

Julia Désirée Huber (2016), Food Consumption Patterns of the Local Population on the Greek Island of Samothraki

Abstract

Today's food consumption patterns in Greece have moved away from the healthy food consumption patterns most Greeks followed until the mid 1960s. Reasons for this change are manifold and reach from globalization, industrial development, population growth, urbanization as well as climate change to a homogenization of lifestyles and an erosion of the Mediterranean diet cultural heritage. But health is not the only dimension affected by changing lifestyles. Unsustainable patterns of food production and consumption are closely interlinked with the degradation of the environment and the natural resources as well as serious social and economic problems.

Back in the mid 1960s many people on the Greek mainland as well as on the numerous islands experienced poverty and lived a simple, agrarian life in close touch with nature. The Greek island of Samothraki was food self-sufficient up until the mid 1960s. However, today the island faces several social and ecological challenges. The aim of the thesis is to find out how the changes in Mediterranean food production and consumption have influenced Samothraki's food consumption patterns over the past 50 years. Due to a lack of official statistics, there is only little data available on the past and present food supply of the Greek island and no data on food demand. Hence, the present study explores, from a social-ecological perspective, the current food consumption patterns of the local population on Samothraki. The empirical data was collected through interviews with locals of different age, gender and occupation by using a quantitative food consumption questionnaire, complemented by exploratory interviews. The questionnaire focuses only on the summer season (May to October) in order to avoid a seasonal bias and addresses food frequency, food quantity, food sources, food choices as well as the socio-economic background of the interviewees.

The results of the study indicate that the island's food production and consumption patterns have changed greatly. During summer about 50 % of all the food consumed by local respondents of the survey is imported to the island, a number, which is likely to be higher during winter when agricultural production ceases. However, the findings also show that some traditional food production and consumption patterns have been preserved. About 50 % of the food consumed by local interviewees, at least in summer, is obtained from local sources. As elderly respondents adhere significantly more to traditional food production and consumption patterns than young interviewees the share of imported food may likely increase further in the future, threatening the social and ecological sustainability of the island.