

Paper
#8



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Power, Politics
and Food Inequalities
in a Bioeconomy

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The impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic at the Slow Food Movement

Thalita Kalix Garcia

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FOOD FOR JUSTICE: POWER, POLITICS AND FOOD INEQUALITIES IN A BIOECONOMY

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Abstract

The corona virus outburst was declared a global pandemic in March 2020, making many countries to go on lockdown in order to try to restrain it and avoid or diminish the overwhelming of national health systems. As work and studies went online and social distancing became a safety rule, social movements also had to adapt themselves. Furthermore, food movements gained more relevance as one of the first concerns was to keep the food production and distribution worldwide despite the shutdowns. This paper aims to analyse the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in the Slow Food movement, how it changed the movement organization, agenda, and actions. It is based on empirical research in two countries: Brazil and Germany and it looks at three moments of the pandemic, from its first impact in 2020 till the adaptations and continuities in 2021 and 2022. This work relies on an on-site and virtual ethnography and is part of a broader investigation on the movement on both countries.

 **KEY-WORDS:** Covid-19 pandemic; Food movements; Slow Food; Germany; Brazil

Short biography

Thalita Kalix Garcia holds a PhD in Anthropology from the University Rovira i Virgili, Spain, with a thesis entitled "Good, clean and fair food for all: Slow Food's role in safeguarding food heritage in Brazil and Germany". She is also a member of the BMBF junior research group "Food for Justice: Power, Politics and Food Inequalities in a Bioeconomy" at the HCIAS of the University of Heidelberg. Within F4J, she has conducted some research stays with the project in 2020 and 2021 and participated in the online seminars and activities of the group. Thalita defines herself as an interdisciplinary social scientist and food activist with a background in anthropology, tourism, culinary arts, and social communication. Food and social movements are the focus of her research. This includes the study of food movements and the societal changes they demand/trigger, and the entangled inequalities of food production, distribution, and accessibility. Disputes over the creation, change, and application of public policies, as well as debates on the environment, care, and cultural heritage are also part of her research. *thalitakalix@gmail.com*

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ASFB	Slow Food Brazil Association
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture
GMO	Genetically Modified Organism
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SF	Slow Food
SFD	Slow Food Deutschland
SFI	Slow Food International
SFY	Slow Food Youth (Germany)
SFYN	Slow Food Youth Network
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNISG	University of Gastronomic Sciences
WHES	Wir Haben es Satt



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Introduction¹

WHES 2021 © Posts in Slow Food Deutschland Instagram [Reproduction]

As cases of the corona virus started to grow in Wuhan, China, in January 2020, most people had no idea what proportions it would take. However, in March, it had already reached the status of a pandemic, forcing many countries into lockdown to try to restrain it and avoid or reduce the overwhelming of national health systems. Work and studies went online, and social distancing became a safety rule, compelling all groups to adapt themselves. Social movements were no exception. Many events went online, using the diversity of apps and platforms available. Some demonstrations migrated to social media, through #hashtag mobilizations or photo actions. Others, more urgent, took to the streets while trying to keep their members safe. Food movements faced the same challenges. However, one could say they had an opportunity to gain more relevance as one of the main concerns of the time was to maintain the food supply chain worldwide, despite the shutdowns.

Here is important to define food movements as a variety of actors and social movements engaged in transforming food politics and the food system, that is, “the diversity of peasant movements, food sovereignty movements, alternative food networks and initiatives, popular feminist rural movements, food justice movements, agroecological movements, and veganism” (Motta, 2021, p. 7). I also identify Slow Food as a social movement, part of the food movement. As Siniscalchi (2014, p. 228) stresses, it is hard to define Slow Food. It sometimes works as an NGO, other times as a foundation or a big fairs organizer, other also as a militant movement. I do understand that those diverse facets are part of the complexity of this social movement – and choose to refer to it as so agreeing with the definition by Sage et al.: “By definition, their claim to social change as a whole, their character as a network, their collective identity and their protest actions are regarded as constitutive characteristics of the new social movement” (Sage et al., 2020, p. 12). Furthermore, even if Slow Food discourses and actions focuses on the food field, it has implications that are broader. In this sense, it is part of a range of food movements that, “beyond isolated protest actions and social milieus, these enterprises institutionally stabilise the movement and enable new syntheses of food production and supply, distribution and demand, economy and participation, self-sufficiency and collective action” (idem). Furthermore, Slow Food and its central coordination also define themselves as a Food Movement.

The aim of this work is to analyse the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Slow Food, as one of the main worldwide food movements: how it has changed the movement’s organization, agendas, and actions. If the restrictions imposed by it made some interactions more difficult, it also amplified the access to groups far apart, as they migrated online. Furthermore, this crises moment becomes a scope

1 The author would like to thank the Food for Justice Team for their essential comments on the first version of this Working Paper.

to observe how Slow Food, as social movement managed to adapt and set itself in motion. “In general, social movements adapt to moments of intense change, mobilizing to turn them to their advantage” (Della Porta, 2021, p. 213).

Global crises have different effects and consequences in each location. They challenge institutions, and generally impact public policies with a tendency toward economic austerity that ultimately affects social welfare.

“As seen with the Covid-19 crisis, emergencies affect not only civil rights but also social rights because they magnify the effects of the unequal distribution of resources within and between countries. In particular, social protection is at stake because living conditions related to primary social rights (such as the right to health, work, housing, and education) are jeopardized by exceptional circumstances. As it is during wars or deep economic depressions, the disruption of everyday life hits especially hard some groups of the population, increasing social, gender, generational, and ethnic inequalities. [Della Porta, 2021, p. 213]”

And the COVID-19 pandemic was more than a health crises, “it is possible to speak of a triple crisis: a health and medical crisis, an ecological one, and a crisis in capitalism and globalization” (Delanty, 2021, p. 2). In this way, Slow Food becomes an interesting object of observation, as an international social movement that is structured in a network, and that has a good part of its work based on awareness and focused on food and, consequently, environmental issues. The pandemic crisis has not only brought these issues to the fore, but also caused an accelerated digitalization of life in some societies, which for Slow Food’s work can have both losses and benefits, as we will see in the following pages.

However, once again, it is necessary to look at the pre-existing inequalities that this crisis reinforces. Such digitalization has not occurred for all groups. In fact, the reality of working remotely from home, for example, is restricted to a portion of the population. When it comes to access to food, these inequalities have become even clearer. Thus, a movement that advocates for an alternative food system is an excellent locus of observation. We are dealing, nonetheless, with a social movement of consumers, made up of activists, white, mainly middle class, upper middle class, with a high level of education (Kalix Garcia, 2023). Thus, the concepts of food inequalities (Motta, 2021b) and *reflexive localism* (Goodman et al., 2012) are fundamental to analyze how Slow Food faces this crisis situation, if the movement is able to get out of its contextual constraints, how it adapts to the new problems that arise (or that finally come to light), and what solutions it brings to the public space.

The links between the outbreak of COVID-19 and the food system are varied. The first of them is evident: where the pandemic is said to have begun, in a wet market in Wuhan, China. The strongest evidence up until now shows that the virus probably migrated from bats to humans (Mallapaty, 2020). Even though this has not yet been proved, the local culture of eating bats was highlighted by many people as the cause of the pandemic, and often in racist and prejudiced ways. To some epidemiologists (Angus, 2020; Wallace, 2016), pandemics like the one we faced in 2020 are the consequence of our food system. In short, the industrial farming model, based

on extensive monocultures, requires deforestation, substituting the local biodiversity for fewer specimens and, with that, creating the perfect environment for the spread of new viruses and bacteria.

The second connection became clear with the advance of the virus and the perspective of lockdowns. People rushed into supermarkets, stocking up on toilet paper, flour, pasta, and canned food. The images of empty shelves all around the globe were impactful. Political leaders reassured there was no need to stockpile, but it was not enough, and it took weeks for the markets to be able to fill up on their goods again.



Figure 1. Empty shelves were frequent at the beginning of the pandemic [Reproduction].

If supermarkets prospered at the beginning of the pandemic, small farmers, whose products were sold to gastronomy establishments or schools, suffered without buyers and products already grown or ready to be harvested were lost. Food producers and market and supermarket employees were declared essential workers in most parts of the world. Meanwhile, there was a shortage of fieldworkers in some countries, such as Germany which relied on a seasonal migrant workforce to harvest products such as asparagus or strawberries (Open Society, 2020). Meat processing plants also became a focus of attention as they seemed to be a perfect environment for the spread of the virus (Geitens, 2020; Nack, 2020; Reuben, 2020). The food system, with many of its problems, was on the public agenda. And in countries like Germany, where the inequalities in the field are not widely known among the general public, it became a significant media topic (Küppers, 2021).

So, if we rely upon Goody's definition of the five phases of food processing, i.e., production, distribution, preparation, consumption and disposal (1982), we can see the links with the pandemic clearer. Production, which takes place on the farms and in the processing plants and is the origin of the process, faced the impacts of

the virus on its working conditions. Distribution was also affected by the overload of demand, the loss of workers to the virus and the closing of borders. Preparation and consumption were affected as the lockdown meant the middle- and upper-middle-class population with formal employment had to stay at home. Because of these circumstances, many people had to learn how to cook every day or get used to it. Food preparation also became a hobby: making bread from scratch seems to have been the big adventure that those that had to or could work remotely from home found during lockdown time. In the Brazilian context, those who were not confined to home-office work also became a concern: how could this population be assisted and not be left to starve²? Also in this first moment of the pandemic, children were not getting their meals at school, and this could have a big impact on their nutrition. It was a global crisis but with quite localized effects and impacts on everyday life [Della Porta, 2021].

This work is based on an on-site and virtual ethnography and is part of a broader investigation on the movement in Brazil and Germany. This will be better explained in the next two sections, where I present the methodology applied and draw a short review on the Slow Food movement. In the following sections I will examine the Slow Food movement in the Brazilian and German cases, locally and nationally, and include the Slow Food International. I will look at three consequences of the pandemic. The first concerns the organizational impact and adaptation. I will consider the biggest challenge imposed by the pandemic on the movement, that of how to translate from the physical to the virtual world. The second is related to the establishment and development of types of action³ and the inclusion of new topics in the agendas. I will discuss how this context was or could be read as an opportunity for the movement to gain more influence in the public sphere as food became a relevant theme. Finally, regarding the third outcome, that of continuity, I will look at the prospects for a post-pandemic movement.



-
- 2 The effects of the pandemic in the food security of Brazilian households were analyzed by Galindo et al. [2021]. The inquiry showed that 59% of the population were at the level of food insecurity during the pandemic [2020]. This data confirms the increase in food insecurity in Brazil earlier identified by the National Research for Sample of Domiciles [Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílio] of 2017/2018. Furthermore, the analysis of the data on food consumption profile combined with the level of food insecurity in Brazilian households shows the severity of the lack of access to healthy food that Brazilian homes experienced during the pandemic, which affects some strata of the Brazilian population, i.e., women, brown and black people [pessoa de raça ou cor parda e preta], residents of the North and Northeast regions and rural areas, households with children and with lower per capita income, more. This research offers a portrait of the food inequalities present in Brazil during the COVID-19 pandemic [Galindo et al., 2021, p. 39].
- 3 Here I choose to go with the concept of “types of action”, relying on Carvalho et al. [2022] similar search “of a broader definition, in which both contentious and non-contentious, public, semi-public and social reproduction actions could be covered” [p. 7].

1 | Methodology

WHES 2021 © Posts in Slow Food Deutschland Instagram [Reproduction]

This working paper is part of a bigger project, “Good, clean, and fair food for all: Slow Food role in safeguarding food heritage in Brazil and Germany” [Kalix Garcia, 2023]. The selection of the two countries was based on the richness those different realities could bring to the comparison. First, the diverse context of these two countries in which the movement is based: Brazil as a Latin American country, with public policies favoring large-scale farming, monocultures and GMOs, and facing land grabbing issues and high levels of violence in the rurality in contrast to Germany, one of the leading countries of Europe, hosting environmental movements and their policies, as well as being home for agribusiness corporations, and being influential in the new European Common Agricultural Policy. The second factor considered was the different relationship between food and food heritage in these two countries. The Brazilian culinary tradition began to be valued nationally through a movement similar to that which occurred in Peru. The famous worldwide gastronomy of the neighboring country inspired many Brazilians, even though there was no public policy in this area. On the other hand, although traditional German cuisine may be known abroad simply as sausage, potato, and beer, their food cultures have a higher number of formal registrations. The national commission of UNESCO has listed, since 2015, 16 practices linked to the German food system in the inventory of German National Intangible Cultural Heritage⁴ and two in the German Register of Best Safeguarding Practices⁵. Finally, the Slow Food operation in these countries must be taken into account: in Brazil, the movement is still young, even though it has grown a lot in the last ten years, suggesting the country as a possible future leader in the Global South, while in Germany, the organization is strong and has been established for 30 years now, with a structure smaller only than the Italian one.

The work presented here is the result of a multi-sited ethnography, that many times had to become a virtual ethnography, with direct and participant observations and in-deep interviews to be able to form the data to be analyzed. The challenge of doing ethnography in contexts so diverse was already within the project – even before the pandemic. The option was for adapt the tools accordingly to the reality faced in each site. As pointed by de Suremain, “This is not about working in the same way in every fieldwork site, but about deliberately provoking contradiction, changing perspective, and gaining generality by starting from common units of analysis—in this case, food heritage” [2019, p. 23].

4 UNESCO. German Commission. German Nationwide Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage. [Available at: <http://www.unesco.de/en/kultur/immaterielles-kulturerbe/german-inventory.html>. Consulted 22 April 2022]

5 UNESCO. German Commission. German Register of Best Safeguarding Practices. [Available at: <https://www.unesco.de/en/culture-and-nature/intangible-cultural-heritage/national-register-goodsafeguarding-practices-2>. Consulted 22 April 2022]

In this sense, the fieldwork done in Brazil, was conducted in 2019, in mainly two cities: Florianópolis-SC and Salvador-BA. Together with the Slow Food Youth Brazil they the three observation unities of my thesis in the country. The selection was based on their representativeness: the Slow Food network in Florianópolis-SC was at that time one of most active and most based centered in Brazil. Also, it was the main coordination of a big project developed by the Slow Food Brazil Association (ASFB) in partnership with the Federal Government, called “Alimentos Bons, Limpos e Justos”⁶. Salvador-BA, on the other hand, was chosen by its increasing importance at the national level with different institutional partnerships, but at the same time it has a newly and not so active network. The third analytical unity was the Slow Food Youth Network Brazil, that only meets online, but does develop many projects. Further, some interviews were done in São Paulo, where it is the head office of the national association and where many of the movement different actions take place.

When the pandemic irrupted, I was in the beginning of my year of field research in Germany. Where I had also three observational unities: 1) the movement in Berlin, which comprises the Convivium Berlin, the Slow Food Youth Berlin, and at some level, the Slow Food Germany Headquarters; 2) the convivium in Frankfurt am Main; 3) and the Slow Food Youth Germany (SFY). This circumstance required me to adapt my methodology and amplify my scope – what resulted in the analyses that I present here. The ethnography was translated mostly to a virtual one, what implies some changes. The migration to online meetings had an impact and it will be further discussed in section 3. Important here is to clarify that most of the participant observation and interviews was done online – in meetings held on Zoom mainly. However, some of the encounters took place in person – what helped to counter-balance the losses that we as researchers have when interacting with people only through the screen. The essential point here is that the scope, whether offline or online, remained the same, that scope being the groups I was following. As migrating to an online environment multiplies the sources of information, this choice is important for ethnography (Hine, 2017). The online groups that were studied exist in an offline situation. One could say that ethnography only moved to an online environment because of the pandemic, but it did mean different kinds of interactions were experienced. In the end, the interplays were always mixed, as was the data generated. In addition, the discourse produced by the different Slow Food groups’ social media during the pandemic was analyzed. This was done by selecting representative posts for the discussions going on within the groups.

Besides participant observation, 50 in-depth interviews were conducted: 40 in Brazil and 10 in Germany. The discrepancy in the number has to do with the time I had in each country – with more time for field research in Germany, I needed less in-depth interviews to understand how the movement works locally. The interviewees signed an agreement and chose to be identified or anonymized (all chose to be identified by their own name).

To be able to discuss the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Slow Food, I need first to do a short overview of the movement’s history and structure.

6 “Good, Clean and Fair Food” in a free translation.

2 | The Slow Food Movement

WHES 2021 © Posts in Slow Food Deutschland Instagram [Reproduction]

The Slow Food is an international movement, present in more than 160 countries. It started in north of Italy, in 1986, as a way of reaffirming local food culture – in opposition to the homogenization promoted by fast food. Its benchmark is a demonstration against the opening of a McDonalds at the Spanish Steps, in Rome held that year. It became an international movement in 1989, with the signature, in Paris, of the Manifesto Slow Food, which advocated for the right of pleasure (Slow Food, n.d.). Slow Food could be considered one of the main alternative agrifood movements, that emerged in the 90's, mainly in Europe, calling for a re-localization of food system (Allen, 2010; Goodman et al., 2012). As it spread to other parts of the globe, it adapted and changed. However, it is crucial to recognize that in many contexts, it has yet a white/westernized understand of good, healthy and faire food (Kalix Garcia, 2023; Siniscalchi, 2013), as much of the movements for alternative food systems (Guthman, 2011).

Having food always as the main topic, Slow Food discourse and agenda changed during the years. This could be observed with the inclusion of the environmental aspect in the 90s, and the focus on climate change in the last years. Currently, its philosophy is to guarantee good, clean and fair food⁷ (Slow Food, n.d.)(Feld). With that it can embrace a great diversity of themes, and has been doing so, adapting its goals with the changes of society. As an international/transnational movement its focus and actions vary accordingly to the local context and members profiles.

Structure wise, Slow Food has many faces. Slow Food International, the central association, has its headquarters in Bra, Italy, where the movement was born. There is also centralized the movement's coordination, with the branches to manage its projects as Arks of Taste and Presidia, or to organize its events, as Terra Madre. The event is one of the highlights of Slow Food – the moment that its members are able to share their experiences and products with fellows from all around the globe. It's a five-day event, with conferences, meetings, round tables, and, of course, shared meals. At the same time, it is also held the Salone del Gusto, a big festival with the products of those food communities, but also from bigger partner companies. In addition to that, also usually held just after those two events every four years is the Slow Food International Congress, that assembles representatives from all the countries where the movement is and decide on the next years agenda and projects. These encounters are, then, an important moment for Slow Food's organization and continuity.

7 In Brazil or even in the A Call for Action of SF International, there is also the food justice aspect included in the movement's philosophy, "good, clean, and fair food for all". However, this last part is still not in most of the international communications (including their website), neither is used in SF Germany – even though food justice was one of the themes that the movement there focused on in 2020.

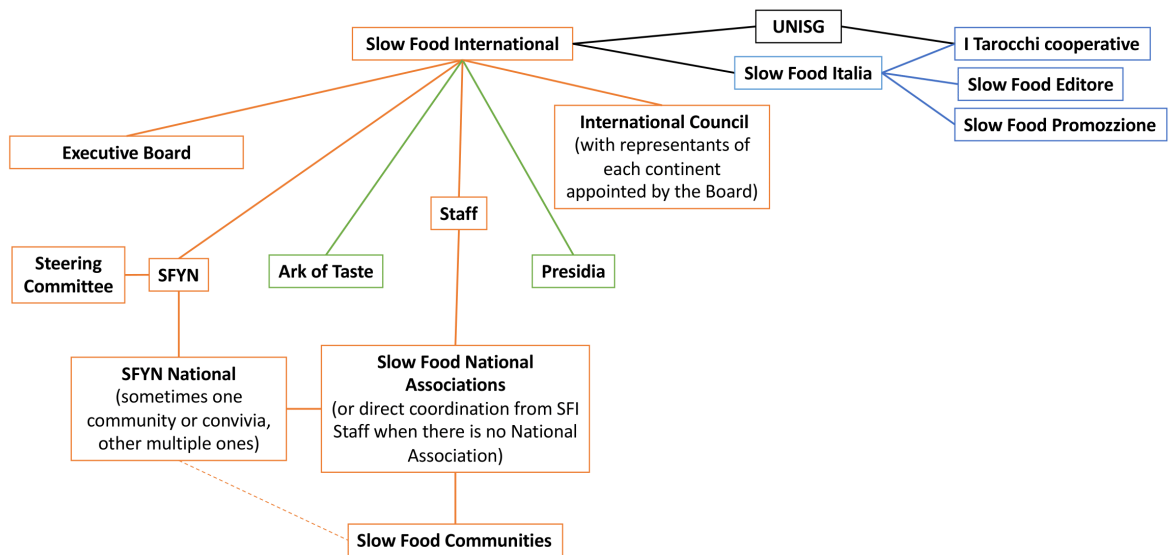


Figure 2. Slow Food Structure until 2022 [Own work].

Since 2020, Slow Food has defined its actions in three axes: education, biodiversity, and advocacy. Those are perceptible in Brazil and Germany. What changes is the priority given in each locality to one ax, type of action, or agenda.

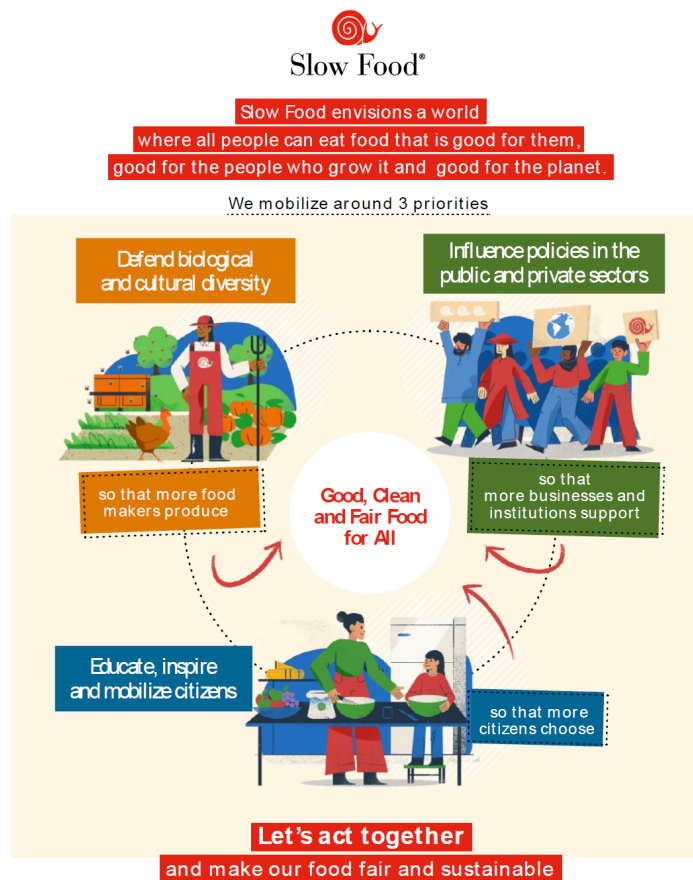
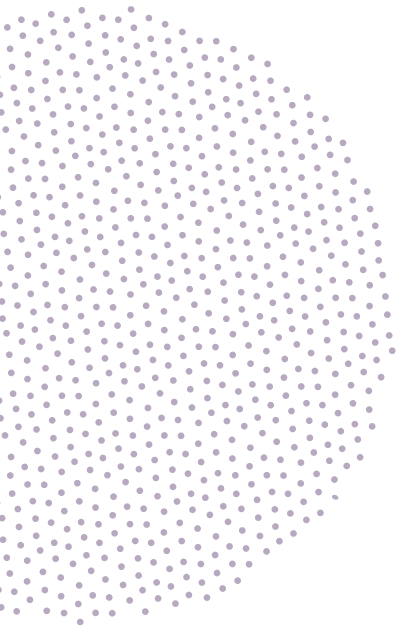


Figure 3. Slow Food priorities according to A Call to Action to help us shape the future of Slow Food, document to start discussions in preparation to the 2022 Congress [Reproduction].

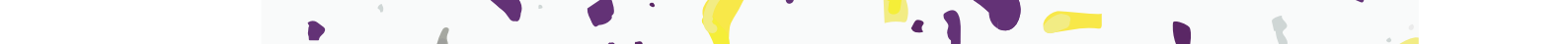


Locally, Slow Food structure varies. Not every country where it is present has a national association. But this is the case of both countries I observe here, Brazil and Germany. They have common points but are quite different – mainly due to its context, one could say.

Slow Food Germany association was the first one founded outside Italy, in 1992. It has around 12.700 members, in more than 80 groups [*Slow Food Deutschland, n.d.*]. These local groups could be *convivia*, or food communities⁸ – these have different organization, and are mainly formed by peasants or food producers that are part of an Ark of Taste or Presidium. Each *convivium* act locally: they usually meet monthly to plan their projects and share a meal. There are also national meetings, usually twice a year, between the *convivia* leaders. The members of each group vary: some are cooks, others just interested in the food topic. There is, however, a predominance of middle/up class, urban and highly educated. One of the main struggles in Slow Food Germany is a sort of crack between youth and the older members – while the first ones are mostly interested in the politics of food and demonstrations, the second has, in its majority, a more gourmet profile. Slow Food Youth Germany is also the only *convivium* that is spread all around the country – as the other ones act only locally.

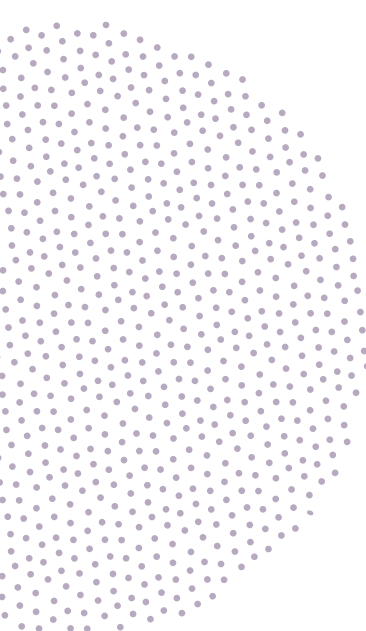
The national association have a central office in Berlin, with around 12 employees that work in specific themes and projects [*Kontakt, n.d.*]. However, most of the movement's work is voluntary. The Slow Food Deutschland Association has a board with 5 members [one from the youth group], and it has also 11 Committees, with different themes and working foci: Ark Committee, Education Committee, Chef Alliance, Purchasing Guide Committee, Fish Committee, Gourmet Guide [*Genussführer*] Committee, IT Committee, Fairs and Markets, Quality Committee, Arbitration Committee, and Wine Committee [*Die Organisation, n.d.*]. SFD finances itself through the members fee and supporters' contributions – business that associate themselves to the Slow Food philosophy and donate to the movement. The projects and actions, however, are mainly funded by partnerships with other institutions and foundations. This is another reason that makes the SFD one of the most established arms of Slow Food International – being the association one of the few that sends money to the central office instead of needing help on funding.

8 Internationally, Slow Food decided in 2020 to simplify its structure and transition all local groups in to Slow Food Communities. However, this format means that the members of each community pay for the association as a group, not as individuals anymore. Because of that, Slow Food Germany decided to not follow this change, otherwise it would have great impact in the national association's budget. That is why there are *Convivia* in Germany and, since 2020, only *Communities* in Brazil. "The word "community" entered the Slow Food vocabulary in 2004 as the foundational concept of Terra Madre. At the time, "food communities" referred to local groups of food producers and others who identified with Slow Food's vision. "After the Chengdu Congress in 2017, the Slow Food Community became an organizational unit conceived in response to the complexity of Slow Food in the world: Neither a classic association nor an NGO, but a movement working in a network that draws its strength and richness from the network, widespread and rooted everywhere, with its own ways of acting, interpreting diversity and fully inhabiting that diversity with dignity. Communities are made up of groups of people who share Slow Food's values and who come together to work towards a specific objective, such as small-scale olive production. They operate at a local level, dialoguing with the rest of the network and strengthening it." [Slow Food International, 2021, p. 45]



It is important to note that one of Slow Food's main lines of action, particularly over the past decade, is advocacy. SFD is not only an active part of Slow Food Europe, an office established in Brussels with the aim of lobbying within the European Parliament, but also has alliances with other movements within Germany. Those translate in demonstrations as *Wir Haben es Satt!*, which I will address in section 4, but also in campaigns and positions papers.

In Brazil, even though there were Slow Food *convivia* since 2005, it was only in 2013 that the Association Slow Food Brazil was founded. With the migration system explained above, it has not individual members anymore, but communities, that should have at least 10 members. Currently there are more the 200 local groups in this format ["*Membros e Comunidades*," n.d.]. However, the great majority of them are, as mentioned before, linked to projects as *Ark of Taste* or *Presidium*, that are abundant in the country. The urban communities, even though are in less frequent, are usually the most active. Here there is also a predominant profile of middle/up class, highly educated members [Kalix Garcia, 2023; Oliveira, 2020]. Differently from Germany *convivia*, the communities in Brazil struggle to have regular meetings. Furthermore, the country's dimensions make it harder to promote national gatherings. That is one of the factors that favors the communication between members to be mostly done online – some by e-mail lists, but mainly via WhatsApp. The Slow Food Youth, that is also a national wide community, for example, only meets virtually – via Skype. There is, however, a big difference between Brazil and Germany here. Even before the change from *convivia* to communities, the youths used to be in at least two groups: the local *convivium* and SFYN Brazil. SFB has also 10 thematic working groups, that gathers activists from different expertise and origins: Artisanal Raw Milk Cheese WG, Native Bees WG, Cassava WG, Free Seeds WG, Education WG, Artisanal Fish WG, Communication WG, Coffee WG, Slow Meat WG, and Commercialization WG ["*Grupos de Trabalho*," n.d.].



The Slow Food Brazil Association does not have a headquarters' office. There are, nonetheless, four people that are hired in a part/time contract to deal with the network and the partnerships. There are also the regional facilitators, that are in charge of doing the bridge between local actors and the association – they are five, one for each region of the country. Most of the work, again, is done in a voluntary basis. Unlike SFD, the Brazilian association does not have a regular income. The association fee paid by the members has never been equivalent to the number of people involved with Slow Food – not everyone would be officially associated. The figure of the business supporter is quite incipient also in the country – there is not the culture of this kind of donation, and, on the other hand, one of the main difficulties would be to assure that the business shares the movement's philosophy. The projects developed by SFB rely on partnership with local governments and international funding – including Slow Food International. When it comes to the political incidence, in Brazil one could say it is less centralized if compared to the one done in Germany, for example. Slow Food Brazil is part of national alliances in different topics as the fight against pesticides and the alliance for healthy food. But the main incidence happens locally – within the cities or states' food councils.

So, when we compare Slow Food in Brazil and Germany, some particularities come up. The first characteristic is that the movement operates in different contexts, and this is reflected in the movement's types of actions and agenda. So, in Brazil, most of the convivia do not have regular meetings; they are spaced out and depend on the group that is more active at that point. Nationally, the ASFB has a small structure and is still establishing itself among activists. At the same time, the communication tools such as WhatsApp, Skype and e-mail lists are used frequently. The movement has a predominance of political engagement, although it also has its gourmet members. It develops many projects in the scopes of Ark of Taste and Presidia but it also runs educationally oriented projects and political campaigns. Despite being perceived as an urban, white elitist movement not only by scholars, but frequently also by other food movements, this entails diverse meanings in the context of high levels of inequality: being middle-class in most parts of Brazil does not translate into a stable life and it implies risks of precarity.

In Germany, on the other hand, the movement has an established structure. Convivia meet monthly or twice a month, the leaders of the convivia twice a year, there is an annual general assembly, and the SFY also has semestral meetings. All of these are held in person. Communications, until the pandemic arrived, were restricted to the SFD intranet (Confluence), the website, and the newsletter and correspondence sent by e-mail. Boards and working groups used phone conferences for their meetings until the end of 2019, early 2020, when they started to use Zoom. The activists' profile also matches the urban, white elitist characteristic, even if it has its particularities. There is an age gap among SFD members: on the one side, there are the youth members (18 to 35 years old), and on the other, the older members from the convivia, aged 50 and up. This is also reflected in the different perspectives of what Slow Food is, with a gourmet wing and a more politically engaged wing.

With this overview and the methodology detailed, I move now to the effects of the pandemic in the movement.



3 | The first impact: how to organize, locally and globally

WHES 2021 © Posts in Slow Food Deutschland Instagram [Reproduction]

It was on March 11, 2020, with the declaration of the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic by the WHO, that the gravity of the pandemic became real in Slow Food. As mentioned before, I was beginning my field research in Germany. So, on that same day, the Conference of Slow Food Germany's convivia leaders [*Convivialenleitungstagung*], which was to take place in Damme, from the 13th to the 15th, and to which I had been granted access as a researcher, was canceled. The weekend-long event was held in a three-hour-long Zoom conference on Saturday morning. It was the first of many. Two days later, I received an e-mail canceling the first two weekends of the Slow Food Youth Akademie, the educational program set up to train food system changemakers.

The initial migration of meetings to Zoom may give the impression that the process was quick and easy. This could not be less true. To show how things were still confusing then, on March 12, I attended a Schneckentisch, a meeting of the Frankfurt Convivium, in a restaurant, with another 13 people. It was dinner and involved the presentation of a cookbook of Italian recipes. Only five of the planned 19 people enrolled canceled due to the pandemic. And the members that attended were still travelling and working as usual, even making plans for the next meetings. Even though there are different perceptions of Slow Food Germany based on the different groups and their goals and actions, the one thing they do have in common is that their activities are based on meetings around food, whether they be in fancy restaurants or at picnics.



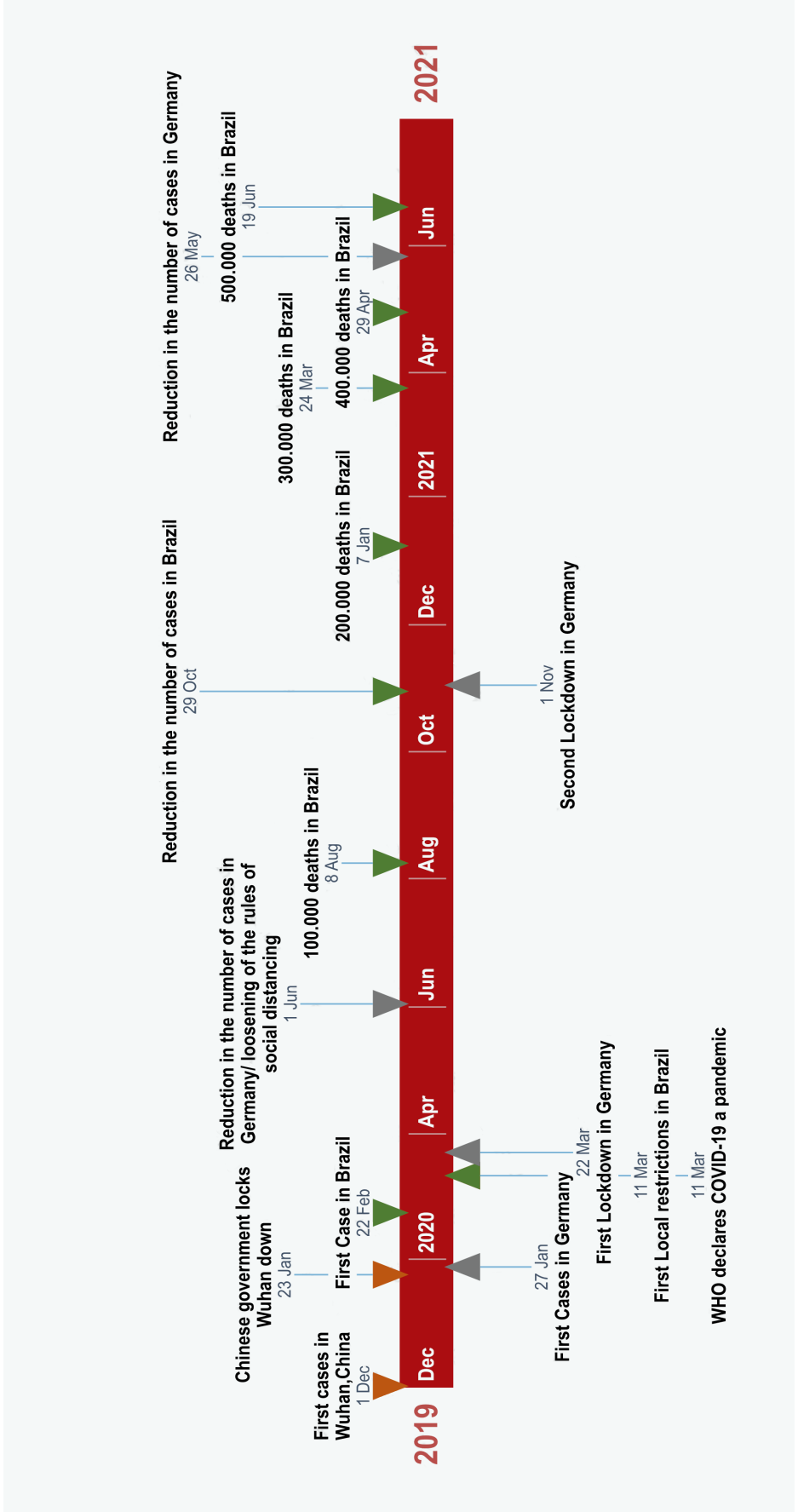
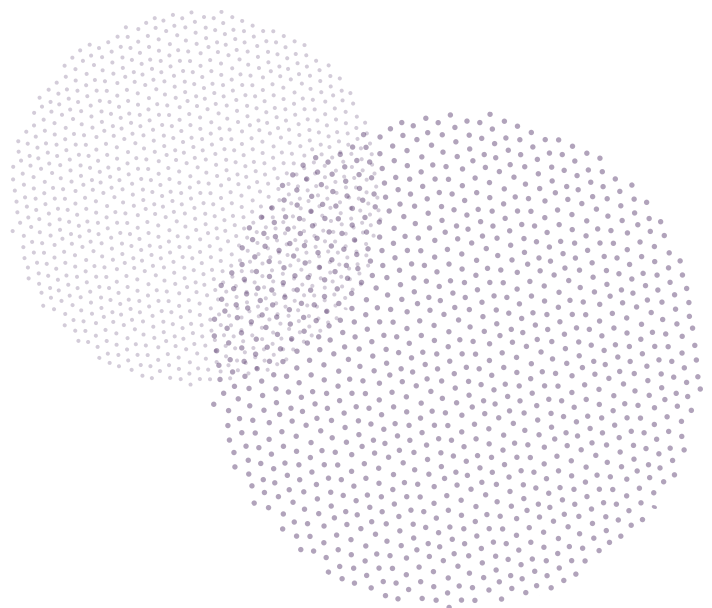


Figure 4. Timeline of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil and Germany in the period of this research [Dwn work].

So, when the lockdown began on March 22, it was not effortless for Slow Food Germany to go online. It required a process. And some groups adapted more easily than others. The two convivia I observed had a harder time. The Frankfurt group was on hold for the next seven months and just met once again, on October 8th, 2020. At that meeting, they started planning to keep their dinners till the end of the year but were stopped by the closing of bars and restaurants once again⁹. The Berlin Convivium did not hold any meetings for more than a year. For those groups, which would always get together at least once per month, the pandemic had a great impact on their organization and mobilization capacity.

The SFY, on the other hand, was quick in migrating into the digital world. Here, generational differences may have played a role, as we are talking about young people, aged from 18 to 35 years old, who were already integrated into the digital world. Their first step was to create a Telegram group, and, from there, to start planning Zoom meetings. On the first one, on March 26, 39 people joined. That was a significant number. To get an idea, the SFY meetings that take place twice a year, once in spring and once in autumn, usually attract around 30 young members in some parts of the country. Those Zoom meetings became a monthly event. So, they met more during the pandemic than before. SFY adapted quickly to what the context demanded, sharing the experiences and struggles they had been facing in their work, their lives, in their cities. Actions and campaigns also were planned during those meetings. Such as the World Disco Soup Day, which had already been scheduled for April, and which was turned into an online edition, the German participation having been planned in those Zoom calls. The SFY postponed its board team election in 2020, which should have taken place in the spring network meeting, hoping to do it in person. However, they chose to use an online process in November of that year. Local groups, such as the SFY Berlin, also went online and not only held their monthly meetings via Zoom, planning new actions and campaigns, but cooked 'together' virtually, each member cooking in their homes. Because they kept in contact [or even strengthened the network exchanges] during the lockdown, the SFY local groups were still able to meet personally during summer [June to August in the Global North], when the contamination numbers in Germany were quite low, for small visits to producers or at picnics, complying with the safety rules.



⁹ They were re-opened only in May 2021, to people proving vaccination or recovery from COVID-19.



Figure 5. Online meetings and campaigns were organized by SFY in Germany [Disclosure].

Nationally, most meetings and projects migrated online. This involved not only the abovementioned convivia leaders meeting, but also the general assembly, where the balances, projects, and plans were presented to the association's members, and the motions and changes in the association were voted on. The 2020 general assembly, in July, was still at the beginning of the pandemic and everything was a little bit new to everyone. This format, even with the possibilities of tools to enhance the interaction, is not an enabling environment for those accustomed to one-on-one meetings to discuss politics. However, with the pandemic not wavering, the members adapted to it and, in 2021, kept the format, experiencing fewer difficulties. One of the main discussions in the general meetings, both in 2020 and 2021, was the necessity of the movement to raise their membership numbers to improve the association funding. The concern was that the numbers were falling and the perspective of the pandemic and its subsequent crisis was not optimistic. Financially, SFD was also affected, as it had to cancel its annual fair, *Markt des guten Geschmacks*, in 2020 and 2021.

Other projects had to be adapted to the constraints of reality. It was the case for the 2020 SFY Akademie. It was normally planned for 25 young activists [from 18 to 35 years of age] per year. It was an eight-month program with a themed weekend per month held in a different part of the country, each weekend focusing on one aspect of the food system. These were intensive weekends, with theory brought by experts, and hands-on learning guided by local producers. In 2020, the program was due to start at the end of March, but with the pandemic having been declared just two weeks earlier, the first two weekends were canceled. So, what ended up happening was that it was adapted on the go and, in the end, six out of the eight meetings were held on Zoom. Then in July and August, with the number of contamination cases under better control, they managed to hold the weekend activities publicly/offline, as planned: one, on fish, was held in Wiesau and the other, on gastronomy, was held in Berlin. One of the effects of this change from personal to virtual meetings was the loss of people along the way: we began with 25 and, for the last weekend, we were between 14 and 17 online. Some members abandoned

the program at the beginning: spending so many hours at the weekend in front of a computer on a Zoom call was time-consuming. The interactions in this format had a different dynamic from the ones in person. Sometimes, they demanded more energy to engage as the conversations did not flow as easily as when people were in the same room, looking at each other and all the non-verbal communication. More than that, the program was designed to be a mix of empiricism and theory - and the virtual format did not allow the participants to touch, smell, or look at from different angles the vegetable products, or the animals, involved. So, even when following all the distance safety rules, spending the weekend together, visiting producers or cooks, or learning to work with fish, for example, and sharing the meals instead of only talking about them made a great difference.

If we had not had the two personal encounters, it would have been harder to retain this number of participants to the end of the course. On the other hand, the online format allowed international experts to take part, which was unusual. For 2021, the hybrid format was adopted from the beginning and planned this way due to the restrictions still in place. It is interesting to note that, despite all the obstacles, the program managed to fulfill one of its functions, which was to recruit young activists into the movement. Thus, continuing the presence of alumni in SFY, one of the participants of the 2020 program was elected to the new SFY Germany leadership team.

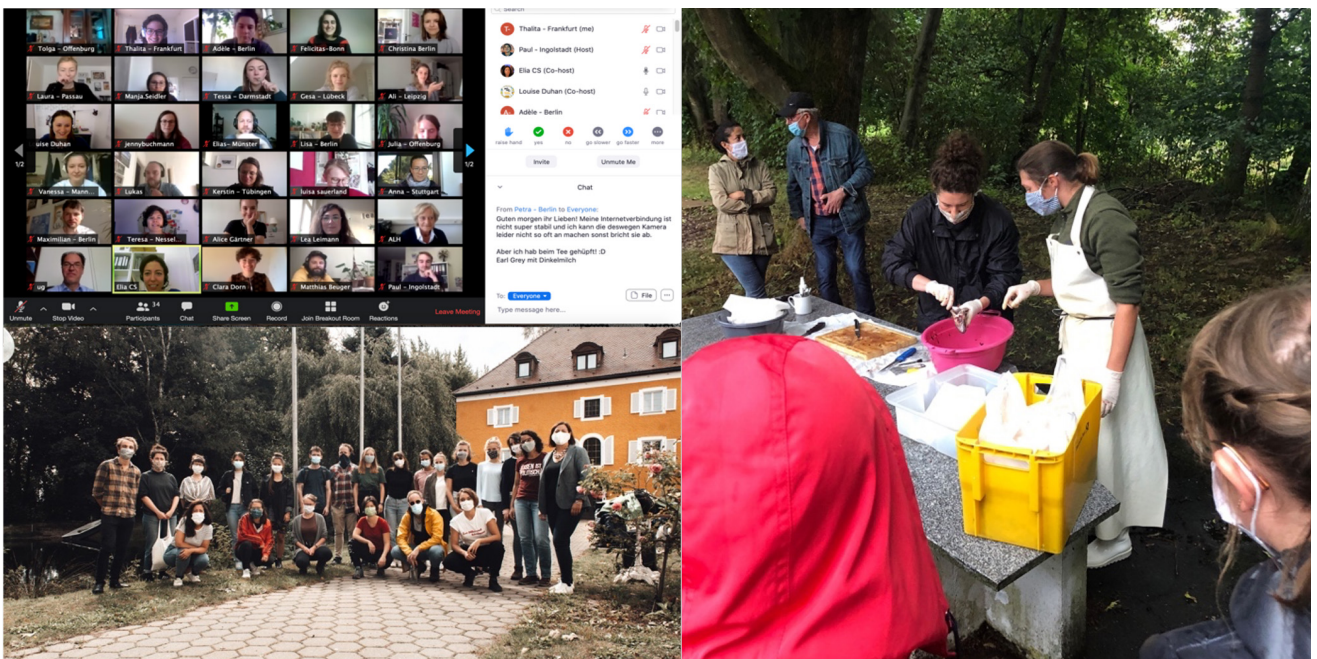


Figure 6. Akademie meetings online and in person. Left top: reproduction of Zoom meeting. Left bottom: Group picture in the first in person weekend. Disclosure image. Right: Students learning to clean the fish. Own work. image. research [Own work].

Finally, Slow Food Germany suffered a great loss in July 2020, unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic, but one that may have had an even bigger impact: the death of the movement leader, Ursula Hudson. She was the president of the national association for eight years, as well as a member of the executive committee of Slow Food International. Her role as a leader guiding the movement toward greater political engagement and making it more attractive to the young generations has been highlighted by many members of the association.

In Brazil, Slow Food may have adapted more quickly at first because, due to its continental dimension, most of the movement's communication at the national level was already online. So, communication mostly continued in a format already used. Of course, the local *convivia* had their meetings suspended. But the groups that I have analyzed in this research, from Florianópolis and Salvador, did not have regular meetings. Some of the meetings were canceled and some virtual meetings were held to discuss urgent organizational matters. If in this organizational aspect, the COVID-19 pandemic did not change a great deal in Slow Food Brazil, it did have a significant impact on the projects and events that the movement had going on in 2020. Five projects, for example, that had external financing (four by IFAD and one by the Swiss Embassy in Brazil) but demanded fieldwork were either suspended or adapted, and all the fieldwork was canceled. They involved indigenous and traditional populations from North and Northeast Brazil and could have endangered both the professionals and the local populations in the pandemic context. In 2020, the first Brazilian edition of SFYN Academy was planned to be held, organized by the Curitiba Convivium. It would be a shorter program than the one in Germany, restricted to the region, in southern Brazil, but it, too, had to go online. The Academy meetings were held on Skype and their dynamics also changed, from visiting small producers to talking to diverse experts and activists around the country (and the world). The program as an entry into Slow Food also worked here as some of the participants joined SFYN Brazil meetings later on.

As most ASFB meetings were already online, the only organizational one that was supposed to happen in person but had to go online was the general assembly to elect the new board of the national association, in April 2021. Even though the format could mean a more accessible event, it was not widely publicized or even made open to all members. Differently from the German association, the Brazilian one does not count one member as one vote; only the representatives of local groups participate in the general assembly.

The greatest loss to the movement's organization, however, was the postponement of Terra Madre Brasil. The event had been planned for two years and it promised to be a rare opportunity to assemble Slow Food activists from the whole country in a four-day meeting, including workshops, cooking classes, debates, and a food fair with the products from Slow Food projects Ark of Taste and Presidia. It was to be the first national Terra Madre in 10 years, and for the first time, it would be open to the public (in the other three editions, it had only been for Slow Food members). Around 30,000 people were expected to attend, and it was to take place in Salvador, Bahia, in June 2020. At first, it was postponed. But then the organizers decided to do it online, in November. On a website¹⁰ and through YouTube¹¹, there was an intensive six-day schedule of debates, taste workshops with products of Brazilian biodiversity, and cultural attractions. There are two perspectives here. The first is losses and how interactions change and are limited when an event goes online. The

10 The event website: <https://terramadrebrazil.org.br/>. Accessed on 15 January 2021.

11 The videos remain available on the Slow Food Brasil YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/c/SlowFoodBrasil>. Accessed on 15 January 2021.

casual encounters, the exchanges between talks and the meals that strengthen the network are all lost. But there are also gains. People who would not normally travel to the event can access it, expanding its reach. The organization calculated that 200,000 people took part in it. This number is the sum of the views recorded on every platform, i.e., YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. But the playing of most videos on YouTube, for example, numbered around 250, some fewer, others going to 800 views. The three exceptions are the ones that had famous artists: the opening table, with Bela Gil, a food influencer, had 2,500 views; Chico César's concert had another 1,800 views, and the talk between the musician Gilberto Gil and the indigenous thinker Ailton Krenak was watched 3,600 times¹².



Figure 7. Terra Madre Brasil went online. [Reproduction].

Internationally, Slow Food was similarly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. 2020 was supposed to host the Terra Madre, and the Slow Food International Congress. Both events were to happen in September. If at first, people thought that in September 2020 things would already be better, it quickly became clear that the pandemic would take longer to be over. The solution for the Terra Madre was to change the format. It went virtual, organizing a six-month long schedule, with online and

12 For comparison purposes, on her channel, Bela Gil has videos posted at the same time as the event. The one with the lowest audience had 3,700 views. Most are between 8,000 and 30,000 views, with one especially popular video having been watched 224,000 times. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/@belagil/videos>. Accessed 09 January 2022.

offline (when possible) local events organized by the convivia and national associations. So, some connection was maintained, even if, once more, the richness of the exchanges that brought activists and producers from all over the world together in one place was lost. On the other hand, the event was extended and allowed activists more opportunities to meet, although virtually, offered an expansion of the debates, and, once more, it reached an audience that might not have traveled to Italy.

More than that, however, one of the biggest concerns expressed by different members of Slow Food in various contexts, was that Slow Food International funds its structure every two years mainly with the support of Terra Madre and Salone del Gusto. Even though this information was repeatedly affirmed, the annual reports of Slow Food International and Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity do not make clear how it impacts the financial state of the movement (Key Documents - About Us, n.d.). No big change could be observed in those institutions throughout 2021. Nonetheless, the commercial arms of the movement (see Figure 2), were not covered by these institutional figures, so this impact could not be confirmed. In any case, a big campaign for donations was launched with Terra Madre in 2020. Slow Food Germany was one of the national associations working hard on this topic. However, it did not last long and raised only €2,960, according to their website¹³.

Regarding the International Congress, the Slow Food board decided to postpone it to 2022 so it would not be online. This was not the first time it did not happen in the planned year. Even though the rule is that it should be held every four years, the last three events were five years apart: 2007 in Puebla, Mexico, 2012 in Turin, Italy, and 2017 in Chengdu, China (Slow Food, n.d.). Taking place after two years of the pandemic was an opportunity to see the challenges and opportunities this brought to the movement more clearly and made it easier to plan the next cycle's foci. But I will address that in the last section of this Working Paper.

So, in short, Slow Food has been impacted in different ways by the COVID-19 pandemic. The first is in its structural functioning since its activists gather around food. With the physical distance imposed, some groups have moved their meetings to the virtual environment, with the necessary adaptations to continue. However, not everyone has been able to do this, either because of material limitations, access to a quality internet network, or personal limitations (such as elderly members having difficulties in dealing with new technologies).

The convivia; partly, they disappeared. There isn't happening anything at all. It seems that they have fallen deeply asleep. And I think it won't be easy to bring it all together. Because the ones that, in quotation marks, only went eating out or met and worked poorly regarding subject matter, don't have a base anymore. One can't meet anymore; one can't go eating out anymore. There are many, not only the old ones but also the young ones are saying that doing Slow Food online isn't working. Eating is still analog. (A. L.H., personal communication, November 3, 2020)

More than that, the extension of these formats has also generated disengagement, with people suffering from burnout either from their workload that accumulated when home and office became intermingled, from too much time spent in front of a screen, or from the insecurities and fears that the pandemic brought with it.

13 Until 17 January 2021, €2,960 had been collected from 79 donors in 10 countries. The same value was registered a year later. <https://donate.slowfood.com/en/campaign/support-slow-food/>. Accessed 19 January 2022.

It is already difficult to keep members and this year we have, for the first time, more departures than admissions. Because[...] Well, on the one hand, these personal levels where people get to know it and participate in it, and on the other hand, regarding these departures, many people feel existentially threatened and look at which expenses, which membership fees, can or must I save. [G. S.R., personal communication, December 14, 2020]

This loss of engagement can also have economic consequences for a movement that depends on membership fees, profits from events, and support from food-related businesses (SFD and SFI). But, of course, although I am here analyzing the impacts on the movement, they are embedded in a broader context. And the fact is that the COVID-19 pandemic was a disruption of everyday life, it triggered “an ‘omnicrisis’” (Negri and Hardt 2000: 189, 201), reinforcing pre-existing ecological, economic, political, social, cultural and personal strains, fusing them into an all-encompassing crisis of multiple institutions that takes on a humanitarian dimension [...]” (Vandenberghe & Véran, 2021, p. 171).

Thus, the existing inequalities became more evident with this crisis (Della Porta, 2021). And conditions in the locations where Slow Food operated were very different. In Germany, the federal and state governments acted in a coordinated way, instituting lockdowns, and re-openings. Emergency aid for businesses was made available so that they could remain closed without having to cut staff¹⁴. Hospitals did not reach full capacity at any time. In Brazil, the federal government was under the control of an extreme right-wing denialist leader. Thus, there was, at no time, coordinated action between the federal government and the states. More than that, some states and municipalities that imposed lockdowns were prosecuted and sued by the national government, that kept denying the gravity of the pandemic. In addition, to help businesses survive the closures, labor laws were relaxed, creating more precariousness among workers. Emergency help was put in place, but in a temporary way and with amounts that were not enough to guarantee monthly food. Brazil faced overcrowding in its hospitals, even with the construction of emergency structures, and, proportionally, was one of the countries with the highest number of deaths from COVID-19 in the world, reaching almost 700,000¹⁵ people.

At such a moment, social movements can play an important role, “mobilizing in defense of those rights that they perceive to be at risk or ever more strongly needed. In general, social movements adapt to moments of intense change, mobilizing to turn them to their advantage” (Della Porta, 2021, p. 213). The work of Carvalho et al. (2022), for example, also shows how some food movements did adapt their type of actions in face of the pandemic in Brazil. The fact that Slow Food operates as a network can facilitate such adaptation, since, despite having a structure that is still sometimes hierarchical, each node ends up tailoring the philosophy to its context and needs. These local solutions can be shared, and more than that, some are built on different realities, such as the cases of the Academies described here. With that in mind, I would like to examine what effects the COVID-19 pandemic had on the Slow Food movement’s actions and agenda.

14 There are certainly many possible criticisms of how these regulations were made and implemented, but they are beyond the scope of this study. The crucial thing here is to note the difference in scenarios.

15 Until January 09, 2023.

4 | Food and the pandemic: an opportunity for Slow Food?

WHES 2021 © Posts in Slow Food Deutschland Instagram [Reproduction]

As stated in this paper's introduction, there are several connections between the COVID-19 pandemic and the current food system. Being a social movement focused on changing the latter, Slow Food had momentum. Here I relate to the concept of political opportunity developed by Tarrow [1994] in debate with Tilly's [1977] studies on social movement's and its repertoires of constriction. It refers to the incentives and constrains that the context within the movement is part and how it incentivizes or restricts the movements actions. It is not a fixed structure, but a contextual, and then a variable one. So, looking at the Slow Food moment, once the first impact of the pandemic had passed and the necessary adaptations had been made to continue operating, the movement found ways of keep it going. In this section, I will examine how it forged new types of action and which of the topics that the crisis brought to light were incorporated into the movement's agenda. Again, I will first look at each country separately and then draw a comparative analysis. The very diverse contexts in which the movement operates create differences in ways of acting and foci. However, similarities are also present. In this crisis, it was possible to notice that the movement's first concern was its historical goal: connecting producers to consumers.

In Brazil, the first main initiative was led by the SFYN: the drawing up of a map¹⁶, using Google, that tagged producers, small food businesses and solidarity actions across the country. The idea of the map was launched in a meeting with five people, me included, at the end of March, and it was executed in a very short period, a matter of days. It was intensively advertised for around two months (April and May 2020). The call for registration and the publicity for it was mainly done through social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram). The engagement of famous chefs reposting it on Instagram gave the project a boost. All the registers were added by the original group of people, as it was an emergency action and there was no time to mobilize more people. So, it was an intense project, one that did not allow much checking on the businesses advertised to see if they were in line with Slow Food's philosophy¹⁷.

16 Available at <https://bit.ly/2UB1cgW>. Accessed on 01.02.2021.

17 We would do a superficial check and businesses that were clearly out of line were not included. The idea was that the risk of including businesses that were not in line with the philosophy of the movement was less important than the urgency of helping those that were aligned and in a critical situation.



Figure 8. The Brazilian collaborative mapping developed by SFYN, which was also publicized by famous chefs, such as Bela Gil. Instagram reproduction.

The second step of the project, scheduled for the second semester of 2020, was never realized. It sought to have the whole Slow Food Brazil Network checking and updating the data. The release of an analysis form, to verify how the map impacted engagement with those small businesses, was also planned for release, but this never went further. Here, it becomes clear that SFYN Brazil has a great capacity for launching campaigns and engaging with the Slow Food Network, but their biggest challenge is the continuity of those projects, and this is related to the lack of a bigger group of committed activists as once there is no funding for this kind of action, it becomes voluntary-based work. This difficulty is also, one could say, linked to the fact that the ASFB does not have a database of allied businesses, as, it is worth remembering, it does not partner with private companies.

The map project also brought a change to the movement's types of action: the inclusion not only of fairs, stores, and restaurants but also of solidarity actions. The latter is not part of the current repertoire of the movement, as it focuses more on changing the food system through change of people's behavior and public policies. However, with the crisis aggravated by the pandemic, solidarity actions were included as a containment measure. Research shows that food insecurity in the country was already deteriorating in 2017-2018. With the pandemic, these issues became even more relevant, and along with them came the emergence of hunger, which once again ravaged the country.

Although the pandemic increased the search for organic produce, simultaneous dynamics happened in the opposite direction in that there was an increase in the consumption of ultra-processed food¹⁸ by different groups in Brazil during the pandemic, according to a Datafolha inquiry (Idec, 2020). This report highlighted how people between 45 and 55 years old, who consumed 9% of such processed products in October 2019, were eating 16% of them in June 2020. Snacks, crackers, and chips had their biggest growth, rising from 30% to 35% during the period.

18 The concept of ultra-processed food is a classification tool for food called the NOVA System, developed in Unicamp, and used in the Food Guide for the Brazilian Population [Brasil, 2014]. It divides food into four categories: unprocessed, minimally processed, processed, and ultra-processed. The first category includes edible parts of plants, animals, fungus or algae. The second category refers to foods that have been dried, fermented, or cleaned, such as rice, beans, coffee, tea, flour, and so on. The processed foods products made from ingredients including oils, butter, cheese, bread, etc. The ultra-processed foods are industrial formulations, rich in sugars and/or fat and "derived from food constituents or synthesized in a laboratory based on organic materials such as petroleum and coal" [Brasil, 2014, p. 41].

However, another index catches the eye: among the higher-income population, the consumption of at least one vegetable went from 83% in 2019 to 89% in 2020, while the consumption of at least one piece of fruit a day reduced in the countryside [68% in 2019 to 62% in 2020] and in the Northeast [from 72% to 64%], which are the areas of Brazil with the lowest incomes. So, while some social strata could improve their diet during the pandemic, increasing the intake of healthy food, buying organic and more fresh fruits and vegetables, a considerable part of the population had to reduce these products intake due to its costs, reinforcing the inequalities.

In this sense, the data from the Food for Justice inquiry (Galindo et al., 2021) showed a reduction of healthy food intake of more than 85% in households experiencing food insecurity, while in those households with food security, this reduction varied between 7% and 15%.

Regarding the changes in the consumption of healthy foods during the pandemic, Graph 23 shows the group of meats with the highest frequency of reduction (44.0%), followed by the following groups: fruits (40.8%), cheeses (40.4%) and vegetables (36.8%). It is worth noting that the group of eggs was, of all foods, the one that suffered the lowest frequency of reduction (17.8%) and the highest frequency of increased consumption (18.8%). It is considered that the increase in egg consumption may indicate the replacement of meat consumption. As for maintenance in consumption, the group of cereals and legumes showed the highest frequency (73.0%).

Regarding the consumption of unhealthy foods during the pandemic, Chart 24 shows the sweets group with the highest frequency of increase in consumption (8.6%), and the pastas/pancakes group as the one with the lowest increase (5.4%). For all groups of unhealthy foods, most respondents reported no change in consumption of these foods. (Galindo et al., 2021, p. 37)

Furthermore, Brazil saw a high increase in food prices in 2020. Inflation reached 14.09%, with basic products such as soybean oil rising by 103.79%, rice by 76.01% and beans by 68.08% (IBGE, 2021b). With this, the purchasing power of the basic food basket for the minimum wage became the lowest since 2005, with a minimum wage being enough for 1.58 baskets (a measure of the amount of food necessary for an adult for one month) (Mendonça, 2021). This trend had already been observed in the family budget research 2017-2018 (IBGE, 2019), which pointed to food as being responsible for 17.5% of family expenses, a figure that reached 23.8% in rural areas. This directly affected the less-privileged classes, such as retirees, who had the minimum wage as income, or the informal workers, who counted for 39.1% of the working population (IBGE, 2021a).

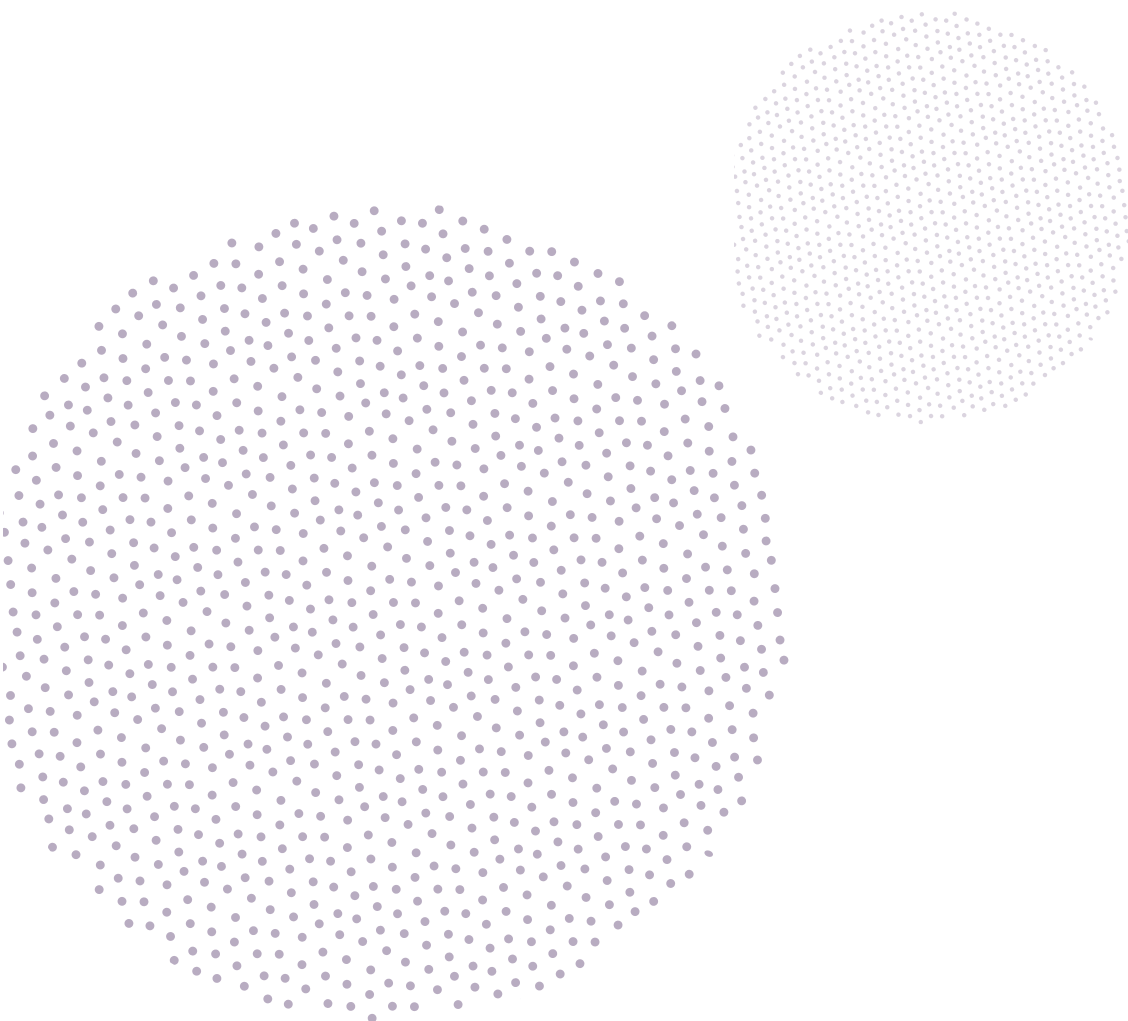
Thus, the pandemic worsened a scenario that was already a crisis and demanded Slow Food pay attention to urgent issues, such as the population's food and nutritional security. The discussions on the topic grew within the movement, as did the advocacy for public policies to guarantee it. At the same time, solidarity actions were incorporated, based on the motto of the Brazilian sociologist Herbert 'Betinho' de Souza, that "those who are hungry are in a hurry". One example is one of the alliances for food security and sovereignty that Slow Food is part of, called Banquetaço. This started as a mobilization against the proposal of the then São Paulo Mayor in 2017, João Dória, to feed poor families with farinata, a granulated compost made of surpluses of the food industry about to expire (Dória, 2017). Since then, the collective has mobilized for the human right to healthy food.

In 2019, it protested against the disbandment of the National Food Council, Consea, one of the first acts of Jair Bolsonaro as president. With the pandemic, in 2020, the collective's new campaign is 'People are to shine, not to die of hunger', and it has brought attention to the necessity of feeding the impoverished population with healthy and nutritious food, best grown by family farmers and agroecological systems. Although preparing and distributing food has been a model used by Slow Food for many years, it has been done in the context of Disco Soups [Disco Xepa in Brazil, Schnippeldisko in Germany], where the aim is to raise awareness of food waste and cook and serve delicious dishes with what would normally end up in the bin. The actions of 'People are to shine, not die of hunger' have a different motivation. They also organize the cooking of tasty meals, like the Disco Soups, but their goal is to bring food to people who do not have access to it. This should be classified as a solidarity action. At the same time, they are also a political act and push for public policies.



Figure 9. Instagram posts of the campaign 'People are to shine, not to die of hunger' (Gente é pra brilhar, não pra morrer de fome) [Reproduction].

Slow Food Germany, for its part, also created, among its first actions aimed at confronting the pandemic, a map¹⁹ listing small food businesses all around the country. There were, however, some differences from the Brazilian project. The first was that they did not rush it, they took their time. This meant that it took longer to register a range of establishments and that it was ready when it was launched. They also had the form to be included in the map available on their private platform, which meant that only businesses associated with Slow Food could access it and that Slow Food had already filtered out who could and could not receive this support. In the same vein, the map was hosted on the SFD website which, a priori, might seem it was restricted to members of the movement. In fact, it could bring curious people to join Slow Food and raise general interest in the movement. Finally, it became a fixed part of the association's website, being integrated as a tool to connect producers and consumers.



19 Available at <https://www.slowfood.de/einkaufen>. Accessed on 01.02.2021.

Einkaufsmöglichkeiten in Zeiten der Corona-Pandemie

Das Netzwerk von Menschen, die durch Erzeugung und Weiterverarbeitung, Handel und Gastronomie unsere Lebensmittelversorgung sichern, ist von der Schließung des öffentlichen Lebens besonders hart getroffen. Sichern Sie mit Ihrem Einkauf Existenzen und unterstützen Sie unser Netzwerk!

Unsere Deutschlandkarte zeigt, wo Sie trotz der Corona-Pandemie weiterhin etwas bestellen, abholen und einkaufen können. Sie finden hier die Lebensmittelerzeuger*innen und -handwerker*innen sowie Gastronom*innen, die über einen Hofladen, einen Online Shop oder über einen Lieferservice verfügen und diesen kurzfristig initiiert haben. Jede*r von uns kann durch die Art des Einkaufens soweit wie möglich die kleinen Betriebe, Läden und Gastronom*innen in der eigenen Region unterstützen und die Möglichkeiten nutzen, auch Online zu bestellen.

Hier finden Sie eine Liste aller >> [Einkaufsmöglichkeiten von A bis Z mit Filterfunktion](#).

Hier finden Sie eine Liste an >> [Online-Einkaufsmöglichkeiten aus dem europäischen Ausland](#).



Sie kennen einen Betrieb, der auch auf die Karte gehört? Sie sind Slow Food Mitglied, dann verschaffen Sie sich mit Ihren SSO-Anmeldedaten >> [hier](#) Zugang zu unserer Webseite und legen Sie die Einkaufsmöglichkeit an. Arbeitshinweise zum Eintragen von Einkaufsmöglichkeiten auf der Karte finden Sie >> [hier](#). Sind Sie kein Mitglied? Dann schreiben Sie an info@slowfood.de und nennen Sie uns Ihre Empfehlung.

Figure 10. Instagram posts of the campaign 'People are to shine, not to die of hunger' [Gente é pra brilhar, não pra morrer de fome] [Reproduction].

Locally, the SFYN Berlin set up a project called Taste@Home, where they assembled products from the Berlin and Brandenburg area in a box, which was then distributed by bicycle couriers on a specific date. Then, that same night, they did a tasting of the food via Zoom.

Who needs support? Because corona is super harmful to the retail sector and restaurants and bakeries, although bakeries not that much. But yes, delicious wine, bread, and chocolate. We got them through the chocolate trip around Berlin. And it was great. And then what was thrilling, it widened up the possibilities of how to organize events because the winegrower also participated, in Hessen, or definitely in the south of Germany, that evening and spoke about how she cultivates wine. And it is totally an opportunity. And also, Anna from Stolzen Kuh was there because we had salami or cheese. I don't remember. Well, we had a product from them. And she wouldn't have come for an evening tasting in Berlin. But sitting two hours in front of a computer, closing it and feeding again animals: brilliant. YES. That was something where I thought 'Okay, some things are easier online'. And yes, for some people, it was a new opportunity. [N. H., personal communication, October 27, 2020]

The same format, on a bigger scale, was launched by the national association. The first was a Piwi wine tasting, on the eve of the general assembly. They sent a box with six bottles of wine, and instructions on what could be served with them, and, then, the tasting was broadcast via Zoom, by a specialist and some of the producers. Later, on the occasion of Terra Madre, Slow Food Germany did other tastings in this format, such as one with products from the Ark of Taste, and one on legumes. The big change between the SFYN Berlin project and the national ones was the scale and the publicity. While the youth group focused their publicity using social media (mainly Instagram and Telegram), the association marketed their tastings through e-mail (newsletters) and its website. If the first could easily reach people outside the movement, the second, somehow, could also be a way of approaching potential new members, as, usually, these boxes for tasting were for more than two people. Also, the first was a little bit less expensive than the others: it cost €35, while most of the first tastings of SF Deutschland were between €45 and €70. This is in line with discussions about accessibility and elitism in the movement (Kalix Garcia, 2023).





Figure 11. Tasting boxes from SFY Berlin, SF Akademie and SF Deutschland chocolates and Ark products [Instagram reproduction (left) and own work (others)].

These initiatives, are, at the same time, innovative in format, and still in the scope of Slow Food courses of action for several years. That is, one of the main aims of the movement has been to connect small producers with consumers, and by doing so, it ends up influencing the production model, the distribution, and the preparation and consumption of food. In this sense, the first moments of the pandemic, at the beginning of 2020, could be seen as a positive context for Slow Food. Higher demand for organic food from local producers was seen in Germany (Bmel, 2021). Many factors, as highlighted in the Die Zeit article 'Einkaufen im Lockdown: Der Bio-Boom in der Pandemie' (Hielscher, 2020) could have contributed to it: the search for a healthier diet during a health crisis, the need to cook more, and even having more money to spend that had not been used for restaurants outings. Producers and activists from Slow Food confirmed this tendency in their interviews, with one farmer stating that his shop was overwhelmed, with a demand comparable to Christmas all through the year.

I think that the producers or farms or workshops which are looking after Ark passengers, they have been receiving revaluation and esteem by corona. Because, well, why exactly? More people are cooking on their own because canteens are closed. [...] For the joy of life, some are more concerned about cooking well and they are interested in where it is from. Farm shops are booming this year in Germany. They don't have any sales problems but more the problem where to get the products for the increased customer interest. They don't have only Ark products but that is exactly the market or farms which are looking after Ark passengers as well. And based on that, I see more uplift in what we are doing (G. S.R., personal communication, December 14, 2020).

It is important, however, to situate this phenomenon. Here, we are dealing with the group to which Slow Food belongs, the middle- and upper-middle-class. So, these are not people who necessarily suffered an impact on their food security in these first moments of the pandemic. But the timing is also fundamental. The behavior described here is consistent with the first months of the pandemic. The 2021 German food report shows that, between 2020 and 2021, more people were cooking almost every day: between 39% and 52% of the interviewees. But, at the same time, there was also a growth in the already prepared food delivery: in 2020, 42% of the respondents had never tried it, while in 2021, this number stood at 33% [BMEL, 2021, p. 8]. This number changed the next year, though, with a decrease in daily cooking to 46%; however, “the proportion of respondents who state that they cook two to three times a week has increased by four percentage points” [BMEL, 2022, p. 7]²⁰. One of Slow Food’s essential focuses of action is to raise awareness among the general public of the inconsistencies and inequalities of the food chain, so individuals could do their part to change this reality through consumer choices. In this sense, the pandemic effects, as highlighted here, could be a starting point for a broader influence of the Slow Food movement. However, despite this behavior change, the aftermath of the pandemic saw a rise in inflation, which was aggravated by the war in Ukraine starting in 2022. Food is among the main products that have gone up in price, with an almost 20% increase in relation to the previous year [Verbraucherpreisindex - Preisentwicklung für Nahrungsmittel - Januar 2015 bis November 2022, n.d.], and the results of this on the consumption of organic and farm-fresh food is yet to be measured.

Another aspect that may have been affected in Slow Food Germany because of the pandemic and the migration of people to the virtual environment is the way of having political involvement. In addition to online campaigns and lobbying in the European Parliament, the movement is part of the coalition *Meine Landwirtschaft*, which organizes the annual demonstration *Wir Haben es Satt!*²¹. If in January 2020, they were able to gather 27,000 people in Berlin’s streets, for 2021, they had to find an alternative within the pandemic restrictions. The solution was to keep the tractor demonstration as it would allow social distancing, and, in the end, a photo-action took place: 10,000 footprints, sent by activists from around the country [and further] were hung up in front of the German Chancellor’s Office as a demand for more sustainable agriculture. The strategy was criticized by some activists, who insisted that a demonstration should have taken place, even if it was to be smaller. “Everybody would understand, it’s a smaller demonstration, but... no, they only want a photo opportunity. Ok, have a photo opportunity then... This is good for people who want to post something on Facebook or Twitter and Instagram, and that is it. Will it make a political difference? I doubt it” [J. M., personal communication, October 28, 2020].

20 The question of having tried food delivery before was not on the 2022 report.

21 More on the *Wir Haben es Satt!* Profile of activists and the coalition can be found in Meinecke et al. [2021].

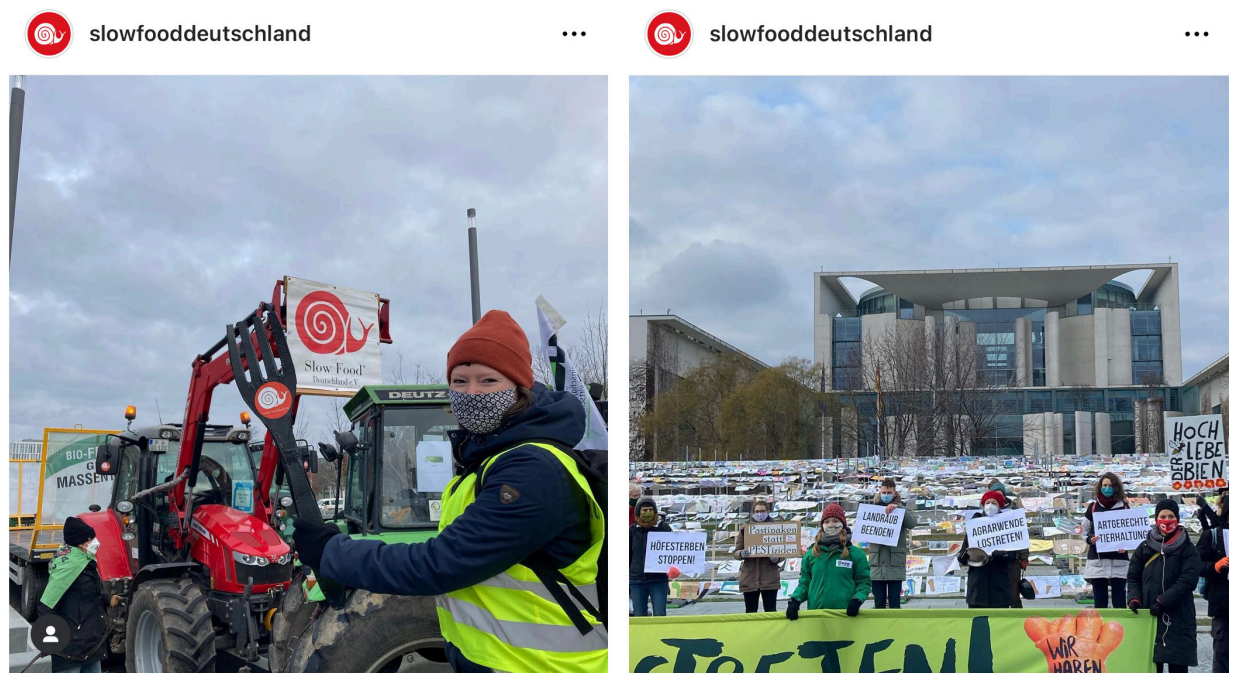


Figure 12. WHES 2021. Posts in Slow Food Deutschland Instagram [Reproduction].

However, it is important to highlight that, even before the pandemic, WHES had carried out photo actions as a model of protesting throughout the year. More than that, the then Agriculture Minister, Julia Klöckner, reacted to this campaign with a video on her Instagram account, something that never happened before. So, what is being debated is the way of doing politics. “We are totally sidelined. Our traditional way of influencing [...] is closed because we are not meeting. Politics is meeting people and not watching your TV screen and listening to boring speeches. That’s the problem” [J. M., personal communication, October 28, 2020]. Nonetheless, this perspective was not shared by a majority within the movement. In January 2022, with the pandemic still restricting crowds, WHES once again had a demonstration format with the tractors, a photo-action with hay bales in front of the Bundestag, writing Agrarwende Jetzt! [Agrarian Change Now!], and an online campaign preceding the event. In this last event, the activists recorded a video. They passed a leek from hand to hand, and whoever was holding the leek would set out their demands and pass the vegetable on to the next participant, like a relay. The more than 1,500 clips were compiled and delivered to the then Minister of Agriculture, Cem Özdemir, with a leek and a QR code.

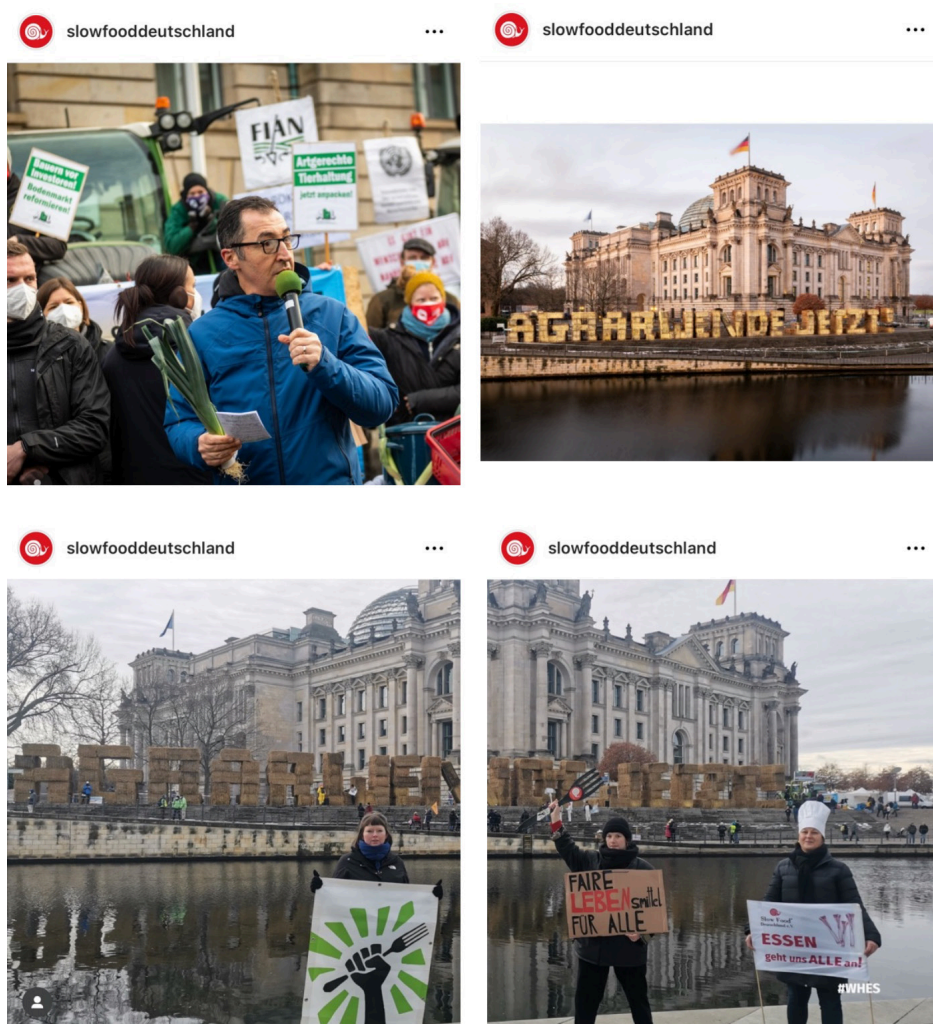


Figure 13. WHES 2022. Posts of SFD on Instagram [Reproduction].

Even when recognizing the importance of meetings and physical demonstrations, some groups, such as SFY Deutschland, had invested in online campaigns, using the power of social medias as a mobilization tool even before the pandemic. One of them was the #WithdrawtheCAP, a campaign launched by several NGOs and movements linked to the agrifood world. This is part of the strategy of the Slow Food Europe office that is used to lobby the European Parliament, and, in alliance with different other social movements and NGOs, has been instrumental in influencing important agenda there. So, in the end, what we see is a discussion, or rather, two different and not necessarily incompatible understandings of how to do politics. Here, once again, a certain degree of generational clash is evident in SFD. While more experienced activists do not believe much in the power of social networks, arguing that they only speak to a bubble, the younger ones see value in this medium as an additional way of acting. Finally, it is necessary to take into consideration the context in which these decisions not to do demonstrations with large numbers of people took place. Berlin was the scene, in the second half of 2020, of protests against the pandemic measures. These marches gathered thousands of people, bringing together extreme right-wing and anti-vaccine movements (Press, 2020). Thus, not taking to the streets with a demonstration at that point was also a positioning of progressive movements, signaling their antagonism to these values.

In Germany's context, still, the pandemic highlighted the poor conditions of workers in the fields. It became a theme in SFD's agenda. It is interesting to note that, even though the topic of migrant workforce exploitation was already being debated by the SFY in Germany, they focused mainly on the Italian problem with tomatoes and Spain with fruit and vegetables. The same problem in Germany was mentioned in articles in the Slow Food magazine (03/2020) but it was not turned into a broader discussion in the network that year, or at least not a discussion that could be perceived as a theme in the groups that I was participating in. In June 2021, the problem of seasonal workers coming from eastern countries and not having proper working conditions was addressed in a cooking class with asparagus and strawberries, the products that first drew attention to the issue at the beginning of the pandemic.

Heimischer Anbau, unfaire Bedingungen

Spargel und Erdbeeren gehören für viele Menschen im Juni unbedingt auf den Tisch. Doch die Ernte wird traditionell von Saisonarbeiter*innen erledigt, die oft schlecht bezahlt und untergebracht sind. Die Slow Food Youth befasste sich in einem Online-Kochkurs mit den bestehenden Zuständen – und mit Verbesserungsvorschlägen.



Die Vorspeise mit grünem Spargel, ein Erdbeer-Crumble zum Dessert: Die Zutaten zum Menü entsprechen der Saison und sind auch aus regionalem Anbau zu bekommen. Und trotzdem bleibt ein bitterer Beigeschmack. Denn die körperlich anstrengende Arbeit des Spargelstechens und der Erdbeerernte wird meist von osteuropäischen Saisonarbeiter*innen gemacht. Und deren mitunter unwürdigen Lebens- und Arbeitsbedingungen sind spätestens im vergangenen Jahr mit Beginn der Corona-Pandemie bekannt geworden.

Geändert hat sich bislang kaum etwas. Was können wir tun? Welche Lösungsansätze existieren? Wie kann ich fair produzierte Lebensmittel aus der

Figure 14. An online cooking class debated the working conditions of seasonal migrants (Heimischer Anbau, unfaire Bedingungen, n.d.).

Also, starting from the idea of justice in the food system, from the fair part of the movement's philosophy, good, clean, and fair food for all, the SFY have been doing workshops as part of the #GoEATHical – Our Food. Our Future project, which is a European action looking to create consciousness in consumers, mainly among the youth, about the food system and its unfairness. The project started in March 2020 and goes until August 2023. Also, the theme selected for the movement nationally in 2021 was fairness in drinking, and looked at the production of wine and, mainly, of juices, such as orange, which had a dedicated workshop on it. Their goal was to show how the products consumed in Germany are being produced in other parts of the world, often not only imposing a negative impact on the environment but also creating poor working conditions for the people who are cultivating them.



Figure 15. Campaign to raise awareness of the poor working conditions of tomato growers in Italy [Instagram reproduction].

So, when we look at the Slow Food movement in Brazil and Germany, we see that the pandemic period made the movement adopt new ways of acting and introduce new themes to its agenda. The differences in context, compounded by social inequalities before the pandemic crisis, meant that the challenges that faced the movement in each country were distinct. Even so, there were commonalities. Both Slow Food Brazil and Germany focused, in the first instance, on connecting food producers and consumers. Both also used the same tool, a map. The differences in the execution of the project, however, reflect the different structures and premises of the movement in these countries. While solidarity actions incorporated into the Brazilian types of actions, in addition to the reinforcement of online campaigns, in Germany, online tastings, workshops and hybrid protests, with photo actions in addition to the online campaign, also became part of the movement's new range of actions. In common, these campaigns embraced a social justice in the food system theme, focusing on the fair aspect of the movement's philosophy. This was not a topic that was brought to light by the pandemic, it was already being discussed before it struck. But it is clear that the impact of COVID-19 in the different realities highlighted the urgency of the problem and made some aspects of it worse, such as hunger in Brazil, or finally made it somehow visible, such as migrant workforce exploitation in Germany. Even so, it can be noted that the issue of food security, in the sense of lack of access to food, is still a topic that is not discussed in the European country internally as a problem of that territory. All that remains now is to analyze the prospects that all these changes discussed so far can bring to Slow Food.

5 | The prospects for a post-pandemic movement

WHES 2021 © Posts in Slow Food Deutschland Instagram [Reproduction]

A historic opportunity: this is how the founder of Slow Food, Carlo Petrini, defines the momentum for the EU's food and farming:

Over the past few years, we have been faced with three crises: the economic crisis, the climate crisis, and, currently, the pandemic crisis. None of these three crises will be solved completely unless we shift the paradigm, unless we move toward the economy which rests on the common good, unless we take into account the environment, food sovereignty, tourism, and fair prices. We shouldn't just look at the product and production. The COVID-19 crisis is tightly related to the environmental and economic crises, which will continue to affect us unless we take joint action. If we keep wasting time, we will miss the opportunity right in front of us. [Anskaityte, 2020]

As described and discussed throughout this chapter, the Slow Food movement was highly impacted by the pandemic, but, at the same time, it saw its historical agendas coming to public attention and even expanded its types of actions and agendas in local realities.

Now, it is necessary to consider some challenges that the movement will have to face in the post-pandemic time. Before doing so, I would like to look at the different phases of the pandemic, in a short review of the discussion here presented. The first impact, in 2020, forced most of the movement to adapt. Some elements, such as Slow Food Brazil, which was already communicating through online platforms, suffered less in that aspect, while others, such as Slow Food Germany, had a harder time in the beginning. But with time, and the diverse paces of the virus and different local contexts, everyone found a way to keep the work going. One commonality seen here in the movements: they changed the ways they operated, but their actions were based on their main aim, that is, to connect small-scale food producers and consumers. It is interesting to see how there were high hopes at that moment when people went into lockdown and the news spread images of water becoming clean and animals circulating in empty cities. It was as if the deceleration could be sustained, and the environment could recover. These hopes did not last long. Soon, the inequalities were revealed: who could work from home, who could not, who would suffer more the social effects of the crisis, and so on.

In the second phase of the pandemic, in the last half of 2020 and 2021, when it was realized that it would last for some time yet, there was the establishment of new ways of working and organizing. The new challenges were clearer: from doing on-line activism to changing the agenda focus. Despite the difficulties of maintaining

its funding sources [German and International event-based, Brazil project-based], the movement was able to resist and create new formats. That brings us to the third phase of the pandemic, after the vaccine programs when there was the hope of an end: the challenge to exercise the influence that the momentum had brought, as pointed out by many members at different levels of the organization.


Look at it as a chance that has been given to us by the pandemic, that many people have recognized that food isn't a random product and that they aren't products BUT something special. A topic one has to talk about now. Now, it has been made visible that, especially in the food industry, there are many precarious labor conditions. Barely in any other area exist so many badly paid people as in food production. Is it possible? That is what all of us need, what is the most important for us, there we permit people to be exploited. And that has shown us the pandemic. And there, I see a chance to say again that Slow Food should observe, to focus on it. As well as health in combination with planetary health. [A. L.H., personal communication, November 3, 2020]

Such an opportunity, however, does not come without the recognition that the current crisis²² has been devastating for many people. Thus, the movement is reorganizing itself to face this new phase. And in its Terra Madre 2022, it proposes the theme Food Regener-Action or 'act to regenerate'. The toolkit distributed after the event still relies on Slow Food current actions and values. However, it is worth mentioning that in 2022 food sovereignty and hunger became a theme at the international meeting, within a physical area in the fair dedicated to activism.



Figure 16. Reproduction of the cover and first page of the toolkit distributed to activists.

22 The writing of this paper closes in early 2023.



So, if the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light many of the problems in the current food system, the way out of these multiple crises would be through its changes. In this same sense, Slow Food has also renewed its structures. After more than 30 years, Carlo Petrini is no longer the movement's president. The change took place in July 2022 at the International Congress. This event, which was planned for 2020, took place before Terra Madre and was restricted to 50 delegates from around the world. The voting, the changes to the statutes, and the election of the new board of directors, however, were broadcast live on the event's website. The new board, chaired by Edward (Eddie) Mukiibi, from Uganda, demonstrates the movement's effort to be more diverse. The young leader is 36 years old and has a group of mostly young directors, with three more experienced members in addition to the former president. Besides that, the group has a balance of men and women, as well as representatives from the Asian and Latin American continents.

Thus, this movement that was born in the small town of Bra in northern Italy and, despite having spread to more than 160 countries, still keeps its headquarters there, seeks ways to embrace its diversity and face the criticism of Eurocentrism. The generational transmission, the space given to young people on the board, also points to an attempt to renew the movement and give space and power to activists who have sought a more politically active Slow Food rather than a gourmet club [Kalix Garcia, 2023]. These changes go in line with the agenda changes the movement undertook throughout its history [Siniscalchi, 2014]. However, it is to be seen if this will be only a formal representativeness or will really impact Slow Food actions and structure. The new board of directors, throughout Terra Madre 2022, insisted on the power of communities and joint action. "It is in the communities that the solutions lie," Eddie reinforced in his speech to the delegates at the event. "We won't succeed without you," added Marta Messa, the new secretary general. The movement is trying to expand its capacity to act, weave new alliances, and be more recognized. Whether these words will become reality and Slow Food will be able to take advantage of this moment of crisis, when its priority agendas are in the public discourse, to continue adapting, reinventing, and growing as a social movement will be the topic of study for some years to come.

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