

Slow Food

Concept: Slow Food

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Description In 1986, following the opening of a McDonald's restaurant on the Piazza di Spagna in Rome, journalist Carlo Petrini launched the Slow Food movement. The primary focus of the movement is on the protection of traditional modes of food production and preparation, including small-scale agriculture, heritage foods, regional cooking, and a return to the ritual of slow, leisurely meals consumed with family and friends. Slow Food opposes not only fast food, but also "Fast Life"— a way of living defined by a culture of industry that "mistakes frenzy for efficiency" and quantity for quality. "A firm defence of quiet material pleasure," the Slow Food International Manifesto states, "is the only way to oppose the universal folly of fast life." An emphasis on enjoyment is balanced by a strong environmentalist ethic. The concept of "eco-gastronomy" expresses Slow Food adherents' belief in the inseparability of culture and ecology.

Headquartered in Bra, Italy, Slow Food became an international organization in 1989. It currently has almost 100,000 members worldwide, with chapters, or "convivia" in more than fifty countries. Activities of the convivia include conferences, cooking demonstrations, food and wine tasting workshops, and educational projects in schools (in one US convivium, for example, the Edible Schoolyard program sets up organic gardens and works to integrate them into the curriculum and cafeteria of local schools). The movement also has a publishing company, Slow Food Editore, which publishes food, wine, and restaurant guides as well as journals and books focused on consumer education, and the promotion of artisanal production methods. Its educational mandate is also supported by the establishment of a university, the Università de Scienze Gastronomiche, in Italy, scheduled to open in the fall of 2004.

The Ark of Taste, a catalogue of endangered food plants and animals, is a key Slow Food initiative. The goal of the ark is to preserve heritage breeds like Iroquois white corn and the Italian Valchiavenna goat by finding global markets for them. One venue for this project is the Salone del Gusto (Hall of Taste), a biannual trade show held in Turin featuring artisanal food producers from around the world. More focused campaigns are organized through the Presidia (Latin for "armed garrison"), grassroots projects that work directly with producers to promote threatened breeds and production methods as well as the cultures surrounding them. Presidia undertakings include helping producers to set up associations and navigate the bureaucracy surrounding food production, building and maintaining infrastructure, and finding restaurants and consumers willing to pay farmers a fair price for their produce.

Slow Food eschews what Petrini, a former activist, saw as the overly dogmatic thrust of environmentalist organizations like Greenpeace, taking instead a light, humorous approach in its defense of the "right to taste." Its quirky style and mixed mandate gives Slow Food a curious political flavour. Its focus on consumption has earned some criticism that it is an elitist movement, catering to the tastes of gourmet jet-setters. However, growing scientific evidence (see for example Tudge 2003) suggests that the Slow Food philosophy represents the best way to address environmental degradation and health problems (ranging from famine to obesity to diseases like BSE) associated with current modes of food production. The movement is also increasingly concerned with preserving the livelihood and tradition of indigenous and Third World food producers. Since 2000, Slow Food has given annual awards to publicize and reward producers who promote biodiversity. Many of these have gone to producers from Central and South America, Africa, and India.

The Slow philosophy has also spawned other movements such as "Slow Cities" (Citta Slow), which aims to promote local cultures, economies, and ecologies. Cities gain accreditation based on their adoption of policies designed to cut noise and traffic, to increase green space and to promote shops and restaurants that sell local produce. Designed to make cities more livable for their inhabitants, the Slow Cities movement — which emphasizes hospitality and neighbourliness — also develops local economies by encouraging tourism. As of 2003, more than thirty cities, mostly in Italy, had gained accreditation.

Slow Food relates to globalization in several ways. Along with Slow Cities and a growing number of other "Slow" ventures, it responds to the accelerated pace of life that is associated with many aspects of globalization, ranging from systems of production and consumption to technologies of transportation and communication. In its acknowledgment of the relationship between culture, economics, and ecology, Slow Food reflects the integration of different spheres of existence that characterizes globalization, as well as the interconnectedness of local and global forces. What began as a movement to preserve the pleasures of simple dining has grown into an international effort to protect the autonomy of farmers and artisanal food producers. Finally, in its promotion of the global marketplace as the most effective site for the promotion of biological and cultural diversity, Slow Food endorses what Carl Petrini (The Ecologist 2 April 2004) describes as "virtuous globalization." According to this view, "shortened distances become an advantage — a way to exchange experiences... in which a people united across the earth celebrate the diversity of our traditional cultures and their specific values."

Work Cited: **Slow Food USA website.** *Slow Food International Manifesto*, www.slowfoodusa.org/about/manifesto.html (accessed 11 March 2005).

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Suggested Reading: **Honoré, Carl.** 2004. *In praise of Slow: How a worldwide movement is challenging the cult of speed.* Toronto: Knopf.

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