

[DOI: 10.20472/EFC.2024.021.004](https://doi.org/10.20472/EFC.2024.021.004)

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"FESTINA LENTE" - HURRY SLOWLY FOR TRAVELERS

Abstract:

Abstract

The study aims to investigate the "manifestation" of "slow tourism", its economic importance and consequences for the sustainable development of regions. A field study was used with managers working in the field of tourism. The analysis of conducted surveys aims to reveal the presence and manifestation of "slow" tourism in Bulgaria, the connection with the sustainable development of the regions. The method is not exhaustive, but it shows some of the essential problems - the lack of sufficient control over the circumstances and consequences of "slow" tourism. The results show statistically significant differences between the average results for the attitude towards the "mainstream" tourist stream and the participants in "slow" tourism, which requires that this group of users be addressed as a separate marketing segment and offer the appropriate tools for this. Exemplary approaches have been developed. The study concludes the importance of the theme of "slow" tourism not only in the context of the sustainable development of tourist regions, but also as a potential solution to labor market problems. The study recommends encouraging tourism business managers, local authorities and the public to take advantage of the findings related to the trends and findings. It is also recommended that when implementing a strategy to interact with "slow tourists", the program should be designed in accordance with the theories and design principles of this type of business.

Keywords:

"slow" tourism, sustainable development, tourism marketing

JEL Classification: M31

Introduction

Slow tourism began to be defined as an independent form of tourism in the early 2000s. It was born as a result of evolution in the logic of "slow food" and "Cittaslow". Citizens, concerned about the protection of the environment and their own mental and physical health, are increasingly looking for ways to avoid acceleration and stress during their vacation. Slow tourism is also part of the large family of "Sustainable tourism", integrating a wide range of activities that differ from mass tourism with a greater personal awareness of the tourist and a completely different management of time, the intensity of activities and the relationship with the environment and with other participants (local community and other tourists).

The study aims to investigate the "manifestation" of "slow tourism", its economic importance and consequences for the sustainable development of regions. There is a lack of research that accurately characterizes the profile of the slow tourist. For this reason, our work uses data from surveys relating to other tourist profiles with characteristics close to those of the 'slow' tourist, such as the adventure traveller, the tourist (athletic and hedonistic), the eco-tourist, the cyclist, the explorer, the sight-seeing and the nature lover.

The method of the research includes an extensive literature survey was done on the topic and a field study which was used with managers from tour-operator companies and tourist organizations. The analysis of conducted surveys aims to reveal the presence and manifestation of "slow" tourism in Bulgaria, the connection with the sustainable development of the regions.

The method is not exhaustive, but it shows some of the essential problems - the lack of sufficient control over the circumstances and consequences of "slow" tourism. Taking into account the possible directions for the quantitative measurement of "slow tourism", the developed criteria for the typology of tourist activities related to slow tourism, the importance of transport and circumstances, the tourist supply and the profile of the slow tourist, we developed and conducted a survey during the International tourism exhibition "Holiday and Spa Expo 2024". All three research tools made it possible to confirm some of the statements of foreign authors and our hypotheses about the situation with slow tourism as a factor of sustainable development and to develop recommendations for Bulgaria. Criteria and requirements have been developed when creating packages for slow tourism and experiences.

1 Definition and origin of slow tourism

Academic literature and texts by experts and practitioners suggest that the term "slow tourism" does not have a precise or agreed definition. Authors such as Guyver, McGrath and Torkington (2016), Pecsek (2015) or Dall'Aglio (2011), among others, blame this lack of definition on the coincidences of "slow tourism" with other tourism modalities and the lack of a clear boundary between them. Furthermore, Guyver, McGrath and Torkington (2016) argue that "slow tourism practices are not new", given that "they were once the norm and still are for millions of people whose annual holiday is spent camping, staying in caravans, rental accommodation, with friends and relatives or perhaps in a second home, immersing yourself in your holiday environment, eating local food, drinking local wine and walking or cycling around the area".

Authors such as Paul Bac (2014) and Serdane (2017) confirm that slow tourism can only be explained by the evolution of social thought in recent years. Nicky Gardner, editor of Hidden Europe Magazine and author of *The Slow Travel Manifesto* (2009), originally characterized slow tourism both by the intensity of activities at the destination and by the conscious decision of the tourist (or traveller). Similarly, Heitmann et al. (2011) affirm that "the meaning and concept of slow tourism is the shift in focus from achieving quantity and volume of vacation experiences to the quality of (usually fewer) experiences." A research study on international trends and innovations in slow tourism by Zago (ed.) (2011) confirms that a tourism experience can be called "slow tourism" only if it satisfies six dimensions, both in terms of demand and supply. These are: time, slowness, otherness, authenticity, sustainability and emotion. Finally, Serdane (2017) and Pécsek (2015) define slow tourism as a set of 4 dimensions each, including environmental, experiential, economic and ethical (Serdane) or place, sustainability, experience-focus and social well-being (Pécsek).

Slow tourism is defined as the "temporal dimension of business and territorial organization" of the activity (long-term planning, time devoted to improving business and customer relations and availability of services over time) from the point of view of supply and "right to reclaim laziness" to the client, "exonerating him/herself". Slowness is defined as the slogan "time, idleness, laziness" as opposed to "time is money". This philosophy leads to the use of slow vehicles, slow programs and "slow assimilation of changing landscapes". Otherness is defined as "a realm of relationships between individuals with different opinions, beliefs, knowledge, and cultures" that create "fruitful opportunities for exchange between them." In particular, the relationship between the guest and the local population, the offer of tourism, and the guests themselves.

Authenticity is defined as "the ability to create and offer an experience that is characterized as non-material and closely related to culture and local traditions", as well as the opposite "standardized/globalized products and services". Sustainability is defined as the impact of tourism activity on the local environment, economy and society. In family hotels, hospitality and the attitude towards the guest contribute to the overall appearance of the tourist service (Zankov & Alexova). Emotion is defined as "the ability to generate unforgettable moments that make the guest leave.

2 Typology of activities related to slow tourism

The number of activities associated with slow tourism can be as large as the imagination of providers and the desires of consumers. However, to generate a certain overall framework, we again cite the work of Dell'Aglio et al. (2011), who established simple criteria for demarcation. The authors establish two axes for classifying tourist activities: "passive-active" (horizontal) and "individual-mass" (vertical). Slow tourism activities occur when both "active" and "individual" activities meet.

They are defined as ecotourism, nature tourism, river tourism, rural (agritourism), trekking, cycling and horse riding. On the other hand (i. e. "massive" and "passive" activities), alternatives such as the beach or entertainment (festivals, concerts...) appear, which can be defined as mass tourism. Halfway between the two opposites, certain modalities appear that could be understood (or not) as slow.

One of the reasons for the existence of slow tourism is to add many types of value to the place where the activity takes place. The slow tourist not only contributes economic value or by protecting the local environment, but also by developing a legitimate interest, respect and regard for local culture and traditions. For this, Pécsek (2015) defends the thesis that "local culture is part of the tourist offer (and) therefore, without the approval of the local community it is impossible to develop and nurture (such kind of) tourism".

This type of tourism is also believed to benefit communities located far from cities or political decision-making centers (typically: agrarian or mountainous areas), at increasing risk of depopulation and/or loss of power. According to Pécsek, slow tourism can help develop a greater entrepreneurial spirit, a decision-making capacity for the future of the region among its inhabitants: "the active participation of local society can ensure a broad consensus that leads to the approval of a long-term tourism strategy in the community. The result of joint efforts will promote community cohesion, a vital characteristic of any healthy and strong community".

3 Profile of the slow tourist

As a summary of the previous statements, it is possible to construct a comparative profile of the slow tourist, as opposed to that of the "mass" tourist. Almost a decade ago, Zago (ed.) (2011) noted that in slow tourism information technology plays a different role than in mainstream tourism. Then both supply and demand for slow tourism can be shown, attitudes are not very favorable for a permanent relationship. However, in 2020, the situation may have changed radically. Information technology has now evolved in a way that not only does not hinder slow hikers, but instead enhances their experience. This is the case with augmented reality applications and other means of placing the tourist through an expanded universe of information, storytelling, experiences and recommendations. It can also play a significant role in promoting many supply-side sustainable tourism initiatives around the world, which in turn facilitates the spread of slow tourism.

The interviews conducted among managers of tour operator companies, hoteliers, restaurateurs and representatives of tourist organizations and organizations for the management of tourist areas in Bulgaria, during the international tourist exhibition "Vacation and SPA Expo 2024" in Sofia, Bulgaria, made it possible to build a more detailed profile of the slow tourist. For the slow tourist who takes an organized trip, it is very important that the guide has a relationship with the local community and thus provides an opportunity for closer contact with the local population. It is important for him to be given the opportunity to drink coffee at the local establishment and shop at the local store. It is highly appreciated if it comes across an event from the real life of the local people: a traditional wedding in the village of Ribnovo, baptism, rituals related to local or religious holidays, etc. he prefers to have a flexible agenda or none at all. To leave a village for the big city and stop at another place, thus staying at the destination a little longer. It is important to have an Internet option, but not everything is too accessible, but to be balanced: Internet only in the common areas. In organized groups, tourists usually don't touch each other's TVs. He only keeps the driver watching TV. More and more Bulgarians prefer to stay in guest houses, to feel the hospitality of the hosts, to try and buy products from the area. There is also a fashion to buy certain products if a popular influencer has shared them on Tik-Tok, or to search for certain dishes, even if they are not particularly typical of the area, if a chef has prepared them in a reality

show and are familiar to consumers. If an analysis of the preferences of the "slow tourist" is made, it is easy to see a potential source of temporary workers in the tourism industry in our country, which has been short of staff in recent years.

Within the framework of the international tourism exhibition "Holiday and Spa Expo 2024" in Sofia, Bulgaria, a survey was conducted in the form of a semi-structured interview about the propensity of managers in tour operator companies, hoteliers and tour operator associations to hire visitors with a tourist visa/purposes as temporary labor (programs aimed at to students and young people (work and travel), i. e. to include the tourist component. The results showed that very few of the tour operators have young people as customers. The reason is that young people manage to research and book places and travel options on their own. Most of them do not want to feel the place and try to skip tour operators as organizers and intermediaries in offering a tourist trip with a total price. This is especially true for the so-called digital nomads, who explore the conditions themselves. For them, good internet and living conditions are important. They mainly use Airbnb for accommodation and do not rely on hospitality. The element of hospitality is completely missing. Regarding work and travel, a lot depends on how much they like Bulgaria. On the one hand, it is profitable for them to live in Bulgaria, but on the other hand, the country is not very attractive for young people at the moment. The ability to work entirely online is of great importance, especially in the IT sector, unlike other European countries where the pay is similar but lacks such flexibility.

4 Characteristics of the tourist supply of slow tourism

Due to its relative newness, it is still difficult to characterize (or find a characterization of) the supply side of the slow tourism market. Valls et al. (2019) highlight the continuous "capacity to create new businesses" from this and state that "slow urbanism generates new businesses such as craft and local markets; museum spaces; information, meetings and exchange of places; the transformation of local products; expanding visits to places less known to the general public; and the restoration of the local way of life and social culture". It also mentions "new accommodation, restaurant and catering services, guides, interpretation, transport and marketing". The organization of free time allows enough time for the traveler to establish a deeper connection with the environment, the different locations, and the people they encounter along the journey. Make room for self-observation, reflection, and personal development: wildlife watching, birdwatching, cultural and themed tours, creative experiences, experiential learning, wellness, introspection.

Searching for accommodations and establishments where the traveler can "stop time". Space and service must be carefully designed: architecture and decor to be integrated into the setting: full attention to detail; a complete experience to fully enjoy. These include: small family hotels and B&Bs, boutique hotels, rural accommodation, private homes and apartments, camping, eco-lodging. The preferred type of accommodation is in guesthouses and family hotels where they have contact with the hosts.

Offering local, traditional food that uses local products. Make travelers appreciate the fact that the food has been prepared with love and care and thus requires time to taste and experience. Menus should appeal to all the senses, and the food should be fresh, from local resources. The "slow" tourist prefers organic and local groceries, tasting local products, small traditional

restaurants, organic restaurants, starred restaurants. The authors Krasteva and Alexova (2024) confirmed that tourists want to enjoy the traditional local cuisine in Bulgarian village, to touch the traditions and customs of the local population through the holidays, music and crafts, which give a unique feeling of authenticity.

For the purposes of the research, the experience of the sports-tourism tour operator company "Odysseia-In", which offers boutique trips for families with children and married couples, was studied. The groups are from 2 to 4 people who want to feel the country. They tend to travel by train, stay overnight en route and indulge in a 4–5-day eco art experience learning crafts and walking around the area. Popular activities are cooking, learning various crafts, icon painting, ceramics. This type of tourist likes to eat local products, they are curious about local dishes and culinary experiences. Taste is very important to them and they are very critical people when they are served semi-finished products. They highly appreciate home-cooked food with products from the region.

Darya Zarichinova from the regional association Tour Club ReMark, in an in-depth interview, shared her impressions of the demand and supply of the so-called "slow" tourism based on the activity of the Association on the territory of Troyan, Apriltsi, Teteven, Etropole and other Balkan Mountain municipalities. She connects the roots of "slow" tourism with the beginning of the 20th century, when wealthy families from big cities came on vacation to mountain villages, stayed in the houses of local people, ate local products, often helped in harvesting. At that time, there were no other opportunities for rest in this region. The subsequent construction boom of private hotels in the 90s of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century in Bulgaria redirected the flow of tourists to completely different vacation options.

In recent years, "slow" tourism, according to her observations, is becoming more and more popular in Bulgaria as well. In the above-mentioned municipalities there are conditions for such tourism, but it is offered rather unconsciously, by intuition, and not as a specially organized tourist product. Accommodation owners often offer homemade products - simply because they are traditionally hospitable. Local people are happy to tell their guests legends and funny stories, show them the sights, organize picnics in nature. "Slow" tourism has been purposefully offered in recent years mostly by "outsiders" who have lived in the big city or abroad, who are aware of what the overburdened urban tourist needs. These accommodation facility owners have the necessary theoretical training and are able to respond to new needs. Taking into account local traditions and conditions. The tourists can learn about local crafts, above all ceramics, sit at the potter's wheel and model. To learn elementary methods of wood carving and pyrography. To participate in sport fishing or boating. To follow all the stages of preparation of the plum brandy. To try different culinary specialties. To make walking or cycling trips along marked paths. To learn about different tree species and herbs. And many other similar activities. For example, comments from the tourists as: "I felt like I was visiting my grandparents in this establishment", "I never thought I could create with clay" are particularly revealing. The emphasis of media coverage is on the personal experiences they convey to their readers, viewers and listeners. This is proof of the need for "slow" tourism.

There is still a lot that needs to be done on the subject in this region, she says. Both theoretical and practical training is required. Many of the tourists who are looking for "slow" tourism in this area come quite intuitively. Attracted by nature, looking for peace and quiet, but also interesting and attractive entertainment. Most are without clear prior expectations. Some hope to find for their children a replacement for the electronic devices with which it is increasingly difficult to compete in their daily lives. I have seen how "city" children have an incredible amount of fun that they can pluck hazelnuts from the tree themselves and break them with a stone, pick blackberries or apples. Elementary, but still someone has to offer it. There are also tourists who are already convinced that the best medicine against stress is contact with nature. That when you work with your hands, your brain rests. More and more people are realizing it. And they are looking for different options for their perfect vacation. You have to work hard for them, it's worth it.

Criteria and requirements when creating packages for slow tourism and experiences include experiences that help preserve the destination's identity. First of all, the products and packages offered must be in line with the local identity. Providing services and products that are in accordance with the local geography and the season of the year and also: providing meaningful experiences; offering a mix of integrated products instead of supplying single strong products to maximize your income; develop alliances with other local tourism stakeholders and a compelling narrative, encouraging creativity, proactive communication, developing long-term relationships with customers/users.

Conclusion

We assume that the slow tourist comes mainly from countries that fulfill two conditions: a consolidated culture of outbound tourism and a consolidated sensibility on the issue of sustainability. Slow tourists are not necessarily distinguished by having a different income level than the mainstream. However, they stand out for their use of tempo and their preference for real experiences, not just standardized ones. All this should be considered when promoting slow tourism packages in different channels.

The delivery of slow tourism should come up with proposals allowing the use of non-polluting and fast means of transport to reach the destination or move there. They must also offer activities that enable the traveler to deepen his connection with the environment and people, accommodation that is neither mass nor standardized, and a seasonal gastronomy that respects local traditions and cultivated with sustainable criteria.

Sustainability in tourism is a mandatory requirement committed to by authorities and industry. Sustainable tourism activities are growing worldwide. Similarly, there are more and more success stories of slow tourism, as well as its presence at the main international tourism forums and exhibitions.

Acknowledgments:

The authors express their gratitude to Eleonora Yosifova from the Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism (BAAT) and Darya Zarichinova from the Regional association "Tour Club ReMark" for the conducted in-depth interviews and overall assistance in carrying out the surveys.

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