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Food Between the Country and the City
Ethnographies of a Changing Global Foodscape

**Edited by Nuno Domingos,
José Manuel Sobral, and Harry G. West**

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claim to modernity is unchallengeable. Although for some post-socialist consumers, the diversity of tastes on supermarket shelves may be a sign of the normalization of the country (Jung 2009), few are those who have reached a Western quality of life.

As people's choices are inevitably formed through discourses and narratives (Scholliers 2001: 9), the food they eat every day cannot be separated from their ideas and images of food, ranging from the beautiful Bulgarian scenes in Japanese advertisements to the heated discussions and notions of the Bulgarian tradition in the mass media. Since discourses are taken for granted as part of the fabric of reality, even those individuals who are now viewed (and view themselves) as guardians of tradition are under the spell of the native bacillus. The continuous interplay between the traditional and the modern, the regional and the national, the global and the local (Wilk 2002; 2006) that occurs in the quotidian production and consumption of yogurt gives people a sense of what it is to be Bulgarian in an era of shaky cultural values and dramatic social change. Today, each pot of grandmother's yogurt contains not just a health-giving substance with millions of organisms of a specific bacterium, but also notions of national tradition, modernity, and the success of *Homo bulgaricus*.

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Unpacking the Mediterranean Diet: Agriculture, Food, and Health

Monica Truninger and Dulce Freire

In 2010, UNESCO included the Mediterranean diet on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. In this diet, olive oil, cereals, fruits, and vegetables are essential foods, together with moderate amounts of fish, meat, and dairy products and many condiments and spices. Wine or infusions are the accompanying drinks. According to UNESCO, the Mediterranean diet is based on "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."¹ UNESCO considers that this is a "nutritional model that has remained constant over time and space."

This chapter intends to unpack, in part, this institutionalized discourse. Despite the emphasis placed on the immutability of the Mediterranean diet model, the gastronomic heritage common to several countries of the Mediterranean rim follows the social dynamics that emerge and evolve at the interface of the city and the countryside.

Since the end of the 1940s, several studies have pointed out the health benefits of a particular set of food practices that is common in some Mediterranean countries, in contrast to more typical practices in Northern Europe and North America. This healthful diet gained recognition by the World Health Organization, in 1994, as a "nutrition reference model" (CIHEAM 2012: 24), and it is presently endorsed by the American Heart Association and the British Heart Foundation (Hoffman and Gerber 2012: 19). The recognition by UNESCO has not only endorsed the therapeutic character of this diet, but also amplified the social and cultural relevance of foods and foodways that have best adapted to the agro-ecological conditions of the Mediterranean region. The standardization of the Mediterranean diet reinforced by national and international institutions resonates at the global level and reconfigures local practices. In a period in which agriculture and food are again at the core of international debates, the heritage status assigned to the Mediterranean diet contributes to repositioning the rural Mediterranean territories alongside transcontinental urban spaces. An analysis of this repositioning enables a revisiting of Raymond Williams's (1973)

writings, as an aid in thinking about new configurations of city-rural relations within the present context of competitiveness and sustainability of agro-food markets.

In this chapter, the following questions are addressed. How has the Mediterranean diet been assembled and appropriated by epistemic communities, particularly in nutrition and the health sciences? What is its composition and nutritional outcomes? How authentic is it? To what extent is the Mediterranean region responding to the demand for quality-food diets? Taking the emblematic case of olive oil, how is the expansion of industrial olive groves matching health recommendations and market demands? Reflection on these issues is based on empirical data for Portugal. The Portuguese case is used as a lens with potential to disclose the many changes that are affecting the Mediterranean region. Albeit there was no intention of reducing this vast region, with its complex meanings and practices, to the ones of a single country, the Portuguese case is deemed sufficiently rich to illustrate these changes. In fact, this country is neither covered by UNESCO's classification² nor located on the Mediterranean Sea rim. However, scholars have repeatedly considered Portugal a Mediterranean country (see, for example, Gilmore 1982; Ribeiro 1998; Silbert 1966), a discussion we address but do not explore in great detail, for it is not our focus.

This chapter concerns three central aspects. First, we examine the discourses produced by medicine- and nutrition-related epistemic communities about the Mediterranean, focusing in particular on the Southern European countries. It is relevant to analyze how the model diet was construed and disseminated by nutritionists and other health professionals, as well as the types of discourses put forward by public bodies to guide populations on how to care for their health and nutrition (Díaz-Méndez and Gómez-Benito 2010: 437). At the same time, as we witness the increasing popularization of the Mediterranean diet in several Northern European countries, the traditional Mediterranean countries, exemplified by Portugal, are distancing themselves from the ideal type of this diet (Durão et al. 2008).

Second, the authenticity of the Mediterranean diet is going to be assessed, together with an appreciation of its variance across space and time and its appropriation by past rural populations. Since the nineteenth century, the discourses produced by geographers, agronomists, economists, and other social scientists have reflected a conflicting relationship between an advanced, urban, and industrial Northern Europe and a backward, rural, and agricultural Southern Europe. In the latter, significant structural societal and economic changes happened much later, even in agriculture (Lains and Pinilla 2009). It is apposite to evaluate how those images of backwardness attached to rural areas and to particular ways of eating show continuities, or discontinuities, with the assemblage of the Mediterranean diet as a collectively recognized dietary model to solve myriad health problems of modern urban societies.

Finally, the impacts on local territories of agricultural and commercial practices that sustain the global diffusion of the Mediterranean diet are going to be assessed, taking the Portuguese cases of the olive tree and oil as illustrative. These are important food icons that have connected the different communities that historically

occupied the Mediterranean rim, giving a certain sense of homogeneity to this area. As olive oil is present in several gastronomic traditions of this region, it can be considered an essential element in the Mediterranean diet's identity. Moreover, olive oil became an integral part of healthful diets, given the importance attributed to it by the medical sciences. Olive oil has attained a high level of gastronomic versatility and prestige that has enabled it to outflank both an image of scarcity associated with the rural Mediterranean and the images rendered by gourmet food niches. It is rapidly turning into a global product for the masses, associated with the preservation of a common good: the health status of world populations.

The Mediterranean Diet: The Scientific Construction of Social Practices

The arguments and recommendations that underpin the preservation of the Mediterranean diet denote that traditional and rural eating habits should permeate the urban foodways of any continent. On the one hand, this diet values nutrient-rich plant-based foods, which were losing prominence and weight in the food habits of industrialized countries since the late nineteenth century (Grigg 1995). On the other hand, apart from infusions, the diet also promotes wine, a drink that has been dissociated from a healthy image since the temperance campaigns at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century—and especially since the generalization of anti-alcoholism campaigns after World War II (Caro 1990; Freire 2010). This diet also tries to conform to the religious beliefs and culinary specificities of local communities. As it is inscribed in the UNESCO writings that define the principles of this diet: "The system is rooted in respect for the territory and biodiversity, and ensures the conservation and development of traditional activities and crafts linked to fishing and farming."³

How has the Mediterranean diet achieved such iconic status as a healthful diet? There is evidence, from archaeological records and ancient Greek, Roman, and Arabic texts, of the diets historically prominent in the Mediterranean region. Such evidence points toward the existence of well-nourished populations that based their diets on plants, bread, spices, sweets, beer, and wine. However, it was from three thorough studies on the eating habits of some Mediterranean populations that more firm evidence emerged on the health benefits of this diet. These were the Rockefeller Foundation study, led by Leland Allbaugh in 1948; Ancel Keys' Seven Countries Study, in the early 1950s; and the EURATOM study that took place between 1963 and 1965 (Nestle 1995). The results of these studies, conducted in Italy, Crete, and other parts of Greece, pointed out that the diet of those populations was mostly composed of plant foods and that the main fat was olive oil. People in the areas studied had a higher life expectancy than Northern Europeans or Americans and were also less prone to cardiovascular problems.

Thus, it was based on a diet pattern found in the Cretan population in the 1940s and 1950s that the Mediterranean diet model was built and given legitimacy as a food pattern that improved health and life expectancy among its consumers. And yet, it is relevant to point out that, in Allbaugh's study in Crete, a discrepancy was found between the optimistic views of the scientific team conducting research on the island (surveys, food inventories, interviews) and the perceptions of the Cretan rural population. Despite the surprising results regarding people's health status, a member of one of the families studied complained: "We are hungry most of the time" (Allbaugh 1953: 31). When people were asked about the foods they most longed for, meat came first (signaled by 72 percent as their favorite food), followed by rice, fish, pasta, butter, and cheese (Nestle 1995: 1315S). Very similar results appeared in the food surveys conducted by several authors (Carvalho and Gomes 1973; Lima Bastos and Barros 1943; Silva 1948) in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s in different rural areas of northern and southern Portugal (such as Alentejo, Vila Real, and Santo Tirso). In these surveys, respondents longed for meat, milk, cheese, fish, and fruit, complaining that food scarcity was a regular feature in daily life (Freire 2011). Maria M. Valagão's in-depth study on the food habits of farmworkers and ex-emigrants in a region of Alto Douro in the 1980s reported several statements confirming the hardship of Mediterranean rural life. One ex-emigrant evokes life in the region in the 1960s, offering a glimpse of foodways at the time: "When I left 20 years ago, we would eat a broth with maize bread [*caldo com broa*] and we would eat nothing else but codfish and sardines, and one sardine would be often shared by three" (Valagão 1990: 329). In fact, in Portugal, at least since the nineteenth century, meat was hardly ever consumed in rural areas, with the exception of the less economically valued parts of the pig, such as bacon (Sobral 1999). Meat consumption was mostly confined to celebratory occasions (such as weddings) or ritual events (such as the killing of the pig); meat was eaten more frequently only by the elite (Valagão 1990; Freire 2011).

Despite this gloomy scenario of misery, scarcity, and even, at times, hunger in the Mediterranean region, Ancel Keys's Seven Countries Study was important in calling attention to how a reduction of fat and cholesterol in the diet could improve heart health and, thus, lessen the incidence of cardiovascular diseases. The diet-heart hypothesis (despite its controversial views⁴) has influenced in a major way the construction of what later became the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Pyramid, introduced in 1992. The path toward this Food Pyramid began with the Dietary Goals for the United States released in 1977 by the United States Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, in which the consumption of saturated fats was discouraged, following the research of Ancel Keys on the Mediterranean diet. However, vested interests around the meat and dairy industries were severely troubled, and later that year, the U.S. government was forced to modify the goals and include recommendations for meat and dairy consumption. Such general guidelines remained little changed to the present day, apart from variations in graphic

representation (e.g., the USDA food pyramid was replaced by the MyPlate graphic representation and related guidelines in 2011). USDA guidelines and the Mediterranean diet model influenced each other—and have been under pressure from industry lobbies over the years.

Following more studies and scientific interest around the Mediterranean diet, the principles and a pyramid graphically representing them were presented by Walter Willet at the 1993 International Conference on the Diets of the Mediterranean, held at the Harvard School of Public Health and aimed at informing the American population of the advantages of eating this diet. A year later, the pyramid was copyrighted by the nonprofit organization Oldways Preservation & Exchange Trust (Dernini et al. 2012). The pyramid also offered advice on the frequency of physical exercise, but it was less clear on other practices, such as commensality, cooking, family meals, and so forth. Interestingly, USDA nutritional guidelines published in 1995 introduced a novelty that might have gotten inspiration from the Mediterranean diet pyramid of 1993: physical exercise appeared for the first time as a daily recommendation for the American population.

The Mediterranean diet model shows an adaptation of the eating patterns of the Cretan rural population in the 1960s to the urban habits of the American population. The inclusion of meat and dairy products was one of the compromises made. As Marion Nestle clarifies: "Because animal foods are principal sources of fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol in American diets, the dietary guidelines necessarily should promote predominantly plant based diets similar to those traditionally consumed in the Mediterranean and Asia. That this point may not be evident from U.S. food guides is at least in part a result of pressures from meat and dairy food producers to ensure that their products retain a dominant position in American diets" (Nestle 1995: 1319S).

This opens up a discussion about the authenticity⁵ of the Mediterranean diet. Some foods were possibly included to fit an idealized healthful diet constructed by epistemic communities across time. It also shows the strength of market pressures to include advice on daily consumption of particular foods that were not frequent in the diets of the populations living in rural Mediterranean areas (for example, dairy products and meat from cattle).

Given the controversies about the authenticity of the Mediterranean diet appropriated by American nutritionists, in which meat and dairy were included with some weight, a scientifically revised pyramid was introduced in 2010. This new pyramid was independent from the Oldways Preservation & Exchange Trust and was put forward by the Mediterranean Diet Foundation (Fundación Dieta Mediterránea), created in 1996 and based in Barcelona, Spain. The aim of this foundation is "safeguarding the millenary heritage shared by the populations of the Mediterranean basin whose lifestyle and customs from agricultural practices, cooking, feeding and physical activity practised regularly have aroused the interest of eminent scientists from around the world in recent decades for its contribution to the prevention of many diseases."⁶ The foundation promotes research on the Mediterranean diet, regarding

its health, historical, cultural, culinary, agricultural, and environmental aspects, and it disseminates the results of these studies. This research organization, with clear objectives for promoting this diet, epitomizes a response to the Americanization of the Mediterranean diet, aiming at preserving its authenticity.

This move toward a search for an alleged authenticity of the Mediterranean diet becomes visible when we analyze the new pyramid that this group of experts puts forward. A clear shift in the type of advice is apparent. Instead of focusing on individual foods (olive oil, fruits and vegetables, seeds and grains), the new pyramid gives prominence to advice on changing not only foods but also lifestyles. The new Mediterranean diet pyramid (see Figure 11.1) encapsulates a lifestyle focus, in which the origin of food, the way we eat, how we eat, and with whom we eat are all offered as guidelines toward what is believed by epistemic communities to be a healthful lifestyle.

Apart from food recommendations, a particular food culture and lifestyle are advanced in order to achieve overall health. As it is stated in the UNESCO text: "The Mediterranean diet... promotes social interaction, since communal meals are the cornerstone of social customs and festive events."⁷⁷ Ideas of community belonging and a sense of togetherness at the table are rendered by the images inscribed in the graphic representation of this diet. As stated by Sandro Dernini and colleagues (2012: 71): "What emerges over the years is the evolution of the Mediterranean Diet from a range of specific foods to a comprehensive Mediterranean lifestyle in which food, health, culture, people, and sustainability all interact, even if its practice in the Mediterranean is diminishing." Eating should be performed together with family and/or with friends around a table, strengthening conviviality. It is encouraged that families with children take on cooking activities together, possibly evocative of concerns about the demise of cooking skills among the younger generation. Physical exercise or leisure activities in the open air should preferably be done with others, where joy and a sense of community are strengthened. Finally, it is encouraged that people use foods produced locally, in season, which (allegedly) lessens impacts on the environment. The last premise links the Mediterranean diet to a sustainable and low-carbon-footprint diet, as has been recently recognized by the Food and Agriculture Organization at the international scientific symposium Biodiversity and Sustainable Diets United Against Hunger (Burlingame and Dernini 2012). And yet, these are very problematic assumptions about Mediterranean foodways' and rural lifestyles, which are going to be scrutinized in more detail in the next section.

The Mediterranean Region, Diet, and Authenticity

There is a long debate in the social sciences literature about the limits and the definition of the Mediterranean. Since the nineteenth century, this term is a polysemic

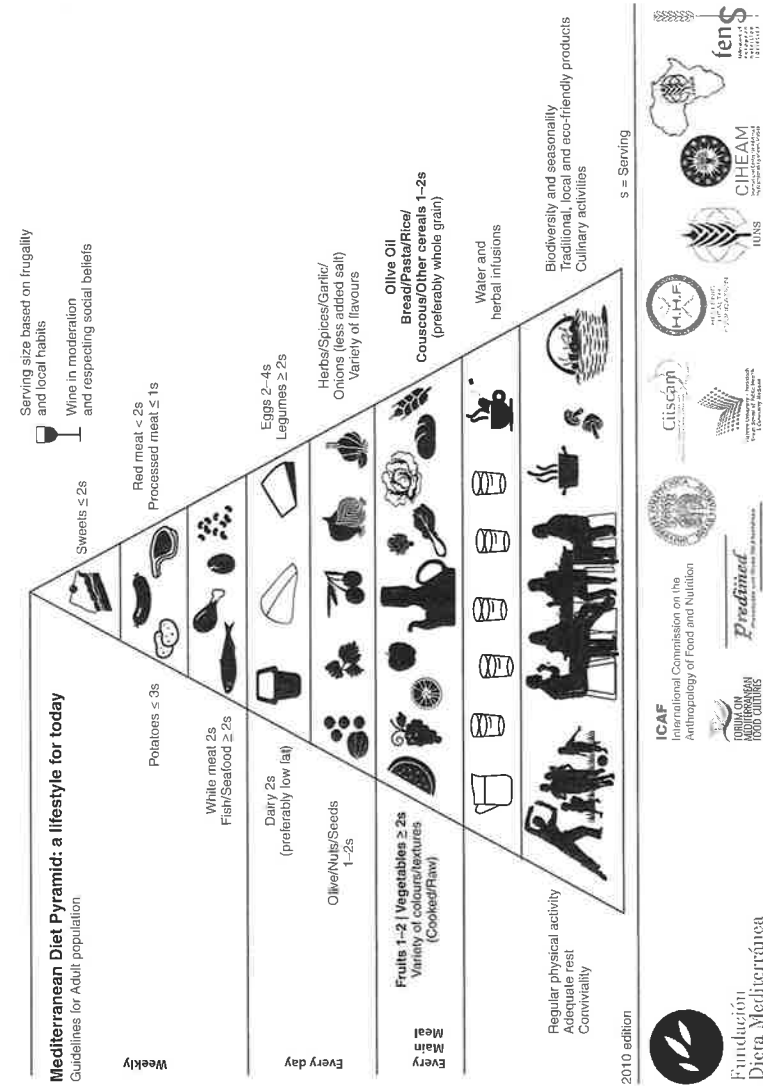


Figure 11.1 New Mediterranean diet pyramid.

concept that lends itself to multiple meanings and uses (Ruel 1991: 11). In that century, geographers (for example, Conrad Malte-Brun and Elisée Reclus) attached the term Mediterranean, for the first time, to a type of climate, consecrating it as an autonomous object of study (Ruel 1991). Later on, in the twentieth century, the French historian Fernand Braudel, writing in 1949, contributed to this debate with a detailed examination of the geophysical, environmental, and human elements of the Mediterranean world (Braudel 1973). Braudel's book, which became a classic, features a complex Mediterranean characterized by great diversity of ecosystems and cultural heritage across a vast territory that surrounds this inland sea.

By taking the definition of a place according to its foods and autochthonous crops, Braudel emphasizes the olive tree as an icon of this region (Braudel 1973). The distribution of the olive tree sets the limits of the Mediterranean. The Portuguese geographer Orlando Ribeiro backed this claim up (Ribeiro 1998), but other authors argue that it is the fig tree that should be considered as the plant for demarcating the region (Matvejevic 1999). Although valuing different products, these views point out the need for a particular climate characterized by warm-to-hot and dry summers and cool moist winters, with soil and morphological features wherein crops such as grape vines, fig trees, olive trees, and wheat grow well. Despite the fact that Portugal does not sit on the Mediterranean Sea rim, it shares these ecosystem features and has most of these products in its territory.⁸

For many years, the Southern European Mediterranean countries were attached to stereotypical images of the rural and the countryside (in opposition to the cosmopolitan images of modern towns associated with Northern European countries) and to backwardness, illiteracy, and poverty. Such images, to a certain extent, matched the reality. To illustrate, Portugal was considered a rural country up until the late 1960s. At the time, around 50 percent of its working population was employed in agriculture, wherein agriculture contributed with 27.2 percent of GDP (Lains 2009). The food situation was characterized by significant nutritional imbalances (a lack of meat proteins, calcium, and vitamins), scarcity, and nutrient deficiencies in many regions of Portugal (Freire 2011). However, since the 1960s, with the intensification of a rural exodus combined with other social changes, there was a rapid process of de-ruralization, with a quick shift in employment from agriculture to service sectors (Ferrão 1996). In 1950, agriculture contributed 31 percent to GDP; by 1970, the figure had dropped to 12 percent, and it was 8 percent in the 1990s (Soares 2005). These social and economic shifts were reflected in pronounced transformations in the diet of the population. In the 1950s, the Portuguese had access to 2,400 calories daily per capita; in the 1970s, the amount was 3,000 calories—a figure that has been part of the nutritional recommendations of health professionals and international organizations since the 1940s⁹ but that the Portuguese would reach only thirty years later (Freire 2011).

This rapid shift also meant that, at the symbolic and social levels, a strong attachment and connection to the countryside would linger for decades in the memories

and practices of the Portuguese population (Truninger 2013). Despite the movement of people from the countryside to coastal cities (Porto, Lisbon, Setúbal), looking for better working conditions and an increase in available income, a strong link prevails to rural social networks important to securing noncommoditized food provisioning (Valagão 1990; Truninger 2013). It is to this rural food heritage that nowadays many claims and images are linked in the marketing of the Mediterranean diet, in Portugal or even in Spain (Díaz-Méndez and Gómez-Benito 2010). This rural past is often portrayed as idyllic, romantic, and quiet and is associated with quality food (Schmidt et al. 2004; Williams 1973). The hardship of country lives, where dietary nutritional deficiencies and even hunger were common, is hidden away in the bucolic images rendered by the marketing of the Mediterranean diet.

Moreover, the Mediterranean diet promotes and renders an image that eating together should be done at the table (see Figure 11.1). There is scant evidence that poor rural families before the 1960s would manage to eat together at the table and according to fixed times on a regular basis, at least in Portugal. First, because in many rural houses the idea of eating at the table was not common, people would often eat next to the fireplace and from the same bowl. Second, mealtimes and domestic routines were often dictated by the rhythms and paces of other activities outside the home (such as farming) that impinged upon synchronization of family members' schedules. To illustrate, Valagão's study notes that, even in the 1980s, small farmers in the region of Alto Douro struggled to have their meals at fixed times, repeating a long-lasting pattern. Dinnertime was dependent on the demands of farming work. Only big farmers and landlords could afford to have regular mealtimes at the table, but even for these people, contingencies of everyday life would interfere. The mythologizing of Mediterranean lifestyles such as eating together at the table enshrines ideals rarely attained in practice. Such ideals may reflect middle-class expectations about eating proper and wholesome meals (Jackson 2009). Nowadays, given the major demographic and cultural transformations in Mediterranean societies—increasing female participation in the paid workforce, the use of domestic technologies and convenience foods, fragmentation of the overall time families could spend eating together (Jackson 2009; Warde 1997)—it is difficult to imagine how these guidelines are implemented in practice. It is important to note, however, that moral expectations about eating together do command the organization of eating in many families in everyday life, and people do make a daily effort to orchestrate eating events around regular and fixed schedules.

The process of standardization of the Mediterranean diet, mostly driven by medicine and nutrition epistemic communities, highlighted particular features of the Mediterranean diet and foodways while hiding others from view. This selection process of making some things visible while occluding others was construed to fit high-tech agricultural production, global markets, and urban consumers, affecting rural-city relations in significant ways. The marketing of the Mediterranean diet provokes a unified and single image of it, connected to certain products and landscapes.

It standardizes and normalizes a particular notion of the Mediterranean region and its foodways (Busch 2011). In the following section, we wish to make visible the existence of transformations in rural regions of Portugal that are departing from these idealized notions to produce yet another (transfigured) Mediterranean—one that is exported to global markets and deemed as the authentic one, based on the premise of delivering health, nutrition, freshness, taste, and food quality.

Country-City Relations, Markets, and Agricultural Techniques

The promotion of the Mediterranean diet associates it not only with healthful food, but also with images of a rural territory characterized by sustainable farming practices. In line with the policies that the European Union has promoted since the 1990s, UNESCO and the Fundación Dieta Mediterránea aim precisely to support local and seasonal products, to preserve biodiversity, and to minimize environmental impacts. In recent years, international agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization are also helping to generalize these recommendations. In a European and global context in which biodiversity and sustainability are set out as priorities for public policy, it is necessary to assess how the growing international demand for products historically associated with the territories of the Mediterranean rim is being fulfilled.

Olive oil and the olive tree have been two of the main protagonists of recent transformations. Historically, the European Union countries are the largest producers of olive oil, and they also represent about 60 percent of world consumption of this product. In recent years, however, sales have increased to other destinations, especially to countries that traditionally were not large olive oil importers, despite their having received large numbers of immigrants from Mediterranean countries. In 2011, the most important world markets for European olive oil were the United States (accounting for 38 percent of European exports) and, to a lesser extent, Australia, Brazil, Canada, and Japan (with values that varied between 4 and 9 percent).¹⁰ According to the Portuguese olive oil producers and distributors trade association, the increasingly widespread popularity of olive oil is opening new markets, and expectations for the future are optimistic. It is estimated that, by 2020, Portuguese olive oil exports will grow by 30 percent. However, even with increased production, it is expected that, at least in Portugal, producers will be unable to satisfy all of the increased demand for olive oil in international markets. There is, therefore, the ambition to produce even more.

There are three routes for responding to the growing urban demand for products associated with the Mediterranean diet, in particular olive oil. Only two depend on the agro-ecological conditions available in the old Mediterranean and that can also be found in Portugal. One route follows the exploitation of the olive tree in rain-fed agricultural systems, which historically have marked the experiences of Mediterranean

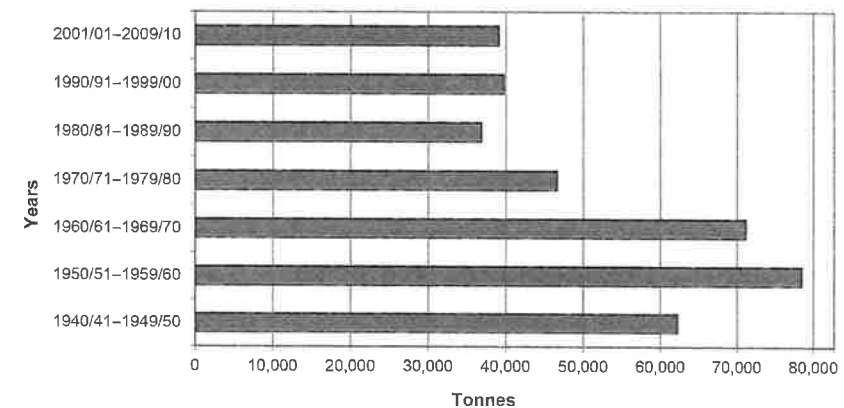


Figure 11.2 Average production of olive oil in Portugal from harvest years 1940–1941 to 2009–2010 (Matos and Martins 2013).

agriculture and rural societies. Another route is associated with expansion of the irrigation agro-industry,¹¹ which has taken place particularly since the end of World War II, resulting in changes in farming practices and crop varieties.

As Portugal has Mediterranean characteristics in almost all its regions, especially in inland areas, olive groves are scattered throughout the country, at elevations up to 700 meters above sea level. Olive groves in dry areas with uneven topography have several characteristics—for example, the trees grow slowly and mechanization is difficult—that limit productivity and increase production costs considerably. These were factors that affected olive groves' economic profitability, leading either to their abandonment or to the promotion of specific public policies that protected this sub-sector. During the twentieth century, due to a scarcity of olive oil to supply the domestic market, the Portuguese government promoted the expansion of olive groves, and as a result, production increased in the 1950s (Figure 11.2). Until the 1970s, olive oil was the main fat consumed in the country, a food pattern that prevailed because of the protectionist policies of the dictatorship (1933–1974) of António de Oliveira Salazar and his successors. However, the increase in production was based on the expansion of traditional olive groves: local varieties of trees, scattered olive trees on mountainsides, polyculture systems on small plots. Modern olive groves (based on extensive plots, monoculture, and geometrically ordered plantings) were a rare sight on Portuguese landscapes. Exploitation of traditional olive groves was entirely dependent on the workforce. Thus, during the 1960s, with the rural exodus and an increase in rural wages, olive trees were abandoned, and production dropped. This gave rise to the so-called olive grove crisis (Baptista 1993).

Figure 11.2 shows how olive oil production decreased during the 1970s and 1980s. Consumption in Portugal fell from about 10 kilograms per capita per year in

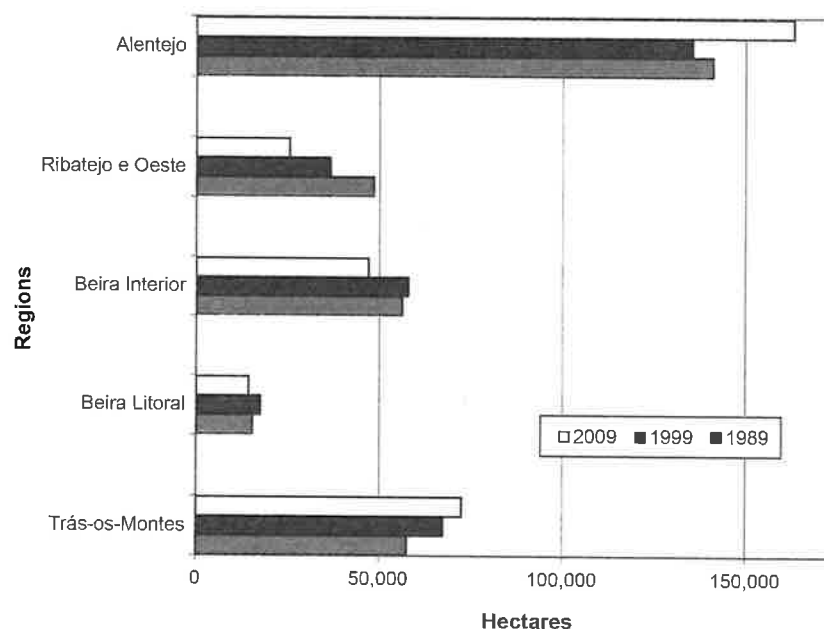


Figure 11.3 Total area devoted to olive groves in the main producing regions of Portugal (Matos and Martins 2013).

the 1950s to 3 kilograms in the 1990s, a decline that was offset by the increased availability of vegetable oils and animal fats. Today, consumption of olive oil is rising again. The Figure also shows that, in the past twenty years, there has been an increase in domestic production of olive oil. However, a change in production geographies is taking place. There is now a regional specialization, with the olive groves sited in areas that offer the best comparative advantages in the current global market competition (Figure 11.3). In some of these regions—such as Trás-os-Montes, in the extreme northeastern part of the country—olive trees still grow mainly in thinly planted groves in hot and dry ecosystems.¹² But in other regions—such as Alentejo, where there is the biggest growth in acreage and productivity—olive groves are shifting from traditional rain-fed systems to densely planted irrigated groves.

Alentejo, the largest Mediterranean region of the country, has often been likened to a fiery heath, an image that refers to its recurrent drought conditions (Rodrigo 2009). However, the vulnerability of agriculture to low rainfall is changing. Since the eighteenth century there have been efforts to increase water availability—crucial to extending cultivated areas and increasing productivity and the supply of foodstuffs and other commodities (Federico 2005). In the nineteenth century, greater scientific knowledge and improved technology enabled major ecosystem interventions (such

as large dams and water-distribution systems), and proposals to turn Alentejo greener multiplied. The plans devised by Portuguese engineers and presented to several governments were part of modern trends toward intensification of resource exploitation and “domestication of nature” (Dicke 2001; Freire 2007). Despite these plans, irrigation was confined to a few areas and based on small-dam systems until the 1940s.

However, over the past seventy years, several large dams have been built, which are now irrigating around 155,000 hectares (44 percent of all irrigated land in Portugal). It is forecast that the amount of irrigated land will continue to grow in the coming years. As in neighboring Spain, the profit-making plans for irrigated areas involve changing the specialization model of agriculture; in Alentejo, this means less reliance on animal husbandry and more extensive use of irrigated land for maize, vegetables, fruits, vineyards, and olive trees. Thus, in recent years, the implementation of irrigation infrastructures is the most striking transformation that is under way in Alentejo, and this transformation is contributing to increased production of some of the most emblematic products of the Mediterranean diet.

Olive trees in traditional groves can live for up to thousands of years in the climate and soils of the Mediterranean; however, the current commercial success of olive oil production is not underpinned by these traditional olive groves. Such groves are being abandoned, transformed, or even ripped out. To illustrate, there is a thriving trade that displaces hundred-year-old olive trees from their traditional places to public and private gardens around the world. The value of these trees has clearly shifted from food to ornament (Freire and Truninger 2012). At the same time, the amount of olive oil that is produced in what are called intensive and super-intensive olive groves is increasing. About 50 percent of Portugal’s production of olive oil originates from what are known as traditional aligned systems, but irrigated intensive and super-intensive systems are gradually encroaching and becoming more common in some parts of the Portuguese landscape.¹³

A significant portion of the Portuguese olive oil that is meeting the growing global demand for products associated with the Mediterranean diet is being produced from olive-tree varieties that enable a high yield and have a short life span (about ten years); these trees grow in irrigated groves, and production is mechanized. These olive groves are expanding on the most fertile lands and near dams. In the area of the massive Alqueva dam—capable of irrigating 110,000 hectares—there are 21,000 hectares of olive groves. About 10,000 hectares belong to a single company that claims to be the owner of the world’s largest olive grove. The Ministry of Agriculture predicts that, in 2020, Portugal will be producing almost 100,000 metric tons of olive oil per year and that Alentejo will provide more than half of that production.¹⁴

The countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea aspire to increase olive oil production to meet growing demand, which is taking place in distant countries. But the expectations of high yields and profits from this business are stimulating the encroachment of olive groves onto other territories. In the early 1980s, the Portuguese geographer Orlando Ribeiro could still write that the “olive tree is the only

crop with global importance, which is confined to the Mediterranean region” (Ribeiro 1998: 14). This statement is becoming severely challenged. Mediterranean countries are still the main producers: more than 50 percent of the world’s olive oil comes from Spain, while other countries—Italy, Greece, Tunisia, Turkey, Morocco, and Portugal—contribute between 3 and 9 percent each (Matos and Martins 2013). However, some efforts to produce olive oil in other parts of the world have been quite successful. If the native Mediterranean varieties of olive trees would not adapt well to other latitudes, the same is not true for varieties mastered in the lab and used in irrigated industrialized productions.

Since the sixteenth century, when Portuguese navigators pioneered maritime travel, the global circulation of plant-based products has intensified (Ferrão 2005). At the same time, efforts by farmers, agronomists, and botanists to adapt crops with high market value to similar ecosystems located on other continents have increased. According to Bernard Dell, Angus J. M. Hopkins, and Byron B. Lamont (1986), there are several climate pockets that replicate the Mediterranean climate, including parts of Australia, California, Chile, and South Africa. Historically, the most important market competition has come from California, and this competition has drastically affected agriculture systems in some regions of Southern Europe (Critz et al. 1999; Pamuk and Williamson 2000).¹⁵ From the second half of the nineteenth century, it has been clear that the agriculture of the old Mediterranean was faced with competition from products of the “new” Mediterranean.

In a trend similar to what has happened with other products (wine, oranges, and dried fruit, for example), olive oil is extricating itself from the old Mediterranean. The emergence of new olive oil producers in continents beyond Europe is becoming a serious alternative (or third way), besides traditional or industrialized Mediterranean production, to respond to growing world demand. In recent years, olive oil made in the United States or Brazil has started to supply those countries’ domestic markets. In the harvest year 2010–2011, Argentina, Australia, and Chile each supplied between 0.5 and 1 percent of world olive oil production (Matos and Martins 2013).

For now, the high valuation accorded European olive oil on world markets challenges new producers to please the taste of consumers. However, in the medium term, Mediterranean olive groves may well be facing competition from new producer countries. Olive oil still is the unifying icon of the European Mediterranean diet, but the oil itself may be produced on any continent nowadays.

Concluding Comments

In this chapter, we sought to understand the construction of the Mediterranean diet by particular epistemic communities, namely professionals in the nutrition and health sciences, and to examine the extent to which the Mediterranean region is responding to the demand for quality-food diets. By taking the emblematic case of olive oil,

we sought to understand the expansion of Portuguese (and beyond) industrial olive groves, by unpacking some contradictions and examining some impacts of the standardization of the Mediterranean diet.

Undoubtedly, the Mediterranean diet is getting more fashionable, and it is being sold as a more healthful diet, important to tackling twenty-first century health problems such as obesity, cardiovascular diseases, and some types of diabetes. The scientific discourse around the Mediterranean diet fosters the consumption of a set of food products whose production significantly affects local landscapes and agricultural systems in the Mediterranean region. Under the European Union’s common agricultural policy, in some parts of this large region, one can already witness the expansion of areas cultivated with olive trees. The increased production of foods associated with a Mediterranean diet is often framed within the context of rural development and sustainable agriculture projects, but it takes place on a global stage to satisfy a global market. To the extent that there are Mediterranean edaphoclimatic conditions and production technologies that ensure the replication of Mediterranean products in other part of the globe, countries far from the Mediterranean can supply both local and distant markets with foodstuff that meet the criteria of the Mediterranean diet.

The farming systems of the Mediterranean rim, especially those of European countries, are facing changes in world demand for their food products (for example, because of a greater value being placed on healthful products and because of new consumption habits of Asian populations). They also face added pressure from the different international normative frameworks for food governance, which affect both production and marketing of foodstuffs (and are exemplified by the UNESCO classification ascribed to the Mediterranean diet in 2010, the guidelines for sustainability announced by the Food and Agriculture Organization the same year, and the European Union’s post-2013 changes to its Common Agricultural Policy). This chapter aimed at contributing to a reflexive exercise on the extent to which the Mediterranean region’s economic agents are responding to the proposals and projects endorsed by these different international bodies. The normative framework against which food production is undertaken reveals the constraints put on the countryside, as it evolves with the shifting tendencies of urban food consumption in contemporary societies.

As a dietary model, the Mediterranean diet is underpinned by scientific evidence, gathered by epistemic communities. It is an urban-oriented intellectual and scientific construction that, on the one hand, aims at standardizing the productive activities of vast and distant rural areas according to therapeutic and nutritional needs of urban consumers. This reflects the interrelationship between the country and the city that Raymond Williams identified in his famous work (Williams 1973). But on the other hand, the Mediterranean diet also standardizes urban lifestyles through a romanticized image of rural foodways appropriated by city dwellers. Ideals such as eating together around a table were already difficult to put into practice on a regular basis

in rural areas of the twentieth century, let alone in urban areas of the twenty-first century.

Thus, the countryside of the Mediterranean is being pressured by the demand of the city, by competition from “Mediterranean” products from new territories, and by foods from other sources that regularly supply local markets. In fact, this triple pressure has been intensifying since the second half of the nineteenth century, making Southern Europe, and notably Portugal, subject to constant changes in agriculture, in society, and in rural landscapes. As a result of such pressures, a paradox was identified in this chapter: cities and other urban areas worldwide are being fed by an imagined “hot and dry” Mediterranean countryside that produces “wet and fresh” food products. The case of olive oil was an excellent entry point from which to unveil this paradox. The hundred-year-old olive trees, with enormous twisted trunks, fail to produce the olive oil we consume today. They are part of our memories of a “fiery heath” rural landscape that belong to the old Mediterranean of the past. Such images are time and again inscribed on the marketing labels of olive oil bottles made in the new Mediterranean: one that is much fresher and wetter and that targets distant urban consumers.

Notes

Chapter 1: Conflicting Wine Narratives

1. Quoted at: *Marketing de Vinhos* (2011), “Vinhos do Alentejo em Prova no CCB” [website], September 28, 2011, http://www.marketingvinhos.com/2011/09/vinhos-do-alentejo-em-prova-no-ccb_28.html, accessed October 10, 2011.
2. The producers acted collectively through the Associação Técnica dos Viticultores do Alentejo (ATEVA).
3. Alentejo now includes eight demarcated subregions: Borba, Évora, Granja-Amareleja, Moura, Portalegre, Redondo, Reguengos, and Vidigueira.
4. The term is a derivation of Michael Billig’s assertion on nationalism (Billig 1995).
5. Phylloxera is a pest that attacks grapevines. *Oidium*, or powdery mildew, is a fungal disease that affects plants.
6. These local cooperatives were founded between 1955 and 1971: Borba (1955), Portalegre (1955), Redondo (1956), Vidigueira, Cuba e Alvito (1963) and Reguengos de Monsaraz (1971).
7. By 1980–1981, the amount of land controlled by UCPs had declined to 528,000 hectares, with 16,100 permanent workers; by 1985–1986, the figures were down to 360,000 hectares and 9,670 permanent workers (Baptista 2010: 150).
8. The author interviewed António Cachola on September 17, 2011.
9. In the context of land use in southern Portugal, *monte* (hill) refers to the location of the housing buildings and the rural properties’ facilities.
10. Examples of traditional nomenclature include Marquês de Borba, Terras del Rei, Reguengos de Monsaraz, Tapada do Barão, Baron de B, Vila dos Gamas, Morgado da Canita, Comendador, Conde da Ervideira, Conde de Vimioso, Real Lavrador, and Vila Santa, Estate names appearing on labels include Herdade do Gamito, Quinta da Esperança, Herdade da Capela, Quinta da Viçosa, Quinta do Carmo, Herdade dos Machados, Herdade da Ajuda, Herdade do Rocim, Herdade Grande, Condado das Vinhas, Terras d’ Ervideira, and Herdade do Esporão.
11. Quoted at: Comissão Vitivinícola Regional Alentejana (n.d.), “Denominação de Origem Alentejo,” *Vinhos do Alentejo* [website], http://www.vinhosdoalentejo.pt/detalhe_conteudo.php?id=17, accessed February 21, 2012.
12. Quoted at DJF Vinhos (2013) *Alentejo*, <http://en.dfjvinhos.com/v/alentejo>, accessed October 2, 2012.

4. For more details on standardization and consumers' attitudes toward standardized food in socialist and post-socialist Bulgaria, see Yuson Jung (2009).
5. Dairy products are not a substantial part of the Japanese traditional diet, and their consumption increased only after World War II, with the Westernization of the Japanese diet. In 1950, with the launch of a sweetened hard type of yogurt, Meiji became the first Japanese company to start industrial production of yogurt. In 1971, a year after the Osaka Expo, Meiji was ready to launch Japan's first plain yogurt. Drawing on Metchnikoff's research, it intended to name the new product Bulgaria yogurt. However, after asking for permission, Meiji got an unexpected refusal from the Bulgarian side: "Yogurt is the heart of our people. We can't lend the country's name to a product made by another people." Two years later, on the condition that Bulgarian production technology and pure cultures be adopted as a guarantee of quality, Meiji received the desired permission, and its new brand was crowned with the name Meiji Bulgaria Yogurt (Meiji Dairies Co. 1987).
6. Based on the socialist BDS (*Balgarski Darjaven Standart* [Bulgarian State Standard]) 12: 1982, the present standard defines Bulgarian yogurt as a product fermented with Bulgarian symbiotic yogurt cultures (*Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and *Streptococcus thermophilus*).
7. Among the most popular are the festivals of beans in the village of Smilyan, of potatoes in the town of Klissura, of *rakia* (a traditional alcoholic drink) in the town of Troyan, and of *sudjuk* (sausage) in the town of Gorna Oryahovitsa.

Chapter 11: Unpacking the Mediterranean Diet

1. <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/RL/00394>, accessed November 18, 2012.
2. Recognition was assigned to Spain, Greece, Italy, and Morocco. In March 2012, Portugal presented to UNESCO a bid (jointly with Croatia, Cyprus, and Algeria) to be included in the recognized group of countries. The Portuguese bid was prepared by local and national partners: the municipality of Tavira (in Portugal's Algarve region), the Ministry of Agriculture, Sea, Environment, and Spatial Planning, and the National Commission for UNESCO. It has the support of other ministries, public institutions, and private organizations (including the University of Algarve and the Order of Nutritionists). It is anticipated that the results of this application will be known during the General Assembly of UNESCO scheduled for the end of 2013.
3. <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/RL/00394>, accessed November 18, 2012.
4. Some of these controversial views are linked to the so-called French Paradox, coined by Serge Renaud in early 1990s. It refers to the observation of a low incidence of cardiovascular diseases in the French population despite a high consumption of polyunsaturated fats. This paradox generated a lot of controversy in the scientific community, for a review see Michel de Lorgeril and colleagues (2002).

5. On the concept of food authenticity and its nuances, see Monica Truninger and José Manuel Sobral (2011).
6. <http://dietamediterranea.com/en/foundation/objectives/>, accessed November 18, 2012.
7. <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/RL/00394>, accessed August 18, 2012.
8. Using geophysical and human criteria, Orlando Ribeiro (1998) divided the country into three main regions (northwest, northeast, and south); in only one of them—the northwest—are there specific non-Mediterranean characteristics (such as a wet and humid climate, densely populated area, and dispersed settlement). It is possible to find Mediterranean pockets in the northeast, especially in the Alto Douro region (which produces the famous port wine and also olive oil). South of the Tagus River, the country is clearly Mediterranean (with rain-fed agriculture and concentrated settlements). In fact, despite Portugal's long Atlantic coastline, more than half of the country matches the Mediterranean rim's features (Silbert 1966).
9. Portugal became a member of the Food and Agriculture Organization in 1946 and of the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (what is now the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) in 1948, but participation in these organizations was not enough to change basic dietary patterns in the country.
10. Data collected by Portugal's olive oil producers and traders association (<http://www.casadoazeite.pt/en/DATA/exportation/tabid/210/language/pt-PT/Default.aspx>, accessed on October 25, 2012).
11. This model is totally different from the irrigation systems that were set up, for centuries, in the southern Iberian Peninsula (for example, the *huertas* of Valencia).
12. However, local producers have been gradually developing strategies to extend irrigated olive groves to the region. On April 9, 2009, a regional newspaper reported that Trás-os-Montes had its first very densely planted irrigated olive groves (Canteiro 2009).
13. The density of trees per hectare distinguishes various production systems: traditional systems are defined as having 70 trees per hectare; traditional aligned systems include 120 trees per hectare; intensive systems have 200–450 trees per hectare; super-intensive systems have 600–800 trees per hectare. The last two production systems are always irrigated (Barroso et al. 2013: 86–89).
14. This information was reported in the Portuguese daily newspaper *Público* on October 28, 2012; See Silva (2012).
15. Alto Douro wines (Martins 1990) and Azorean oranges (Dias 1999), which since the seventeenth century supplied the British market, have, from the nineteenth century onward, had to adapt to new trade competition.

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