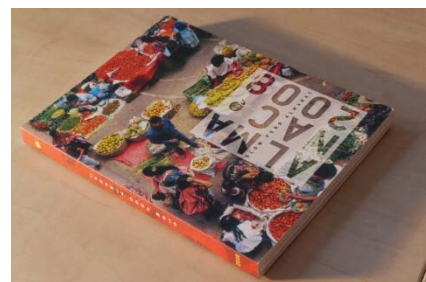


transformative  
social innovation  
theory

# Transformative Social Innovation: SLOW FOOD MOVEMENT

A summary of the case study report on the Slow Food Movement



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## About TRANSIT:

TRANSIT is an international research project that aims to develop a theory of Transformative Social Innovation that is useful to both research and practice. It is co-funded by the European Commission and runs for four years, from 2014 until 2017. The TRANSIT consortium consists of 12 partners across Europe and Latin America. For more information, please visit our website: <http://www.transitsocialinnovation.eu/>.

## About this Document/ Disclaimer:

This is a summary of a case study report on the Slow Food Movement. Both, the case study reports and this summary, were guided by empirical research questions based upon a preliminary [conceptual framework](#) of the TRANSIT-project. These questions concern inter alia:

1. Emergence of Social Innovation
2. Transformative Social Innovation dynamics
3. Agency in (Transformative) Social Innovation

This summary presents the interpretations of the researchers, and does not necessarily reflect the views and nuances of the initiatives and respondents themselves. For a full account of each transnational network and local case, including interview quotes and expressed nuances by respondents, we refer to the case study report, which is available via [communication.transit@ihs.nl](mailto:communication.transit@ihs.nl). Both the case study report, as well as this summary document, is the basis for future research activities and publications.

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**Date:** 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 2016

**Authors:** Adina Dumitru, Isabel Lema-Blanco, Iris Kunze, Ricardo García-Mira

**Contact:** [communication.transit@ihs.nl](mailto:communication.transit@ihs.nl)

## **Table of contents**

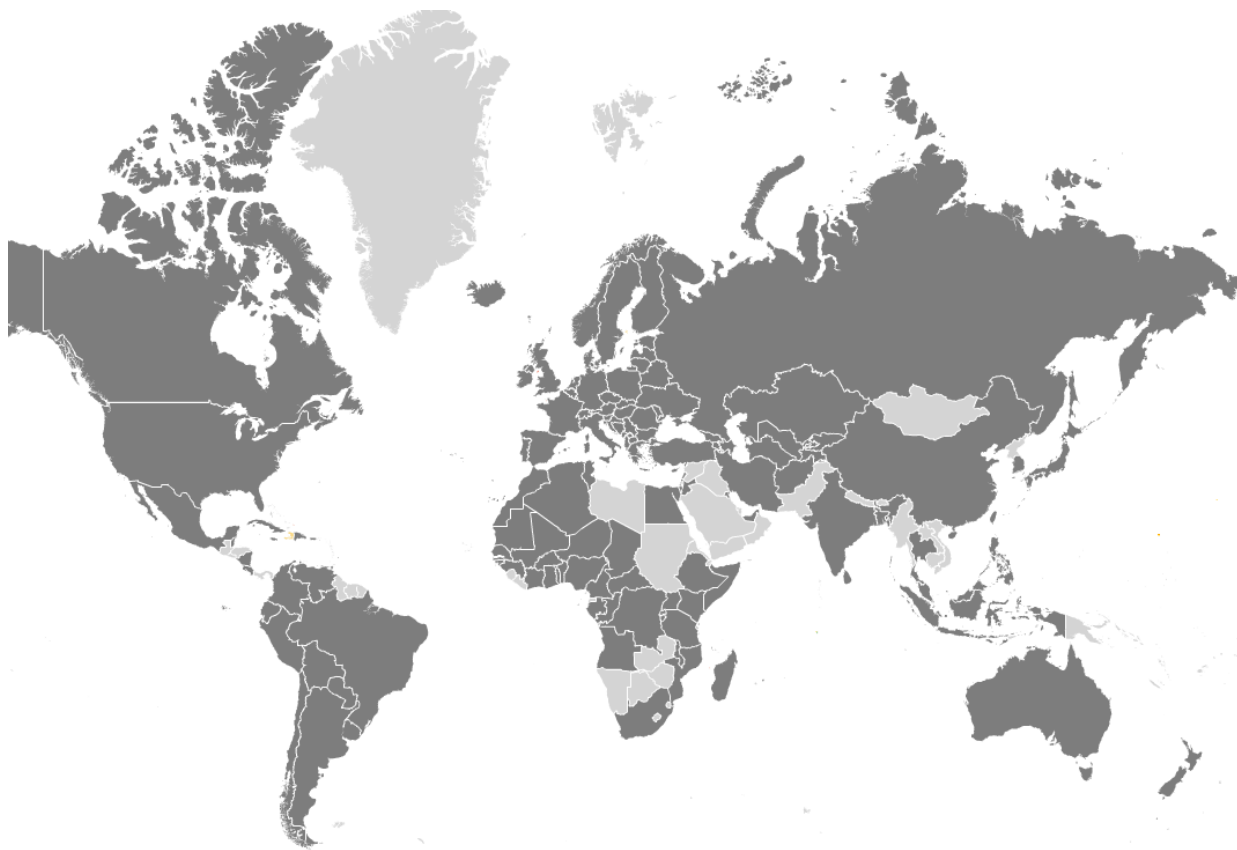
<b>1. Introduction to the Slow Food Movement .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. The Emergence of Social Innovation .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Transformative Social Innovation dynamics.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4. Agency in (Transformative) Social Innovation.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5. References.....</b>	<b>12</b>

# 1. Introduction to the Slow Food Movement

The Slow Food movement has been defined as a “**culture movement**” (Petrini, 2005) based on the intrinsic value of local production, that critiques the globalized and delocalized food production system (Roos et al ,2007). Slow Food is also a **counter movement** which “*represents an act of rebellion against a civilisation based on the sterile concepts of productivity, quantity and mass consumption, destroying habits, traditions and ways of life, and ultimately the environment*” (Petrini in Hodgson & Toyka, 2007: 138). An extended scientific work has studied the emergence of the Slow Food movement, its evolution, rhetoric, politic and social impact in the global and local context (Andrews, 2008; Sassatelio & Davolio, 2010; Kjorstad, 2007; Siniscalchi, 2013; Hall, 2012, Peace, 2006; Scheneider, 2008:398). Besides, Slow Food pioneers and leaders have published relevant documents to disseminate their philosophy and discourses (Carlo Petrini, Vandana Shiva, Alice Walters, Piero Sardo), particularly relevant examples are “*Buono, pulito e giusto. Principi di nuova gastronomia*” (Petrini, 2005), “*Slow food revolution: A new culture for dining & living*” (Petrini & Padovani, 2006) or the more recent “*Slow food nation: Why our food should be good, clean, and fair*” (Petrini et al, 2013).

The Slow Food movement, founded in Bra (Italy) in 1986, is coordinated the Slow Food International Association. The international network is present in 160 countries throughout the world with 1.500 convivia (local groups) formed by 100.000 affiliates and 1.000.000 of supporters. Slow Food also counts with several national associations (Italy, Germany, Switzerland, USA, Japan, Netherlands, Brazil, Kenya and South Korea), two Slow Food International Foundations: The Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity and the Terra Madre Foundation and one University of Gastronomic Sciences (Italy). This study will focus on the Slow Food movement. The research reviews the origin, evolution and organization of the **Slow Food International Association** and two European local manifestations: the “**Convivium Slow Food Araba-Vitoria**” (the Basque Country, Spain) and the “**Convivium Freiburg-Südbaden**” (Germany). We will analyse the ambitions, activities and discourses of change developed by the association during its almost 30 years of history. Specially, we will focus on the social dynamics and the agency processes that explain their social impact, political influence and capacity of social transformation.

Figure 1: map representation of Slow Food Movement.



Source: Map adapted by the authors from the Slow Food Website:

<http://www.slowfood.com/international/4/where-we-are>

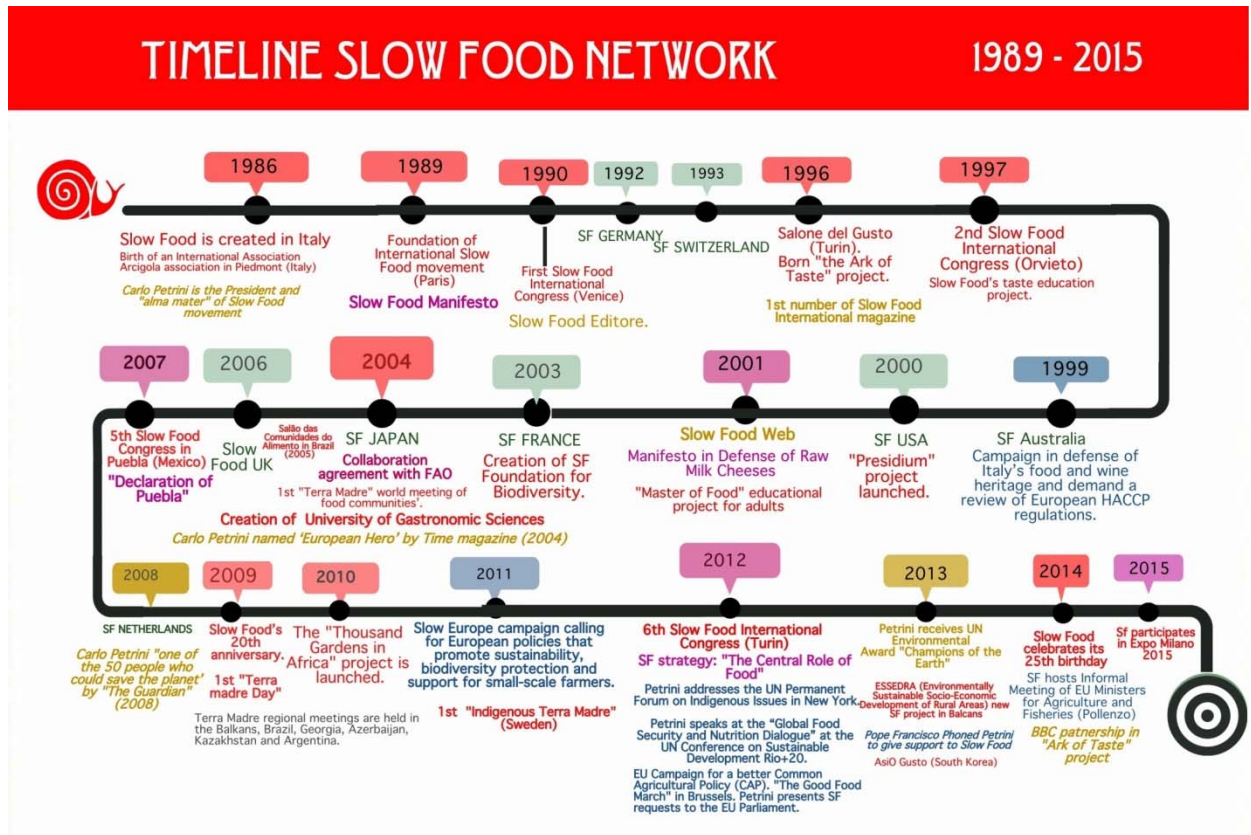
## 2. The Emergence of the Social Innovation

Slow Food is a global association that pursues cultural, environmental and social goals built around the “centrality of food”, contributing to critical global discourses that propose **sustainable lifestyles** and responsible consumption. The network is considered a “new social movement” (Schneider, 2008) that represents an *“act of rebellion” against the unsustainable economic system that destroys food habits, culture and lifestyles* (Petrini in Hodgson & Toyka, 2007). Slow Food was born in Italy in 1986, under the leadership of the journalist and social activist Carlo Petrini, as a counter-movement that confronted the upcoming concept of fast food, aiming *“to support and defend good food, gastronomic pleasure and a slow pace of life. It then broadened its sights to embrace the quality of life, local and global sustainability development and biodiversity conservation”* (Irving & Ceriani, 2013). The Slow Food movement proposes a **holistic vision of gastronomy** and provides political and pragmatic alternatives to face the main global social challenges, claiming a new economy and new social relations and defending the *right to “good, clean and fair” food* -and food security- as the primary human right to ensure. Slow Food particularly defends *“the right to pleasure”*, relating pleasure, social activism and political commitment both in local and international spheres.

The international network is headquartered in Bra (Italy) and since 1989 the movement has spread out over 160 countries promoting the emergence of grassroots local manifestations -called “convivia”- in both the global north and south. The movement enhances enhancing the local and sustainable development of rural communities and the preservation of the local cultures and biodiversity through intervention projects (*“Ark of Taste”, “Presidia”, “Earth markets” or “Food Communities”*), creating thousands of “food communities” worldwide that *“break the cycle of wholesale, do not competing with the big brands but generate consumer demand of good local products, creating short marketing circuits that enhance different and direct relationships between consumer and producer. It also involves innovation in product sales ”and ”stable buy commitments”* (quote: SFAV\_07).

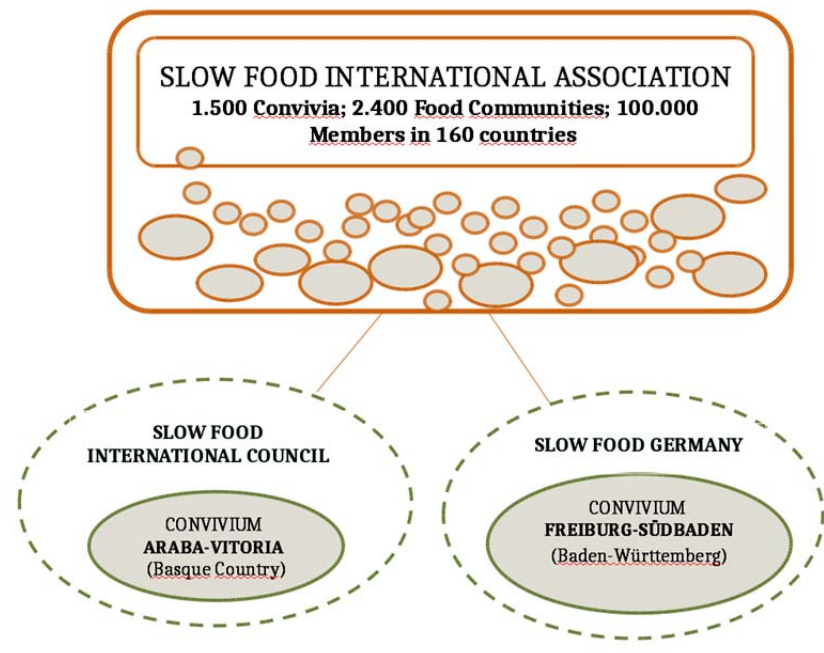
Slow Food is considered a relevant **political actor** and a reliable interlocutor to international organizations like the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) or the European Union. They participate in international panels and debates (e.g. the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (USA); the UN Conference on Sustainable Development Rio+20 (Brazil) and their work has received numerous awards and the acknowledgement of the international media.

Figure 2: time line of Slow Food Movement.



Source: time line created by the authors based on Slow Food's primary documents and interviews.

Figure 3: case-demarkation of the Slow Food Movement.



### 3. Transformative Social Innovation dynamics

The Slow Food philosophy transcends the food area to propose sustainable lifestyles and a new food system based on a change of relations between consumers and small local food producers. Their **aims, values and activities** have dramatically evolved over time, handling new societal needs and goals; becoming a modern social movement named “*eco-gastronomy*”. Slow Food practitioners claim “**the right to pleasure**”, the pleasure of food, enhancing human relations and conviviality with family and friends. Slow Food proposes a consumption model where people are no longer consumers, but co-producers in a democratic society (in a similar meaning that political consumption approaches propose the term ‘prosumer’).



Source: Slow Food International Association website.

Slow Food has been able to introduce **new ways of knowing, doing and relating** in (mainly local) food systems, based on trust relations between food producers and consumers. The network posits **a change in market relations, from competition to collaboration** and sharing knowledge: *“Of course we help each other. I have no problem to help someone, to show them how we did. I wish we would be more organize and be able to supply all local demand. I was delighted to explain everybody who asked for help”* (quote: SFAV\_10).

Besides, local consumption also involves **changes in food demanding, social lifestyles and relations**. Eating is a pleasure experience, which relates to tradition, family and cultural roots. *“We are missing the pause, time for relaxation, to talk things quietly. It is unusual nowadays, but it is important. (...) I like quiet. Enjoy a little chat. We're talking about ancient things that we are gradually returning”* (quote: SFAV\_03).



Slow Food activists are firmly confident about their **capacity to contribute to social, political and systemic change**, regarding food production and consumption but also concerning local and rural development, environmental protection and environmental education. Despite being a minority, they consider that individual consumption decisions have direct impact on local context and environment: *“We are a minority, but we have the ability to influence, to change things gradually, through food education activities that change individual consumption decisions”* (quote: SFAV\_02). Slow Food leaders have perceived, in the last ten years, a **positive change in societal discourses** especially related to the increasing awareness in health issues and the right to access to quality: *“we perceive a global social change, especially in the United States, where the fast food philosophy was born”* (quote: di Croce, 2015). Slow Food has been able to **influence**, in a certain way, **local and regional public policies**. The international network has signed numerous agreements with national governments (Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Chile, China, South Korea. etc.), counselling them in the development of public policies, being as well a key interlocutor to the European Union or FAO.



Slow Food Campaign: Terra Made Day. Source: Slow Food Website

## 4. Agency in (Transformative) Social Innovation

In this section we analyse the agency processes that emerge within the Slow Food movement, the relation between motivations and processes of empowerment and how and in what extent agency is manifested in the international network. From the analysis of the international and local organizations (Slow Food Araba-Vitoria, in Spain, and Slow Food Freiburg, in Germany) a number of strategies arise to fulfil the needs and ambitions of their members and enhancing **individual and collective empowerment processes**:

- Developing a common identity, a collective vision of change, a mission that transcends the local context and engage with other like-minded people worldwide.
- By formulating a coherent discourse of change, presenting the network as a consistent minority with transformative capability through their local and global activity.
- Discourse of belongingness to a group that share your values and fulfil people's needs of autonomy, relatedness and competence.
- Autonomous governance structure that permits the experimentation of freedom and autonomy of action.
- External governance and networking activity to gain social and political influence.

The Slow Food discourse connects with individual needs and aims that seem to be fulfilled by or within the initiative. Deci & Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (2000), explain agency phenomena in terms of the meaning of events to individuals, and their significance for people's attempts to satisfy their basic psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The social innovation is able to fulfil those **intrinsic and extrinsic motivations** in terms of consistence with people's personal values and ideologies, contribution to one's community in a meaningful way; the

Slow Food activists experience similar **human needs and motivations**:

- Need for **autonomy**.
- Need for **connectedness**.
- Need of **living coherently** with the own values. Aim to develop their professional careers according to their own values.
- Aim to **contribute to one's community** in a meaningful way.
- Aim of **preserving local identity and connection with the past** of one's community, through the protection of the cultural and culinary heritage.
- Aim to **act locally** and working in a **transformative** project.
- Aim to give back to peasants, farmers and food producers their **dignity and acknowledgement**.
- Aim to **protect the environment** and preserve (food) biodiversity.

preservation of local identity and connection with the past of one's community or Giving back to peasants, farmers and food producers their dignity and acknowledgement.

Slow Food has developed **symbolic and persuasive rhetoric** that reinforces "*the sense of being a member of a global community*", basis for agency and empowerment as well as for scaling up processes. Slow Food leaders emphasize the emotional links among food, pleasure, "*hedonism and conviviality*", but also they highlight the connections with the past of one's community, their culture, their traditions, landscape and place attachment. The network also develops empowerment processes that enhance individual and collective power. In this sense, the network supports a **vision of distributed leadership**. Autonomous governance structures create spaces for local leadership and social engagement. The local convivia strengthen the participation of their members through flexibility, openness, mutual support and friendship relations. Slow Food activists develop a **sense of personal power** when they perceive that are capable to contribute to their community in a meaningful way. **Collective empowerment** arises through the external recognition and international support that the social initiative receives and their capacity to create synergies and alliances with other social initiatives and public institutions as well as influence international and regional policies.

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