

Laudatio Carlo Petrini

Louise O. Fresco, chair of the jury of the Johannes van Dam Prize

The Jury has decided to award the 2014 Johannes van Dam Prize to Carlo Petrini, the man who has singlehandedly and fundamentally changed our thinking about food and society. In reaction to the opening of a fast food hamburger outlet next to the Spanish Steps on the Piazza di Spagna, the iconic site in the center of Rome, he coined the term SLOW FOOD, in contrast to FAST food. And the rest, as you know, is history.

From 1986 onwards Carlo Petrini has contributed numerous articles on food and taste and has created a worldwide network of those who want to explore the roots of food. In 2001 Carlo published his book groundbreaking book *Slow Food* of which a translation is re-published today. The Slow Food movement now exists in over 50 countries with publications in many languages about traditional, local recipes and products. In the last ten years, the Terra Madre conferences have drawn thousands of farmers, cooks and consumers. Moreover, Carlo Petrini also created the University of Gastronomic Sciences in the North of Italy.

The term SLOW has now permeated nearly every realm of our society: we have slow cooking, slow cities, slow travel and tourism, and even slow working. It has become the symbolic term to counter the speed of the hasty, media driven crowded world of today. Even if it is difficult to define SLOW exactly, the intention is clear: to live, eat and work in a meaningful and mindful way with attention to details, to the here and now.

Of course, the slow food movement is not entirely exempt from criticism. There has always been some concern about its elitist image and its emphasis on taste. “We believe in the right to enjoying food”, the key statement of the movement, could be easily misinterpreted in a world where even the right to food is still tenuous for hundreds of millions. At the same time, the emphasis on artisan production which has provided an impetus for many a restoration of old techniques has sometimes been overly rigid, excluding semi-industrial production. Furthermore, slow food, fair trade and sustainability do not automatically coincide. Indeed, as little as five years ago Johannes van Dam himself wrote an article about the lack of support for Slow Food in The Netherlands, and the dominance of Italians in the movement, and noted that many of the slow food concepts already exist, even at the level of detailed descriptions of traditional foods. However, since Johannes wrote these words a lot has changed, and many enthusiastic young people have now joined the Dutch Slow Food Movement.

But Johannes also lauded the way in which Slow Food became a movement that

touched ordinary people, and not just the establishment. I quote: “The Salone del Gusto is visited by a cross-section of the population: mothers with children, gourmets of a certain age, youngsters who worry about the environment. Italy is the country where not only love passes through the stomach, everything goes through the stomach. One could say: the stomach is love.”

Carlo Petrini has been honored for his work before. We feel that he also deserves the Johannes van Dam award because, just like Johannes, he has a strong and independent mind. He does not speak the language of the majority but instead follows his own vision. Both men also have tried to find at least some of their foundations in science and research, which makes it very appropriate that I am allowed to hand out this award as President of Wageningen UR. I firmly believe that the continuous dialogue between science and society, and particular innovators like Carlo, is the only way forward to balance tradition with the modernization that is needed to feed the entire world, and not just the middle classes in the developed economies.

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