

Healthy Eating Campus: Social Marketing Strategy for Mediterranean Diet Adoption

Sandra Gomes, Mafalda Nogueira
IPAM Porto, Portugal

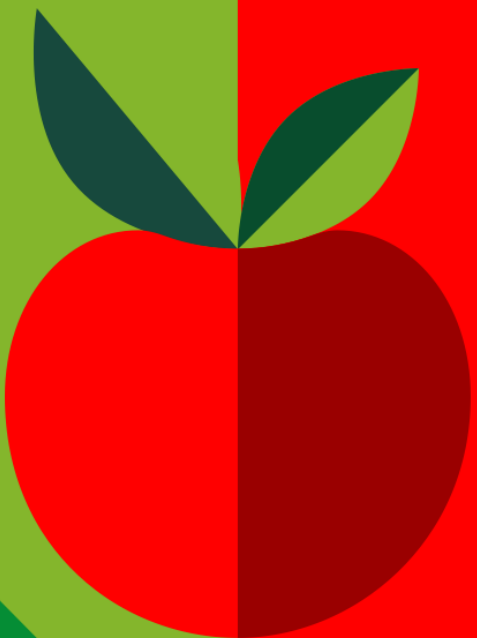
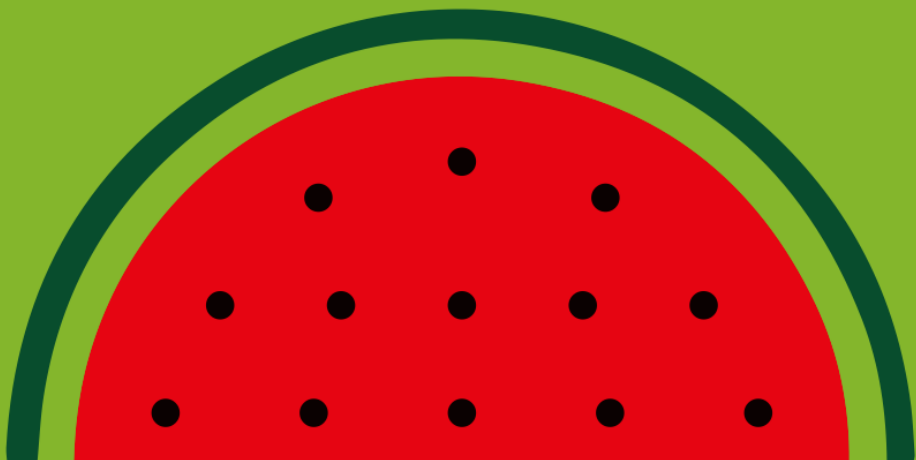


**WORLD
SOCIAL
MARKETING
CONFERENCE**

ALICANTE, 5 - 7 NOVEMBER 2025



EAT LOCAL
EAT SEASONAL
EAT REAL



MEDDiET

- MENUS 4 CAMPUS -



PROJECT OVERVIEW

Healthy Eating Campus: Social Marketing Strategy for Mediterranean Diet Adoption



PROJECT

TEAM

PUBLICATIONS

RESOURCES

NEWS

: PORTUGAL + TURKEY + CROATIA

This work is financed by national funds through FCT – Foundation for Science and Technology, I.P., under the project PRIMA/0008/2022, PRIMA/0009/2022, PRIMA/0010/2022 and PRIMA/0011/2022.

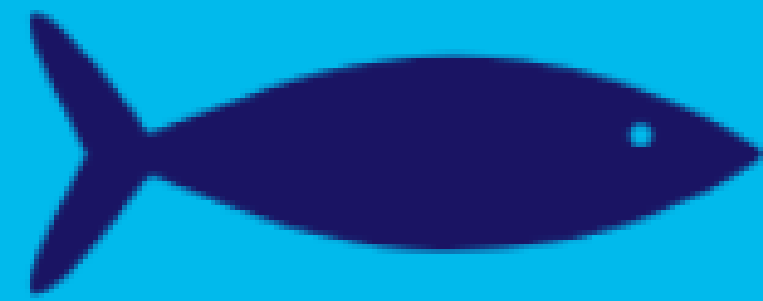


OUR MISSION

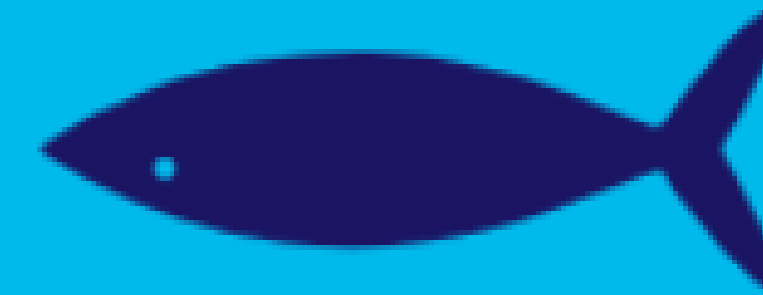
Our mission is to promote the adherence to the Mediterranean food pattern in higher education institutions using social marketing strategies.

MEDDiET

- MENUS 4 CAMPUS -



OUR Aim



We aim to identify and intervene in priority areas to promote healthier and more sustainable food habits, engaging all the stakeholders involved in this food system.

OUR VISION

Our vision is to change the food service paradigm by creating a new concept of healthy and sustainable food service supported in the Mediterranean food pattern.

We also aspire to be a reference in terms of food offer and to create solutions to meet the emerging needs of consumers.

We hope that the knowledge gained from our comprehensive multicultural dataset can help and inspire the adaptation and implementation of the Mediterranean pattern in food service in other countries.

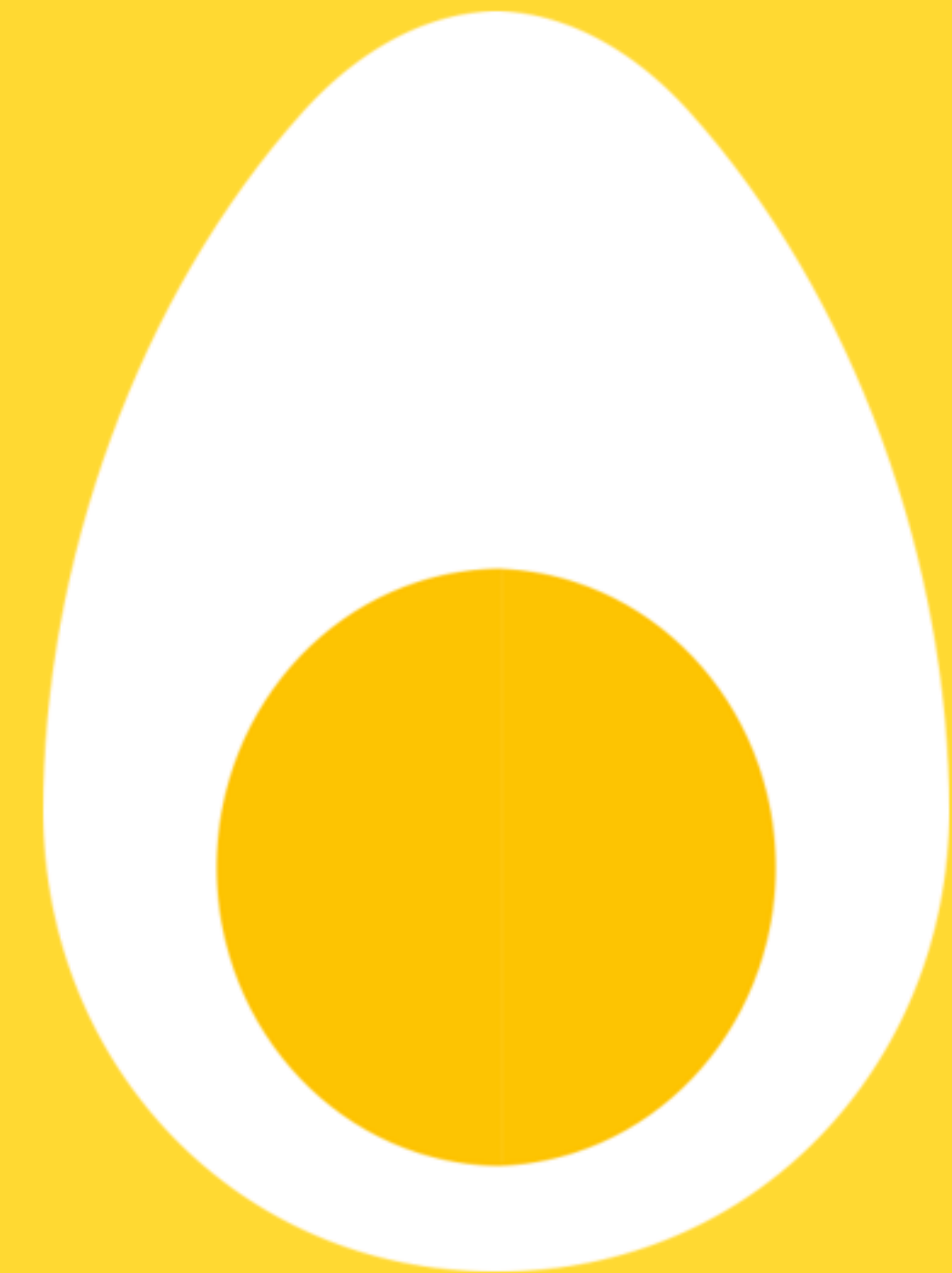
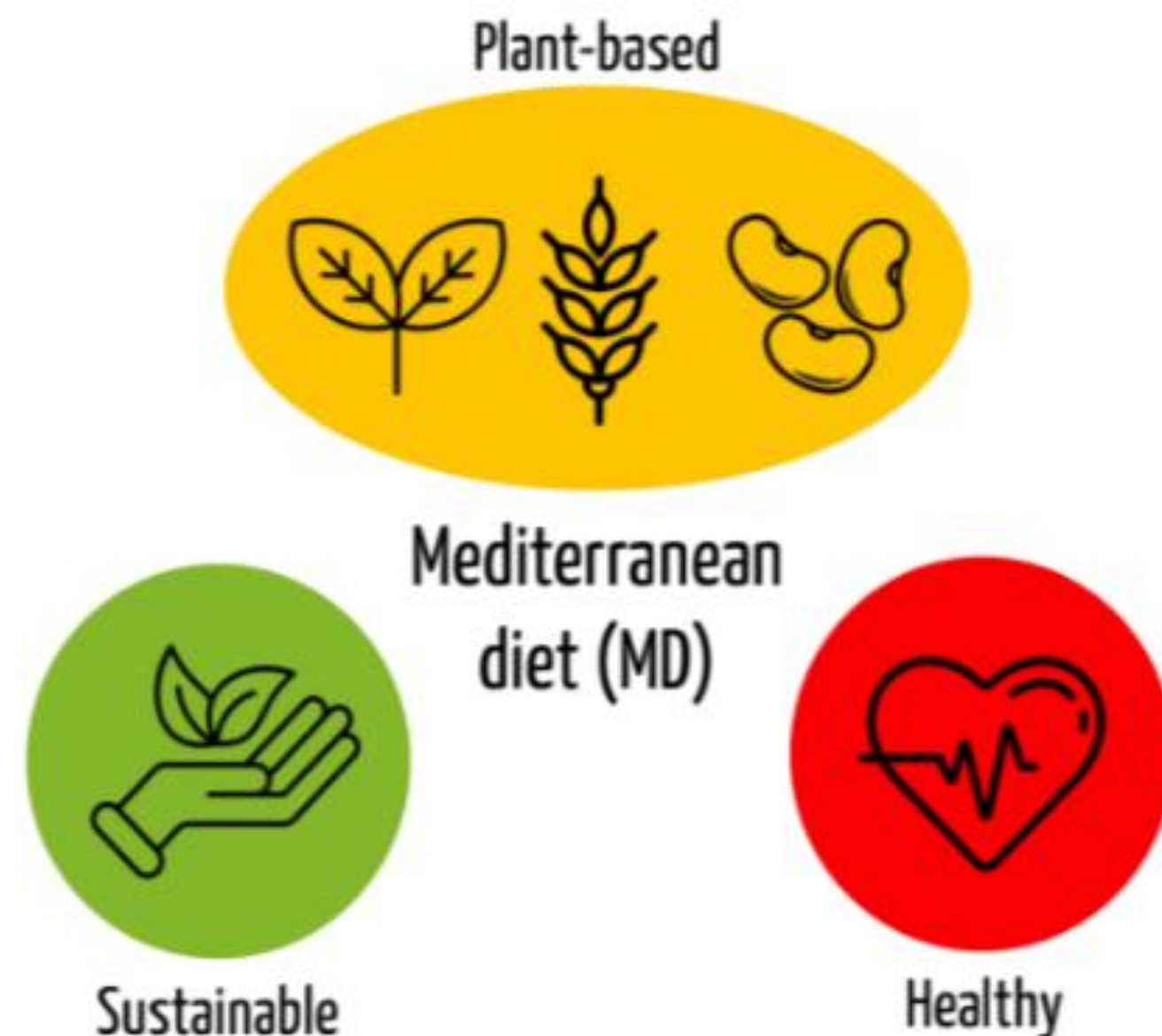
RELEVANCE OF THE PROJECT



RELEVANCE OF THE PROJECT

Mediterranean Diet

The Mediterranean diet is rising as a potentially **healthier option** to promote **wellbeing** and **long-term sustainability**, and is being largely discussed as a **positive contributor to reach SDGs**



RELEVANCE OF THE PROJECT

Food Service

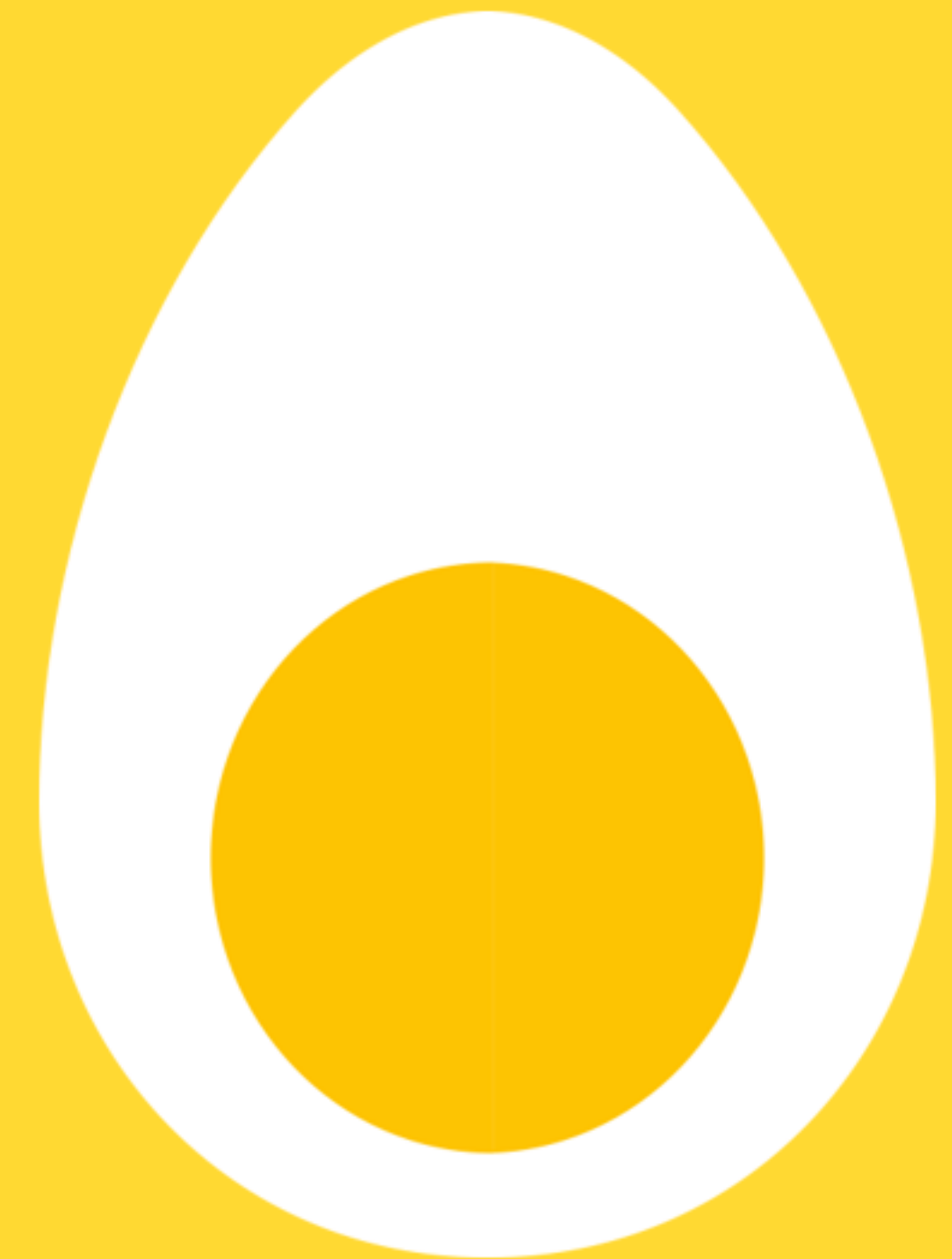
67 millions consumers / day

1 in 4 meals is eaten out of home

1 in 2 meals is eaten at the workplace

More than 1 in four 4 meals is eaten at school

More than 1 in four 10 is eaten at the social / health sector



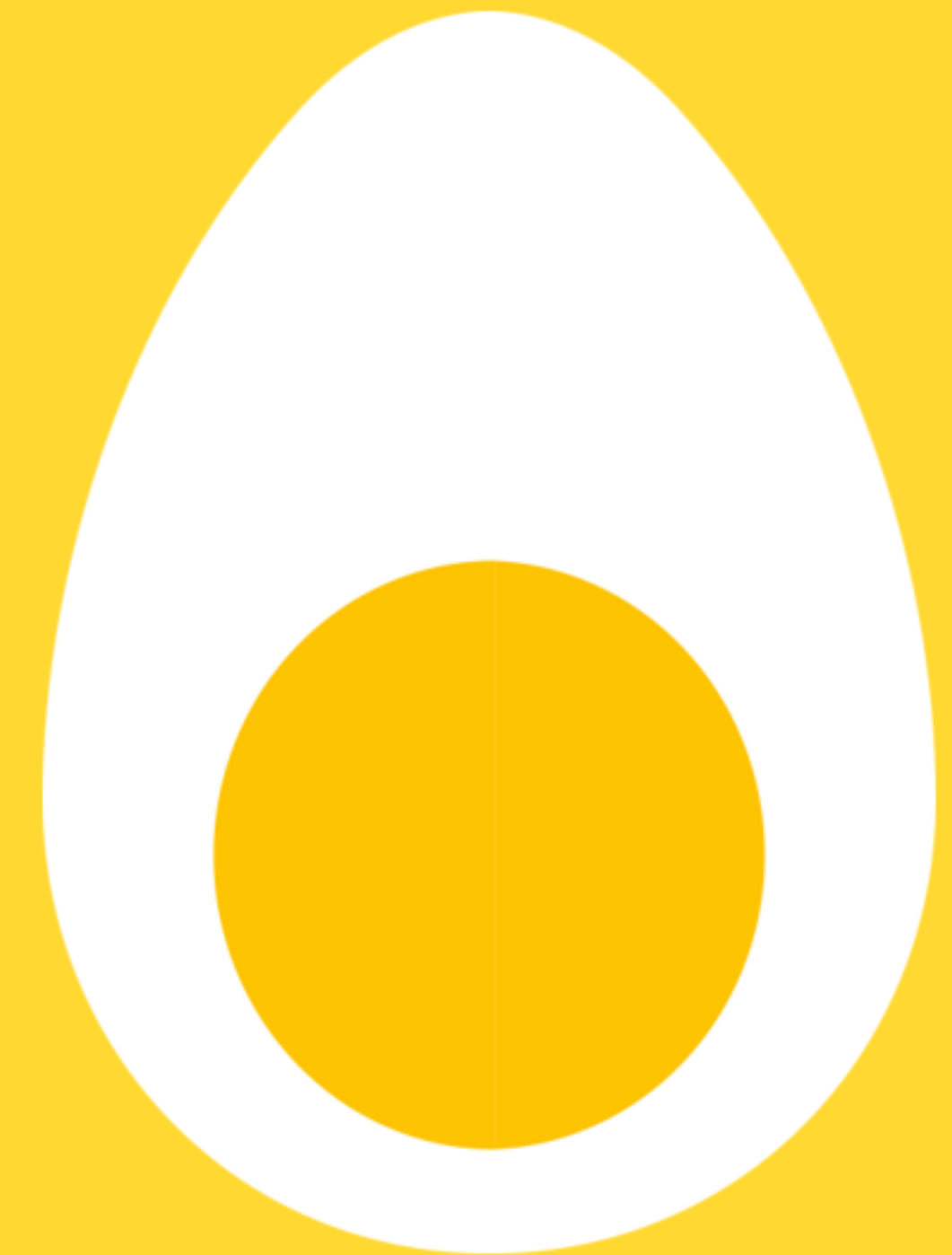
CONTEXT

Food Service

In Europe, it is estimated that an average of **165 million meals are produced in food service every day** (Food Service Europe, 2022).

This sector constitutes an important setting for **public health interventions**, potentially educating consumers and modulating behaviours through the meals provided.

Few studies were found on food service offers in canteens from higher education canteens.



CONTEXT

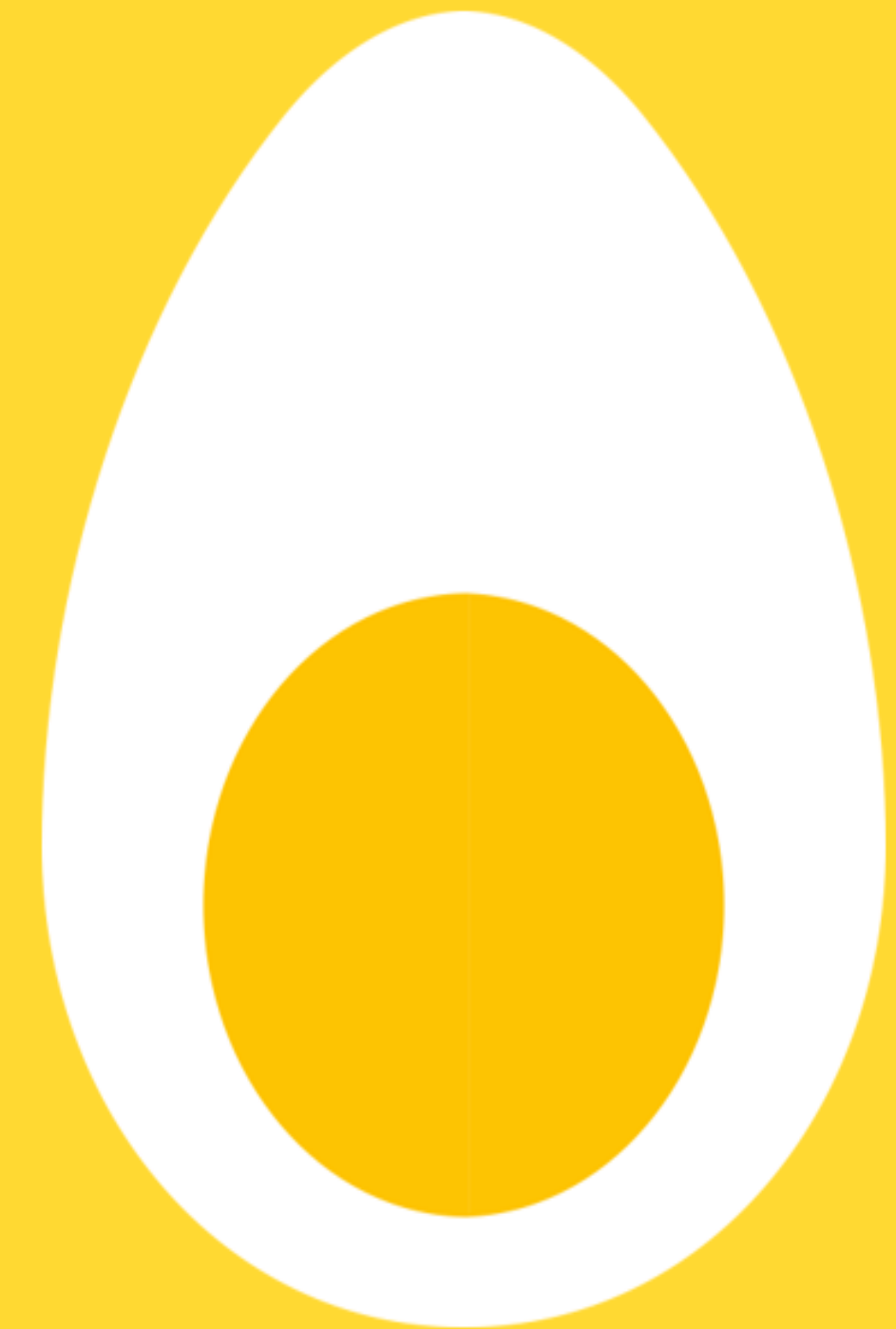
Food Service in Higher Education Canteens

Studies have characterized meals in HE canteens as **unbalanced, high in calories, fat, saturated fat, salt, sugars, meat and processed meat**, supplying **low quantities of vegetables, whole-grains, fruit, nuts, pulses and olive oil**, presenting a pattern drifting away from the Mediterranean diet (Šatalić et al., 2004).

University students are in a **transition to adulthood**, in which lifestyles are influenced by several factors that condition decision-making:

- distance from the family
- sudden changes in routines, namely in terms of schedules
- changes in the surrounding environment
- more independence and autonomy, particularly in eating.

In the first year of higher education, there is a tendency to **gain weight and increased prevalence of overweight and obesity** (Garrido & Prada, 2016)





p=portion Serving or portion size based on frugality and local habits

Regular physical activity
Adequate rest
Conviviality
Wine (and other alcoholic fermented beverages) in moderation and respecting social beliefs



Biodiversity and seasonality
Traditional, local and eco-friendly products
Culinary activities


DIAGNOSIS



1. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT



32 Exploratory Interviews



12 Interviews



8 Interviews



12 Interviews

2. DIAGNOSIS

OFFER | CANTEENS



85 In-Depth Interviews with Stakeholders
(canteen managers, food service companies, HEIs)



30 Interviews



25 Interviews



30 Interviews



Evaluation of 52 Menus



14 menus




24 menus




14 menus


DEMAND | STUDENTS




1614 students' surveys + 11 focus group




510 students



500 students



604 students



3. INTERVENTION PROPOSALS

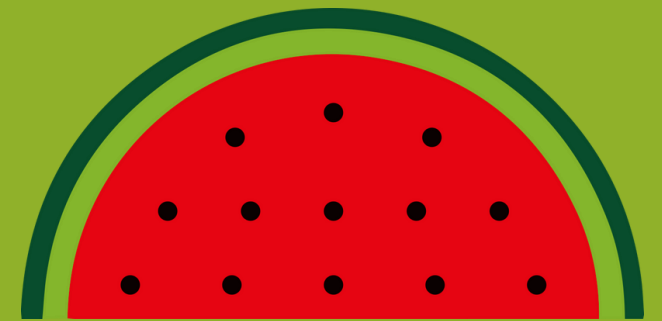


1. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

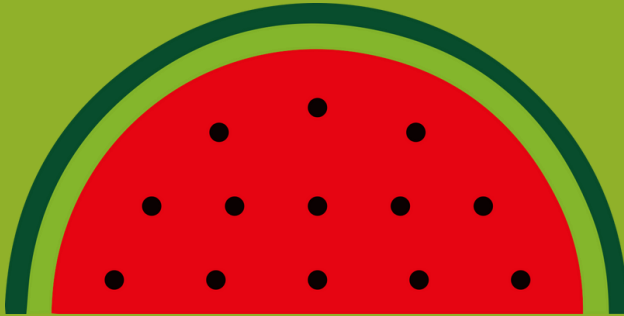
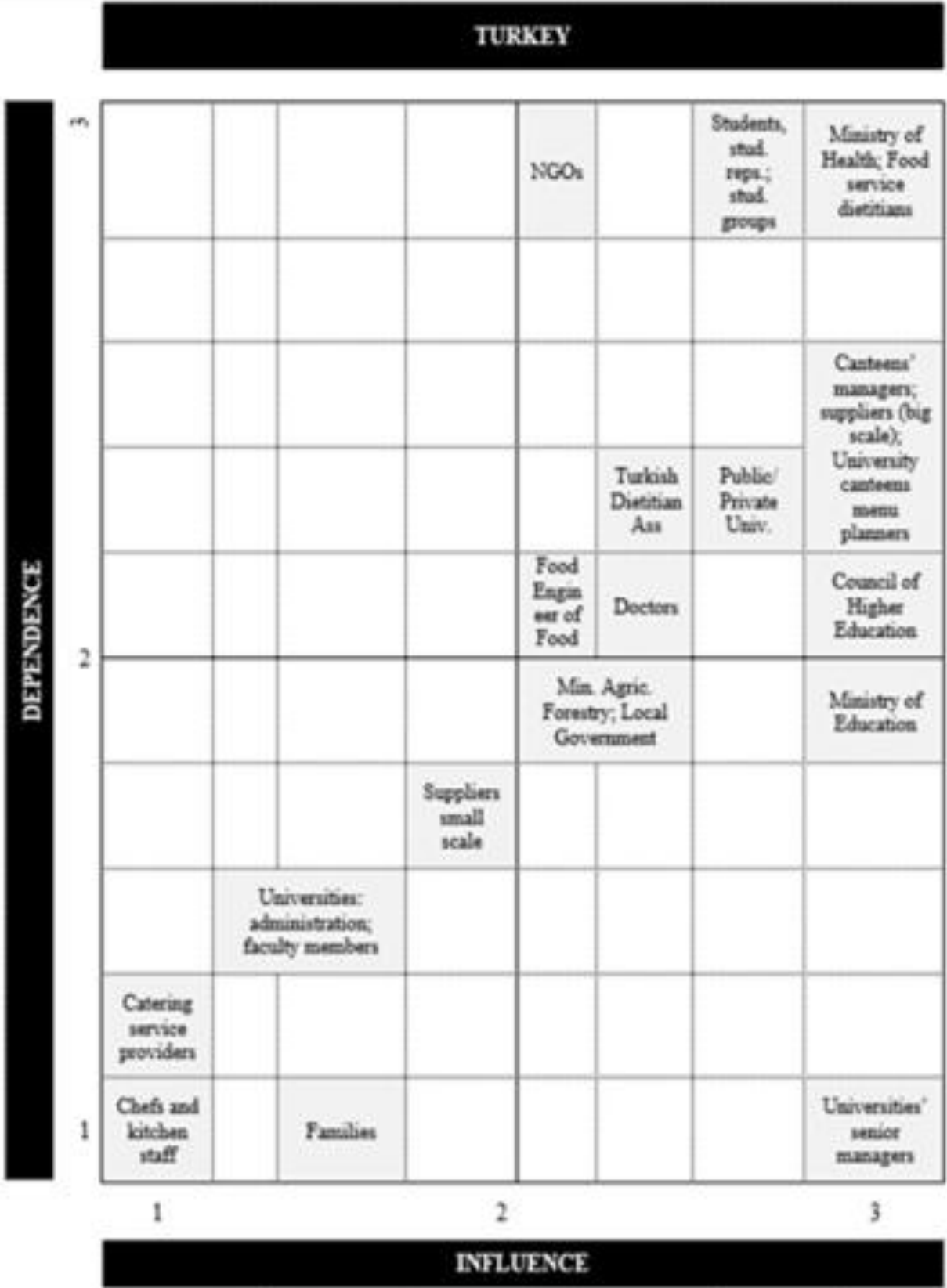
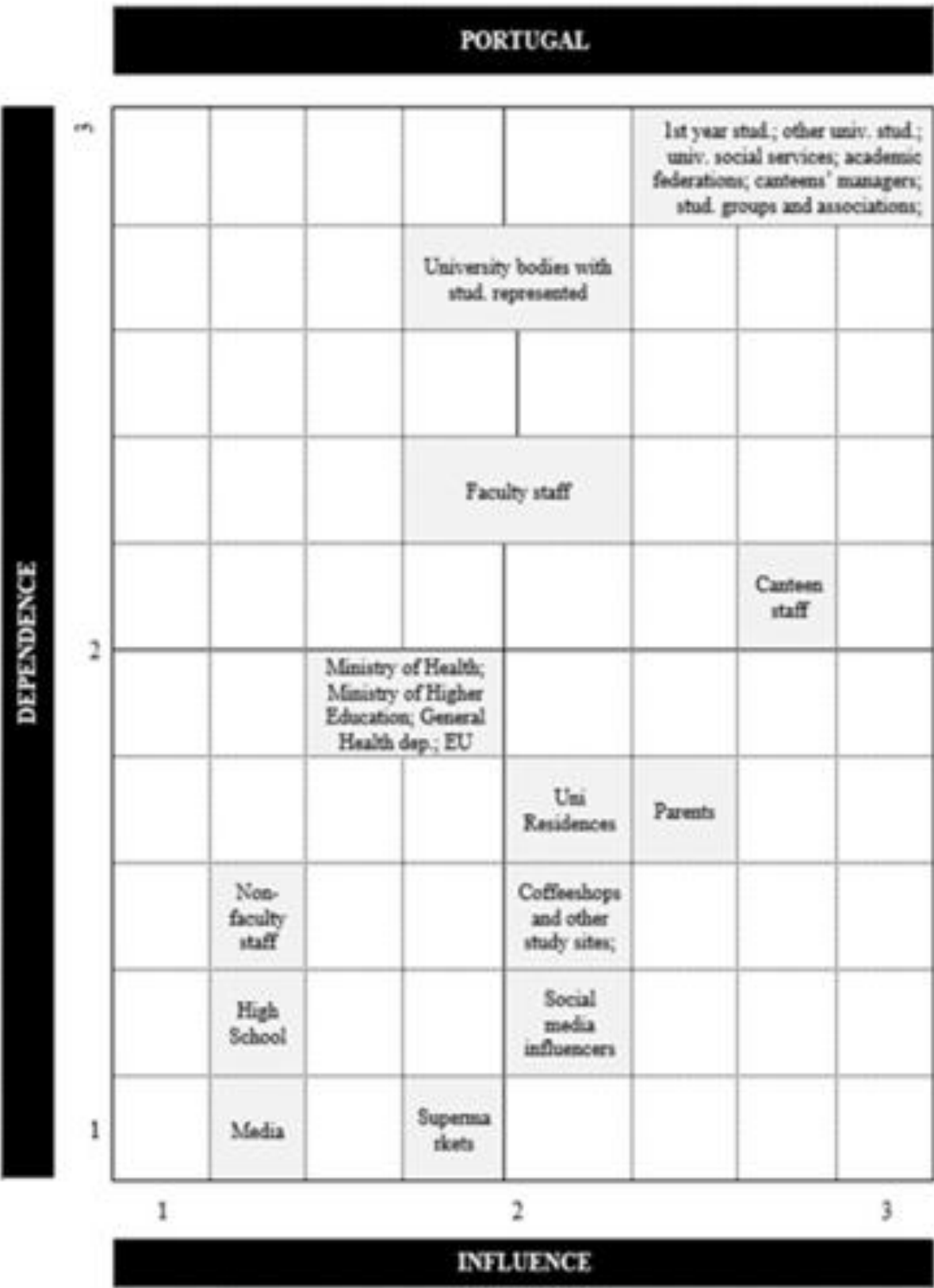
Identification of main stakeholders in HEIs

		Portugal	Turkey	Croatia
Total number of stakeholders		29	26	29
Number by segments	Upper level	4	8	7
	HEI	8	4	5
	Students	6	4	4
	Canteens	2	4	4
	Nutritionists	2	3	3
	Other	7	4	7

- Total number of stakeholders are similar in the 3 countries
- Turkey and Croatia identify more segments of stakeholders in upper level (deans and managers) than Portugal. Portugal presents a more decentralized HE system



Priority Stakeholder Matrices





2. DIAGNOSIS

OFFER | CANTEENS



14 menus



24 menus

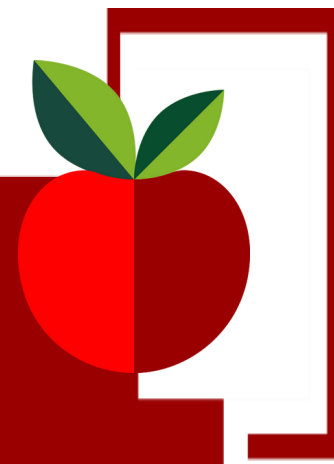


14 menus



Evaluation of MD menus

Task A - MeDCIn
(MD Compliance Index)



- Tool Development
- Guidelines for application

Task B - Application of
MeDCIn to evaluate
menus



- Evaluation of 52 menus
on the 3 countries

Task B - Assess the
Water and Carbon
Footprint of menus



- Assessment (LCA) of
the same 52 menus

Menu Mediterranean Index and Characterization

OFFER | CANTEENS



14 menus



24 menus



14 menus

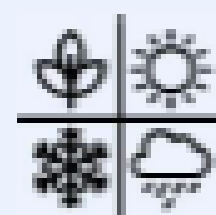


Evaluation of MD menus

Key findings

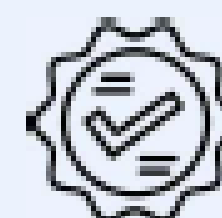
Seasonality

Seasonality difficult to assess - availability of all types of foods all year



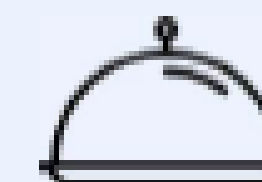
Compliance

Low compliance by low variety of key MD foods (pulses, vegetables and MD dishes)



Offer

High consumption of processed meat in PT and HR





Main results from the Interviews with canteens stakeholders

- Even if the canteens offered healthier options, the students wouldn't choose them.
- Students have a strong preference for meat in terms of protein, followed by fish and finally vegetarian/vegan.
- **The biggest barrier that canteens have is the price. It's quite challenging to implement healthier options when they have a very small profit margin, especially canteens that charge social prices (i.e., 3 to 4€).**
- In addition, companies are afraid to take risks when they already know what sells, i.e. less healthy and more fatty food.
- Most canteens are willing and open to possible collaboration with universities.

DEMAND | STUDENTS



510 students



500 students



604 students



1614 students' surveys + 11 focus group



1614 university students



n = 500



n = 604



n = 510



71.2%



26.6%



average age of **22.4 years old**
(*SD* = 5.27)



76.7% full-time university students



85.1% pursuing an **undergraduate degree**



26.8% on Life Sciences



23.6% on Formal Sciences

DEMAND | STUDENTS



510 students



500 students



604 students



1614 students' surveys + 11 focus group

Online questionnaire (Qualtrics) to assess students' perceptions of their university canteens and the Mediterranean Diet (available in 4 languages).

**Sociodemographic
screening**

**Health status
screening**

**Dietary practices
scale**

**Perceptions about food services and offers in campus canteens
scale**

**- NET promotion score
- Willingness to pay**

**Mediterranean Diet
Adherence
index**

**Mediterranean Diet
Knowledge scale &
Information seeking**

DEMAND | STUDENTS



510 students



500 students



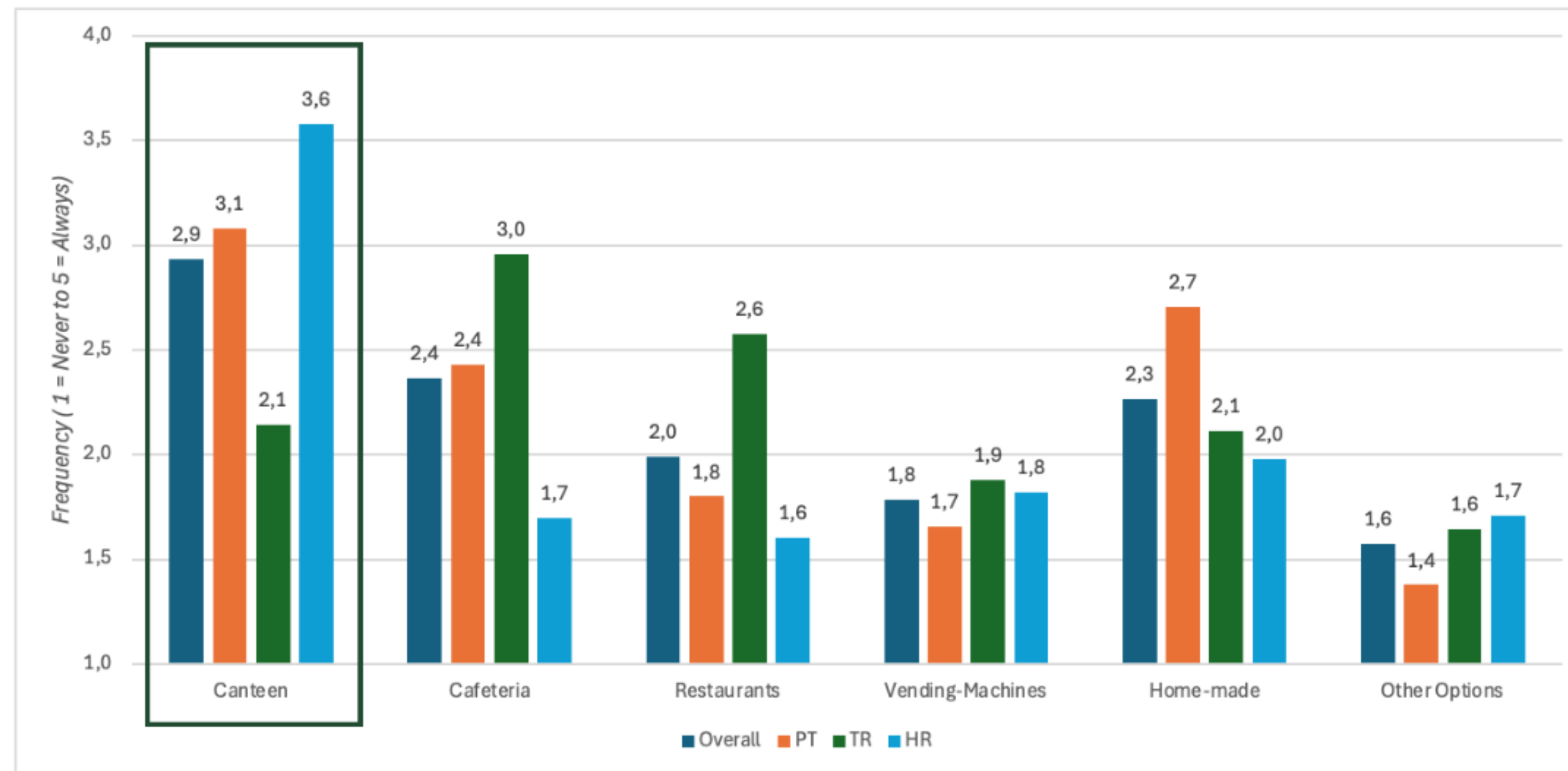
604 students



1614 students' surveys + 11 focus group

Results

Dietary Practices on Campus



DEMAND | STUDENTS



510 students



500 students



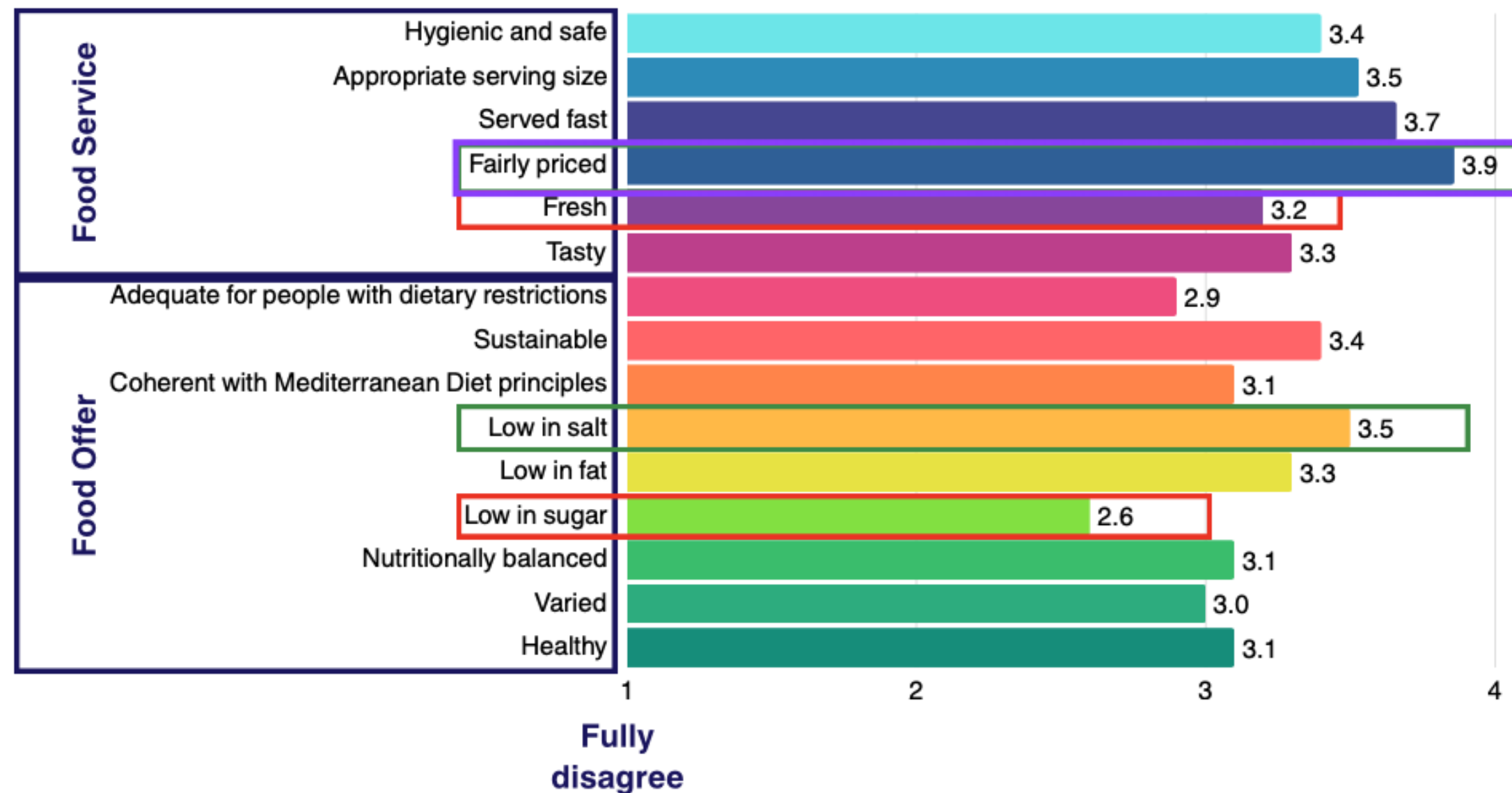
604 students



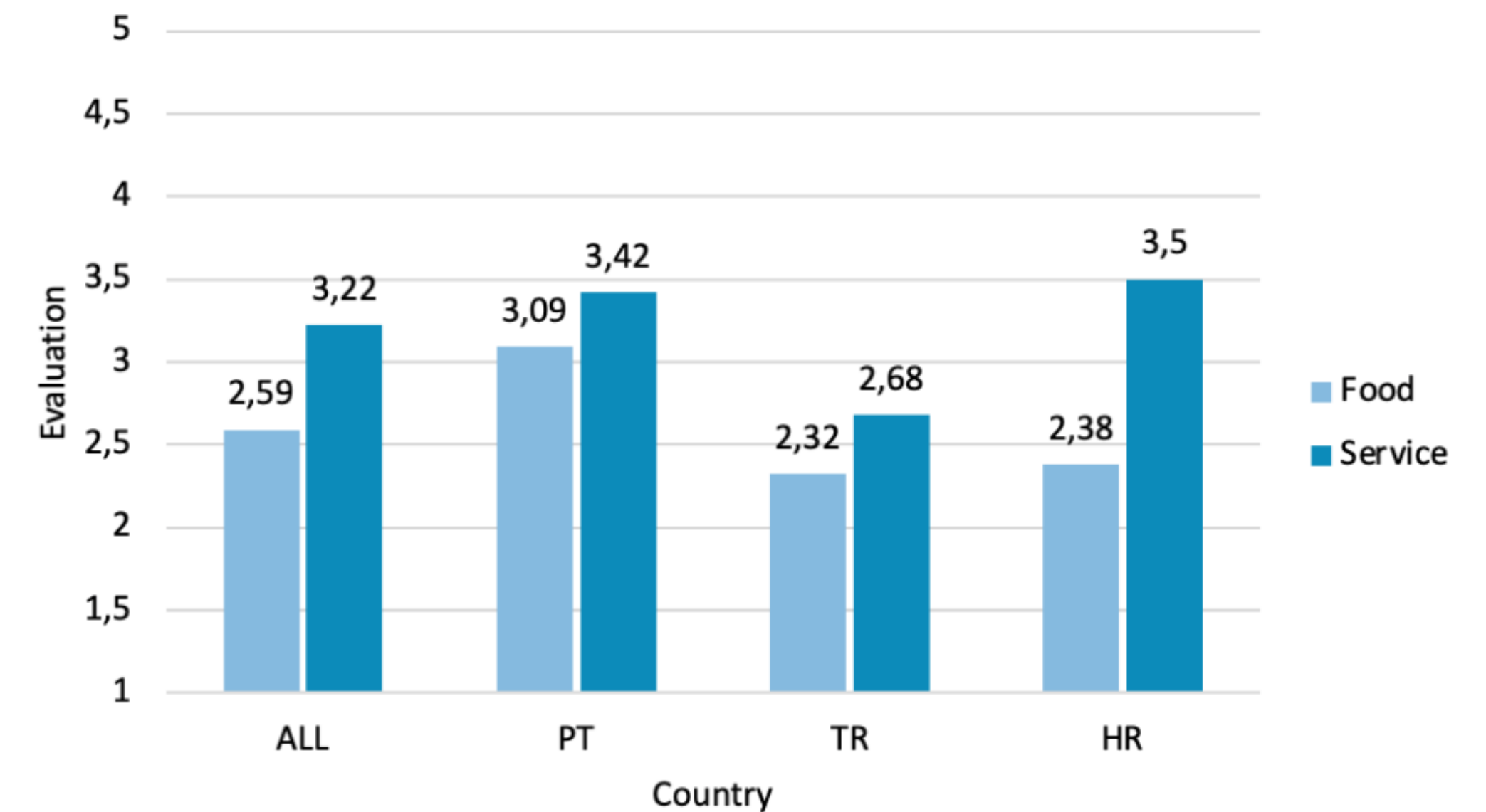
1614 students' surveys + 11 focus group

Results

Canteen Appraisal



Interaction between Canteen Appraisal Dimensions and Country



DEMAND | STUDENTS



1614 students' surveys + 11 focus group



510 students



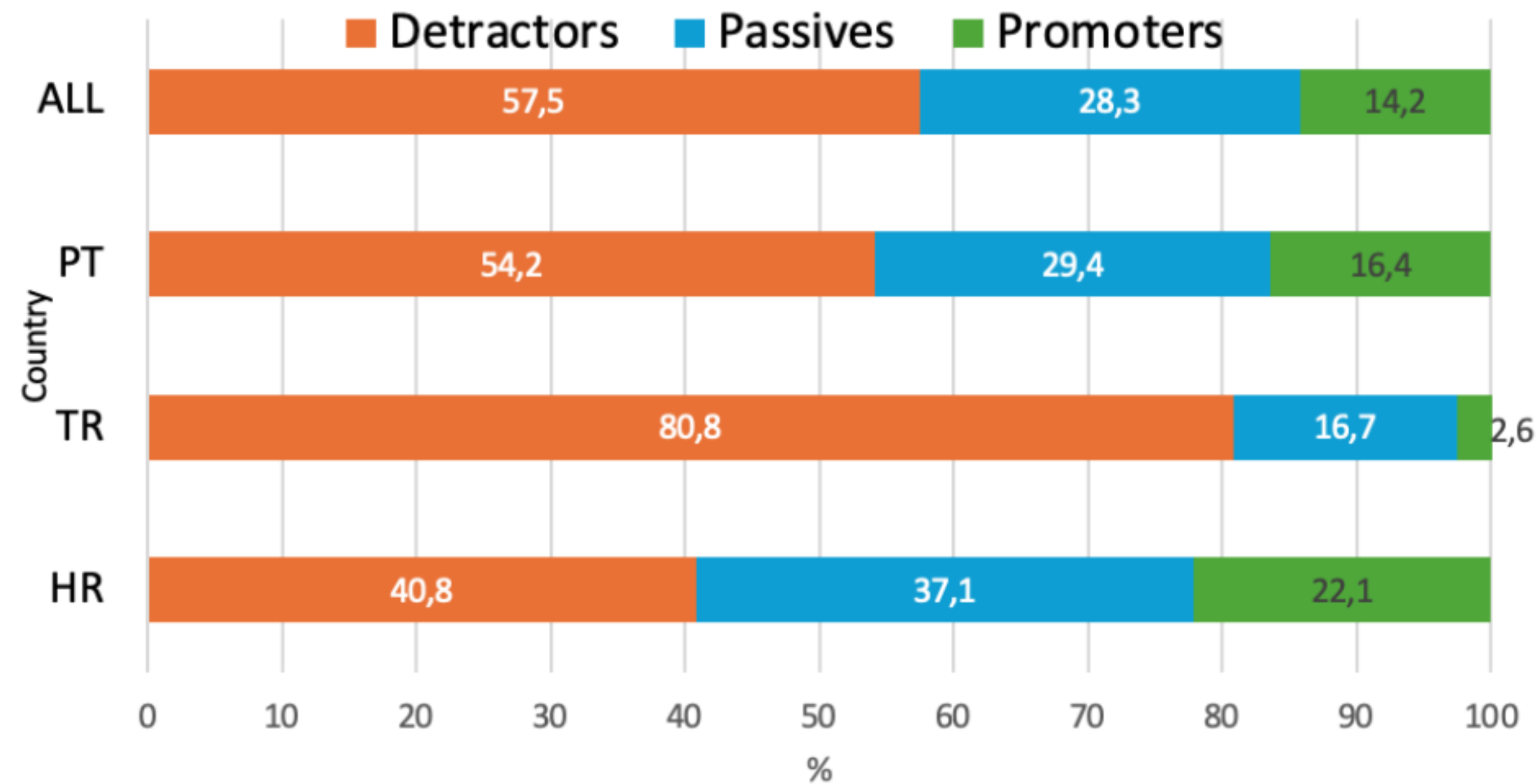
500 students



604 students

Results

Net Promoter Score: Overall and per Country



DEMAND | STUDENTS



1614 students' surveys + 11 focus group



510 students



500 students



604 students

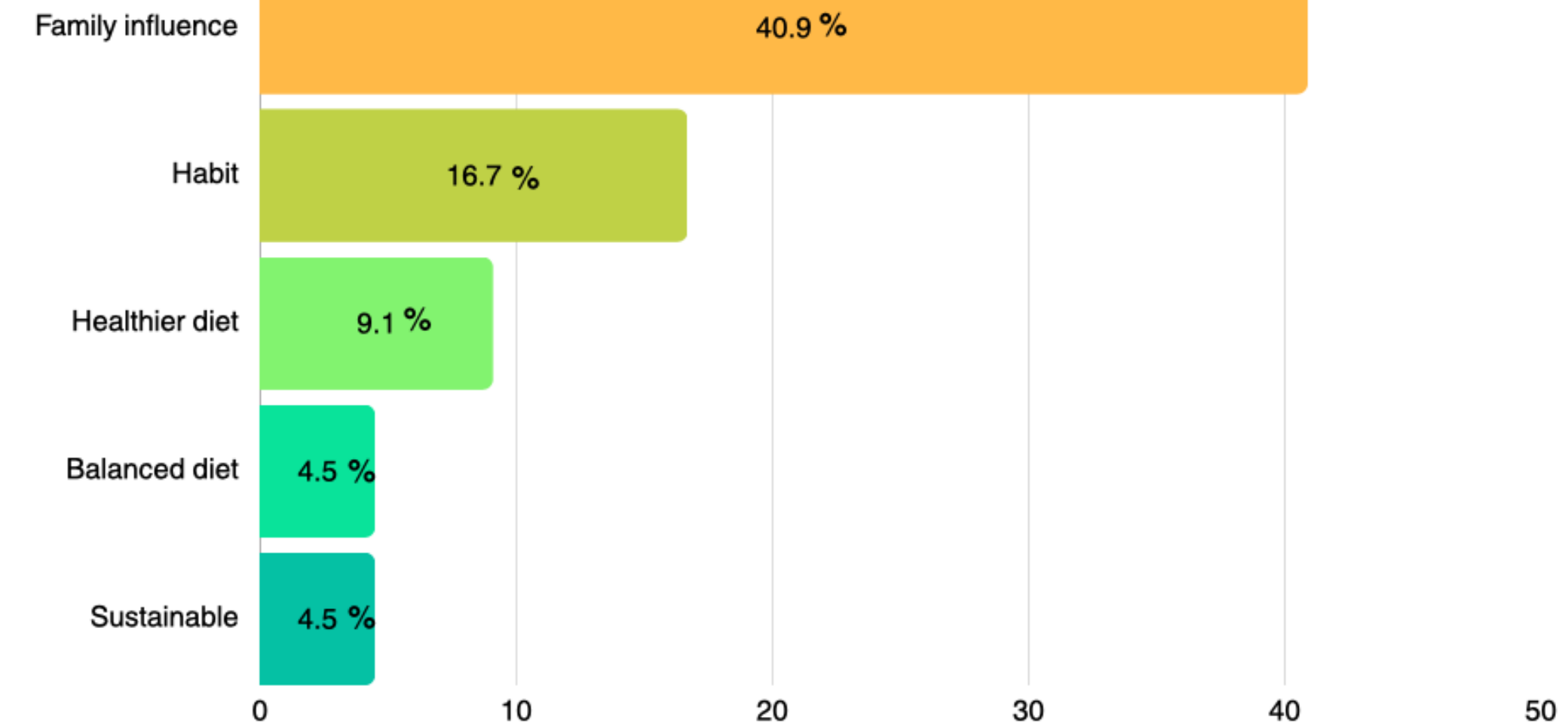
Focus Group

- **Family influence** → The main reason to adopt the MD, especially when food choices are made by other family members.
- Students recognise health benefits as a reason to adopt this diet.
- **Convenience** → The main barrier since there is a perception that other foods are easier to cook and take less time.
- The cost of food is also important, because **this diet is perceived as expensive** (e.g., olive oil, fish).

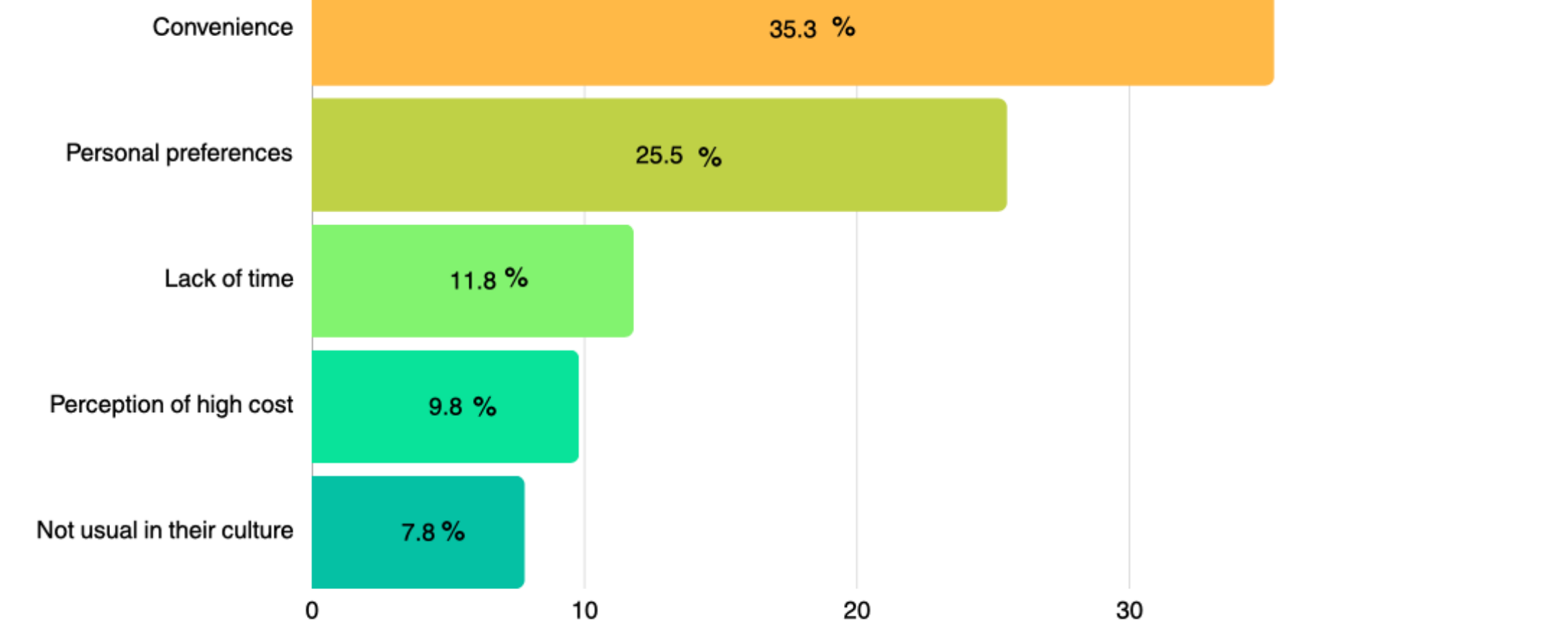


- **Visual appeal** is a key driver of positive perceptions about MD dishes. This aligns with previous research, highlighting the impact of food presentation on taste expectations and consumption (Zellner et al., 2010).
- These new dishes are also seen as **an opportunity to try new foods and innovative** compared to the usual offer.

REASONS TO ADOPT MD



REASONS NOT TO ADOPT MD





INTERVENTION PROPOSALS

Segmentation and targeting strategies

Targeting

2 MAIN TARGETS:

- Students: displaced and non-displaced; first year and subsequent years
- Canteen managers and staff (companies and higher education institutions)

Definition of these 4 personas for each country



**Student 1st
year
displaced**



**Student 2nd
year**



**Cafeteria
Manager**



**Cafeteria staff
direct contact
with students daily**

PRODUCT

Behaviour to be changed:

The adherence of the MD as a result of understanding its benefits.

- 1) increased offer and supply of MD menus by university canteens;
- 2) increased consumption of MD menus and student bags by students.

To achieve this goal, **two tangible products** were created:

PRODUCT 1 New Food Service



Guidelines of the 2-week menus

- Creating and testing recipes with a Chef
- Technical specifications
- Elaborate the 2-week menus

PRODUCT 2 Student Bag



Guidelines of the student bag

- Elaborate the recipes to the student bag
- Test the recipes

Focus groups
with the students

€ PRICE

Cost perceived by students:

- Trying new foods and flavours
- Price of student bags and MD menus
- Going to the canteens (time pressure and contextual barriers)

Cost perceived by canteens:

- Cost of menu production
- Cost of changing work procedures
- Higher need of service encounter



PLACE

Distribution points:

- Canteens
- Classrooms
- Areas with vending machines
- University Residences and Cafes

PROMOTION | WORK-IN-PROGRESS

Communication Objectives

- a) Raise awareness about the adherence to MD
- b) Promote value proposition of the intangible product:
perceived benefits of the MD
- c) Promote value proposition of the tangible products: student bag and MD menus

Emotional hooks

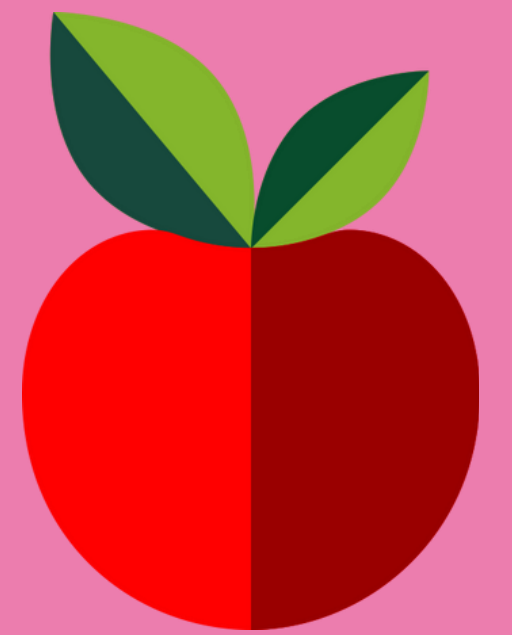
BELONGING: *“Find the table where everyone feels at home.”*

WARMTH: *“It’s not just food. It’s a hug on every plate.”*

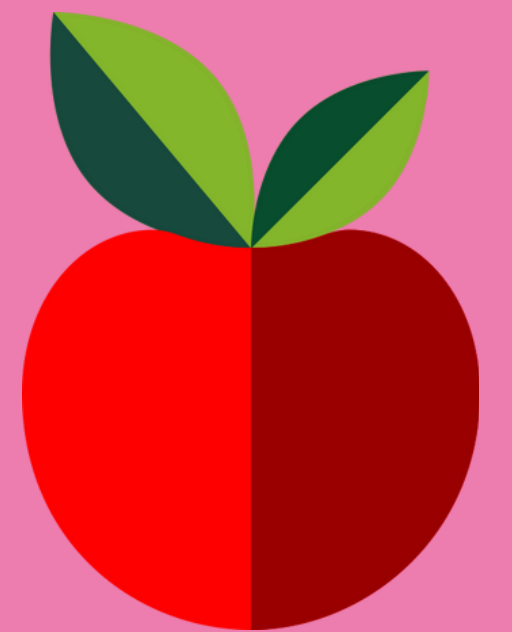
Triggers: Homesickness, price anxiety, need for speed, noise fatigue.

Attributes Valued By Students

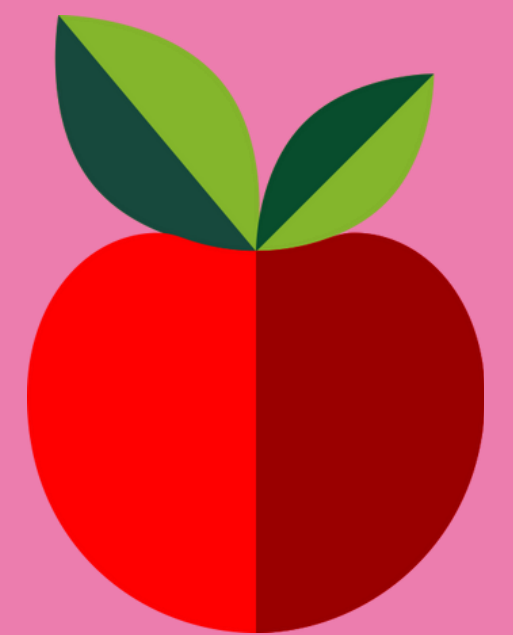
Comfort food, nostalgia/memories;
safety; conviviality; practicality; full
meals; warmth; company; familiarity;
knowing what's in the food; flavour and
health; diversity; local food; visual
presentation of the dishes



SOME EXAMPLES



SOME EXAMPLES



Acknowledgements

This work is financed by national funds through FCT – Foundation for Science and Technology, I.P., under the project PRIMA/0008/2022, PRIMA/0009/2022, PRIMA/0010/2022 and PRIMA/0011/2022.



Thank You!

Follows us on:

For more informations:

Sandra Gomes

sgomes@ipam.pt

