

EDITORIAL

The Potential of/for 'Slow': Slow Tourists and Slow Destinations

Slow tourism practices are nothing new; in fact, they were once the norm and still are for millions of people whose annual holiday is spent camping, staying in caravans, rented accommodation, with friends and relations or perhaps in a second home, who immerse themselves in their holiday environment, eat local food, drink local wine and walk or cycle around the area. So why a special edition about slow tourism? Like many aspects of life once considered normal (such as organic farming or free-range eggs), the emergence of new practices has highlighted differences and prompted a re-evaluation of once accepted practices and values. In this way, the concept of 'slow tourism' has recently appeared as a type of tourism that contrasts with many contemporary mainstream tourism practices. It has also been associated with similar trends already 'branded' slow: slow food and *cittaslow* (slow towns) and concepts such as mindfulness, savouring and well-being.

Being a relatively young term, the exact definition of slow tourism is still being debated. Firstly, the distinction between slow tourism and slow travel is often unclear. The term 'slow travel' is sometimes used to denote travel to and from the destination, but may also encompass activities while at the destination (e.g. see Gardner 2009; Germann Molz, 2009). McGrath and Sharpley (forthcoming) suggest that slow travel refers to the tourists' actions, while slow tourism applies to the supply side at the destination.

One disputed aspect of slow travel and tourism is whether the tourist has to consciously choose the activity and label to qualify as a slow tourist. The Mintel Report (2009: 1) defines slow travel as 'a trip made using non-aviation methods', while Gardner (2009) insists it is the conscious choice which makes it slow travel/tourism. Our contributors address this issue with Larsen (2016) finding aspects of slow tourism in otherwise conventional holidaying, while Lannoy (2016), a self-confessed slow tourist,

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admits his slow holidays include activities which would not be classed as slow tourism by purists.

This special issue was initiated by a meeting of the International Tourism Masters Network - ITMN (in Heilbronn, November 2014) when it was noted that there was a lack of literature about destinations offering slow tourism. Interestingly, the case studies we received focus on slow tourism *potential*, rather than established slow destinations, possibly indicating that, as yet, few slow destinations exist, perhaps the topic of another special edition in a few years! However, an exciting discovery of the current issue is that not only are many tourists unwittingly practising slow tourism, but many providers are unwittingly offering holidays and attractions which include many aspects of 'slow', and it is the researchers (see Bagnoli, 2016; Fraga and Botelho, 2016; Fuentes *et al.*, 2016; Pecsek, 2016, this issue) who see the potential of using 'slow' in the branding.

The relationship between slow tourism and sustainability is also ambiguous. Some studies (Dickinson *et al.*, 2010; Yurtseven and Kaya, 2011) have found motives among slow tourists include endeavouring to reduce negative impacts and to enhance the quality of experience. Caffyn (2012) suggests slow tourism, with its offer of conviviality, even hedonism, is an easier 'sell' than green or eco-holidays, but may also result in more sustainable local tourism. Guiver and McGrath (2016) concur that sustainability can be a benign by-product of slow tourism, but is not promoted as a motive. What seems evident though is that slow tourism encourages a deep respect for the place visited, an appreciation of its uniqueness and a willingness to adapt to the place, rather than it adapting to the tourists.

This issue brings together a number of papers with different perspectives to examine how slow tourism is constructed, represented and performed. A variety of theoretical and methodological approaches (including quantitative surveys, interviews, discourse analysis and self-reflection) grounded in different disciplines (geography, tourism studies, sociology) present their findings from a wide range of locations (Brazil, Spain, Hungary, France, Italy, Denmark).

The issue begins with three conceptual papers all with a focus on representations of slow tourism, but from different perspectives. These papers contribute to developing an understanding of what slow tourism entails, both in terms of individual tourist behaviour as well as engagement in a more collective set of principles and practices that

might simultaneously distinguish slow tourism from other, more 'mainstream' types of tourism and, perhaps, allow slow tourism to be somehow integrated into other forms of travel and tourism behaviour.

The first paper, by Jo Guiver and Peter McGrath, compares discourses from academia and websites relating to slow tourism and travel. It concludes that whilst there is some overlap (in particular relating to investing and savouring time in the destination place), academic texts tend to focus more on the perspective of destinations and how the slow movement might benefit them in terms of sustainable tourism development, whilst the 'real world' texts collected from websites stress the benefits to tourists and travellers themselves. The paper also questions whether 'unwitting' slow tourists, those who take on some of the behaviours associated with slow travel and tourism without actually calling themselves 'slow tourists', can be considered as practising slow tourism, a point taken up in the following paper by Gunvor Larsen.

Larsen employs discourse analysis to examine what people say about their trips without consciously talking about slow travel, or without having consciously engaged in slow tourism practices. However, it emerges that many of the respondents in this study place high value on their 'unintended slow travel behaviour', relishing this aspect of their holiday experience. Larsen suggests that these findings are encouraging for the promotion of slow travel, and indeed for destinations concerned with integrating these types of practices into their tourism strategies in order to develop a more sustainable form of tourism.

Sociologist Pierre Lannoy takes a more focused approach to the same kind of question. Through a frank and fascinating self-analysis, drawing on a range of social and geographical theoretical perspectives on the nature of socio-spatial relations, Lannoy takes us on a slow journey through his reflections on some of his personal holiday experiences (hiking in the mountains and taking a boat along the canals of France), and concludes that what brings him so much pleasure from these journeys is a complex interweaving of material, embodied, and symbolic conditions. He then goes on to speculate that his own form of 'slowness' has little to do with the structures upon which the slow tourism philosophy appear to be based. He even goes so far as to suggest that the mindfulness of slowness that characterises the individual pleasure and satisfaction he takes from the practices described is incompatible with the necessarily heavily

mediated practices that a ‘fully fledged’ form of slow tourism, with its ethical underpinnings, advocates. However, his reflective analysis provides a useful insight into how a framework for evaluating slow tourism experiences might be developed for future research. Once again, it might be argued that rather than attempting to define slow tourism as a ‘stand-alone’ type of niche tourism, it might well be more fruitful to consider how ‘slowness’, as both philosophy and practice, can be integrated into other types of tourism from the perspectives of other tourists themselves and destination managers.

This is in fact the focus of the four case studies which follow. In the first, Laura Fuentes, Ana Muñoz Mazón and Cristina de Vierna Fernández describe their research into a farm in Galicia, Spain which offers horse-riding tuition and holidays. Their interviews with the owner and manager and survey of customers demonstrate how many ‘slow’ principles are already in place and they go on to discuss the potential to use the term in future marketing.

Brigitta Pecsek takes us to a small spa town in Hungary – Mezőkövesd – in the heart of the Matyó land where her research into tourists’ activities again shows that slow tourism is already happening, but could be developed further, for example by encouraging longer stays. She highlights the potential revitalisation that slow tourism can offer small towns, particularly those faced with declining and aging populations. She also reflects on how folklore and traditional handicrafts connect with slow tourism’s ideas of savouring time and enhancing creativity.

Lorenzo Bagnoli also explores the potential of slow tourism to help sympathetic development of a cross-border mountainous region located between well developed tourism areas in France and Italy. His systematic audit of the region’s assets reveals numerous attractions including the restored railway, destroyed in the Second World War, which could act as both an attraction in its own right and a means of access. The region has a fascinating history, including the transfer of territory between the countries.

Railways and history also feature in the final case study, based in Brazil, by Carla Fraga and Eloise Botelho, who explore the potential for slow tourism in a region which has a series of historic but still operational steam railways. The region is also characterised by an abundance of protected areas, through which many of these

railways pass. The authors therefore posit that the active development of ‘slow rail travel’, involving a multitude of stakeholders including the railway operators, the managers of the protected areas, and local agents who can provide an array of products and services grounded in folklore and gastronomy, could provide a unique way of experiencing a combination of landscape, locality and nostalgia, for both domestic and international tourists in Brazil.

This diverse collection of papers adds to the small body of academic literature on slow tourism and we hope contributes to the continuing debate about how it should be defined and practised.

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