

# **Why Was the Nutritional Transition so Slow in the Mediterranean Europe? Insights from the Consumption of Dairy Products in Spain (1950-1965)**

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Why was the nutritional transition so slow in Mediterranean Europe? Why did what we today call a Mediterranean diet (featuring moderate energy intakes and a strong orientation towards foods of vegetal origin) persist as late as after the Second World War? This paper seeks to contribute to give an answer to this question by means of a study of the causes why the consumption of dairy products (one of the major carriers of Western nutritional transitions) remained low in Spain in the 1950s and early 1960s – that is, right before milk became a massively consumed commodity.

The article relies on quantitative material elaborated from official statistical sources (household budget surveys, in particular) and qualitative material taken mostly from professional dairy journals. These materials are interpreted from a political economy perspective that places Louis Malassis' synthesis within a structuralist ontology. The paper challenges the current state of the art by portraying it as reductionist. The state of the art is heavily oriented towards environmental and developmental explanations which the article shows to be only a part of the story. Yet, the persistence of a Mediterranean diet had to do with economic backwardness, which restricted consumer income, and with the environmental constraints prevailing in southern Europe, which were ill-suited to the production of cow's milk under organic conditions. But had these been the only factors at play, the consumption of dairy products should have increased much faster.

The article introduces then the role played by the political economy of the food system, in particular the failure of the dairy industrialisation policy implemented by the Franco regime during these years. It also shows the substantial analytical space that needs to be covered by a qualitative element: consumer perceptions about food quality. In a way that could probably be extended to other Western countries, the nutritional transition is presented as a process that was less teleological than is commonly argued.