

A Finger-Licking Dish (*Pjat za polizat*) – Mediterranean Diet and Kindergartens on the Island of Hvar

A Finger-Licking Dish (locally referred to as Pjat za polizat) presents the results of a survey of nutrition in kindergartens on the island of Hvar in the spring of 2019. This research primarily strived to question the logic and logistics of organised children's nutrition, but also the level of children's nutrition literacy. Against the backdrop of a lack of educational or similar long-term programmes aimed at the local community, the project was intended (in part) as action research, a kind of pilot project aimed at raising awareness of the basic values of the Mediterranean diet within preschool education, and consequently in the local community.

Keywords: Mediterranean diet, children's nutrition, foodscape, sustainable diet, island of Hvar

INTRODUCTION

Ever since Croatia joined the multinational inscription of *the Mediterranean diet*¹ on the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity² in 2013, there has been a hunger for programmes that would protect, revalue and/or popularise *the Mediterranean diet*, i.e. *the Mediterranean diet in the Croatian Adriatic, its coast, islands and a part of the hinterland*, as it is localised in the Register of Cultural Heritage of the Republic of

1 To distinguish *the Mediterranean diet*, as an intangible cultural asset, from the food practices of the Mediterranean in all their heterogeneity, I write its name in italics.

2 *The Mediterranean diet* was included in the previously mentioned list in 2010 at the session in Nairobi when Italy, Spain, Morocco and Greece presented this intangible cultural asset. In 2013, the list of countries was expanded, and Portugal, Cyprus and Croatia joined it. To find out more on the decision, visit: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/decisions/8.COM/8.10> (accessed on 01/04/2024)

Croatia. Such programmes, most often of a festival nature³ are mostly financed within the Public Needs Programme in the field of culture and measures for the protection of intangible cultural heritage of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia. However, a scarcity of funds, a lack of a clear (and long-term) vision for protection and interdepartmental co-operation necessarily determined the genre boundaries of action, but also minimised the long-term impact on the preservation and promotion of this cultural and food model in its more recent articulations (cf. Medina 2015, 2019; Dernini et al 2017; Ivanišević et al. 2023). Popular dishes and food that we recognise as Mediterranean, i.e. localized Istrian, coastal and Dalmatian, are not only a part of everyday food choices today, but also live their new life as festival and/or tourist attractions. The selective representation of traditional cuisine thus represents a new foodscape⁴ that provides a symbolic, but also a commodified image of nutrition and underlines the resource-based understanding of intangible cultural heritage. This understanding shifts the elements of traditional nutrition from everyday life to the space of economic exchange, unquestionably changing their character and position within the community (cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 195; Hafstein 2018, Hameršak and Pleše 2018). Traditional cuisine thus becomes a culinary capital that can be revalued and potentially incorporated into the development strategies of cultural or gastronomic tourism, but the sustainable social and economic development of island communities can also be based on it.

As participants in the process of inscription of the *Mediterranean diet* from the very beginning, but also collaborators in the activities of the informal network of the countries to be inscribed, IEF researchers have often been invited to propose, implement or evaluate research and/or documentary programmes whose results can be used in popularisation and education in the long term. In the absence of educational or developmental programmes aimed at the local community, *A Finger-Licking Dish - Mediterranean Diet and Kindergartens on the Island of Hvar*⁵, was intended (in part) as action research, a kind of pilot project aimed at raising awareness of the fundamental values of *the Mediterranean diet*⁶ within preschool education, and consequently in the local community. Striving to move away from modern articulations of traditional cuisine,

3 The Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia, as part of the Programme for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Goods and Public Needs in Culture, financed events such as *the Night of Hrapoćuša* (Dol, Brač) and *the Wild Plate* (Dol, Brač).

4 By the term foodscape, I mean a real or imaginary space that is equally shaped by individual practices and food policies. In this understanding, the foodscape is viewed not only as a material space (where food is grown, processed or consumed), but also as the practices that take place on it. Thus, individuals are as much a part of the foodscape as they are a part of its representation, but also of the broader political frameworks that govern production, distribution or food-related legislation. To find out more on the notion of foodscape, check, for example, Wenzer 2013: 83-85.

5 A year-long project *A Finger-Licking Dish* was realised with funds from the Ministry of Culture and Media, as a part of the Public Needs Programme in 2019. The description of the project and the results are available at: <https://www.ief.hr/istrazivanja/pjat-za-polizat-vrtici-i-mediteranska-prehrana-2/> (accessed on 21/03/2024)

6 *The Mediterranean diet*, as intangible cultural heritage, represents the totality of skills, knowledge, practices, beliefs and traditions linked with agriculture and fishing, processing, preparation and especially food consumption. By giving priority to small, local food production (and consumption), it contributes to the preservation of old varieties, traditional products and the art of food processing in its natural environment, and especially values the balance between work and leisure, work and private life. *The Mediterranean diet* represents a sustainable, social and cultural model of living in harmony with the environment and climatic conditions. To find out more on the basic messages of *the Mediterranean diet*, visit: <https://mediterraneandietunesco.org/about/messages/> (accessed on 21/03/2024)

especially from the uncritical interpretations of the touristified and festivalised image of the local diet, which mostly takes place during the (short) tourist season, we thought about research to explore institutional models of knowledge transfer about traditional food, irrespective of whether the community refers to it as Mediterranean. We were not interested in how *the Mediterranean diet* is presented at island events and restaurant menus, but whether there is a place for it in the year-round, everyday life on the island. By focusing the research on preschool education institutions, we were equally interested in how nutrition topics are addressed within educational programmes, as well as how food is supplied and prepared in kindergarten kitchens. We were also interested in *children's tastes* – composed equally of preferences and resistances, but also knowledge about food that children acquired at home or what they learn in kindergarten. Such an approach provided us with in-depth insight into everyday dietary practices and choices, as well as the health and nutrition policies that shape children's institutional nutrition. That is why *A Finger-Licking Dish* was not only conceived as a research and popularisation of this part of the intangible cultural heritage of the island of Hvar but was implemented as a possible step towards a long-term goal – increasing food literacy and raising awareness of the issue of food sustainability and resilience of this island community. In this study, *the Mediterranean diet* is understood as a framework and a tool for achieving this goal.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Although in this research we were primarily interested in the ways in which menus are created and realised in kindergartens on the island of Hvar, a part of the research was dedicated to a better understanding of children's foodscapes. In researching the eating habits of the youngest Mediterraneans⁷, we were primarily interested in how knowledge about nutrition, especially traditional nutrition, fits into the usual activities in kindergartens on the island of Hvar. Moreover, how does the knowledge about food, growing and processing of food fit into educational programmes in kindergartens on the island, but also into their daily functioning? In addition, it was particularly important for us to explore the principles that guide the creation of everyday menus in kindergartens and where the ingredients in their kitchens come from. We were also interested in the challenges they face, either in organising kindergarten meals (in terms of procuring groceries and food preparation), or in shaping healthy eating habits of children.

In addition to the realisation of the previously mentioned educational materials on *the Mediterranean diet*, the idea behind the research was to encourage kindergarten management to *localize* kindergarten nutrition as much as possible. Namely, local food production and consumption is at the very foundation of the concept of *the Mediterranean diet* (Ivanišević et al. 2023; Belaj and Ivanišević 2018) advocating, in the long term, a shift towards short food chains that contribute to the food sustainability of the community in the long term (cf. CIHEAM/FAO. 2015, EU Commission 2020). Moreover, local food is crucial for preserving biodiversity and reducing the carbon footprint.⁸ *The Dish* has therefore partly been conceived as action research of culinary heritage that assumes that “knowledge about a particular community is available and present within the community itself, that it can be articulated by the actors of the process

7 According to recent data, Croatia is at the top of the infamous European ranking of childhood obesity (WHO 2022a and WHO 2022b).

8 According to data in 2023, the share of the global food industry in the production of greenhouse gases is as much as 30% (European Commission 2023).

of social change being studied, and that its creation, exchange and application can benefit those same actors” (Škrabalo et al. 2006: 8). In an effort to encourage social micro change, *A Finger-Licking Dish* can also be considered as a small “cultural (heritage) intervention” (Whisnant 1983: 13, according to Hansen 1999) into the everyday life of preschool education institutions, optimistically planned to contribute to change (Hansen 1999). *The Dish* has given us the opportunity to use our knowledge and experience striving to offer some answers to contemporary environmental, economic or health challenges faced by communities (Kedia and Willigen 2005). The cultural and civilisational value of *the Mediterranean diet* may be undeniable today, but it has been seriously undermined or even abandoned (Nestle 1995, Naja et al. 2021). Everyday food practices are increasingly moving away from traditional menus that mirrored the annual rhythm of nature and were based on local agriculture, fishing and the collection of wild edible plants, as easily accessible additional food sources (Sardelić 2008).

A Finger-Licking Dish included all the kindergartens on the island of Hvar, in Jelsa, Stari Grad and Hvar, as well as regional kindergartens in Dol, Vrbanj and Vrboska. The research consisted of a series of semi-structured interviews with all the kindergarten principals (kindergarten Srdelice - Stari Grad, kindergarten Jelsa, kindergarten Vandela Božićković - Hvar), with expert teams, educators and kitchen staff, striving to better understand nutrition (and health) policies and rules when creating kindergarten menus that, at least in principle, intend to create healthy eating habits. In addition to eleven interviews with adults, art workshops were organised with preschool groups in kindergartens in these cities and regional departments in Svirče and Vrbanj⁹. If conversations with kindergarten employees were to reveal the logic and logistics of kindergarten nutrition, children’s drawings were supposed to show the level of nutrition literacy, as well as children’s dietary preferences and resistances. The food that children love, within the framework of *healthy food choices*, will subsequently be used to illustrate the children’s pyramid of *the Mediterranean diet*, which was one of the results of this project¹⁰.

CHALLENGES OF ORGANISING CHILDREN’S MEALS

Some children’s parents are fishermen, yet we still buy fish at the supermarket.

Children’s menus in Croatian kindergartens are created in accordance with the guidelines prescribed in the *Programme of Children’s Health Protection, Hygiene and Proper Nutrition of Children in Kindergartens* (NN 105/2002, 2007 Dopune i izmjene). According to them, nutrition in kindergartens is planned according to the recommended daily amounts of energy and nutrients for children aged 6 to 12 months, 1 to 3 years and 4 to 6 years. Although it standardises, the *Nutrition Standard for Planning the Nutrition of Children in Kindergarten* (Vučemilović and Vujić-Šisler 2007) does not unify children’s nutrition, since it recommends menus that contain “characteristics of local eating habits” (ibid.: 252). The diet can thus be adapted to regional and local variations. Although, as far as health and nutritional benefits are concerned, the rules for

9 The research was conducted in accordance with *the Code of Ethics* (IEF, 2011) and before the research itself, permission was obtained from the kindergarten principal to conduct an art workshop with children. The management of the kindergartens involved in the research informed the parents about the topic, purpose and goals of *A Finger-Licking Dish* and obtained verbal permission from the parents to participate.

10 The results of the project (colouring book and children’s pyramid of the Mediterranean diet) are available on <https://www.ief.hr/istrazivanja/pjat-za-polizat-vrtici-i-mediteranska-prehrana-2/> (accessed on 29/01/2024)

planning children's nutrition are well set, the impact that the procurement of food for kitchens in kindergartens could have on the long-term (and year-round) sustainability of local food production, unfortunately, has not been recognised. There are individuals who strive to introduce local products to the menus, but the procurement of local food depends on the enthusiasm of individuals. According to all the kindergarten principals, local food rarely appears on kindergarten menus, although some legal tools enable a shift towards more sustainable, *green* solutions in the long term. One of them, topical at the time of our field research conducted in April 2019, was the *Action Plan for the Promotion and Strengthening of Short Chains in Food Supply of Public Sector Institutions for the Period 2019 and 2020*. Strengthening local consumption primarily means that, as stated in the *Action Plan*:

“Local producers are left with a larger share of the added value of the product. In addition, the local economy is strengthened, which enables the sustainability of agriculture and the survival of small businesses, crafts and farms” (2019: 2).

The legal framework also offers tools and mechanisms such as ‘green public procurement’, such as Article 284, paragraph 7 of the *Public Procurement Law*, which gives public contracting authorities the opportunity to:

“When determining the criteria for the selection of the most economically advantageous tender in which the subject of procurement are agri-food products and food, the contracting authority shall consider the criteria that evaluate products produced in the quality systems of agricultural and food products (seasonal, ecological, integrated products, etc.), food produced in accordance with the quality standards for food laid down in national regulations on agriculture and food, as well as food that has been sustainably produced and processed, thus creating food of higher value in terms of higher freshness or *lower environmental impact* (shorter transport, less transport, less burdened with packaging materials and in packaging made of environmentally friendly and/or recycled materials, etc.)” (NN 120/2016).

According to such thinking, the *localisation* of nutrition, for example within the framework of the intangible cultural heritage of the *Mediterranean diet*, in island kindergartens could offer, once self-explanatory, and today a (self-)sustainable development direction. Given the tendency to direct kindergarten nutrition towards healthier food practices visible from the *Children's Health Protection Programme* and the *Nutrition Standard*, and emphasising the necessity of *green solutions*, it would be possible to imagine positive shifts in kindergarten menus that would be guided by the principles of the *Mediterranean diet* (such as seasonality and local food consumption). Restrictions on seasonal production and the availability of only a small number of locally produced ingredients in sufficient quantities need not be a reason to completely abandon the localisation of kindergarten menus. Certain local products, such as olive oil or honey, could be introduced into the foundations of kindergarten nutrition and be a year-round, stable incentive for local, small food producers to strengthen their production and, consequently, as stated in the previously mentioned *Action Plan*, “it would be easier to communicate originality and authenticity, in terms of the cultural and nutrition identity of a certain area” (2019: 4).

Unfortunately, the implementation of *green solutions*, as already hinted, depends on the will and skill of the management of kindergarten institutions. The biggest obstacle to the localisation of the cuisine, which was pointed out by the principals of all the surveyed kindergartens, are the rigid rules of public procurement that unequivocally direct consumption towards retail chains. Standardised by hygienic, sanitary and accounting restrictions, all groceries that enter the

kitchens, which all the principals have repeated, *must have a declaration!* The declaration is what makes it difficult to include food such as fresh, locally caught fish or surpluses of certain food (such as tangerines) in their peak season, which are produced in private gardens on the island. In addition to the receipt, each purchase of groceries must have a clearly stated declaration with the designation of origin, expiration date and composition. In practice, this means that packaged food has an absolute advantage over that sold without packaging, irrespective of the proclaimed favouritism of food with a *lower environmental impact*. Although individuals do make an effort to overcome administrative problems when supplying local food, the practice of procuring groceries from local retail chains prevails in Hvar kindergartens. Although conventionally produced ingredients and food products from the shelves of retail chains do not necessarily have to be of inferior (nutritional) quality, their consumption does not have long-term, positive effects on the local community and the local economy. Localisation of nutrition in kindergartens on the island of Hvar could show that traditional agricultural knowledge and skills, as well as the preservation of local biodiversity, can have a positive environmental impact and provide the basis for sustainable development. Namely, the link between cultural heritage and sustainable development is well known and argued (Duxbury et al. 2017; Verdini 2016; European Commission 2015). The preservation of cultural heritage, in this case the culinary capital of *the Mediterranean diet*, can also be seen as a pledge of sustainable development (UNESCO 2003: 2) and needs to be incorporated into national and regional development policies (Meissner 2017).

Only one of the three main kindergartens on the island supplies most of its vegetables, chicken, eggs and fish from local producers, which represents an additional administrative and organisational effort, and in the long run, given the higher prices of local products, it can affect the price of kindergarten programmes. What increases optimism is that after the completion of the project, a shift was noticed in the supply of island food to kindergarten kitchens. In September 2019, when we visited all the kindergartens for the second time to hand over children's pyramids and colouring books created on the basis of research with children, all island kindergartens bought free-range eggs from the island of Hvar.

CHILDREN'S FOODSCAPES

The concept of the foodscape has given us the opportunity to observe children's food practices at the intersections of different spaces, in which they mostly take place in a routinised way, and the concepts and ideas on which their nutrition literacy develops. Research in kindergartens meant entering not only a physical but also a discursive space in which the opposition between *healthy* and *unhealthy* food is clearly expressed (Brembek et al. 2013). More than at any level of education, preschool education institutions develop nutrition literacy, either in distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy food, or in getting acquainted with dishes and landscapes in the immediate environment. Kindergartens encourage and develop healthy dietary choices with their programmes and diet. The eating habits that children acquire at home and in kindergarten are immersed in the practices of their parents and their immediate environment, as well as the rules of "appropriate nutrition for children" in kindergartens. In addition, in all the kindergartens on the island, food is very much present as a topic in regular activities designed and implemented by educators. In addition to the topic of health (especially dental), food also appears as part of activities intended to get to know the landscape and the environment (such as thematic walks that take place cyclically at different times of the year), and especially the cultural



Figure 1. *The Happy Tooth Poster*,
photo by: Jelena Ivanišević

heritage of the island¹¹. In most kindergartens on the island, there are several extremely good practices in transferring knowledge about traditional cuisine, in the form of research, collection and even preparation of traditional recipes in kindergarten kitchens or transferring ethnobotanical knowledge of extremely endangered plants through recognising and collecting wild edible plants at outdoor workshops.

In addition to all the above, good practices of preserving and transferring traditional agricultural knowledge have been documented, especially in the field of olive growing and viticulture. Namely, throughout the year, kindergarten programmes enable children to become acquainted with the annual agricultural cycle (planting, pruning, harvesting (*jematva* in local dialect) and processing olives) in which individual kindergartens also participate by planting small gardens or taking care of already planted olive trees, whose oil is later used in kindergarten kitchens. Continuous exposure and introduction to traditional agricultural knowledge and skills is a form of environmental learning, planned with the far-reaching idea of the need to mitigate the effects of climate change and preserve the environment (Gibbs et al. 2013; Bangay and Blum 2010; Gray and Sosu 2018).

After talking to adults, the principals, the educators of the groups with whom we researched and the professional staff, the part of the research that we were somewhat afraid of ensued. Unaccustomed to children's storytellers, we asked the educators for help and, upon their suggestion, designed a short introductory play with the then popular plush toys *Zdravoljupci*¹². The

11 The island of Hvar even has inscriptions on UNESCO lists, *klapa multipart singing tradition, the art of Hvar lacemaking, the Following the Cross procession, the Stari Grad Plain and the Mediterranean diet*.

12 *Zdravoljupci* are plush toys that used to be sold at a discount in Konzum supermarkets. The discount was achieved by collecting points and stickers (cf. PR članak 2018).

children knew the main characters well – Mladen Onion and Mirko Carrot, and hence soon the mood in the group became relaxed and talkative. After the play in which they participated loudly, the children of the preschool groups (aged five to seven years old) were asked to draw ingredients/dishes and sort them into groups *healthy* or *unhealthy*, that is, into groups *I like/I dislike*. We spent almost an hour with the children drawing and talking about the food they eat in kindergarten, but also at home. Through intermittent conversations, we slowly found out what they like and don't like eating, what their parents forbid or persuade or make them eat. We found out how much ice cream they are allowed to eat and what we should eat because it is healthy. We also found out about dishes on the menu on different days, what is eaten on birthdays or Sundays.

In addition to an art workshop with children, the principal also organised a tasting of healthy and unhealthy food in one kindergarten. On one side of the table, various salty snacks were offered, and on the other, a colourful and varied plate of fruit with a pineapple in the middle. While snacks and most fruits were well known to all the children, not everyone had tasted the pineapple. This buffet showed that curiosity is a good way to reduce children's resistance to new food. After all the snacks were gone, the children soon wanted to taste the pineapple. Adults, with children's loud encouragement, peeled, sliced and offered them the pineapple. It was eaten up in an instant.

By observing children's nutrition as an intersection of diverse foodscapes, equally material (eating at the table at home or in kindergarten, kitchens, island gardens and shops) and imagined (mom's or grandmother's kitchen, healthy eating) (Brembeck 2013), it was possible to contextualise their tastes, preferences and resistances to certain food and dishes. In addition, research on children's eating habits, within the given categories of *healthy/unhealthy*, has shown that there is room for resistance to acquired knowledge of nutrition and the demands placed on them by adults.

The collected children's drawings, in which we wrote short notes, parts of the conversation and their explanations during the workshop, showed which food the children like or dislike. They also showed us which dishes they like, but also those that they should eat even if they do not like them. By talking to the children during the workshop, we found out what and how to eat. For example: "You have to eat lunch and fruit and dinner." (a 4-year-old) or "For muscles, you should eat fish with broth." (a 3.5-year-old). We also talked to them about what is healthy to eat ("Cereal from DM," a 5-year-old) and what is not. We asked them who cooks at home, if they help them, what is their favourite food. Since they have covered the topic of dental health with their educators, they confidently say that sweets are not healthy "but a little is okay" (a 5-year-old). We learn about their eating habits from home, they readily compare what is eaten at home and in kindergarten, and then they explain to us that "Small children are not allowed to cook or touch the plate." (a 4.5-year-old). Indeed, although children today more than ever have the opportunity to choose, by which we primarily mean too often indulging children's tastes at home, today they participate less than ever in food-related affairs. Their role is rather passive, which potentially only contributes to their resistance in the area of nutrition. Namely, kindergarten teachers tell us, unlike a few parents with whom we talked along the way, that children are usually ready to taste new food and dishes, especially if they are in any way involved in its preparation. They also point out that they respect the rules concerning eating in kindergarten. In addition, on visits to nearby farmers, such as that of a goat farm, children are happy to taste the products even when they have not been familiar with them from before.

According to the results of children's drawings from all the Hvar-based kindergartens, the top



Figure 2. The Mediterranean Diet Pyramid for Children by Danilo Dučak

list of favourite vegetables includes as follows: carrots (36), pumpkins (as soup or porridge) (18), onions (9), followed by beans (8), cabbage (7), broccoli (6), tomatoes (4), cucumber (4), chard (2), peppers (2), eggplant and beetroot (1). Peppers (6), cabbage (5) and onions (4) lead the list of the most hated vegetables, and among them are also the pumpkins (3) and olives (3). In addition to vegetables, we were also interested in fruits that they know and love. The favourite fruit is, somewhat surprisingly considering the fact that there are few of them on the island – apples (27), followed by bananas (21), strawberries (20), oranges (13), watermelons and cherries (10), pears (7), melons, tangerines and grapes (4), lemons and kumquats (2), plums and peaches (1).

From the previously mentioned lists, it is evident that children are familiar with many types of vegetables and fruits, but the absence of typical Mediterranean crops such as figs, almonds, carob or mulberry indicates a trend of standardisation with the dietary patterns of the continental part of Croatia. Among the fruits mentioned by the children, there are also not many wild plants or spontaneous wild plant species from their environment, such as blackberries, Mediterranean hackberries, the fruit from the strawberry trees, which used to be common children's favourite food (Łukacz and Kujawska 2012). The change in lifestyle, and especially parenting styles, consequently brought about the loss of ethnobotanical knowledge and practices common among children when parents cannot see them.

The absence of different types of beans, such as chickpeas or broad beans, as well as the once typical types of leafy vegetables such as collard greens or wild cabbage, also shows the abandonment of former dietary practices. But children's tastes prefer fish (29) to meat (15). While there were four votes against fish, irrespective of whether baked, boiled or in a soup, not a single child said that they did not like meat. Some children also point out *maništra* (a thick stew with salsa or meat) among their favourite dishes, and they often mention potatoes. Surprisingly, in the most drawings of favourite dishes there is soup (20), irrespective whether it is made of meat, fish or vegetables – locally referred to as a *false soup*. Their favourite is pumpkin soup, and their least favourite is green soup (which they are not sure what it is made of). The list of favourite dishes, according to children's drawings, includes pizza (9), gnocchi (4), risotto (4), octopus (3), various *maništra* stews (pasta) and fish with potatoes (3), black risotto (2). Some children also mention traditional dishes such as bread with olive oil, wild cabbage with meat, tripe and meat in sauce.

After analysing the children's drawings and statements, we singled out their favourite types of fruits, vegetables and certain salty and sweet dishes, which will show individual groups of ingredients on the planned pyramid of the Mediterranean diet. When creating this pyramid, we were guided by the latest pictorial representations of this food model, especially those presented at the EXPO 2015 exhibition held in Milan¹³. Namely, it was created based on new research that put sugar and processed food at the top of the pyramid rather than red meat. By designing this children's pyramid of the Mediterranean diet, we actually wanted to make a puzzle with which children could learn about this part of the island's cultural heritage with their educators. By basing the visual content on their preferences, we strived to make the pyramid familiar and appealing to them. In the parts that describe different food groups for a balanced diet, we have shown ingredients and dishes that did not invoke children's resistance. All the food shown on the pyramid was on the list of food that children love. At the base of the pyramid are outdoor activities, playing and football, care for nature and eating together. (Figure 2)

ADVOCACY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET (IN THE SPIRIT OF SUSTAINABILITY)

We owe the concept of *the Mediterranean diet*, as we know it today, to the research of Dr. Ancel Keys (Matalas 2006; Dernini et al. 2012; Petrillo 2012, Dhami and Vaidya 2015; Moro 2016), who used it for the first time to denote the diet of southern Italy in the 1950s and 1960s, that is, as it was “before everything went wrong” (Ivanišević et al 2023: 19). In the United States, where Keys came from, there was an epidemic of cardiovascular problems, while the population of southern Italy in those years showed extremely good cardiovascular health, despite a lower standard of living and relatively poor access to medical care. Keys attributed this fact to the peculiar diet and active stay outdoors made possible by the mild, Mediterranean climate. The health benefits of the Mediterranean diet, as Keys stated in his research¹⁴, has been the main driver of its

13 The Universal Pyramid of the Mediterranean Diet is the result of research by the MedEatResearch group. The description is available at: www.mediterraneandietvm.com/en/piramide-universale-della-dietta-mediterranea/ (accessed 29/03/2024)

14 Keys popularised his research on the Mediterranean diet in books he co-authored with his wife Margaret - “Eat Well and Stay Well” (1959) and “How to Eat Well and Stay Well the Mediterranean Way” (1975). In the latter, Keys, in addition to nutrition, presents a broader concept of the Mediterranean lifestyle, which is characterised by harmony with the environment and a balanced relationship between work and leisure.

exceptional popularity outside the Mediterranean countries.¹⁵ However, the global recognition of the Mediterranean diet has also brought a kind of reduction and simplification of various dietary practices that we find throughout the Mediterranean. Such simplification is to some extent inscribed in the text of the UNESCO inscription:

“The Mediterranean diet is characterised by a dietary model that has remained constant over time and space, consisting mainly of olive oil, cereals, fresh or dried fruits and vegetables, a moderate quantity of fish, dairy products and meat, and many spices, as well as wine or various herbal infusions, while respecting the beliefs of each community. But the Mediterranean diet encompasses more than just food. It promotes social interaction, as shared meals are the basis of social customs and folk festivities. [...]. This way of life is rooted in the territory, and it respects biodiversity, ensures the preservation and development of traditional activities and crafts linked with fishing and animal husbandry in Mediterranean communities. Women play a particularly important role in the transmission of knowledge, as well as in the knowledge of rituals, traditional dances, ceremonies and the preservation of skills” (UNESCO 2010).

At a time of this exceptional recognition of the food culture of the Mediterranean, global food policies, such as the UN’s 2030 Agenda¹⁶, are rethinking the sustainability of modern food systems in the context of new climate challenges. It needs to be highlighted that the inscription of *the Mediterranean diet* on the UNESCO list happened just at the time when the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is adopting a definition of a *sustainable diet*, which today includes a whole range of topics, from health and nutrition to rural development and biodiversity. Thus, in the repertory titled *Sustainable diet and Biodiversity* (CIHAEM/FAO 2015) we find an entire chapter dedicated to *the Mediterranean diet*, which, as an exemplary example of a sustainable food model, is characterised by:

„[...] low environmental impact and contributing to food security and healthy lives for present and future generations. Sustainable diets contribute to the preservation of the environment and respect biodiversity and ecosystems; they are culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable; nutritionally suitable, safe and healthy; optimising natural and human resources” (ibid: 7).

In a series of similar, strategic documents, *the Mediterranean diet* becomes a valuable tool for rural development, biodiversity conservation and cultural landscapes, and a step towards establishing more sustainable food systems (UNEP/MAP 2005; FAO/Biodiversity 2010; CIHEAM/FAO 2015). It is therefore based on seasonal and locally grown food that is mostly consumed locally and presupposes a balanced diet with an extremely low intake of animal proteins.

Since in the protection and promotion of *the Mediterranean diet*, special attention is paid to the integrity of the lifestyle resulting from a harmonious relationship with the environment, due to its effect on the quality of life of the local community, the strengthening of local consumption and the local economy, on personal health (prevention of modern health risks) and

15 For a comprehensive insight into the popularity of Mediterranean food beyond the borders of the Mediterranean, check Lysaght and Rittig Beljak (2006)

16 To find out more, visit <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> (accessed on 21/03/2024)

the environment, it is today considered a sustainable food model.¹⁷ Such food models are characterised by long-term stability in food supply (as they presuppose the wise management and preservation of traditional food sources and agricultural crops, while preserving biodiversity) and an extremely low carbon footprint due to the preference given to short food supply chains (sourcing food directly from producers when possible), which also guarantees the development of rural communities and the strengthening of food sovereignty. Furthermore, the strengthening of small producers significantly contributes to the preservation of biodiversity endangered by extensive industrial agriculture in the last fifty-odd years, which is certainly one of the goals of long-term, global food policies. Against the backdrop of the *Decade of Family Farming 2019 – 2028*, which represents the basic global action plan of the FAO, and in accordance with local initiatives and policies derived from these global goals (such as the previously mentioned *Action Plan*), it is possible to imagine that kindergartens could make a small but long-term contribution to the achievement of global food goals with their food policy, focused on locally produced, fresh and seasonal food. Thus, the localisation of *the Mediterranean diet* within the framework of preschool education institutions would support the concepts of development based on the symbolic and identity meaning of the traditional diet. Bearing in mind that *A Finger-Licking Dish* was initially conceived as a cultural intervention and an incentive for social change, in addition to the educational materials on *the Mediterranean diet* that all the kindergartens on the island received at the end of the project, a study titled *Advocacy of the Mediterranean Diet – Localisation of Kindergarten Nutrition* was compiled addressed to their administrations. It strived to offer the idea of partial localisation of nutrition in kindergartens as a small step towards the (imagined) nutritional (self)sustainability of the island of Hvar.

The lack of long-term and strategic plans, which would make it a part of educational or development and sustainable (island) policies, prompted this research that strived to explore how knowledge about *the Mediterranean diet*, irrespective of whether the community referred to it in that way, is transmitted in the year-round everyday life in the kindergartens on the island. Following the conclusions of the annual meetings of the informal network of inscribed countries, in which IEF researchers have been participating since 2014, especially the one on the importance of knowledge transfer to younger generations, this research was designed in anticipation of national policies and measures aimed at drawing attention to environmental and self-sustainable aspects, rather than to the proclaimed and potentially lucrative traditionality or health benefits. *A Finger-Licking Dish* can be considered a small intervention into the everyday life of preschool education institutions, optimistically designed to contribute to cultural change. A small step towards the island's self-sufficiency concerning food by strengthening the (year-round) consumption of locally produced food. Early childhood education institutions need to play a significant role in *environmental education* and *sustainability learning* (Gray et al. 2019), as they are raising a new generation that has yet to face the consequences of the climate crisis. Although local groceries play only a small part in the practical, everyday functioning of the kindergartens on the island so far, there is a continuity of good practices in the transfer of heritage knowledge and skills during the last years of preschool education. The proposed modification of kindergarten menus, based on local and seasonal ingredients, could contribute to the creation of *kindergartens of the Mediterranean diet* – proactive bearers of sustainable development of the entire island community *from an early age*.

17 Find out more on sustainable food systems and their impact on biodiversity conservation in Berlingame and Dernini 2012.

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