

NUTRITION AND MEDITERRANEAN DIET. A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF A “HEALTHY DIET” IN SPANISH SOCIETY

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SUMMARY

In this paper our aim is to analyse the way the relationship between health and food has been changing at the same time as Spanish society itself. From the beginnings of the consumer society until the present day the modernization process has made its imprint on the guidelines public bodies have issued to the public on caring for their health and diet. Beginning in the sixties with a welfare idea of a healthy diet, very typical of the decade, and meant for a population with nutritional problems, today we have guidelines for an overfed population. The social trends dominant in each historical moment are shown throughout this transformation process and the dietary recommendations have been part of the social change. However, the perceptions of the administration itself on what constitutes a healthy diet have also made their mark on the criteria. The modernizing nature of the paternalistic administration of the sixties can be easily seen in contrast with the public bodies of the eighties competing with the messages from the food and agricultural businesses. As the XXth century drew to a close dietary advice was in keeping with a background dominated by considerations on the nature of social change and in which both public bodies and citizens trusted in the truths of science as a reference point for correct action. At the beginning of the XXIst century reflexivity and questioning of scientific power appear and also an increase in public preoccupation with food risks. Each stage is analysed relating historical background and dietary recommendations.

1. Introduction.

In this paper our aim is to analyse the way relationships between health and food have been changing in step with those in Spanish society itself. From the beginnings of the consumer society to the present day the modernization process has made its imprint on the guidelines issued by public bodies to the population on how to care for their health and nutrition. It is an approach to the analysis of changes in dietary recommendations made by public bodies. What factors can explain these changes? The hypothesis we propose and aim to prove empirically is that such changes do not only follow on the logical adaptations of a society to changes in its dietary needs, but that they also respond to alterations in the idea of what constitutes a healthy diet as defined by experts and incorporated in dietary recommendations by the pertinent public bodies.

Contrary to expectations as befits a body of knowledge guaranteed scientifically by nutritionists and food scientists, what is meant by a healthy diet is a concept as changeable and as contradictory as any other social theory and in such a way as to bewilder consumers. It is precisely these changes and contradictions that are responsible to a large measure for the uncertainty that is a characteristic of the modern food consumer. This uncertainty and confusion has not been helped by the crises in food safety in recent years (chicken dioxins, the mad cow disease etc.), which not only call into question the modern food system, but also the industrial production of foodstuffs and the regulatory system for the control of food safety and quality. Consequently, in the eyes of the consumer, all this casts doubt on the capability of the expert systems to propose consistent food recommendations and to guarantee the safety and quality of the foodstuffs.

The changes in food recommendations become much more noticeable over a long period of time. For this reason we are going to analyse the food recommendations made by those public bodies responsible for and empowered to deal with this matter throughout the four decades from the 1960's to 2000. It is a period that begins with the background of a more or less underdeveloped society with important food scarcities and closes with a developed society with abundant food in which the problems arise from over-nourishment; a society which has gone from one where food security was understood as meaning a problem with accessing food and dietary insufficiencies to one where there are problems of food safety, understood as a question of health safety and quality of food.

Studies on food behaviours, especially eating habits, are often viewed as

phenomena in themselves or related to the cultural and social characteristics of the consumers but are rarely linked to the evolution of the food and agriculture sector and food and agricultural policies. It is not usual to relate production and consumption demand and supply in food. The agricultural food system offers the foodstuffs. This system is composed of the agrarian or primary sector, the food industry and the distributing sector while the first two, especially the agrarian sector are regulated by agricultural policies. Thus, a second hypothesis would be that food recommendations made are related to the evolution of the agricultural sector and agricultural policy. The evolution of both sector and policy has to be seen not only as an adaptation to the changing needs of the population and consumer preferences but also as confirming these needs and preferences.

The following information leaflets, issued by national bodies responsible for the broadcasting of food norms to the population, have been used as study material. The majority are from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fishery and Food, (in Spanish MAPA) the body that till the eighties had a near monopoly in these matters. In the eighties and the nineties other bodies such as the Ministry of Trade and Economics and some agencies in the Autonomous Communities were added. The weight of the institutions gradually fell more on the areas of health, mainly via the National Institute of Consumption (an organization dependent on the Ministry of Health). Finally, the creation in 2001 of the Spanish Agency for Food Safety closes the institutional cycle of food recommendations, taking on the principal role in this area.

In this work we can only approach the aims of the study leaving a more complete and detailed analysis for the future. There are specific areas for analysis to explore in order to better understand the changes in food recommendations and especially in the concept of health that we have not even touched on : the impact of food publicity and changes in the consumer profile are some other aspects. However, it would even be worth going deeper into some of the relationships found here, such as the changes in agricultural policy and the new social actors in the consumption orbit. We would like to stress it is a matter of a paper that opens up analytical possibilities and calls for an analytical development of some of the conclusions we have reached.

2. Changes in food recommendations

The sixties and the first half of the seventies, acknowledged as years of development⁶, were to be the years of the Spanish economic take-off even if the country still showed numerous features of underdevelopment when compared with neighbouring European

countries. In 1960 Spain continued to be an agricultural country, with 40% of its working population employed in agriculture, 29% in industry and 27% in the service industry and a rural country with almost 58 % of the population (17.5 millions) living in municipalities with less than 10.000 inhabitants. Taking into account that the service and industrial sectors experienced take-off in only a few areas and regions, interregional differences were imprinted very clearly on the Spanish welfare and consumption framework⁷. Although the period of food shortage (1939-circa 1955) that followed the Civil War (1936-1939) had already been overcome, the food situation in Spain in the early sixties still leaned towards scarcity rather than surplus and was characterized by pronounced nutritional imbalances. Nonetheless, it is this decade that saw the beginning of the consumer society in Spain. As Castillo (1963) shows consumption on the increase, though still far from that of the mass consumer society. The geographical imbalances are generally more noticeable than the patterns of consumption of goods themselves, as they reveal a Spanish society in which minority, urban, well-off social classes in the early sixties are living side by side with the rural poverty of the majority of the regions. The most marked imbalances are the regional ones, being also the ones that distance us from the rest of Europe, and which show also a rift between town and country. The early sixties are not the beginning of mass consumption for the majority of the population nor are they years of plenty for food. (Castillo, 1963)

The Ministry of Agriculture bore in mind the importance of the rural population, its worse living conditions, its cultural backwardness (high illiteracy levels) and acted. It played a leading role in spreading a new food culture in which the close link with the guidelines for agricultural policy can be appreciated. This task was carried out above all by the Agents for Home Economics of the Agrarian Extension Service, created in 1955⁸. This agency accomplished an important task in getting through to the rural population food recommendations via programs of home economy. Numerous aspects were covered, such as conservation, handling and care of food, home maintenance and decoration, nutrition, child care and feeding, housework, care and cultivation of the family kitchen garden etc. For this reason, as we will see, food recommendations are very often linked with problems of the home and country family finances so that the family plot may be used to better advantage and the domestic finances and feeding of the family improved. Recommendations are not only made from the nutritional standpoint but also with the aim of gradually creating a demand for the new products the food and agricultural system is putting on to the market. The institutions with

responsibilities for food launch campaigns and programs to improve the situation of a country suffering from food shortages and inequalities, belonging more to an underdeveloped country starting out on the way to development⁹.

The Home Economics Agents spread the idea of food modernity among the rural population. Family relationships are marked by traditional roles and the idea of the traditional family where the wife and mother, the housewife, takes charge of looking after the home and family can be seen in the advice on food. It is directed exclusively at this type of woman, concerned about feeding “her own” and directing her energies at achieving their welfare. The information leaflets proclaim the following: “It is to you, the rural housewife (...) that what we are going to say is of interest” (Ministry of Agriculture, 1965-1968).

It was a time when there was plenty of information on milk, and its being “the most complete natural food” was stressed (Ministry of Agriculture, 1965) when low quantities of this product were being consumed. However, at the beginning of the seventies more detailed information on the relationship between health and diet began to be offered: “Food has a great importance in the matter of health, due to the fact that foodstuffs are composed of nutritional elements that have different functions and must satisfy bodily needs” (Ministry of Agriculture, 1970). Guidelines on hygiene accompany these food recommendations advising the boiling of fresh milk and at the same time recommending that it be bought pasteurised. The intent to modernize food habits can be seen for while insisting on the most correct way to consume fresh milk, the interest in changing this habit is made clear: “Pasteurised milk from the main dairies is the best, as one can be sure it has not been diluted with water or other substances and is clean and germ-free and offers no harm to health.” (Ministry of Agriculture, 1971). Although the consumption of factory-produced milk is not expressly recommended, its positive aspects and the negative ones of the traditional custom are made very clear.

From the late sixties and very clearly in the seventies the effect of diversity in the foodstuffs on offer in Spain can be appreciated. The changes in the structure in agricultural production, the remarkable increase in productivity and drop in food prices favoured a greater accessibility to a larger quantity and diversity of food products for the Spanish population¹⁰. Until then the still low consumption of meat (especially beef)¹¹ can be explained by the weakness in meat production in the country, as compared with more developed European countries, in spite of the upturn in its

consumption in the late sixties. In the dairy sector the slow development in refrigeration systems hindered expansion of the products on offer¹². On the other hand, the opening of the Spanish market to foreign products strengthened the diversity and offer of foodstuffs and thus, the Spanish diet was becoming more and more like that of its European neighbours.

In the sixties recommendations came backed by doctors, the trusted referees of that time: “Always consult your doctor, he knows better than anybody what is right for your child” (Ministry of Agriculture, 1968). In some of the suggestions the respect due to these recommendations is expressed insofar as regards their coming from trusted sources and people to be respected as truthful referees: “modern food science advises the avoidance of strong spices” (Ministry of Agriculture, 1967). Addressing a rural woman with scant formal education, medical science offers the most appropriate information on how to feed oneself correctly: “Do not act on your own and do not heed your neighbours. The doctor, better than anybody, knows what is right for your child” a (Ministry of Agriculture, 1973). This norm of educating in matters of food is now carried out by the Wheel of Food. The intention is to consolidate the goal of having the country dweller achieve a balanced, nutritious and varied diet. The way to succeed in this is to instruct and inform the rural women, the only ones responsible for the family food: “For this reason, it is absolutely necessary that you, as the housewife, should learn basic practices in food and nutrition and not trust in customs, cravings or instinct when preparing food for the family” (Ministry of Agriculture, 1971). The error of following traditional ways is stressed: “Home made sweets prepared “conscientiously” could help to add more weight than need be” (Ministry of Agriculture, 1971)¹³. The clues as to who can and ought to give recommendations on food and health are clear, trustworthy recommendations are offered by scientific research in the sphere of food: “Current developments in food science allow us to state, with nearly one hundred percent accuracy, the quantity of nutritious elements that the human body must consume to maintain itself normally and to develop” (Ministry of Economics and Tourism, 1977). The role of medical science is thus reinforced again, it is the chief point of reference for the recommendations to be followed to achieve an adequate diet and these medical guidelines are spread by way of the Wheel of Food: “Your skill as housewife consists in knowing precisely how to combine foods according to their constituents in order to offer daily a healthy and balanced diet to your family” (Ministry of Agriculture, 1970). This food information of a technical nature culminated with the appearance in 1974 of

the Spanish Food Code (Ministry of Agriculture, 1974).

Although a set of recommendations intended to banish “wrongful” food information and change practices and beliefs was first issued in the sixties, this strategy was consolidated in the seventies. The link between fatness and health: “Being fat does not mean you are well-fed” (Ministry of Agriculture, 1971), is a predominant theme especially with respect to recommendations for children: “Madam, make a variety of dishes for your children (...)do not force them to eat ” (Ministry of Agriculture, 1968). At the outset of the seventies generalisations are made: “Many families believe a fat person is well-fed and they favour this image and this leads them to overeat” (Ministry of Agriculture, 1974). In 1974 obesity is mentioned explicitly as a health risk for the population and for the first time the effects of eating are given public importance: “Obesity is a public health problem” (Ministry of Agriculture, 1974).

The rapid urbanisation of Spanish society explains why in 1972 the first information leaflets directed at the urban woman appear. They were drawn up by the National Institute of Consumption of the Ministry of Economics and Trade¹⁴. This Information is of a different nature from that offered previously, as it concentrates more on consumption and the need for urban women, far from the rural production area, to acquire shopping habits. Shopping habits are going to be decisive to communicate a new image of modernity, that of the woman with less time to devote to food and for whom speed and convenience will be the pattern to follow: “Very many authors have shown that frozen fish has a higher nutritional value than that we call fresh fish” (national Institute of Consumption, 1973). In the same document the way to defrost fish is mentioned: “WHETHER YOU’RE NOT IN A HURRY..., OR YOU ARE IN A HURRY..”¹⁵ thus underlining this new feminine role, carrying out more tasks than those of caring for and feeding the family. Reducing preparation time now seems to be of interest to recommend, though the use of this saved time is not made explicit. Time-saving products are promoted: “If the difference in price is not great, buy pre-cooked food that will make your work in the kitchen easier and leave you more time free for other activities” (Ministry of Economics and Tourism, Board of Home Trade, Technical Service for food, 1977). It is also the time of publicity in favour of the pressure cooker (“the pressure cooker preserves better the nutrition value of food and even its taste”). This continues into the early eighties and refrigerators also become common in what the administration calls “the democratisation of Cold” (National Institute of Consumption, 1981).

On the other hand the decade of the seventies is the decade of the hegemony of supermarkets and small shops, while hypermarkets are practically non-existent. Yet the food and agricultural industry is already offering a wide variety of pre-cooked or semi-cooked products: frozen meats and fish, soft drinks, fruit juices, ready-made soups sliced loaves, soluble coffee etc.¹⁶

However, the agricultural administration continues to pursue its intention of banishing old customs and food beliefs. At a moment when meat production is not sufficient to meet demand the ministry of Agriculture states: "It would be a mistake to think that whoever does not eat meat daily is badly fed" (Ministry of Agriculture, 1971) and the National Institute of Consumption, (offshoot of the Ministry of Health and Consumption), already at the close of the decade, was carrying out an important publicity campaign for national products that had increased their output: "The breeding of yearlings (prime beef) means the production of much more meat with the same number of animals (...)and reduces imports of this foodstuff with the consequent savings of foreign currency" (Ministry of Agriculture, 1979). Recommendations are offered directed at increasing variation in diet, using the strategy of including recipes in the leaflets for products not widely used and expressly advising their use. These suggestions are carried out in the campaign Know your food, waged in 1976: "Mussels, rich in proteins, Madam, serve the best of the Rías" (National Institute of Consumption, 1978). These recommendations are also given in a context of civic responsibility in response to the economic crisis at the end of the decade, when the inflationary effects of the first oil crisis began to be felt. For this reason the Ministry of Finance intervenes, though up to that moment it has stayed away from matters relating to home economy and food, and offers ways of saving when spending on food: "A family that feeds well and avoids unnecessary spending proves its good sense and civic spirit" (Ministry of Economics and Tourism, Board of Home Trade, Technical Service for Food, 1977). It can be seen how from the end of the seventies, food itself is no longer in the foreground and consumers are beginning to be concerned about their position in an opulent society, where plenty, though it does not define all social groups, is perceived as a general norm of Spanish society (Orizo, 1997). Status and social prestige standards spread to food by way of consumption. Therefore, the information codes become more of references for companies by way of publicity. The age of brand marks in food¹⁷ has begun.

The decade of the eighties shows some special characteristics. The most significant factor being the verification of the complete urbanisation of the Spanish

population , which leads to all food recommendations, even those from the Ministry of Agriculture , being addressed to the people in the towns and cities. The onus of making recommendations passes to The Ministry of Health and Consumption and the target is the citizen as consumer. The new citizen's role in a society marked by a growing gap between producer and consumer is recognised: "If we human beings were to limit ourselves to covering our basic needs, the production chain would be cut with detriment to industry, trade and jobs in these sectors" (Ministry of Agriculture, 1981). Not only does the new type of citizen consumer responsible for his own acts of consumption, acquire the role of protagonist, but also the administration, who must watch over his interests in a decade of great expansion for the food and agricultural industry and, in its wake, food advertising. A high urban demand for products goes with all this. "It has compelled public authorities in all countries to more and more daily interventions in the production and distribution processes of food both to ensure the honesty of business transactions as well as to guarantee to the maximum the sanitary conditions of all those products for human consumption" (National Institute of Consumption, 1981). Similarly, the National Institute of Consumption gives recommendations on how to learn to choose among foodstuffs, how to store them properly or even, for the first time how to lodge a complaint: "... and if you are not satisfied with your purchase, you should lodge the appropriate complaint at the provincial head office of inland trade" (National Institute of Consumption, Ministry of Trade and Tourism, undersecretary of domestic markets, 1980).

In the sense of looking to make consumers more responsible when making their purchases, the recommendations are clear: "To protect oneself against the negative aspects of advertisements, they must be viewed and heard with cold objectivity (...) it is possible to protect oneself against deceptive advertising" (Ministry of Agriculture, 1981). Food laws are beginning and leaflets indicating what legal aspects must be kept in food consumption mushroom. Everything lies within the framework of a beginning concern about food consumption that spread through Spain after the appearance in the spring of 1981 of the so-called Toxic Syndrome, an illness produced by the consumption of adulterated rapeseed oil. The very origins of the problem cause public bodies to take extreme precautions and bring food control down to local level. Information leaflets on the local government situation, with reminders of responsible purchasing norms, are frequent. In Madrid it was said: "The sale of lambs with heads, skin and offal is forbidden. The entrails must be dealt with in the cheap butcher's shop

controlled by the municipal health authorities”(Campaign for Consumer Guidelines, Community of Madrid, 1982). In Catalonia: “Buy oil in the shop or trade centre where you usually purchase things and where you know they will not deceive you (...)demand it is sold to you bottled, in a sealed and labelled container” (Campaign of guidelines for consumers, Generalitat of Catalonia, 1982).

The official response of the time seems to have been to go back to local products with health controls as information leaflets on the virtues of typical Spanish products make their appearance. The return to certain traditional eating habits, so reviled in the previous decades, become prominent in defining a balanced diet, and recommendations stress that some habits considered wrong be banned. Status seems to have affected food and the association between good products and expensive ones makes administrations underline the need to make a difference between the two things: “Contrary to what people believe, red meat, besides being cheaper, is much more nutritious and tasty than white meat” (National Institute of Consumption, 1981). Later in the decade we find: “Meat consumption does not need to be encouraged (...) however, we believe the population should value other foods (...) This way the diet will be both nutritious and acquired at a more reasonable priced” (Ministry of Health and Consumption , 1985).

Specific foods continue to be promoted, eggs, for example defined as a “complete food” and about which it is said “its richness in cholesterol is exaggerated” (Ministry of Health and Consumption, 1985). The eating of fish is persistently encouraged, its wide use in Spain being highlighted and indicating that “this is a very positive custom” (Ministry of Health and Consumption, 1985), and it is asserted again and again that “meat and fish are of equal food value” (Ministry of Health and Consumption, 1984). The effort to modify a diet with a high content of animal fats, inherited from the previous decade, continues: “The best meat is white pork...because of its lower fat content” (National Institute of Consumption, 1981).

Eating fruit is recommended: “In our country we have got rid of the idea that fruit is not necessary for health and is a useless luxury” and so two pieces daily are advised (Ministry of Health and Consumption, 1984). These are the first two steps towards what will later be the definition of the Mediterranean diet, not just because of the products, but by certain norms of eating not strictly dietary: “We keep to Spanish customs, three meals a day, but increasing breakfast a little as it is too scanty” (Ministry of Health and Consumption , 1985). The gentle but persistent interest in encouraging the use of olive oil by specific recommendations is not left aside even at the beginning of

the eighties “Many people do not like olive oil because of its taste and smell (...) It has more dietary virtues than the others” (Generalitat of Catalunya, 1982). This promotion of local products is intensified by Ministry of Agriculture publicity in favour of Spanish products and which increased with Spain’s entry into the European Community in 1986. The former is allotted the role of defender of national food industry products and begins the campaign “Spanish food products” (Ministry of Agriculture, 1987).

In the eighties the traditional gender roles are still to be seen with men and women fulfilling different functions and, although during the decade there is a growing trend to associate family values and equality, in reality equality is not as it would seem to be desired. Thus, in the middle eighties, gender is still a clear factor in the recommendations: “Bad temper in husbands, lack of appetite in children and all kinds of protests can be caused by an unappetising menu (Ministry of Health and Consumption , 1984) or “The housewife should carefully study her family’s likes and evaluate from the financial point of view whether it is worth buying a cheaper cut of meat with a lot of waste as it will not be eaten or serve portions of better quality that will be consumed entirely ” (Ministry of Health and Consumption, 1984).

The eighties continues to be a decade concerned with obesity. Specific products are pinpointed and there is an incipient and growing concern with the excessive calorie consumption. In the beginning it is associated with sweet products: “The excessive consumption of sweet products is to blame for the most part for our children’s fatness. Do not spend a large amount of the family budget on buying food that only affords calories” (Ministry of Health and Consumption, 1985). It is odd to contrast this with the recommendation in previous years with the clear advice to eat “Sugar and sweets daily” (Ministry of Health and Consumption, 1980). There is also concern that certain habits have been lost : “It is a pity that certain social classes have eliminated pulses from their menus, considering them as second class foods” (Ministry of Health and Consumption , 1980). This text shows us clearly one of the reasons for the change: the close relationship between traditional diet and low social class. This perception, accepted generally by the population, favours the spread of those products and food habits associated with a higher socio-economic status and the consequent rejection of those of lesser status.

The administration also points in this direction and stops its effort to give a new message. In the middle eighties recommendations are made to incorporate variety in diet by eating pasta, rice and cereals as replacements for the usual pulses: “Pasta and

rice can form part of our weekly menu replacing pulses and vegetables and th adding greater variety to our eating” (Ministry of Health and Consumption, 1985), or also: “White bread is more easily digested than wholemeal as its fibre content is lower and therefore more easily tolerated” (Ministry of Health and Consumption, 1985). With regard to fats: “It can be stated that diets with a high fat content allow a person involved in hard labour to give a better performance” (Ministry of Health and Consumption , 1985), thus by implication setting apart from this recommendation those groups with lighter work.

The late eighties and early nineties witness an important change in food recommendations beginning with a clear and swift swing towards the sphere of health: “Health by eating” we are reminded by the Ministry of Health and Consumption in 1991. This slogan is backed by the spread of what was already called the Mediterranean Diet, whose position as a healthy diet was strengthened under the aegis of the association established at the International Conference on the Diets of the Mediterranean (1993) where the relationship between life expectation and the consumption of products from specific geographical areas was affirmed. This resulted in institutional attention being focused on the recovery of some of the traditional eating habits, that in light of the recommendations of the time, appeared to have been lost: “In recent decades Spanish eating habits have undergone great changes that have begun to distance it from the Mediterranean diet, that researchers today consider as the most rational and the one that best fulfils the principles of natural eating!” (Ministry of Health and Consumption, 1991).

The relationship between health and eating and especially that between illness and a bad diet are the twin concepts characteristic of the nineties: “The goal is to spread information and knowledge about eating, nutrition and health, aimed at those who, aware of the importance that eating habits have on their health, wish to improve it by adopting healthy eating habits” (Ministry of Health and Consumption, 1991). Or : “To keep people healthy, to co-operate in the cure of illnesses or assure normal growth and development in children” (Ministry of Health and Consumption, 1991).

References to inadequate diets appear, reminders of the need to change eating habits, that either by excess or defect, produce upsets in health: “It could be enough to make small changes in living and eating habits to resolve disorders or prevent future diseases from appearing: stomach acidity, diarrhoeas, influenza, haemorrhoids, colds, overweight...(Ministry of Health and Consumption, 1992). It is the start of

medicalization in food, the governing bodies giving messages clearly linking cure and/or prevention of certain illnesses with a balanced diet. It is an ideal cultural environment for the spread of what will be called medifoods / health foods or functional foods at the opening of the new century.

The nineties also sees the beginning of the important relationship between physical exercise and health that will develop later on: "Doing physical exercise, which increases the use of energy, is the ideal complement to a diet" (Ministry of Health and Consumption , 1992). However, care in the use of medicines, especially for weight control, is stressed: "Treatment with drugs to control obesity must always be at a doctor's instigation" (Ministry of Health and Consumption, Health and Self-care , 1992). This comes at a moment when sociological reports are already noting the growing value given by the Spanish people to beauty and slimness. (Miguel, 1992; 1995; 1996). The fight against obesity, encouraged in the previous decades, seems to have become a problem in the nineties and is heightened in particular by the spread of light products by the food industry..

The ministry of Health and Consumption refers to health experts, doctors specialising in nutrition for reliable information. However, in the nineties other bodies, non-governmental groups, are turning to the food consumers and emitting similar messages, including the spreading of certain habits. Thus, for instance, in 2000 the Ministry of Health and Consumption and various consumer associations work together to spread what is called "The formula for a full life is simple: an active life plus healthy eating, the best of health". Collaboration is also open to the business world: "Cheap cut products: nutritious, light, delicious, you will be surprised" (Ministry of Agriculture, MERCASA, ANECAS, 2003).

Thus, if the nineties are characterised by the health aspect of eating, the twenty-first century begins with food risks, opening the way to experts concerned with hygiene and food safety. References are made to experts in the field of nutrition in the Faculties of Pharmacy, who are more concerned with risk prevention than people's nutrition.

In the nineties the Ministry of Health and Consumption (1992) slogan - with a pronounced individualistic nature- "Take care of your body, it has to last all your life" shows the individualization process recommendations are heading for, thinking of a consumer who decides for himself without others on what to eat and how. Hedonism, moreover, marks each initiative, as the need to seek the body's wellbeing by controlling food is pointed out: "Watch what you eat to feel well. You must relearn habits to

strengthen your wellbeing and control your weight” (Ministry of Health and Consumption, 2000).

In the decade beginning in 2000 food guides gain importance as definite means of educating in nutrition as does the pronounced educational nature of the administration with regard to eating. It is a time when already thought is being given to the effects or mistaken or wrong eating habits; erroneous both because of lack training, tanto as much as for the variety of messages from the different agents in the social sphere throughout the last decades. There is strong competition between the administration and advertising in transmitting norms of behaviour in suitable eating habits.

In 2001 the Agency for Food Safety takes the reins to protect food consumers at a moment of international crisis in the food industry with illnesses caused by the intake of foodstuffs, no longer outside official control, but unforeseeable by the bodies responsible for this control .

If before it was urged that traditional lore should be put aside, now a new avenue of information and official training are asked for. The family had been the point of reference and especially the housewife. Citizens are urged to take part in a debate on civil duties that the administrations take the responsibility of promoting by campaigns and which citizens should follow: “Food guides were created as backup for education in nutrition (...) and their aim is that the population should be aware of, accept and put into constant practice the dietary recommendations offered” (Spanish Agency for Food Safety, 2003). The family, fathers and mothers, are now regarded as an educational means favouring (or not) the integration and transmission of these good practices: “The parents' role in the formation of their children's eating habits and of a healthy life style is essential” Spanish Agency for Food Safety, 2003).

In the last stage, the recommendations do not have such a definite target, they lean more to an undefined body who has a duty to behave correctly without specifying whether these duties are towards themselves or their family. In any case the beginning of the century is marked by the educational direction taken by officialdom in food matters , it being taken for granted there is no longer an unquestionable reference point to indicate action. Important initiatives on the part of international bodies are appearing (such as the NAOS program for nutrition, physical exercise, and fight against child obesity or the Five a Day program) which stress a need to change eating habits. At the

moment, they are concentrating on what they call “The epidemic of the XX1st century”, obesity and overweight in an attempt to publicise the current new slogan “Eat something of everything”. Currently, attention is being focused on the child population and we will wait and see what the coming years bring us.

3. Changes in concepts in health and food: explanatory factors

Throughout the different decades analysed here, we have been able to see the changes happening not only in the food recommendations but also the social background. Many of the factors of social change in our most recent history are a reference point to understand the way recommendations and the very concept of what constitutes an appropriate diet have been subject to change. We are going to look at some of these aspects that may be considered as independent variables to explain the changes.

In the sixties and seventies food recommendations lay exclusively in the hands of agricultural institutions; they were paternalistic and transmitted an idea of a suitable diet whose central objective was to improve the food of a people living in underdeveloped conditions and that still had memories of hardship and hunger. Gradually the weight shifted in favour of bodies responsible for health and later consumption. The Ministry of Agriculture, that played a decisive role in the early sixties in spreading the basic concepts of a suitable diet, is relegated little by little to promoting national agricultural products. Its subordinate role in the food area is even more noticeable after Spain's entry into the European Community. On the other hand, bodies geared towards consumption begin to form the basic references, linking health and consumption by way of information from the Ministry of Health and Consumption. With this background food becomes more a field for action, with organisations formed focusing more on the role of the consumer and his/her education by means of the National Institute of Consumption.

It is against this backdrop of consumption that change takes place in Spanish society itself: in the early seventies information is directed at the urban population, when the trend of the Spanish population towards urban life is confirmed after the rural exodus. Later, in the middle eighties, and after the adulterated rapeseed crisis, consumer protection is sharpened. If at first it was more a question of recommendations of an informative nature, educating the citizen as a consumer, (look at labels, making good choices in the establishment etc.), in the eighties it is the reliability

of all that is state-regulated, clearly underlining the the protective nature of the State in food questions. However, the nineties the advertising nature of the recommendations made by institutions under the aegis of companies and non- governmental bodies, that, together with the State, help in the spread of food information of national products in a competing European market. The change can be seen from administrations interested in the Europeanization of Spain in the decade previous to the eighties to the era after entry into the EC, with a swing towards the traditionalism of the Mediterranean diet and national products.

Strangely, there is a return to the regulating and protective nature of the State once the XXIst century has begun, after two new food crises (that of the mad cows and the chickens with dioxins). These are assimilated by the institutions by the creation of a specific body, the Spanish Agency for Food Safety (Spanish initials, AESA) to take control of the situation and to focus on food safety and health promoted.

On the other hand, some of the advertising campaigns of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food analysed on the consumption of national products, such as Canary bananas, sugar olive oil or sardines, among other examples, are better explained as stimuli for the consumption of these products to favour or give an outlet to national agricultural production than as recommendations due to their nutritional or dietary value. Although it must be said their nutritional qualities or their relationship with the prevention of diseases may come guaranteed by the opinioof famous experts. The participation in these campaigns of interprofessional bodies (made up of all the strata of a production sector - for example, that of sugar- from primary production to distribution, from public administration to the professional organizations) makes what we say very clear. Therefore, we think the position of the agrarian sector, and when the industrialization process has advanced more, the food agricultural industry, and the aims of agricultural policies explain many of the food recommendations and an in-depth sociological study of them must bear this in mind. .

The variations are also significative with regard to the people targetted. If in the sixties the recommendations are directed at the rural housewife and her role as the only one responsible for feeding the family is gone into in depth, this role is gradually altered. In the seventies the traditional role of woman as a housewife changes, as the target becomes the urban woman, though the image of women as being responsible for the feeding and care of the family and home still persists. Although in the eighties society shows signs of asking for gender equality and women take up activities outside

the home, recommendations still respond for a time to the stereotype of the hardworking woman looking after her own to whom there is now offered the chance of devoting less time to cooking. In the nineties the target for recommendations becomes more individual and depersonalized, a consumer who seems to have no other concern except to feed him/her/self and look after his/her body. At the end of the decade family responsibilities in food themes reappear, though in a new form. The role of the family as coeducator is called for with the aim of bringing the educational food guidelines of the State in line with those of the family from which they appear to have become distanced. A perhaps late return to the family group after a period where the lessening of women's responsibilities in food has been replaced in part outside the home (by school canteens especially) though not within the family group itself.

The referee for reliability used in the food recommendations has also undergone important changes, going from the general practitioner in the sixties to researchers analysing nutrition in the following decade. This trend is reinforced in successive years by continued references to nutrition specialists, medical or pharmaceutical, that accompany the guidelines of the institutions as supreme sources of truth in order to eat correctly. From the eighties these experts are shown in a more technical light, as researchers, whose advice reflects the efforts of experimental science. After general information on food nutrients, made clear in simple sketches easily understood, such as the wheel of food first, and later the pyramid or rhombus, other more intricate household items appear. In the eighties food guides with a clear educational nature strengthened their position not only by offering nutritional information on foods but also so that this should be accepted and adopted as a dietary recommendation to be referred to.

But perhaps the role of the target facing the expert has undergone a greater change than that of the expert. In the sixties it was insisted that the doctor be consulted for correct guidance on food and the rural woman was asked to leave aside traditional knowledge based on experience. The low educational level of these women makes the guidance understandable as does the scant value the administrations of the time place on their skills and knowledge. In the following years more sophisticated messages, that include a large amount of technical information on nutrients in foods, reveal the growing educational level of the target. There is an overall educational nature of the process that seeks to have decisions on food in the home made on the basis of the nutritional knowledge of scientific experts. Rationality is considered the appropriate

model, though curiously enough, in some cases, what at those times was considered as rational eating has been later attacked as irrational. Likewise, what was traditional in the past and therefore, criticised harshly, is shown to be a correct food model at the end of the eighties and into the nineties and what constituted a luxury before is today common and what previously pointed to a low social status is today associated with the eating habits of the most highbrow elites.

Nonetheless, perhaps the most significant changes are those referring to what it is right and not right to eat, for implicit within them lies the idea of diet and health constantly promoted officially. In the sixties recommendations are reminiscent of models suitable for an underfed population who is being instructed on how to get rid of monotony in their diet by adding new products to their menu. It is quantity, in the name of variety, that is more important than any other recommendation, but in the seventies the effects of these guidelines can be seen by the models to get rid of the idea that being fat is healthy. Recommendations encouraging the consumption of manufactured foods and to add fish to a diet focused on animal fats are insisted on in order to break this association. Institutional objectives in the sixties and seventies are achieved as diet increases in variety and quantity, but this brings in its wake effects in the composition of the diet, showing a greater preference for meat, a product with a higher status symbol.

The late seventies and the eighties give way to recommendations to incorporate new products in the diet, substituting traditional ones. Pasta, rice, manufactured sweets occupy the space left by pulses, whose status symbol is low, that of the lowest class. But also because of this social symbolism highly valued new products, such as new vegetable oils, white meats and a group of products bespeaking modernity, in so much as they are far from those traditional, rural products of red meat, animal fats, pork, chicken, stews... All is relegated to a backward rural world, with the administration encouraging the desire of the urban population to leave it far behind. The age of scarcity quickly becomes that of overabundance without interruption and obesity, considered in the sixties and early seventies to be a matter affecting the child population, here crosses the age limits. The development policy that pervades the recommendations, the keenness to introduce manufactured foods into the diet and the drawing away from naturalness and rurality mark the beginning of the eighties. Everything leads to the appearance of new food problems and institutional concern about cholesterol and calorie excess begins, which problems are doubtless stem from recommendations of

previous decades and mark the early eighties and nineties. With regard to this, there is outstanding interest in reducing the consumption of sugar and sweet products, eating less meat and choosing lean meats and controlling the intake of hydrates including bread. The egg too is shown to be a dangerous product because of its effects on cholesterol. However, it is the expansion of low calorie products food industry advertising exploits to the full¹⁸. At this time there is a growing preoccupation with slimness. Gradually the recommendation not to put on weight grows in strength at a time when there is general access to food products and the food industry is greatly expanding and being accepted. In this context of overabundance, any excess can lead to obesity.

If at the start of the eighties, cholesterol and calories were problems, at the end of the decade, after the entry of Spain into the EEC, one can see the spread of products of a national character, that foster a different diet, identifying against a background of free circulation of goods and loss of national differences. Olive oil gains ground against animal-based fats although negative evaluations of some highly used ones (that of vegetable seeds in particular) are brought in. It is back to the beginning, to the traditional diets that appear with reference to previous times, but now better valued, while development policies seem to have peaked. The greatest spread of the promotion of the Mediterranean diet is in the late eighties and early nineties with an attempt to get back the foodstuffs from a more traditional Spain with a rural past, such as pulses, fruits and greens. Slimness becomes an ideal to follow and these products help to achieve it besides offering a certain national identity by way of food.

In the nineties there is a kind of medicalization of food recommendations. The association between health and food is strengthened when a causal relationship is established between the consumption of certain products with the presence or absence of certain diseases. The established relationship shows the target at whom the information is directed how to achieve optimum health and avoid or cure diseases by the consumption of specific foods.

If non-food aspects were introduced on caring for the home in the first decades, the element outside food is now physical exercise as a decisive factor to accompany a suitable diet. But perhaps the latter is the only common factor as the relationship between food and health leads to an extreme association between foods giving rise to wellbeing or malaise, it being up to the consumer to follow the path of health or illness. Control over one's own body is behind these recommendations in the search for the perfect body, naturally svelte and slim, that shows not only health but also the ability of

self-control also in the area of food.

Perhaps this is the reason why at the beginning of the century the insistence as an official slogan that there are no good foods and no bad foods reaches its peak. Nor are there right and wrong diets, which would seem to indicate the the recommendation of the previous decade has been taken to the extreme. Citizens have exercised self control in eating and have gone to extremes to achieve slimness, even losing sight of health to succeed. There is official visible concern for miracle diets, especially in the search for the ideal weight at any price (it is the time when institutions are worried about anorexia and bulimia) recalling the importance both of excesses as well as scarcities. The slogan is to be "Eat something of everything" which is a reminder of the sixties, but then because of a scarcity of food, and now because of an excess. Concern is shown by what now is officially known as the epidemic of the twenty first century, obesity and also overweightness. We can expect an official war against these enemies as a result of the important link established by researchers between the development of a large number of illnesses and the weight increase of an overfed population. The fat boys and girls of the sixties, today parents, would seem to have the moral duty to achieve their children's ideal weight and their own, showing the same responsibility as in the past when values of another nature were transmitted.

As we indicated at the beginning of this paper, it is not possible to establish an unquestionable causal relationship between food recommendations and the factors that cause them to vary. We do believe, however, that this work gives a good account of the existence of this relationship, although it is complicated to determine the connections exactly. At each historical moment food recommendations are working with a concept of suitable diet that is highly changeable and which is conceived in response to social changes and institutional convenience. It could be said that a large part of the problems we see today were forged in the past and seem to be the unintentional effects of institutional actions designed to modernize Spanish society. The urge to leave aside traditional diet and its products and its tastes is shown today in a set of eating habits a long way from the traditional diets of yore. The seeking of variety to break the dietary monotony in times of scarcity was accompanied by the appearance of new products, that did not always provide the hoped for health and yet substituted the the previous products. The promotion of our own, proclaimed by the Mediterranean diet seems to fall on deaf ears in some homes, where traditional models are no longer referred to for action and lack status. The proposal to recover these habits seems a complicated and

even impossible task today not just because of a lost or unknown past but also because of a large number of interests apart from the State. These new agents are directing recommendations today towards a top quality diet, sometimes with greater insistence and influence than the institutions themselves and above all, not always in the same direction.

There remain, doubtless fields to be explored that could enrich the analysis of what could be called a social history of Spanish food. They could also help to get to know better and face the coming so-called food destructuring.

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FOOTNOTES.

1.This work forms part of the international research "The Mediterranean diet and eating habits", financed by the Spanish National Plan I+D+I and whose team leader is Cecilia Díaz-Méndez. The Universities of Oviedo, Rovira, and Virgili as well as the National Open University, the Polytechnic University of Valencia and the Universities of Oporto,(Portugal)and Naples are collaborators in the project.

2. It is not the case with sociologists who have been studying food from the standpoint of agricultural sociology and some economists of the food agricultural system. On this topic, see Díaz-Méndez and Gómez Benito(2005)and Díaz-Méndez (2005).

3. Around 1,500 documents have been used, selected by years and decades. A content analysis was made that served as an empirical reference point for this work.
4. In the current political organization of the Spanish state, the Autonomous Communities (17) constitute the regional government with ample legislative, executive and judicial powers and wide powers also for fiscal policy, tax raising and full and almost exclusive rights in nearly all spheres of government. The Autonomous Communities function almost as states in a federal system.
5. The National Institute for Consumption was created in 1975, but has been linked to the Ministry for Health and Consumption since the latter's creation in 1981.
6. The First Development Plan was set in motion in 1964 a four-year plan. Four would be started.
7. For more information on agrarian policy and the agricultural system in the early years of Franco, see Gómez Benito, 1995.
8. SEA was the Spanish version of the Cooperative Extension Service of the U.S.A. It was created in 1995 with financial aid from the U.S.A. and expert assessment from Spain. On this topic, see Sánchez de Puerta (1996) and Gómez Benito and Luque Pulgar (2007).
9. It has to be borne in mind that the sixties saw what has been called "the crisis of traditional agriculture (and that of society) and the modernization process of agriculture began, following the model of the green revolution.
10. In the late sixties factory farming began to be developed (poultry and pig) and the cattle sector was developed by the spread of new cattle fodder, that would increase the intake of proteins of animal origin, recommended by all the agencies and nutrition and healthy eating experts. More details on this see Reports II(1970) and III(1975) Foessa (1976:205 AND 1976:509-510, respectively).
11. Meat consumption was lower than that in Italy, Greece and Yugoslavia (Foessa report, 1966).
12. The production series of the Ministry of Agriculture reveal the main products from 1960 upto 1970, by which we can see the growth in meats, especially of chicken and pork, eggs, milk, sugar, fish and fruits, while cereals, pulses and vegetables show scant increase. In general diet increases and diversifies.
13. This appears in inverted commas in the original.
14. In the sixties agriculture was no longer the main occupation. According to the Agricultural Census of 1972, the active agricultural population was 25% of the whole. But the inequalities between town and country continued to be very acute. However, throughout the seventies there is a growth in elements of material wellbeing that plunge Spaniards into the modern consumer society. As Castillo Castillo (1987) reminds us children born in this decade do so in an environment of noticeable material wellbeing.

On the other hand, the greater acquisitive power of Spaniards is shown in that for the years 73-74 , spending on food represents 38% of the total family spending (compared with the average 27.9% of the EEC), but quite lower than the 48.6% of the years 1964-1965, as shown by the family budget survey.

15. In capital letters in the original.

16. In 1973, the food spending framework, by product type, was as follows: fresh products, 33.4%; traditional conversions 15.9%; non-traditional conversions 29.4%; processed foods 21.3%. The last two, that indicate the change in food offers, that year represented 50.7% of the total food spending in homes, compared with 41.2% of ten years previously and the 59.2% it will represent ten years on (Abad and Naredo, 1977:267).

17. In sociological studies on eating in these years, and with regard to eating habits, a change in the meal system is instigated that is more fitted to needs and work timetables and similar to the European meal system (FOESSA report, 1970:715). In the same report, the importance of the aesthetic values, human relationships etc. that mark the act of eating is acknowledged.

18. Within the reference project to which this work belongs, a study has been made of the understanding of health and eating in food industry advertising from the sixties to the year 2000 (Díaz-Méndez and Bastida Blázquez, 2007, in print).