - has been established on 25 July 2006 by the Sapienza University of Rome, the University of Calabria, the University of Gran Canaria, the University of Parma and the University of Tuscia. Its administrative office is at the Department of Medical Physiopathology of Sapienza University of Rome.

The Centre has the scope to gather together a whole of different competences in the study of the Mediterranean diet, as an expression of a style of life in continue evolution, and to function as a stable link between the multiple facets of the Mediterranean food system.

The Centre operates as a multidisciplinary and multicultural structure of liaison among participants with the purpose to develop an interuniversity international network open to collaborations with research institutes, the food system (production, transformation, distribution, etc.), and the international agencies of the United Nations.

The CIISCAM has the aim to study and to adapt the Mediterranean and the achievement of a balanced Mediterranean area, the Mediterranean diet and its high biodiversity and nutritional well being values. The Mediterranean diet is acknowledged as an intangible cultural heritage to be safeguarded and enhanced within the today globalization process.

The CIISCAM intends to deepen the knowledge on the Mediterranean diet and its evolution throughout time in order to widen the dialogue among different cultures that have in food a common root.

Objectives:
- To promote, realize and coordinate researches in the field of food science, with particular regards to Mediterranean food cultures;
- To foster cooperation among participant universities and research institutes, consortiums and industries that work in this field, at national and international levels;
- To start initiatives of training, scientific dissemination and interdisciplinary collaboration;
- To set up collaboration agreements with other research groups.

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In the Mediterranean Sea there is a spread awareness of the social, cultural, health and economic dimension of ‘food’, shared by all Mediterranean people. The diversities of the Mediterranean food cultures as well as many elements of the Mediterranean diet are currently under the risk of extinction for the effects of globalization, the homogenization of lifestyles, the losing of meanings, understanding and appreciation, which lead to the erosion of the Mediterranean heritage and to the lack of interest among younger generations about their own heritage. The Mediterranean diet, recognised as one of the healthiest dietary patterns, is an unexplored resource in biodiversity and nutrition. The diversity of Mediterranean food cultures, expressed by the wide food variety of the Mediterranean diet, should be recognised as a resource for a sustainable development to be safeguarded and enhanced, in both industrialised and developing countries, to achieve good health and nutritional well being for all in the Mediterranean.

The purpose of the 2009 CIISCAM conference in Parma is to produce an international scientific consensus position on a new revised Mediterranean diet pyramid, with no copyright, moving from the current concept of the Mediterranean diet as just a model of healthy eating, that reduces mortality and morbidity, to an updated well-being lifestyle concept of the Mediterranean diet(s) as a sustainable well-being model, with country-specific, and culturally appropriate versions.

It is necessary to refer more to a Mediterranean lifestyle of which diet is only a part. It should include physical and social activity, recreation and rest. It may be possible to construct a Mediterranean food lifestyle index to assess such a holistic aspect which could also include the diet score of 12 items which has been used successfully to correlate with improved morbidity & mortality.

The current perception of the Mediterranean diet is focuses principally on its functional health benefits, related to the consumption of a balanced quantity of different nutrients, distributed within a pyramid structure, instead of being associated more to the everyday Mediterranean lifestyle of eating and living, in which “food” has health, aesthetic, cultural, social and religious values - factors that should be perceived together for a nutritional well being and education renewal. It is necessary to rethink the frameworks under which educational initiatives are developed and addressed to increase diversified food consumption patterns as well as to improve a larger consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables and physical activity behavior.

Such a change of route in food lifestyle, starting from Greece, Italy, Morocco and Spain, that have requested to the UNESCO the acknowledgement of the Mediterranean diet as an intangible cultural heritage, needs the development of new effective community-based nutritional well being education approaches, that will take into high consideration the experience from the too many food education communication campaigns conducted in the past, at international, national and local levels, that have produced not so many tangible impacts.
The traditional Mediterranean diet is the heritage of millennia of exchanges of people, cultures and foodstuffs all around the Mediterranean basin. It was the basis of food habits until the mid twentieth century in all countries of the regions but it is now progressively disappearing due to the widespread dissemination of Western-type economy, urban and technology culture and production and consumption globalization. Since the Seven Countries study in the 1950’s and based on data collected in Greece, Italy and Yugoslavia we know which foods were more or less frequently consumed in this area. This led to define the traditional Mediterranean diet pattern rich in plant foods (cereals, fruits, vegetables, legumes, tree nuts, seeds and olives), with olive oil as the principal added fat source, along with high to moderate intakes of fish and shellfish, moderate to low consumption of egg, poultry and dairy products (cheese and yoghurt), low consumption of red meat (mainly sheep and goat), pastries and saturated fat, and moderate intake of alcohol mainly as wine during meals. It was also the diet chosen by mainly poor rural societies. It was also the model of sustainable diet, the Mediterranean diet pattern as an intangible heritage of humanity by UNESCO, and considering the worldwide interest about the need to update the present recommendations on this model the foods to consume daily, weekly or less frequently. It is thus the responsibility of scientists to identify the sound questions, to discuss them with an open mind and to propose consensus responses to serve as a basis for renewed communication to the public, health professionals and stakeholders.

The pioneer Seven Countries study and numerous more recent surveys and/or intervention studies have established in several countries the health benefit associated with adherence to this traditional Mediterranean diet pattern but questions are raised about the need to update the present recommendations based on this model considering the new lifestyle, dietary, environmental and health challenges facing the next generations, different countries and sectors of the population. The following questions arise which need to be addressed among others: i) consumption of fresh, minimally-processed, local and seasonal foodstuffs, ii) balance between energy-dense and nutrient-dense foods in relation to reduced energy expenditure and the obesity epidemic, iii) availability, sustainability, accessibility and cost of recommended foods, iv) adaptation to various geographical, socio-economic and cultural contexts, v) and other issues raised by the participants. It is thus the responsibility of scientists to identify the sound questions, to discuss them with an open mind and to propose consensus responses to serve as a basis for a renewed communication to the public, health professionals and stakeholders.

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The notion of a sustainable diet would have been curious a few hundred years ago, when people obtained the majority of their foods out of their ecosystems. Biodiversity was valued and utilized; ecosystems and agro-ecological zones produced the foods that they had produced for millennia. Traditional knowledge and practices ensured the conservation and sustainable use of food biodiversity within healthy ecosystems. Agriculture, diets, and nutrition have changed so dramatically in recent decades, that now, the concept of a sustainable diet seems novel.

In their 1986 paper, Gussow and Clancy explored the notion of "sustainable diets", recommending foods to be consumed for both their nutrient contents and with respect for their ecosystems. The concept was borrowed from "sustainable agriculture," as an activity that is not wasteful of natural resources and that produces food for local and seasonal consumption. The sustainable diet was likely derived from "human ecology", a term developed by Ellen Swallow Richards in the mid-late 1800's and applied to the earliest university curricula in human nutrition.

Modern agriculture and globalization of foods, the concepts of the sustainable diet and human ecology have been neglected in favour of intensification and sustainable use of food biodiversity within healthy ecosystems. Agriculture, diets, and nutrition have changed so dramatically in recent decades, that now, the concept of a sustainable diet seems novel.

In addition to the problems of undernourishment, obesity and its associated chronic diseases are rising. This, coupled with the alarming pace of food biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation, makes a compelling case for re-examining agricultural systems and diets. While good nutrition should be a goal of agriculture, it is imperative that concerns of sustainability not be lost in the process. Many dietary patterns can be healthful, but they can vary substantially in terms of their resource cost. The Mediterranean Diet has been characterised, analysed and promoted through a variety of methods within a number of scientific and applied disciplines. It continues to be recognized and appreciated as a sustainable diet – in the Mediterranean Region – even if its practice is diminishing. In 2008, the Mediterranean Diet as an Intangible Cultural Heritage received the full support of the 7th CIHEAM Conference of Mediterranean Ministers of Agriculture and Fisheries, held in Zaragoza.

This strategic proposal to candidate the Mediterranean diet for inscription on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, was thought to be preserved and enhanced as a resource for an effective sustainable development in the entire Mediterranean region.

Therefore, the diversity of Mediterranean food cultures, expressed by the wide food variety of the Mediterranean Diet, was thought to be preserved and enhanced as a resource for an effective sustainable development in the entire Mediterranean region.

The Mediterranean diet as a whole life style makes visible our cultural identity and diversity, providing a direct measure of the vitality of the culture in which it is embedded. The Mediterranean diet is an expression of a Mediterranean style of life in continue evolution throughout time. Mediterranean diet as intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation, and it is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to the change of their environment and their history. It provides a sense of identity and continuity for the Mediterranean people.

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The Mediterranean diet(s) is an outstanding resource, not yet been fully acknowledged and enhanced within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, for the achievement of an effective sustainable development in the Mediterranean.

Now, within the new framework of the Union for the Mediterranean, in particular in 2010 with the co-chairmanship of Spain, Mediterranean diet should receive more support by taking also in consideration the last reports of the Sustainable Impact Assessment of the EuroMediterranean Free Trade Area, in which a decline in the Mediterranean’s healthy diet patterns was already forecasted. In the report Mediterranean Strategy on Sustainable Development, issued in 2005 by the United Nations Environment Programme is stated as follows:

Mediterranean agricultural and rural models, which are at the origins of Mediterranean identity, are under increasing threat from the predominance of imported consumption patterns. This trend is illustrated in particular by the decline of the Mediterranean dietary model despite the recognized positive effects on health. The prospective scenario for the expected impacts of trade liberalization, climate change and the lack of efficient rural policies offers a gloomy picture in some southern and eastern Mediterranean countries, with the prospect of aggravated regional imbalances, deeper ecological degradation and persistent or accrued social instability.

Create a conducive regional environment to help countries develop policies and efficient procedures for the labelling and quality certification of Mediterranean food products and to promote the Mediterranean diet.

At the 26th FAO Regional Conference for Europe, held in June 2008, in Innsbruck, within the discussion of the item “promotion of traditional regional agricultural products and food: a further step towards sustainable rural development”, it is reported that many delegations highlighted the Mediterranean Diet as rich in biodiversity and nutritionally healthy. The promotion of the Mediterranean Diet could play a beneficial role in the sustainable development of agriculture in the Mediterranean region.

Toward the advancement of Mediterranean food cultures, joint networking activities should be developed in the Mediterranean area with the aim to stimulate the development of joint technological innovation projects and community-based research programs with the participation of local agro-food producers to improve diversified applications of their local crops in different Mediterranean-type food productions, as well as to promote the advancement of their local training capacities. A common action is also necessary, through communication and educational initiatives, to educate and to orientate the consumer in the direction of diversified food consumption habits, as well as to improve a larger consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables.

Safeguarding measures should be also created to resist to the growing speculative commercial exploitation on the brand name of “Dieta Mediterranea” as a dietary model for export, associated with marketing of Mediterranean Diet pyramids, made with USA copyrights.

THE STRATEGIC NEED TO PRESERVE THE DIVERSITY OF MEDITERRANEAN FOOD CULTURES AS AN OUTSTANDING SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE FOR ALL MEDITERRANEANS.

RECTOR HALL
UNIVERSITY OF ROME “LA SAPIENZA”

29 SEPTEMBER - 1 OCTOBER 2005

2005 YEAR OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

ITALIAN OFFICIAL CELEBRATIONS WORLD FOOD DAY 2005
"AGRICULTURE AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE".
THE 2005 ROME CALL FOR A COMMON ACTION ON FOOD IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

In 2005, at the University of Rome Sapienza, on the occasion of the 3rd Euro-Mediterranean Forum on Food Cultures, it was issued The 2005 Rome Call for a Common Action on Food in the Mediterranean, in which the first support from the scientific community was expressed towards the proposal of the Mediterranean Diet Foundation to candidature the Mediterranean diet for inscription in the UNESCO list of the intangible cultural heritage of mankind. At the Forum, it was pointed out the underestimated crosscutting dimension of “food” through the three social, cultural and human development axes of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. The 2005 Rome call by stressing the pivotal role of ‘food’ in the economic, social and cultural sustainable development of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, acknowledged ‘food’ as a ‘total social fact’ to be more accounted in the intercultural and interreligious dialogue in the Mediterranean. The identity of food was pointed out as an effective vehicle for learning about diversity and transmitting knowledge of the other and increasing mutual understanding and social cohesion. By stressing the need to act together to revitalize local capacities towards the increasing erosion of the diversity of Mediterranean food cultures heritage, the Call also recommended to reinforce the attention towards the young generations, who are in the Southern Mediterranean countries the highest majority of the population, and to the evolution of their Mediterranean style of life. By pointing out the need of a common updated definition of the Mediterranean Diet, at the Forum it was proposed to establish as a priority a cohesive definition of the Mediterranean diet as a means of preserving cultural heritage. Main foods included in the common food basket are: an abundance of olive oil and olives, fruits, vegetables, cereals (mostly unrefined), legumes, nuts and fish, moderate intake of dairy products (preferably cheese and yoghurt) and low quantities of meat and meat products. Wine in moderation is acceptable when alcohol/wine intake considering both CVD and cancer (not obviously the same).

There is a need also to make efforts to depart from particular contexts and make a pyramid proposal suitable for most all contexts (especially considering developing countries where all key Med foods are not necessarily available and/or affordable regarding prices or religious and cultural constraints). Surveys have shown a dramatic increase of overweight and obesity in Southern Europe, higher than in their Northern European counterparts, especially among the older socio-econo- mics sections of society. Thus, the major challenge for public health is in applying the Mediterranean diet lifestyle to the different populations and determining the barriers to its implementation.

Therefore, it is urgent to move away from the perception of the Mediterranean Diet, as just an healthy dietary pattern, becoming more and more expensive, to come back to a Mediterranean lifestyle sustainable diet grounded on a variety of local and seasonable foodstuffs. This preservation strategy should strengthen education initiatives, awareness-raising and capacity-building projects and training in the management of the intangible cultural heritage, in order effectively to preserve and to advance the transmission of Mediterranean diet heritage through the present difficult time into the future, and resisting also to the growing financial speculation on the brand name “Dieta Mediterranea”.

Today, the Mediterranean Diet should also be studied and acknowledged as a survival model to be used in other food cultural systems around the world to achieve food security and nutritional well being as recommended since the International Conference on Nutrition, held at FAO, Rome, in 1992.
At a time when the global economic crisis dominates the news, the world needs to be reminded that not everyo-
ne works in offices and fac-
tories. The crisis is stalking the small-scale farms and rural areas of the world, where 70 percent of the world’s
hungry live and work.

With an estimated increase of 105 million hungry peo-
ple in 2009, there are now 1.02 billion malnourished
people in the world, meaning that almost one sixth of
all humanity is suffering from hunger.

Both public and private investments are needed, more specifically through targeted public investment to encourage and facilitate private investment, espe-
cially by farmers themselves.

On the occasion of World Food Week and World Food Day 2009, let us reflect on those numbers and the human suffering behind them. Crisis or no crisis, we have the know-how to do something about hun
ger. We also have the ability to find money to solve pro-
blems when we consi-
der them important.

Let us work together to make sure hunger is reco-
ognized as a critical problem, and solve it. The
World Summit on Food Security proposed by FAO for
November 2009 could be fundamental for era-
dicating hunger.
A GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR AGRICULTURAL BIODIVERSITY

DIVERSITY FOR LIFE
A GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR AGRICULTURAL BIO DIVERSITY

In collaboration with a wide range of partners, Bioversity International is mounting a multi-year global awareness campaign in the lead up to 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity. The goal of the campaign, Diversity for Life, is to inspire people to use agricultural biodiversity to improve their nutrition, their livelihoods, and the health of the planet. The key target audiences are policymakers, schools and the media. Diversity for Life was prompted by a number of concerns. At no time in recent history has agricultural biodiversity been so threatened. According to research by Bioversity, by 2055, more than half of 23 crops studied—including wheat, rye and oats—will lose land suitable for their cultivation due to climate change. This loss will fall disproportionately on sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, regions that have the least capacity to cope. The transfer of agricultural lands to biofuels production has further limited the amount of space available for producing food, thus contributing to the current food price crisis.

The Ark of the Well Being was presented in 1996, in Rome, on the occasion of the World Food Summit, within a special event “From Welfare to Well Being, Eating Art, Food for All, Get the Best from Your Food”, organized with the technical collaboration of the FAO Food and Nutrition Division, and focused on the human right of the nutritional well being for all.

Since 2005, with the 2005 Rome Call at the Sapienza University of Rome, the Ark of the Well Being was staged as a permanent exhibition within the CISCAM international conferences.

The Ark of the Well Being, www.plexusforum.net, is a travelling exhibition made by Plexus International, a non profit entity. Its purpose is to raise more attention on the increasing erosion of the natural and cultural heritage of humankind.

The project started in the 1990s from a series of international Well Being and Reconciliation symposia, held in Sardinia, organized by the University of Cagliari.

The International Community has repeatedly stressed that “Hunger and malnutrition are unacceptable in a world that has both the knowledge and the resources to end this human catastrophe” and “We consider it intolerable that more that 800 million people throughout the world... do not have enough food to eat to meet their basic nutritional needs.” As a group of concerned individuals, we issue this Open Call to all others who would join in giving life to these commitments. When we become serious about refusing to accept the unacceptable and not tolerating the intolerable, we can make an enormous difference in the lives of the poor and malnourished around the world.

http://www.diversityforlife.org/
Organizzativa Office and Media Partner

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