



Abstract

A North–South Comparison of Commercially Produced Foods Sold in European Public Universities [†]

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Background and objectives: University food environments (FEs) play a crucial role in preventing nutrition-related diseases. However, there is a lack of in-depth studies on these environments, especially those comparing different sociocultural contexts. Thus, we analysed the availability and characteristics of commercially produced food supplies between a Northern European and a Southern European university.

Methods: We conducted a cross-sectional observational study at OsloMet (Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway) and the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU, Spain). A nutritional quality assessment of food products was carried out using three nutritional profile models (NPMs), those developed by the Spanish Agency for Consumption, Food Safety and Nutrition (AECOSAN), the UK nutrient profiling model (UK NPM), and the Norwegian Food and Drink Industry Professional Practices Committee (Matbransjens Faglige Utvalg [MFU]), as well as a combination of these models. Additionally, food items were categorized according to processing level (NOVA system).

Results: The percentage of foods classified as having low nutritional quality (LNQ) was significantly higher at the UPV/EHU (54.5% of total products) compared to OsloMet (40%) ($p < 0.001$). The majority of the products offered were categorized as ultra-processed. However, there were no significant differences in the proportion of ultra-processed foods between the two universities (OsloMet: 86.1%, UPV/EHU: 83.3%, $p > 0.05$). **Discussion:** This study reveals North–South differences in terms of the availability of LNQ food products, with a higher proportion in the Southern university. This result agrees with the opinion of the university community about these FEs; more students and staff from OsloMet considered that they are usually able to choose “healthy” foods compared to those from the UPV/EHU [1,2]. These findings underscore the need for the development of interventions and policies that promote healthier campus FEs and consider sociocultural contexts.

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