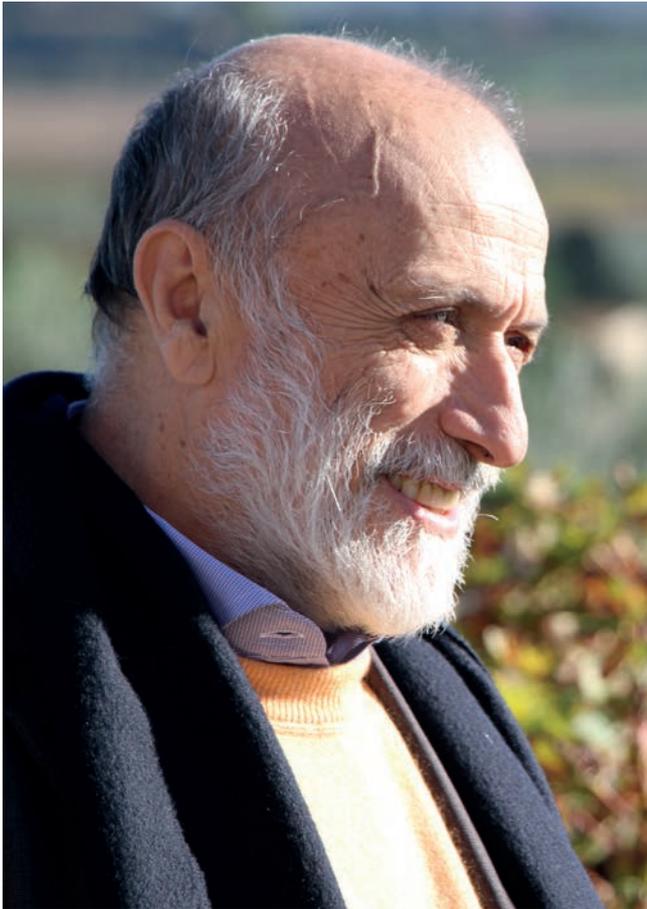


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## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

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### Reflections on political policy



The main feature that characterizes Slow Food, its *raison d'être* at the global level, is its defense and protection of diversity. Diversity seen as an invaluable, irreplaceable factor in the quality of life for all lifeforms on the planet. Diversity not only from a scientific and genetic point of view, but also in terms of cultures, of social arrangements and organizations, of languages, of the relationships of communities and individuals with the sacred and spiritual sphere.

We have elaborated our definition of food quality—summed up in the 'Good, Clean and Fair for All' formula—as a theoretical framework in which diversity plays an indispensable central role. There can be no food quality without diversity because diversity is the beating heart, the living matter from which our association's body draws the lifeblood to express its peculiarity and identity. If food is not good, clean and fair for all, then

it is not good, clean and fair for anybody. This is our unique message and we must never lose sight of it. The only way to bring it to life and give it relevance is by defending, embracing and valorizing the diversity that provides the humus for it to grow in.

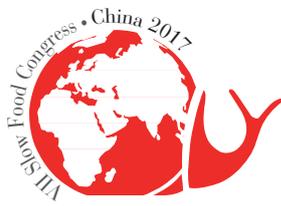
In its thirty years of activity, Slow Food has had the opportunity to encounter and experience a great many diversities. It has used them as a subject for training and study, been fascinated by them, employed them as a method for in-depth interpretation of local areas without reductionism or simplification.

By placing food at the center, by setting out from the very crux of the matter—namely the survival and adaptation of every community on Earth—we understood how it was possible to be better acquainted with the world, to understand the stories and stratifications of thousands of years, to perceive feelings and developments, to plot trajectories of meaning. Hence the consideration that even the slogan that has given Slow Food its international identity—Good, Clean and Fair—loses significance and effectiveness if it is not underpinned by diversity.

Learning to understand diversity: this is the challenge of the century for all of us. Understanding, accepting and respecting diversity is the path to follow, even when it irritates us and we struggle to fit it into our categories of thought. Diversity—in our case, of food first and foremost—is an element of identity that needs to be viewed holistically. Without diversity, there can be no identity, and we cultivate our roots precisely in relation to the other, aware of and accepting the world's diversity.

#### **WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE WANT TO BE**

Despite our many weaknesses and fragility, we have to recognize that our presence on the world stage is the fruit of limited resources but of great insights. These have gradually rendered our own internal horizon more complex, extending it to the most diverse areas and contexts, multiplying forms of participation and allegiance, opening scenarios of action and interaction that cannot be schematized in organizational terms—and which we ourselves often struggle to understand and



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interpret. Yet these scenarios exist and are now part and parcel of our social organism, influencing, driving and stimulating our work increasingly day by day.

We have now reached a crucial moment. The need to adjust our organizational structure to this multiplicity of policies, in order to better implement the theme of diversity as our guiding principle over the coming years is evident and cannot be further postponed. This process cannot and must not begin without identifying the significance of our activities. To do this, we have to embrace the planet's complexity, be inclusive, broaden our views and try out new models.

Diversity has laid the foundations for the Ark of Taste, the Presidia and the Terra Madre communities. The extraordinary diversity that local areas and populations have produced in the field of food—the shared heritage of those communities and indeed of all humanity—must be the fulcrum of an effective paradigm for an economy that is strong at the local level but also capable of networking globally. This is our idea of economics and development, and we believe that the words of Pliny the Elder are as valid today as they were 2000 years ago: 'We are now about to enter upon an examination of the greatest of all the operations of Nature—we are about to discourse to man upon his aliments, and to compel him to admit that he is ignorant by what means he exists'.

Our second distinctive feature—whose importance and revolutionary power we underestimate—is the fact that, since its foundation, Slow Food has declared itself an international movement for the protection of the right to pleasure. We are still paying the price for this definition today, and are still seen in some circles and in some contexts as an organization that puts play before social commitment. But the pleasure we are referring to is the pleasure of participation and the sharing of beauty, the pleasure that mobilizes thousands of volunteers under the banner of our snail symbol every day. For us, pleasure is the universal right to enjoy the extraordinariness of life. Why do we still have problems in conveying the essence of what we are and in making it understood? We will probably never be able to fully shake off the problems this issue raises, the root causes of which can be found in Brillat-Savarin's definition of gastronomy: namely a complex discipline that relates to all that is human and cannot be confined within well-defined or schematic limits.

We should perhaps reflect upon two words that often appear in the Slow Food lexicon to describe our world view, and which have to be increasingly central: complexity and harmony.

'Complexity' derives from the Latin verb *complector*, to embrace, to enwrap, whereas 'harmony' derives from the Ancient Greek noun *ἁρμονία*, which means union, agreement.

To all intents and purposes, to grasp complexity is to embrace the world, to be aware that, to accept multiplicity and diversity without expecting to pigeonhole or categorize them. To do this harmoniously means generating connections. Our Terra Madre network is the most shining example of harmony born of connections, even the most unexpected and informal. This is the path we have to follow, our vision for the future.

### OUR RELATIONSHIPS

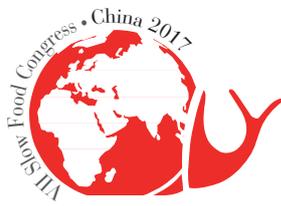
Looking at other international associations apparently similar to ours, we might think that the model to follow is the one they are testing with some success: hefty investment in communication, with plenty of proceeds to then spend 'in the field'.

In comparison, we who have never spent anything (or only the bare minimum) on communication, have managed to give free rein to ideas and initiatives in local areas, and with unimaginable success. We have literally done things on a shoestring.

We must ask ourselves, therefore: should we turn this philosophy on its head to become something that we are not? Are we really prepared to adopt a *modus operandi* that has never belonged to us?

We have always given free rein to ideas that seemed impossible, out of our reach. And we have often achieved this by giving our all with the work of thousands of tireless volunteers, raising our game even when it looked as though we lacked the wherewithal to do so. We have to make sure that Slow Food remains a breeding ground for brilliant, unexpected initiatives, we have to help the bumblebee to take wing even when the laws of physics are against it.

**We must rise above the logic that states independent organizations are opposed to one another, and instead ensure that dialogue materializes in common plans of operation.** We must not rule out the



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participation of delegates of associations with similar goals to ours at our next congress.

By virtue of our holistic vision, we can and must explore areas of common ground with other associations and organizations without fear of being inclusive when it comes to participation. This is yet another way of optimizing what we call our 'austere anarchy', thus enabling us to be dominant in the cultural and philosophical sphere, to soak up outside influences, to grow and to better interpret the reality we are working in.

## **WHY WE HAVE CHOSEN CHINA FOR OUR NEXT INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS**

Just as the Puebla Congress gave us a broader, more international vision, so the upcoming Chengdu Congress will bring us face to face with the unequivocal need for another paradigm shift. The contradictions of modernity are increasingly obvious today, with its unwavering focus on absolutized values such as growth, profit, expansion and competition. One only has to look around to see the failures of this model whose legacy is one of economic, social, political and humanitarian disaster, which we must rebuild from scratch, starting with the dignity of local communities.

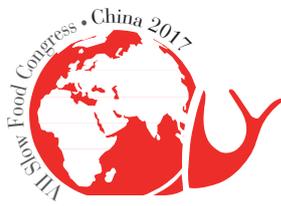
Of the 150 countries where the Terra Madre network is active, people are having to struggle with problems of survival every day in at least 30 of them. The same problems are mounting in the suburbs of this wealthy opulent west of ours, fueled by mass migration which we will continue to see for many years to come. Neo-liberalism has pervaded the social, political and economic discourse, imposing unbalanced production methods in which the most fragile communities, environmental resources and common goods always come off worse. In this process, the so-called great powers continue to take the lion's share, unwilling to take alternative measures to avoid disaster, their governments prey to economic and financial lobbies whose only guiding light is private profit. Despite the commitments that emerged from COP21 in Paris, where the participants signed an agreement to contain climate change, there is still a lack of a determined, shared effort to redesign a model of wellbeing in harmony with planet Earth and the species that live on it. Furthermore, this lack of balance is increasing exponentially at the social level too, as inequality reaches historically unprecedented levels. The

wealthiest 1 per cent of the population possesses more wealth than the other 99 per cent put together, while the eight richest people in the world own the same amount of resources as the 3.5 billion poorest.

Can we opt out? Can we expect to go on working as if all this had nothing to do with us? Our expectations are being held in check by a geopolitical situation that is, de facto, tantamount to a third world war. And we can see no way out. Our activities will be infused with meaning by the realization that our work on biodiversity can be our own small contribution to peace and human development. The moment has come to decide which side of the world we are on. There can be no half measures.

The power of the few over the many is coming home to roost. We have inherited a world of slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism, exploitation and, today, land grabbing. The congress is where we will refine our positions, design our alternatives and the horizon for our actions to establish a different way forward. Today roughly one human being in five is Chinese and China is coming to terms with the results of fifteen years of shining economic growth. If on the one hand this has helped vast masses of the population to emerge from poverty, on the other it has stripped bear the country's traditional craft, food and farming heritage, sparked lightning urbanization—with the accompanying costs in terms of quality of life—and savagely depleted environmental resources. Given its huge importance on the world stage, China cannot remain indifferent to a domestic and international situation that demands a radical change of direction. Thanks to the experience of food communities over the world that safeguard the resilience of their local territories and seek fair, harmonious wellbeing, we at Slow Food can make a modest contribution in staking out possible roads to follow. Which is why, at Chengdu, we must speak about the climate, biodiversity and the new economy, and table our most noble and ambitious projects to find the right solutions for the right places at the right time. Likewise, it will be necessary to rethink our role in a changing world in which we want to be, have to be pioneers. Because food is what allows us to live and meet each other—our identity and our window on the world.

Chengdu has to be a springboard for effective answers to the contradictions that we are witnessing in the world today, for finding an organizational dimension inclusive



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of the diversities expressed by our communities: from the convivia to the Terra Madre communities, from indigenous peoples to spontaneous groups, from young people to other associations.

Accordingly, we have to accept the liquid, unstructured dimension of our association's grassroots and organizational model. This has been the lesson of Terra Madre but, even more so, of the indigenous populations that, over the centuries, have conducted the largest operation in defense of their own diversity.

### PRACTICE

If what I have written above is to constitute the philosophical basis for our present and future actions, it is necessary to open a discussion about our organizational structure, which has to be inclusive, not exclusive, at every level.

I believe that we have to set out from all that Slow Food is and has been, exploiting all the positive experiences of a social organism that came into being with a western associational logic and has since opened out to embrace not only a network dimension, but also other original forms of organization. This is what has allowed classic associationalism to coexist with the support of the grassroots initiatives typical of Terra Madre. The consolidated structures of a western-type participatory democracy have thus chimed with the ancestral values particular to indigenous communities and with the libertarian spirit of diversity and fluidity that we have summed up as 'austere anarchy'.

The process of structural reorganization that we wish to implement (which we embarked upon at the last Slow Food International Council meeting as outlined in the document attached) must be extremely comprehensive, capable of integrating all forms of diversity. Here we return to the core political issue of our association, which we have always addressed, while also seeking to give sharing and exchange a central role in our activities. This is a crucial challenge because it will be fought out on a field of carefree precariousness, not rigid certainties. Let us begin to think in terms of a policy of alliances with other subjects rather than of a rigid structure. And let us also think in terms of the diversity within our movement before moving towards a rigid stance. The fact is that things happen irrespective of our way of affiliating our members, and we see this every day, in every corner of the world.

Over the years, the great organizational shortcomings

that we have often talked about have also undoubtedly been a great strength of ours. Proof of the fact is that the collective imagination outside our movement often perceives us as being much stronger, much more solid than we actually are.

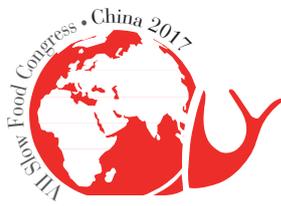
Using the human body metaphor, if diversity constitutes the beating heart that keeps everything alive and without which nothing is possible, our organization must work to protect it and make the lifeblood it generates circulate. The heart/diversity sets into motion our circulatory system, its veins and arteries: namely our ideas, our projects, our initiatives and the associational structures at the central and local level whose job it is to convey our message at every level. Even the tiniest blood vessel, even the most minor capillary plays an important role in the functioning of our associational body and must be protected and included without questionable hierarchies. The whole organism works only if all its organs work, which is why we are obliged to have a vision that is broad, inclusive, friendly and, it goes without saying, diversified.

The challenge is thus to reconcile local with international, diversity with organizational necessity. To win, we have to be firm in our thinking and careful to acknowledge the stimuli that reach us from the diversity of all the different territories where we are active (in this sense, the Congress is the highest, most intense, most valuable point of all), while staying focused on international political identity campaigns that extend to everyone.

The road map towards an idea of organization that acknowledges the dual value of the complexity-unity and local-global relationships must be charted by a series of general principles.

At the central level:

1. We need a center with high political and planning skills, capable of keeping attention and theoretical elaboration alive within a constantly changing political framework. Insofar as it is our tool for interpreting the world, reflection must play the central role. This is why we have involved a benchmark group of intellectuals worldwide to help us decipher and interpret contemporaneity and be as effective and precise as possible in our actions. A board of friends of our movement who will give us greater theoretical insight and depth of thought—to take a stand and have our say.



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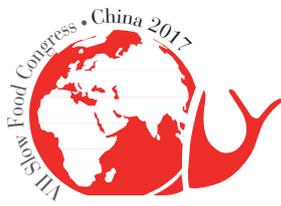
2. We need to choose a management team to focus on the elaboration and proposition of effective international campaigns that bind the whole movement together. This is the distinctive element. The substance of these campaigns must give identity to the movement's international unity, and our strength here will depend on our ability to perceive the fundamental demands of the gastronomic, agricultural and environmental sectors at the world level. Defending and valorizing diversity will be our global bond. A community of destiny built around reciprocal curiosity and knowledge, practiced every day around the world and celebrated at the major events we organize and take part in, we both acknowledge our differences and consolidate our convictions.

At the local level:

3. Utmost respect for diversity of participation at the local level, maintaining broad, inclusive and non-rigid allegiance to the movement. The diversity of our

grassroots founding groups is our force and should be promoted, not belittled. The fundamental bond of adherence—besides the principles of the Manifesto, which still represents our founding text—will be represented by international campaigns, in which the whole network will be called upon to respond as one.

4. The governance of Slow Food's presence in local areas through dialogue and participation among the various diversities. There must be no primogenitures or hierarchies between one social formation and another. It is necessary to favor and promote dialogue between reciprocal autonomies. Diversity has to generate new, more diffuse, less hierarchical leaderships at every level, including the local. Paradoxically, concentration is more ineffective at the local level than at the international level, because having a strong point of reference in a whole country or in a large local area is neither efficient nor functional to the framework described above. Ensuring harmonious enlargement must be one of the guiding principles of our reorganization.



## Discussion on the Future of Slow Food, prepared by the International Executive Committee

We began a discussion about Slow Food's future at the International Council meeting in June 2015 during which ample consideration was given to a document drawn up by the Executive Committee. After several months and various changes, the International Council approved the following document to frame the discussion leading up to the 2017 International Congress:

**What:** Reflect on the future of Slow Food. What do we want to be, how are we to achieve this?

**Why:** Redefine our organizational model

**Objective:** Redefine our main goals, structure, governance and organizational model

### Two core guiding questions

#### 1. Where do we want to be in 5 to 10 years time?

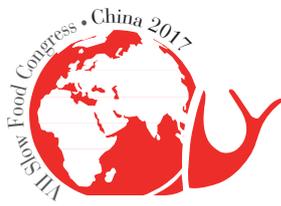
- Rebrand the organization as a whole: We are THE FOOD ORGANIZATION.
- Message: need to trim down what is it that we are talking about and define priorities in terms of actions.
- Focus should be on the impact of biodiversity projects, on the ground, on farmers and on citizens.
- Use of the logo and use of our message: we should improve our communications in order to become simpler and more effective while explaining who we are, without losing the complexity of our message and the multitude of our projects. We have too many logos and instead we should broaden the use of the snail.
- Local groups: need to find a way to connect the new image with the work done by the convivia.
- We need more food communities rather than convivia.
- The focus should be less on quantity and more on quality (i.e. fewer convivia and food communities, but more active).

#### 2. Who will be involved in Slow Food?

- We need to target new groups, not only the intellectual elite.
- Local groups should involve persons of all backgrounds and cultures, in particular young people and indigenous people.
- Evolve from a club (Rotary-like) to a network of activists (food movement).
- It is necessary to go beyond a movement based on membership only: members represent a portion of our network, and new types of affiliation will be introduced, either against payment or for free.
- Define how we communicate with the people, involve them, keep them engaged—at international, national and local level (centralized + decentralized communication).
- Need to develop geographic networks and thematic networks—to increase efficacy in communication (overcome language barriers) and harvest the benefit of sharing common issues/solutions linked to a specific geographic area (e.g. the Black Sea) or to a specific topic (e.g. hygiene regulations).

Based on the above mentioned points, on the discussion and the reflections that emerged from within the International Council, further exploration led to a series of points that were discussed at the Executive Committee meeting in December 2015. The main points discussed and approved were as follows:

- The "Food for Thought document" was accepted, and therefore the goal for Slow Food is to become "The Food Movement."
- To be able to achieve this, it is necessary for Slow Food to go beyond the perspective of a membership association and start thinking about new ways of membership, something that is already happening in many parts of the world.
- Local communities remain our point of strength. (The word convivium will no longer be used. We will talk about communities or something better than convivia.)
- In each country new organizational forms that better fit with the country itself will have to be analyzed and founded (an association or other organizational structure).
- Slow Food will define the visions, strategies, goals and guidelines for the possible activities to be implemented. Local communities will be free to decide how to put them into practice, at a local level.



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- The operative role of Slow Food should be mainly dedicated to:
  - Content/Campaigns
  - Communications
  - Training
  - Helping local areas to raise funds and supporting the work in these countries, including overseeing the initial phase of the various projects.
- It is necessary to investigate a mechanism that would regulate relationships between Slow Food and the local organizations, both in terms of planning and financial relationships.
- The future financial model for Slow Food should rely on individual donations.

## **Synopsis of the exercise to identify consensus among the International Council meeting, June 2016 in Puglia, Italy**

Presented with Carlo Petrini's discussion paper and the Executive Committee's "Food for Thought" document, the global body of stakeholders—the International Councilors—got to work in June 2016 using methods of discussion that reflect an organizational desire to do differently. By addressing seven questions, we learned to:

- Glean global insights from influential leaders;
- Recognize which issues have broad support;
- Identify if certain responses and geography are related (or not);
- Identify potential short- and long-term steps for the organization to take in the next International Congress.

Among the many issues that enjoyed widespread support, one rose to the surface: The desire for a single, global campaign that unites us all. To review findings from this interactive exercise, please seek out your International Councilor or contact Slow Food International to receive a PDF copy of the report.