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Q&A: Paolo di Croce

The secretary general of Slow Food International talks to Bernice Chan about why Hong Kong needs to change pace when it comes to how we eat



PAOLO DI CROCE. PHOTO: BRUCE YAN

You've been here for less than 24 hours. What are your impressions of Hong Kong? "We had a good dinner at Kin's Kitchen. It was interesting to see such attention being paid by the chef. He cares about everything he puts on the plate and that is very much [the slow food movement's] philosophy. We also walked through Graham Street wet market [where] you see eggs from Holland. It's clear there is a

different approach to food here from [that of slow food adherents]. We think we should know everything about what we eat and where the food comes from.”

How can a fast-paced city such as Hong Kong improve the way it eats?

"It's a matter of priority - we are what we eat. The fastest country in the world [when it comes to food] is the United States. They invented the fast-food model. But now a lot of people have decided to change their habits because of the health problems related to bad food: obesity, diabetes, heart problems.

"It's not true that we just eat to survive. Food is part of our lives and we should dedicate more time, attention and money to what we eat. I know Hong Kong imports a lot of its food, but maybe it's time to start thinking [about producing] something here or not too far from here. I understand land is expensive here, but in the future we cannot eat computers or mobile phones - we have to eat something.”

How can we change our approach to food? "The law of labelling here is different from other places so we don't know what we are eating. Food should not be a matter of being lucky; it should be about choice. Then, if I prefer to eat unhealthy food, it's my choice.”

What does your job entail? "I follow the activities of the 2,000 local groups we have around the world. Here in Hong Kong, it's a few members but in Europe, we talk with politicians. We have relationships with food institutions in the UN. We are one of the players in the food system.”

You fly a lot. When you go home, what do you like to eat? "When I go home, I like to rest! I'm lucky because I live in the northwest of Italy, in a town called Bra, near Turin. It is where Slow Food was born. We have great food.”