

SUSTAINABLE MEDITERRANEAN

MEDITERRANEE DURABLE • ΒΙΩΣΙΜΗ ΜΕΣΟΓΕΙΟΣ • MEDITERRANEO SOSTENIBILE

المتوسطة المستدامة



MEDITERRANEAN FOOD: a vehicle for stimulating intercultural dialogue and promoting sustainable consumption and production

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L'ALIMENTATION MÉDITERRANÉENNE: un véhicule stimulant le dialogue interculturel et promouvant la consommation et la production durables

Quarterly newsletter produced by the **Mediterranean Information Office** for the **Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development**, in collaboration with the **European Environmental Bureau** and the **Arab NGO Network for Environment and Development**

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The theories about eventual cultural “clashes” and “gaps” e.g. around the Mediterranean, which is an active North-South, East-West interface, have raised a lot of discussion in many parts of the world. In our region they have been considered with great caution and skepticism within the Mediterranean countries, which despite their current cultural and socioeconomic differences, cooperate in a very large number of fields and strive to secure a peaceful coexistence and progress - prerequisites for the sustainable development of the region. As a whole Undoubtedly, the problems in the region are many and challenging within all components of sustainability; the degradation of the environment and natural resources is exacerbated by rapid changes in the climate and is closely interlinked with unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, overpopulation and serious social and economic imbalances.

Mediterranean food, although still distinctly characteristic of every country, has an overall common character as a result of using similar ingredients (such as olive oil) but mostly as a result of active interchange among cultures, as well as of the historic developments of the region as a whole. It is noteworthy that although several tensions still exist among some of the countries of the region and sometimes there are difficulties in formally accepting the cultural influence of others in the current realities of each country, food has remained surprisingly outside these tensions. Food is an area where loans and back-loans are freely admitted and even commented upon with humor and openness and with minimal ideological and religious “charges”.

Apart from going into more detail on the issues touched upon here, this Sustainable Mediterranean also presents some important initiatives in the region that have based their central focus on these particular parameters of food.

One of these is the educational material: “Mediterranean food: Historical, Environmental, Health & Cultural dimensions” recently produced by MIO-ECSDE within the MEDIES Network (see the related article). Mediterranean food was selected as an educational vehicle because it is of direct interest, close to people, a living issue with old roots and admitted influences. It is an area providing an excellent opportunity to explore the linkages between cultural and biological diversity in the Mediterranean through the interrelationships between human productive activities, cultures and traditions, environment and natural resources. Education is one of the most needed tools for the development of individuals and Mediterranean societies and even more necessary is an education which could promote at the same time sustainable development and better understanding and respect for the different cultures in the region. Within the MIO-ECSDE material on Mediterranean food, food and related topics -cuisine, diet, production and processing of basic foodstuffs, etc.- are used as “vehicles” for stimulating Intercultural Dialogue and promoting Sustainable Consumption and Production within the framework of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

MIO-ECSDE and its partners identified and set up the following, as focal areas of the project on Mediterranean food, and in general, when working on “food topics” within ESD and Cultural & Biological Diversity, based on the “UNESCO Decade on ESD” and the “UNECE Strategy on ESD” principles and priorities (related to food):

- Typical Mediterranean foodstuff and their production, landscapes and biodiversity, traditional agricultural practices, terraces, etc. with special emphasis on the Mediterranean diet triad: “olive oil, cereals and vines”.
- The historical evolution of Mediterranean food production, dietary and cooking practices from the Ancient Mediterranean world to the Middle Ages and then on to our era.
- A thorough overview of the Mediterranean diet today and modern consumers and their responsibilities within the life-cycle of food products.

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EVOLUTION OF FOOD AND DIET IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Between nine and ten thousand years ago, in Syria and Palestine, people found out that they could have a steady supply of meat by keeping certain animals in farms, under human control, killing a certain number for meat, allowing others to breed, and using their milk. This worked best for sheep from the eastern Mediterranean countries and for goats, perhaps from south-eastern Europe. Meanwhile, other species, including cows from North Africa according to some people, camels, dogs, and later on, horses and buffaloes, were used as working animals; some of these also became sources of milk and meat. Pigs, perhaps originally from Anatolia, were another reliable source of meat for those peoples who chose to keep them. Roughly at the same period, farmers in Syria began to sow the seeds from food plants and in this way to make sure that they grew in a chosen field the following year. This worked well with wheat and barley, with lentils, chickpeas, beans and peas. Probably what people first did with all these seeds was to make soups and porridges from them but, very soon, the first ovens were built and flat bread was being baked from wheat.

These great inventions of keeping and breeding animals and sowing and harvesting food plants were the beginning of agriculture and farming. They made food

gathering much more efficient and the food supply much more reliable. However, there were risks: a bad harvest, or a disease among the stock, meant that suddenly food ran out. This is why the sea, the forests and mountains have always remained important for Mediterranean peoples. They are sources of extra food - wild animals, fish and shellfish, wild herbs and fruits - that enrich the diet and, in difficult years, may prevent starvation.

Over thousands of years the idea of farming spread from end to end in the Mediterranean. As it spread, farmers experimented with new species - some of those that had previously grown wild, on the mountains or on the edges of cultivated land. Vegetables like lettuce and cabbage, roots like garlic and onions, and, last of all, fruits like grapes, figs, pears and apples. In this way the diet became more varied again and there was less need for gathering foods from the wild. It was possible for the same land area to feed many more people, and the population of the Mediterranean continued to grow.

Last invention of this early period was beekeeping. Until then, honey had been stolen from wild bees. Most probably, 5.000 years ago, in Egypt, humans

began to keep bees in hives and learned to take a share of their honey. When hard physical work meant high energy consumption, honey was the best available sweetener and an essential food; it taste good too.

Some fruits grown during this period originated far from the Mediterranean shores. The grape vine came from the Caucasus or western Iran. Melons and watermelons came from Africa, figs and dates perhaps from Arabia. No one knows exactly when or how they came; it must have been a slow, gradual process as seeds or cuttings were passed on from place to place and from one farmer to another. Diet in the Mediterranean has not remained static. However, starting from the ancient world, Mediterranean diet, despite local variations and influences, was largely centered on what the historian Fernand Braudel called the “eternal trinity”: cereals, vines and olives provided the basis of the traditional agricultural and dietary regime.

The vine

The vine, first grown about 5.000 years ago, was especially important, providing grapes, raisins and wine; a juicy fresh fruit, a reliable source of dietary sugar and a drink which in ancient times was used throughout Mediterranean lands. Wine was safer to drink than untreated water, and it was easy to keep, unlike milk which was impossible to store. The vine's origins go back to central Asia, the southern area of the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea to the north-eastern area of Afghanistan. In a region between Georgia and Armenia there was viticulture, according to archaeologists and a primitive form of wine from the fermentation of grapes was discovered. This “primitive” wine was attributed a sacred character by the ancient Georgians (around 3000 BC) who used to place on the side of the deceased a small vine branch with its roots, kept in a silver purse, to be planted in the world of the dead.

On the long journey it took wine to reach the Mediterranean, Palestine was an important stop. References to vines and wine and its symbols are frequently mentioned in the Bible i.e. the marriage of Cana. In ancient Egypt, the presence of various representations of viticulture and libation were very common in the tombs. A jar full of wine on which the date, specific vineyard and the producer's name were clearly mentioned accompanied the dead to their last trip. This culture is also found in ancient Greece (1000 AD). The Greeks and later on the Romans were the ones who diffused viticulture and wine to the entire Mediterranean through their civilizations.

The olive tree

The olive tree seems to be native to the eastern Mediterranean, because fossil olive leaves have been found in the caldera of Santorini dating about 50 or 60 thousand years ago. Soon, olive oil had a major role in Mediterranean food and life. However, it is noteworthy that the olive tree would not grow everywhere, thus other kinds of oil were produced as well, such as sesame oil in Egypt and parts of the Near East, argan oil in Morocco, etc. Oil was used for many purposes i.e. food, lighting, fuel, cosmetics, etc. A storeroom full of wine and oil was a sign of prosperity in the Odyssey - the ancient Greek epic - just as it would have been elsewhere in the early Mediterranean. Thousands of years ago, people found

ways to prepare and store olives for eating, by conserving them in salt, in brine or in vinegar. There are many recipes for flavouring olives and adding to their health-giving qualities. Ancient Greeks liked unripe, green olives, broken and cured in salt; they also liked them black and wrinkled. Fennel was one of the herbs that were added to the brine. Athletes prepared their bodies with olive oil before a contest. According to mythology, the first olive tree was planted by the goddess Athena on the Acropolis of Athens to settle her quarrel with the sea-god Poseidon; it grew there for many centuries, behind the Erechtheion temple, as a symbol of peace, progress and wealth. The Romans learned how to conserve olives from the Greeks and the Phoenicians: they also used fennel, as well as coriander, cumin, mastic, mint and rue. They used olive oil with added aromatics such as myrrh to rub on their bodies as a kind of soap and perfume, also to soothe skin irritation (a traditional use of olive oil in the Maghreb as well). Romans believed that the mythical hero Hercules brought olives to Italy: they called him Hercules Olivarius, the “olive-grower”. The olive tree is a symbol of peace in the Mediterranean culture.

The cereals

Cereals were not the same everywhere: “cereals” might mean barley, emmer, durum wheat or bread wheat, depending on the place, the local climate and resources and tradition. Bread is the famous product made of cereals that existed and exists in one variety or another in every culture and on every continent. Leavened bread in its whole variety - from dark rye bread to crusty white loaves - belongs to the Egyptian tradition: the first bread of modern type must have resulted from a mixture of yeast with wheat or rye flour which was left to “rise” or ferment. The technique originated from the ancient Egyptians, who began baking such bread 4.500 years ago in ovens, although they used a more primitive species of wheat (emmer) and their flour was not ground as finely as today. Ancient papyri and wall paintings show that they produced about 50 types of bread and cakes with various added ingredients. Athens, in ancient Greece, was also famous for its big bread ovens and the many kinds of fresh bread sold at the “agora” (the market place). Regardless of time and place, however, breads and grains have always been symbols of life and prosperity. For people of the ancient Mediterranean, bread was a basic food, an essential; in fact “bread” was a synonym for “food”.

Meanwhile some major new foods were reaching the Mediterranean from the Persian Empire and further east: perhaps chickens were the most important of all, but among others were peaches, apricots, citrons, and pistachios. The movement was not all one way: coriander, originally a Mediterranean herb, reached India about 400 BC, while the grape vine reached China following the way of the Silk Road, around 120 BC. While Greek colonies spread along the northern shores of the Mediterranean, the Phoenicians, from the coast of modern Lebanon and Syria, colonized and farmed much of North Africa from their famous settlement at Carthage near modern Tunis. Their writings are lost, but their farming is known from archaeological findings and from Latin texts, because the Romans learnt many of their farming skills from the people of Carthage. The Phoenicians also introduced the olive tree in North Africa.

In Rome, if one could afford it, one could choose and buy luxuries from anywhere in the Empire. Travel and trade were just as free as in modern times, even more so, since there were no national frontiers. But travel was slow: it was a five-month voyage from the Pillars of Hercules (Straits of Gibraltar) to Antioch in Syria. Only foods that were dried, pickled or salted, and only special wines would stand up to such a journey. Meanwhile, building on what they learned from Greeks and Carthaginians, Roman gardeners developed multiple varieties of vegetables and fruits, notably apples, pears and grapes. Alongside more familiar farm animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, chickens, Romans took trouble with various other species from geese to snails and added new ones including dormice, ducks and hares. They farmed many species of fish in inland pools and marine enclosures. And they imported spices from far beyond the region, including pepper, cinnamon, ginger, cloves and nutmeg from southern Asia and Indonesia. One more important food contribution of the Romans is the recipe book. There were written recipes in ancient Greece, possibly even earlier in Egypt and Syria, but the Latin text called *Apicius*, from the Roman Empire of the 4th century AD, is the only surviving recipe collection from the ancient world.

Thanks to the trade routes, new foods introduced to the Mediterranean in the Middle Ages included spinach, eggplants, lemons, bitter oranges and sugar. All these originated in Asia and spread from East to West, along the North African shore and into Spain due to the Islamic expansion during the early Middle Ages of the 7th century AD and after. An exchange of foods from these vast territories was possible. No longer was “Arab” food only that of the desert nomads. It was during this period that sugar and rice, formerly expensive rarities, gradually became cheaper and more common. The importation of sugar, a much more versatile ingredient than honey, led to the creation of jams, jellies, “spoon sweets” and sweetmeats. Eastern spices were

difficult to get in medieval Western Europe, but Arab lands were closer to the sources of the spice trade, and westerners who tasted Arab food were sometimes overwhelmed by the flavours they encountered.

The high cost of spices in Europe - at a period when pepper, ginger, cinnamon and nutmeg were thought of not just as flavourings but as essential to health - was one of the reasons why Columbus set out across the Atlantic. He hoped to find new routes to the sources of these spices. Instead, he found America with its chillies, allspice, vanilla and chocolate, its tomatoes, haricot beans, squashes, potatoes, maize and sunflowers. All these products have influenced the food of the Mediterranean. Some of them, when people learned to use them fully, were revolutionary: the tomato for its flavour and nutritional qualities, the chili pepper as an easily-grown flavouring to compete with black pepper, potatoes and maize as cheap staple foods, sunflower for its oil as a cheap alternative to olive oil. Meanwhile, the farm animals and plants that used to be typical of the Mediterranean are now farmed in many parts of America. Thus, from 1492 onwards a revolution took place in food habits. Food and food trade have gradually become global. New crops have continued to arrive, including sweet oranges, tangerines, grapefruit, maize, kiwi-fruit, etc. In spite of all these novelties, the ancient Mediterranean staple foods still survive today, including:

B read
O live oil & olives
B road beans and other pulses
G rapes & their products
F igs & dates
S eafood of many kinds
M ilk & cheese
L amb, kid and other meats.



Cooking pots from the ancient Greek Classical period (6th-4thBC)
 Museum of Stoa of Attalos, Athens

THE DIET OF THE MEDITERRANEAN PEOPLE TODAY

As is quite well-known, the typical Mediterranean diet is characterized by:

- The use of olive oil as the main source of dietary fat.
- High consumption of highly varied plant products and in particular, cereals and breads, leguminous plants, vegetables and fruits- fresh and dried.
- Low and regular consumption of dairy products, mostly milk, yogurt and fresh cheese.
- Consumption of fish, poultry and red meat, especially bovine meat, goat and sheep, on special occasions and not as part of the daily fare.
- Extensive use of aromatic herbs, spices, lemon, and vinegar.
- Moderate consumption of wine during meals.

Of course, the benefits of the Mediterranean diet are enhanced when combined with a physically active lifestyle and controlled weight. Nevertheless, today the dietary styles of the people of the Mediterranean countries have changed significantly from the typical Mediterranean dietary pattern.

In the countries of the northern shore of the Mediterranean (France, Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal) the Mediterranean diet model has been replaced by a model of excess in calories, with animal products and fat. The shift from a “biological rationale” to an “economic rationale” in the agri-food industry has also encouraged the introduction of food and practices foreign to the Mediterranean culture. At the same time lifestyles have changed remarkably with accelerated urbanization. For instance, working conditions for men and women drastically reduce the time for cooking for many Mediterraneans who rely either on precooked refrigerated food or on food prepared outside the home, such as home delivered food, fast food, etc. The social changes in the Mediterranean, followed by the changes in food trends and the availability of comparatively much cheaper food than in the past (fresh and deep frozen) of all kinds, have resulted in a gradual shift from the typical Mediterranean diet. The aforementioned could explain why the difference is gradually disappearing between the originally lower mortality rate from heart diseases and cancers, obesity rates and longer life expectancy of the residents of France's Languedoc- Roussillon region and the higher figures in the rest of France.

In the countries of the southeastern shore, improvements supported by pro-active health and food policies, have made it possible to meet some of the

dietary deficits of the 1960s. Yet, despite progress, food intake remains far from the accepted standards as defined by international dietary standards. Even in the absence of recent surveys, a deterioration of the dietary situation cannot be excluded after the structural adjustments and privatisations of the 1990s which led to some disarrangement by states and a marginalization of parts of the population. Furthermore, lifestyles and consumption patterns that are foreign to the region are to some extent imitated. This is expressed in Tunisia, for example, by the sharp decrease in durum wheat consumption in favour of soft wheat (doubled in 1968-1995) and the large increase in the number of overweight people.

The eastern Adriatic shows disparities that are increasing in several countries when comparing 1963 with 2000. Poverty-related food insecurity is still a basic problem in several regions. For example, the rural poor in Albania spend the greatest part of their household budget on food (66%) and less for non-food products (21.2%) as compared respectively to those of 48% and 25% of the relatively wealthy in Tirana, the capital.

According to the Special Eurobarometer 186 (EC, 2003) about the profile of dietary changes of the EU population, nearly one third (29%) of EU citizens have changed what they eat or drink in the past three years. Regarding this one third of the population the following were recorded:

1. The major changes were the addition of more fruit and vegetables (61.1%), eating less fat (61.0%), drinking more water (50.0%) and taking fewer calories (42.8%). Other significant changes were eating less sugar (41.0%), less salt (32.2%), less meat (37.4%) and less alcohol (34.1%).
2. The four biggest changes were made more often by women, by those who are older and by persons with more education.
3. The reasons for making such dietary changes were “to stay healthy” (33.9%), “to lose weight” (30.1%) and “because of a health problem”.
4. Spain (21.2%) and Portugal (21.3%) have changed their eating habits the least of all Europeans.

Worth mentioning is that although most European Mediterranean children appear to be well nourished, the risk of nutritional inadequacy, particularly for certain vitamins, is significant. A varied and balanced diet should provide adequate amounts of all nutrients. The intake of nutrients among population groups typically varies widely and will range from "low and inadequate", "sufficient or optimal" and beyond to "high and possibly excessive" intakes (which does not necessarily mean toxicity). The results of some dietary surveys conducted in Europe suggest that adolescents are probably one of the population groups at highest risk of nutritional deficiencies, and despite their higher caloric intake as compared with adults, teenagers are more at risk of suffering inadequate intakes of iron, vitamin C, E, D, folic acid and B6.

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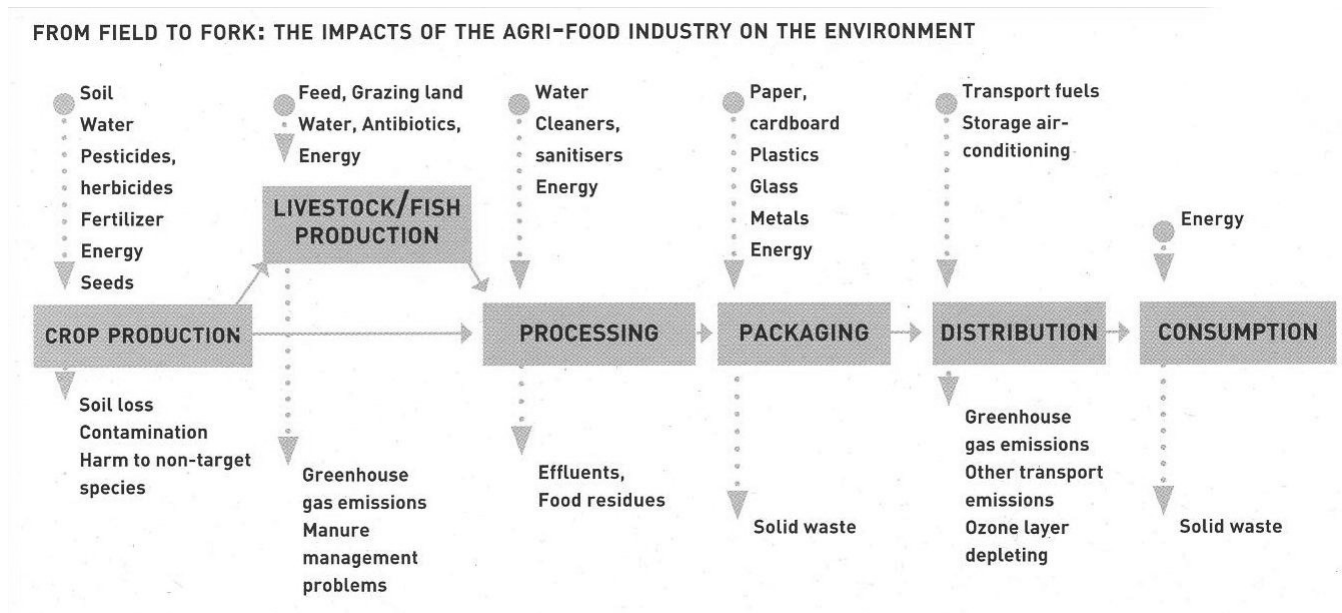
THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF OUR EATING HABITS

"Feed the world without starving the planet" is the motto of UNEP regarding the environmental impacts of the food industry. Between the two extremes of obesity in developed countries and undernourishment of 13% of the world's population one can find out the increasingly industrialized food production, market-led strategies and developing countries dealing with famine because their farmers produce more for export than to cover their needs. On the other hand, "reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger" is one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that the UN has to meet by 2015.

Faced with such expanding needs, agriculture, livestock production and fishing unfortunately keep on turning towards more intensive methods for the last decades. An obvious consequence of this "productivity race" is the overexploitation of natural resources. Science and technology are working all out to develop new techniques and increase production and yield. Fertilisers, pesticides and genetic manipulations are becoming the everyday tool of agriculture. The agri-food business is a veritable industry: it produces processes and markets, produces 70% of foodstuffs and has a large share of responsibility for environmental damage. Furthermore, whether for processing or transportation and distribution, the agri-food business consumes up to 15% of all the energy produced in industrialised countries.

Apart from the huge impact on land's fertility and the consequent erosion problems due to the unsuitable machinery and its inappropriate use, to over-consumption of fertilisers and pesticides, to over-exploitation of water resources and the absence of crop rotation, another significant impact of "modern agriculture" is the threat it poses on biodiversity. The increase in farmland to the detriment of grassland, forests and meadows has drastically reduced biodiversity. The draining of many wetlands of the region for agricultural purposes poses also huge risks and threats to the regions' biodiversity: birds, fish and mammals. According to Birdlife International, 1 in 8 of the world's bird species is threatened with extinction as a result of uncontrolled agricultural expansion and deforestation.

On the other hand, pollution from agricultural activity and the use of various pesticides have repercussions on health, including intoxication, toxic effects, allergies and other. Each year over 4 million tons of chemical products find their way in nature. While some countries of the region regulate their application, elsewhere fertiliser and pesticide use continues uncontrolled. Very often, vegetables contain record concentrations of chemical products e.g. nitrates.



The impacts of food industry on the environment (UNEP, 2004)

Some key facts

Water consumption in food production

Irrigation claims close to 70% of all freshwater appropriated for human use. It takes approximately 1.000 L of water to produce 1Kg of wheat, over 2.5 times that to produce 1 Kg of eggs and 13,5 times that amount of water to produce 1 Kg of beef.

1.500.000L of water are needed to produce 300.000L of soda.

If the entire global population were to adopt a western-style diet, about 75% more water would be needed for food production!

Livestock impact

20% of the world's wheat production is used in livestock as fodder. For example, 25-35 Kg of cereals are needed to produce 1 Kg of red meat.

33% of global arable land is used to grow feed grain.

26% of the earth's terrestrial surface is used for livestock grazing.

One person following a meat-free diet or with very restricted amounts prevents more than 4.000m² of trees being destroyed per year!

Fishing & Aquaculture

In the beginning of the 1900s, the annual catch was about 8-10 million tons of fish in the Mediterranean; this became 100 million tons in the beginning of the 1990s!

Increased catches are accompanied with a drop in yield, a sign of stocks quality degradation and especially where industrial fishing occurs e.g. in the Adriatic and around Sardinia, which used to be the most productive areas.

For some species the overall catch per fishing unit is 60% less today compared with about 20 years ago. The total catch has fallen in several countries; the current state of several stocks and spawning of commercially valuable species confirms the degradation in fish resources.

4-6 Kg of wild fish are ground into meal to produce 1 Kg of farmed fish.

Food production will have to increase 50% to feed a population of nine billion people by 2050.

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SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES OF FOOD PRODUCTION

According to UNEP (2004) “Sustainable agriculture is a productive, competitive and efficient way to produce agricultural products, while at the same time protecting and improving the natural environment and the socio-economic conditions of local communities”. In other words, agriculture is sustainable when it leads to:

- * Farm profitability
- * Improvements in the quality of life of the farming families
- * Rural community's vitality
- * Protection and conservation of the environment and its resources
- * Considerations and perspectives for the future including the wisdom of the past.

A holistic approach to agriculture recognises the linkages between soil, vegetation, air and water and the ways these influence each other and are influenced also by the farmers' beliefs, perceptions, ambitions, skills and knowledge as well as by the socio-economic, political and cultural systems within which the farm operates.

In practice, an integrated approach in agriculture should include (UNESCO, 2002):

- a. Organic farming that respects the ecological balance and the farmer's autonomy. It implies the absence of synthetic chemical products, recycling of organic substances, crop rotation and biological control of pests and diseases.
- b. Taking animals out to pastures to provide high-quality forage and reduced feed costs while avoiding manure build-up in barns.
- c. Soil conservation methods such as: strip cropping, reducing or avoiding, if possible, tillage with heavy machinery, use of terraces, cover crops. “Cover crops” are growing plants such as rye or clover in the off-season after harvesting the crop and provide benefits including erosion control, improved soil nutrients and weed control.
- d. Water conservation methods are of major importance; drip irrigation is recommended.
- e. Crop and landscape diversity conservation; ensuring diversity and abundance of pollination services.
- f. Nutrient management: increased use of on-farm nutrient sources such as manure and leguminous cover crops and reduced use of chemical fertilizer.
- g. Agroforestry that covers a range of tree uses on farms including inter-planting trees with crops or pasture, better managing woodlots and using trees and shrubs along streams as riparian buffer strips.
- h. Trade & Marketing practices: direct marketing of agricultural goods to consumers such as farmers' markets, roadside stands and community supported agriculture; fair trade practices are becoming much more common.

From their part, consumers can... :

When they buy food	When they cook
Prefer local traders	Use water with care, not only during cooking but also when washing the dishes.
Support fair trade initiatives	Find ways to reuse waste water from dish washing, e.g. in the toilet bowl
Choose products in season	Cook with the most efficient appliances possible e.g. charcoal barbeques for grilled foods. Bake more than one meal when they use the oven. Prefer products with the least packaging
Refrain from constantly opening and shutting the oven door.	Shut down the plate or oven 10min before the food is “done”.
Buy no more than needed	Refrain from constantly opening and shutting the refrigerator door.
Study labels and check the product's origin	Avoid waste of ingredients and materials: cook as much as you need.
Adopt a healthy diet based on the Mediterranean pattern	Keep the food left over in the refrigerator for another meal.
	Try to reuse the food left over e.g. by making compost or feeding domestic animals.

EUROMED SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS: PARTNERSHIP IN FAIR TRADE OLIVE OIL PRODUCTION

by Nikolaos Zaferatos, AWISHhellas

The EUROMED Sustainable Community Connections project, funded by the Anna Lindh Foundation, establishes a network for long term partnerships for the benefit of marginalized local rural communities of Jordan, Palestine, Greece, Tunisia, and Italy, by conceiving, developing, and implementing culturally appropriate and economically viable forms of sustainable community development. The project partners include AWISHhellas (Greece, lead organization), APNEK (Tunisia), LHAP (Jordan), PHG (Palestine), Me.Dia.Te (Italy) and SD-MED (Greece). Institutional supporters to the project include the United Nations University (Amman) and The Hellenic American University (Athens).

The project serves as a model in Mediterranean sustainable community development based on a “community-to-community” self reliance approach to olive oil production and marketing; develops criteria to reflect appropriate approaches for Euro-Med sustainable community development; and establishes a long term ALF Network of Partners to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, education, culture, and social and environmental justice principles in rural community development. The objective of the project is to establish viable rural development through the direct transfer of knowledge among olive oil producing communities, and to establish inter-community cooperation in order to finance, market, and promote olive oil products in a manner that has a positive effect on the community’s ecological surroundings while concurrently supporting long term social and economic sustenance. The project emphasizes “fair trade” practices through the establishment of a sustainable olive cooperative.

The Sustainable Community Connections project resulted in formulating criteria for sustainable community development and fostering cooperation and intercommunity reliance in building a long term network for rural community development within the Mediterranean landscape. The process respects the long history of co-dependency relationships

among peoples of the region, and is based on the principle that mutual cooperation should be shaped by co-operation and solidarity among communities lying on the shores of the Mediterranean.

More information about the project at: www.awish-hellas.org/workshops



ATLAS OF LEBANESE TRADITIONAL PRODUCTS

by Silvia Barbatello, TerCom Project, CIHEAM IAM Bari

CIHEAM – IAM-Bari and the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture, in the framework of the cooperation project “Activation to Sustain Rural Territories and Communities in Lebanon (TerCom)” funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs / General Directorate of Cooperation Development and the Apulia Region, published the first “Atlas of Lebanese Traditional Products”.

The ATLAS, which is a remarkable result of the project effort to support the Lebanese rural economy, is a collection of traditional products of the Lebanese cuisine with a strong link to the territory, the history and local production. The products are arranged and presented according to the international recognized categories: commodity classes, local names, uses and brief description, including also a section of recipes.

The products included in the ATLAS have been identified through many field visits of the TerCom team with the full collaboration and support of the MoA experts and the Local Action Groups established in the framework of the project. The information was collected through meetings with the local

communities, mainly women producers, individual and associations.

The publication definitely represents both a promotional tool for the richness and uniqueness of Lebanese territory and communities and an essential path aiming at preserving, encouraging and promoting the production and consumption of traditional foods in an era of globalization. The ATLAS intends to be an invitation to anybody interested in the Lebanese culinary heritage to join efforts in order to maintain and revive it. Traditional food is an open window still to be discovered and a basic chance to keep the Lebanese identity, to support the socioeconomic development of the country and, to rediscover a healthy Mediterranean diet, that is a common tradition Italy and Lebanon share and that TerCom project and CIHEAM-IAM-Bari are proud to support.

The ATLAS published both in hard and digital copy is available for the public on the TerCom project web-site: www.tercom.org



Presentation of the ATLAS during a public event

Reduced to essentials the story of humankind revolves around the basic needs for survival. Any civilization which managed to survive had a huge appetite; it was thrust forward by the grumblings of the stomach, that basic impulse which organised entire cultures and societies. Yet food represents much more than that. It is the basis of any type of economy as well as of the political strategies of families, communities and nations. Food, moreover, is an incredible, fascinating storehouse of condensed social meanings and symbols, a repository of cultural heritage, a system of images and communication, a protocol of practices and behaviour in particular situations. Food practices and techniques comprise a nation's experience, the accumulated wisdom of our ancestors and a reflection of their vicissitudes. Food is therefore, a tool through which we can examine and interpret a society, its culture and institutions, religious beliefs, social classes, personal and collective attitudes and identities. Considering the social context of diet and nutrition it is evident that the cultural dimension influences food preferences and habits. Diet and its rituals are soaked in cultural elements and values. In this framework, it has been proposed that educational approaches, when it comes to food education projects, should be based or permeated by cultural perspectives.

"Food" and "food security" are included in the major topic areas of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), analysed in detail in the "International Implementation Scheme of the UN Decade on ESD" (UNESCO, 2005) and the UNECE Strategy for ESD. ESD is widely recognized as an evolving and dynamic concept that encompasses a new vision of education seeking to balance human and economic welfare with cultural traditions and respect for the environment and the earth's natural resources. Food topics are identified in the basic thematic areas of ESD together with the protection of the environment and natural resources, sustainable production and consumption patterns, poverty, health, citizenship, democracy, human rights, gender equity, cultural diversity (UNECE, 2005).

The Decade of ESD that was adopted in 2002 by the UN General Assembly aims at promoting education as the basis of a sustainable society and integrating the principles of sustainable development in all forms of education: formal, non-formal and informal, and all educational systems. Regarding food within the "curricula" of the UN Decade on ESD emphasis

is given on the following issues:

- ESD promotes an integrated approach focusing on the environmental and socio-economical aspects of food and linking them with the sustainable management of natural resources (water, soil, biological diversity, and energy), sustainable patterns of agriculture, livestock and fishing, poverty reduction, fair trade initiatives, revival of traditional agricultural practices, etc. ESD seeks for the balance between economic welfare, conservation of cultural traditions, respect for the environment and the natural resources, promoting integrated approaches in management. Sustainable consumption, environmental attitudes and responsible and active behaviour are patterns that ESD encourages within food thematic projects.

- ESD addresses the cultural component of food to ensure the survival of proven traditional and indigenous food production systems and practices and the related cultural elements (customs, etc.) and traditional cuisines. Food is an ideal focal area to be used as a vehicle for intercultural dialogue. In line with ESD approaches to food topics, in addition, Intercultural Education approaches to food promote, inter alia:

- a) Meeting and mutual influences of the various cultures.

- b) Removal of the impediments placed in the way of such a meeting.

- c) "Preparation" of the cultural exchanges and enrichment in the near future.

- ESD addresses also the "health-dimension" of food apart from the environmental and cultural ones. In particular, when it comes to Mediterranean food, ESD may ideally promote the principles of the Mediterranean diet. Further research is required on how to positively influence children's diets, particularly in European populations undergoing significant changes in their traditional food habits, such as those of Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean region. Research on early grade school students has shown that food choices are first shown to depend on personal and family factors, as well as the teachers' influence and later to depend on culture, economic concerns and agricultural conditions (UNESCO, 1983). A recent research in Greece (Loumakou, 2005) has shown that "teachers consider food education very important as a cross-curricula subject, having impact on students' academic progress and being a subject of interest for the students".

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UNESCO (1983) “Nutrition Education Case Study Experiences in Schools”, Nutrition Education Series, Paris.

Loumakou M., Sarafidou E., Kordoutis P., Barbopoulou D. (2005) “Teachers attitudes and diet education in school”, *Mentoras (Greek Journal)*, Issue 9, Spring-Summer 2006.

THE MEDITERRANEAN FOOD EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

The “Mediterranean Food Educational Project” is based on the cooperation between the educational community -educators and schools- and the civil society of seven Mediterranean countries: Egypt, Greece, Jordan, Italy, Portugal, Morocco, Tunisia, for the production of an interdisciplinary learning material on the topic of “Mediterranean Food”. The material “Mediterranean Food: Historical, Environmental, Health & Cultural dimensions” aims at enhancing the Intercultural Dialogue among Mediterranean peoples and strengthen their mutual comprehension on “immaterial” cultural goods that have common roots and providing a Mediterranean-wide background resource, introducing topics related to food of regional, national as well as local relevance. The ultimate goal of the programme is the support of educational projects developing the values of intercultural dialogue, sustainability and peace. The project was supported by the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures (ALF). It was actually approved by its first Call for Proposals under the Thematic Priority: “EuroMed Schools Programme” and coordinated by MIO-ECSDE (lead partner).

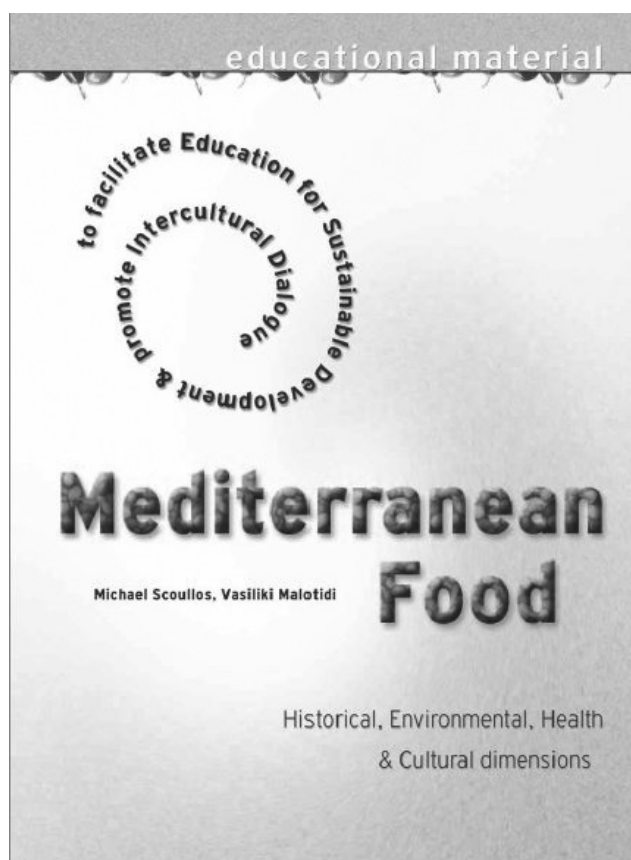
Theme

“Food” was chosen given that it is:

- (i) An area with almost no conflicts and in which nothing was developed “isolated”.
- (ii) A field where one can understand the evolution of dietary habits linked to economic development and socio-cultural attitudes.
- (iii) An ideal theme within Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), particularly in the Mediterranean region, exploring the links of food production activities with landscape and environmental resources as well as the connections between cultural and biological diversity.
- (iv) A thematic area that offers the opportunity for exploring the linkages of Mediterranean diet and consumption choices.

Objectives

- To enhance understanding on Mediterranean food products and diet and related topics, in regard with environmental, economic and social factors.
- To recognise agricultural activities as the basic and most important activity of the Mediterranean countries.
- To be aware of food sustainable production and realize its links with the traditional practices of food production in agriculture, fishing, livestock, etc. around the Mediterranean basin.
- To become acquainted with the local and national natural and cultural heritage related to food.



- To explore cultures and traditions of other Mediterranean countries related to food production and cooking, and identify similarities and differences among Mediterranean countries' traditions and cultures related to food.
- To relate the diversity of landscapes and species to the diversity of Mediterranean cuisines and related customs.
- To appreciate the importance of the Mediterranean diet to health.
- To be aware of their role and responsibilities as consumers within the life-cycle of foodstuffs.
- To develop the skills of critical and creative thinking, communication and research, and the competences of solving and managing issues.
- To appreciate eating habits that are compatible to the Mediterranean diet principles.
- To adopt positive behaviour and attitudes towards the conservation of traditional food products and cuisine.
- To appreciate cultural differences and diversity and develop respect and tolerance.

Process

The process followed during the Project was fully participatory and interactive and involved people with experience in educational matters and from different cultural backgrounds, thus providing the project with intercultural and interdisciplinary character. The following NGOs were the project partners:

- Arab Office for Youth and Environment -AOYE (Egypt)
- Association for the Protection of Nature and Environment Kairouan -APNEK (Tunisia)
- Club Marocain d' Education en Matière de Population et d' Environnement-CMEPE (Morocco)
- Land and Human to Advocate Progress -LHAP (Jordan)
- Circolo Festambiente - Legambiente (Italy)
- Associacao Cultural ETNIA (Portugal).

The project started on May 2006 and ended on October 2007. However it is still ongoing given that MIO-ECSDE is promoting the educational material to all Mediterranean countries through the MEDIES network*. The main phases of the project are presented herewith:

- a. Material's drafting, in English. During this phase, a roundtable of experts took place in Athens (9 June 2006) entitled "Culinary technologies & practices in ancient Greece & Mediterranean" organised by MIO-ECSDE and the University of Athens. The meeting provided further initial input for the development of the content of the material.
- b. Partners meeting in Athens on 1-2 December 2006. The meeting aimed at discussing the developments of the project i.e. timetable, activities, logistics, partners tasks, etc. and elaborating the draft version of the material in terms of objectives, content, structure, pedagogical methodology, etc.
- c. Final editing
- d. Translation in the partners' national languages: Arabic, Greek, Italian and Portuguese.
- e. Production of the English and Arabic publications and in e-forms in the rest of the languages Greek, Italian and Portuguese
- f. Launching of the educational material during Training Seminars about the material's implementation in school and NGO educational projects. The seminars introduced the material to a core group of educators in each partner country and included experiential workshops on the application of some of the material's activities and methodologies. The workshops were combined with presentations and discussions on the principles and methods of ESD. The seminars took place in: Grosseto-Italy (19 October 2006), Kairouan-Tunisia (19 October), Chãos- Portugal (27 October), Cairo-Egypt (29 October) and Amman-Jordan (30 October).
- g. Dissemination of the material (still in process)
- h. Full reporting throughout the project.

Impact

All partners involved enriched knowledge and experience in the development of ESD projects using participatory and communication processes. The target group of the project, formal educators (teachers, school staff, school directors and professors) and non-formal educators (NGO members) developed competences related to stimulation and implementation of ESD projects when it comes to the topics of food. In particular, some 300 educators were involved in the project either in the material's development and promotion and/or in the training seminars in Rabat, Grosseto, Kairouan, Rio de Mayor, Cairo and Amman. The educators involved stated that the material could strengthen mutual comprehension on "immaterial" cultural goods related to food, providing a Mediterranean background resource and introducing topics of regional and national, even local relevance. During all the project's phases educators exchanged experiences and ideas on how to organise joint ESD activities based on the material, focusing on cultural identity-diversity and dialogue.

* MEDIES is the Mediterranean Network on ESD coordinated by MIO-ECSDE; some 1800 formal and non-formal educators participate in MEDIES (www.medies.net).



Investigating dietary habits during the training seminar in Grosseto, Italy

1001 ACTION FOR INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE “DISCOVERING & DISCUSSING ABOUT OUR MEDITERRANEAN FOOD CULTURE”

Following up the “Mediterranean Food Educational Project” MIO-ECSDE coordinated the action “Discovering & discussing about our Mediterranean food culture” that was part of the “1001 Actions for Intercultural Dialogue” Campaign of the Anna Lindh Foundation*. The project was actually a pilot implementation of selected parts of the material: “Mediterranean food: Historical, Environmental, Health & Cultural dimensions” by four schools from Greece, Egypt, Jordan and Italy. The students initiated a dialogue on the links between traditional food -cooking practices, meals and products- and major socio-cultural events -feasts, religious holidays, births, funerals, etc. and they discovered various similarities and differences. The students’ groups compiled their findings in posters and presented them in various events. More particularly, the project included the following activities:

(A) Based on the material “Mediterranean Food: historical, environmental, health and cultural dimensions” four groups of Secondary school students from Egypt, Greece, Italy and Jordan implemented a project with the topic of “links between food & culture”. The students searched for traditional meals and food products used during special social and religious occasions e.g.

weddings, funerals, local feasts, etc. of their country.

(B) The students’ groups chose particular cases of links among food and local culture and tradition, i.e. the Greek group worked on the topic of funeral food traditions, the Italian group on food-related local traditions on St. Joseph’s Day and the Jordanian group on a selection of traditional meals of Jordan. Students compiled and presented their work on posters they made themselves, in their national language and in English.

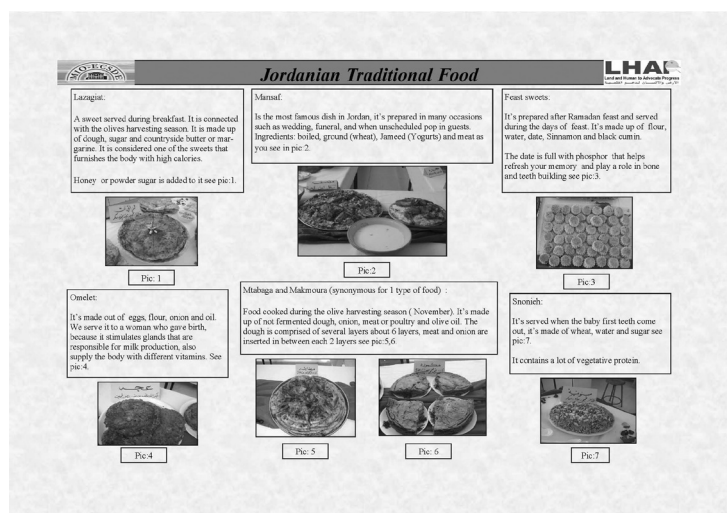
(C) Various events were organised to present the students work. The Jordanian group cooked and presented the traditional meals identified during the “Traditional Food Festival” on 22 May on the occasion of the World Biodiversity Day. Thus, the value of food was highlighted as a vehicle for cultural dialogue as well as its links with biodiversity. The Greek group also cooked the traditional meals that were identified and studied and they presented them on 15 May in a special event that took place in the school. MEdIES Secretariat was involved in the event, presenting the 1001 Actions Campaign and coordinating an “Appreciative Workshop” from which the attitudes of students emerged towards their own engagement and expectations from a project for Intercultural Dialogue. The Italian group embraced this 1001 Action under a bigger project that it was in progress at the school entitled “Let’s meet at the table”. The project lasted throughout the school year, where students studied also the nutritional properties of the traditional meals in the laboratory.

* 1001 Actions is a major campaign initiated by the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation and its network of over one thousand civil society organizations, for the mobilization of people and actions dedicated to the promotion of mutual knowledge and respect in the region (more at <http://www.1001actions.org>).

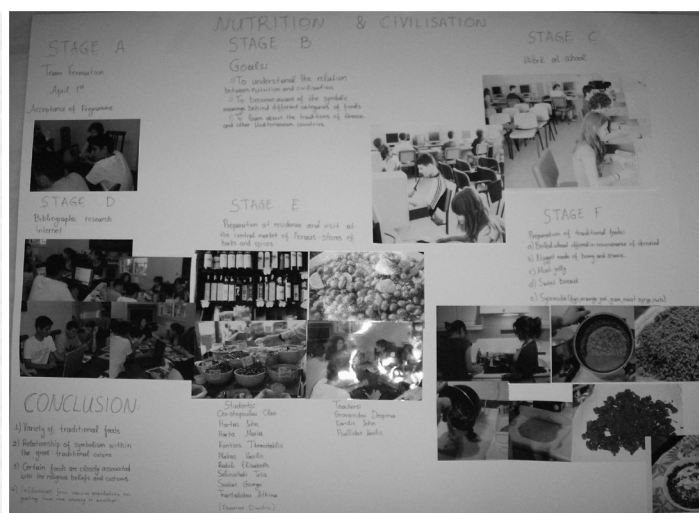
(D) The students' groups exchanged several emails about their research and findings on the national traditions and traditional meals and realised how different or common these links are. They also sent their posters to the rest of the groups.

(E) The project and the posters of the groups were presented during the Euro-Mediterranean meeting: "Dialogue in Action – Civil Society and Intercultural Dialogue" that took place on 28-30 May in Athens and organised by the Hellenic Foundation for Culture (the Head of the Hellenic Network of ALF) and the ALF.

Some 60 students and 12 educators were fully engaged in the project from its beginning. Overall, the action sparked up the dialogue among young people on their food cultures and stimulated their interest and curiosity on the links between culture and eating habits of their country as well as of other Mediterranean countries. The majority of students expressed their wish to keep in touch and work together again in a common project, hopefully in the near future. Positive feedback was also received by the teachers and educators involved in the action.



The Jordanian group poster



The Greek group poster



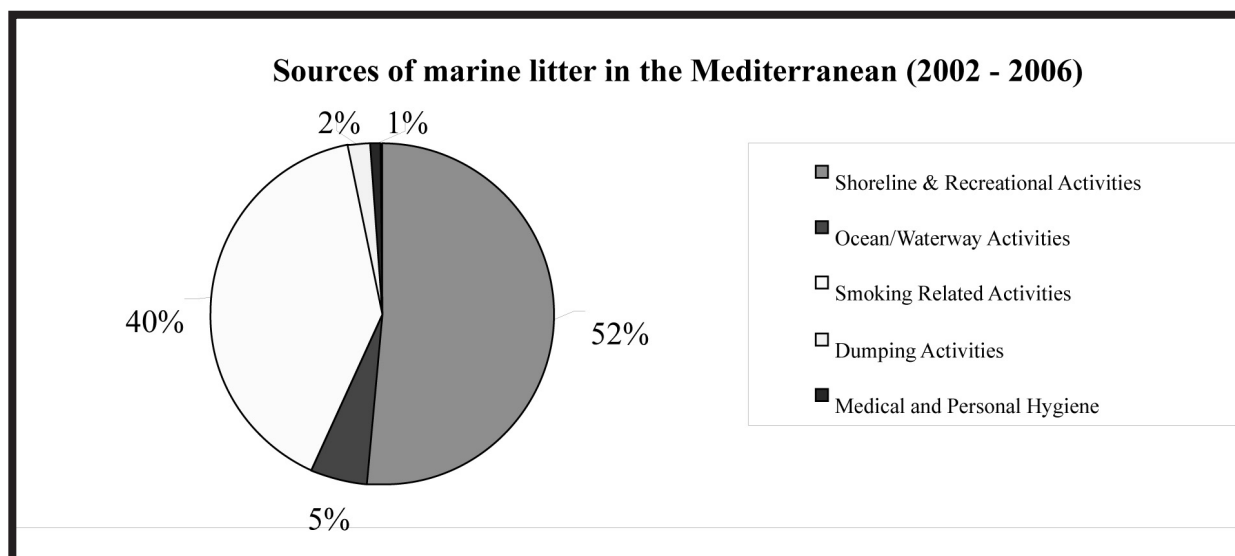
The Italian group poster

MISCELLANEOUS MEDITERRANEAN NEWS

THE ASSESSMENT OF “THE STATUS OF MARINE LITTER IN THE MEDITERRANEAN” HAS BEEN COMPLETED

MIO-ECSDE, jointly with HELMEPA, Clean-up Greece and the valuable contribution of LEGAMBIENTE concluded the task of assessing the status of marine litter in the Mediterranean, which was requested by MED-POL of UNEP/MAP in the framework of the efforts of preparing a regional strategy on how to effectively address the problem. The assessment contains information under the following headings and once made public by UNEP/MAP will send it to the Membership.

1. Assessment of the scale of the problem: Amounts of marine litter in the Mediterranean based on regional and national surveys; Types of marine litter in the Mediterranean; Recording of litter floating on the surface of the Mediterranean sea; Sources of marine litter in the Mediterranean
2. Elements on the environmental effects and socio-economic loss of marine litter in the Mediterranean: Impacts on wildlife and humans; Secondary pollution from marine litter; Socio-economic impacts.
3. Indicative marine litter monitoring programs in the Mediterranean
4. Analysis of the questionnaires that were sent to the relevant authorities in the Mediterranean countries
5. Gaps, needs and proposals as a basis for setting priorities for actions



CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP ON "INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF SHARED LAKES BASINS"

16-18 JULY 2008, OHRID FYR MACEDONIA

General Framework

The Capacity Building Workshop on "Integrated Management of Shared Lakes Basins", was organized in Ohrid FYR Macedonia, 16-18 July 2008 by the Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean (GWP-Med) and the Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO/ECSDE) in cooperation with the GEF/UNDP "Integrated Ecosystem Management in the Prespa Lakes Basin of Albania, FYR-Macedonia and Greece" project and the FYR Macedonian Ministry for Environment and Physical Planning. The activity is supported by the European Commission*, GEF IW: LEARN, GEF/UNDP "Integrated Ecosystem Management in the Prespa Lakes Basin of Albania, FYR-Macedonia and Greece" project and UNEP/MAP.

Lake basins have special characteristics such as their integrating nature, long water retention time, and complex response dynamics. The combination of these characteristics which can individually be found elsewhere as well (e.g. groundwater and estuaries) is what distinguishes lakes from other water bodies. This fact often affects the way that their basins need to be managed and has to be taken into account while respective policies and subsequent laws and management instruments are being planned and implemented, and institutions are set up. It is essential to understand that the implications of these characteristics mean that management institutions and their policies and

plans need to be established and funded on a long term basis; that scientific knowledge is particularly important for unraveling the complex responses of lakes to exogenous changes; and the management instruments need to be adapted to the integrating nature of lakes. It can be easily understood that this rather difficult task is becoming even more difficult in the case of shared lake basins.

Transcending political and even administrative boundaries, the available water must be shared among individuals, economic sectors, intrastate jurisdictions and sovereign nations. There are numerous obstacles in achieving these aims. Except for these deriving from the interdependences that are created between different uses (fisheries, agriculture, hydropower generation, water supply, tourism, etc.), there exist different priorities and interests in each country as well as different policies.

There are three major shared Lakes in the SEE region: Prespa**, Ohrid and Shkoder***. These Lakes and their basins are spread in a geographical area that includes Albania, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro and Greece. These water bodies along with Drin and Buna/Bojana Rivers – also shared water bodies – comprise an interconnected hydrological system that will be described later in this

** The Prespa basin includes two lakes separated by a naturally formulated narrow strip of land: Macro Prespa and Micro Prespa. From this point forward we will refer to the system of the two lakes as Prespa.

*** The Lake is named "Skadar" in Montenegro and "Shkodër" or "Shkodra" and also sometimes "Scutari" in Albania.

* Through the Annual Funding of MIO/ECSDE

Table 1. Shared lake basins in the South-Western Balkan Peninsula

Shared lake basins	Country			
	Greece	FYR Macedonia	Albania	Montenegro
<i>Prespa</i>				
<i>Ohrid</i>				
<i>Shkoder</i>				

document. They can all be considered part of the greater Drin River Basin.

The Workshop is part of a series of targeted capacity building activities that focus on methodologies and experiences on addressing issues of transboundary water resources management in the framework of the Petersburg Phase II / Athens Declaration Process and GEF IW:LEARN. Four workshops in total will be organized until the end of 2008 while two more are planned for 2009. The aim of the workshops is to enhance the practical capacity of key stakeholders on priority issues of integrated management of shared water bodies, hence assisting in advancing practical application in Southeastern Europe (SEE). The next workshop is planned to be organized in Shkoder, Albania. The specific theme of the workshop is to be decided in cooperation with key actors in the area. The activities work in synergy with the GEF IW projects in the area i.e. "Integrated Ecosystem Management in the Prespa Lakes Basin of Albania, FYR Macedonia and Greece" and "Integrated management of Skadar Lake ecosystem". Moreover they work in synergy and support the implementation of the GEF Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean Large Marine Ecosystems as well as the Mediterranean Component of the EU Water Initiative (MED EUWI). The series of workshops geographically focus primarily on the:

- a. hydrographical network of the Southwestern Balkan Peninsula that includes the Prespa, Ohrid and Shkoder Lakes and Drin River basins.
- b. Sava River Basin.

Objectives of the Workshop

The purpose of the workshop was to build the capacity of stakeholders on transboundary lake basin management and to equip them with the knowledge / tools that will enhance their skills to participate in the preparation of Lake Basin Management Plans.

Responding to and serving the outcomes of the Ohrid International Roundtable (2006)^{****}, the workshop also aimed to assist the process for the development of a shared vision for the greater Drin River Basin as a first step towards cooperative management of the Basin.

- The specific objectives for the participants were:
 - To become familiar with Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) approaches, concept and tools as well as with the Ecosystems Approach as an integral part of the IWRM approach.
 - To understand the need for integration of water resources management and spatial planning.
 - To be informed about the legal frameworks and tools for water resources management at international and EU levels.
 - To receive basic information on the EU WFD and its provisions (also in relation with IWRM).

- To understand the conceptual framework of integrated management of lake basins at different levels: trans-national, national, and local.

- To understand the basic steps of the preparation of a Lake Basin Management Plan - what does such a plan entail; what are the different steps for its preparation.

- To identify peers in the region to work together in addressing related issues in the future.

Participants and facilitators

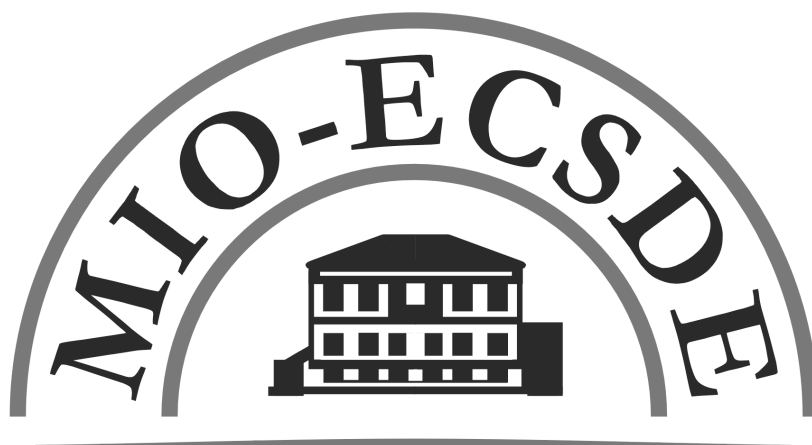
Twenty three selected representatives of water competent management authorities at national and local levels, local authorities, joint commissions and bodies, management authorities of protected areas, research institutes, regional and national NGOs from Albania, FYR Macedonia, and Montenegro participated in the Workshop. The list of participants is given in Annex I. The representatives of the organizers – one from GWP-MED, two from MIO-ECSDE and two from GEF/UNDP "Integrated Ecosystem Management in the Prespa Lakes Basin of Albania, FYR-Macedonia and Greece" project – were responsible for administrative issues and assisted the team of the two facilitators, Mr. George de Gooijer and Ms. Nighisty Ghezze in the different activities of the workshop.

For further information on the workshop please contact

*Dimitris Faloutsos, Programme Officer
Global Water Partnership - Mediterranean (GWP-Med), email: dimitris@gwpmed.org,
Anastasia Roniotes, Senior Programme Officer, Mediterranean Information Office for Environment Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE), email: roniotes@mio-ecsde.org*

Information about the workshop as well as on other activities regarding transboundary water resources management in Southeastern Europe, are available at the Transboundary Waters Information Exchange Network for Southeastern Europe website (www.watertsee.net).

^{****} International Roundtable "Integrated Shared Lake Basin Management in Southeastern Europe", 12 - 14 October 2006, Ohrid, FYR Macedonia



MIO-ECSDE Profile

The Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development, is a Federation of Mediterranean Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) for the Environment and Development. MIO-ECSDE acts as a technical and political platform for the intervention of NGOs in the Mediterranean scene. In cooperation with Governments, International Organizations and other socio-economic partners, MIO-ECSDE plays an active role for the protection of the environment and the sustainable development of the Mediterranean Region.

Background

MIO-ECSDE became a federation of Mediterranean NGOs in March 1996. Its roots go back to the early 80s, when the expanding Mediterranean membership of the European Community encouraged the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) to form its Mediterranean Committee supported by Elliniki Etairia (The Hellenic Society for the Protection of the Environment and the Cultural Heritage). The Mediterranean Information Office (MIO) was established in 1990 as a network of NGOs, under a joint project of EEB and Elliniki Etairia and in close collaboration with the Arab Network of Environment and Development (RAED). The continuous expansion of MIO-ECSDE's Mediterranean NGO network and the increasing request for their representation in Mediterranean and International Fora, led to the transformation of MIO-ECSDE to its current NGO Federation status. Today it has a membership of 104 NGOs from 25 Mediterranean countries.

Our Mission

Our mission is to protect the Natural Environment (flora and fauna, biotopes, forests, coasts, natural resources, climate) and the Cultural Heritage (archaeological monuments, and traditional settlements, cities, etc.) of the Mediterranean Region. The ultimate goal of MIO-ECSDE is to promote Sustainable Development in a peaceful Mediterranean.

Major tools and methods

Major tools and methods used by MIO-ECSDE in order to achieve its objectives are the following:

- Promotion of the understanding and collaboration among the people of the Mediterranean, especially through their NGOs, between NGOs and Governments, Parliaments, Local Authorities, International Organizations and socio-economic actors of the Mediterranean Region.
- Assistance for the establishment, strengthening, co-operation and co-ordination of Mediterranean NGOs and facilitation of their efforts by ensuring the flow of information among relevant bodies.
- Promotion of education, research and study on Mediterranean issues, by facilitating collaboration between NGOs and Scientific and Academic Institutions.
- Raising of public awareness on crucial Mediterranean environmental issues, through campaigns, publications, exhibitions, public presentations, etc.

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