

## **SLOW TRAVEL IN TOURISM - AN OUTLINE OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS: POTENTIAL AND LIMITS IN THE CONTEXT OF POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY**

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**Abstract:** The fast pace of life and the pressure to maximise performance, particularly in developed countries, has led to an increase in time poverty and the value of time as an intangible and irreversible commodity. The response to the rise of time poverty was the formation of the Slow Movement. Its main objective is to return to the natural pace of everyday activities and seek to gain control over its management in terms of appropriateness adapted to current individual needs. The Slow Movement sees the basic premise of a healthy society as the "slowing down" of life by creating a sustainable alternative to the mainstream culture of a consumption-driven society, fed by disproportionately increasing pressures for efficiency and performance. Slow tourism is understood in this study as a mental model based on slow travel. The review article's main objective is to outline the conceptual frameworks of slow tourism. In this context, the study aims to identify the key attributes of the concept and the theoretical basis of slow tourism. Methodologically, we draw on a set of nine empirical studies from the pre-pandemic period. These studies were analysed and then compared with other proposed models. On their basis, we have created an overview of the differential attributes in relation to the "fast" mode of tourism products. The following discussion is based on the subjective perception of the time required to achieve the set goals of slow tourists. We understand the dichotomy of fast and slow travel within slow tourism as two complementary components necessary to achieve travel goals. Slowness is perceived attitudinally rather than behaviourally. In conclusion, the review article also highlights the limits of the concept in view of the opportunities offered in the process of post-pandemic recovery of the sector.

**Key words:** slow movement, slow travel, slow tourism, motivations, sustainability

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### **INTRODUCTION**

A precondition for the development of tourism in its early stages was sufficient resources to cover the costs and sufficient time, determined by the limitations of the available means of transport. Even from the current perspective, we tend to regard time as a limiting factor. This is a consequence of the ever-increasing pressure to be efficient and to

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maximise work output and, ultimately, most everyday activities. Patterns of 'fast behaviour' with an emphasis on elaborate time management, not infrequently at the expense of leisure activities, make 'time' a scarce, non-reproducible asset stimulating demand for time-saving products. In tourism, they are more often linked to the demand to reduce the length of transfers to/from or within tourist destinations. In particular, the use of modern means of transport makes it possible to reduce the time required for these transfers. In the past, before the advent of modern means of transportation, travelling was much more time-consuming. The total length of stays, e.g. Grand Tours (17th-19th centuries), was often several months or even years. Travellers spent several weeks or even months in each city they visited (Matlovičová et al., 2015). The duration of the transfers was determined by the way the journeys were organised, in which all transfers were considered part of the travel experience. Such journeys combined travel experiences and learning about the cultures of the local communities that travellers came into contact with during their journeys (Towner, 1985; Murray and Graham, 1997). These journeys were mainly pilgrimaged, religious, cultural and romantic in nature.

The acceleration of the development of means of transport and the necessary infrastructure, together with rising living standards and accelerating pace of life, led to a gradual massification of tourism. The initial phase of optimism about the profitability and high degree of versatility of the sector, fuelled by the growing demand for relatively homogeneous products, regardless of local specificities, was replaced by sobering and later frustration about the negative environmental impact and, due to the impact of increasing globalisation, the loss of authenticity of the tourist destination offer. These trends were perhaps most evident in the food and gastronomy sector, where the traditional, original offer was initially supplemented and later replaced by 'new' elements that were alien to local culture and traditions.

### **Slow Movement**

The fast pace of life and the pressure to maximise performance, particularly in developed countries, has led to an increase in time poverty and the value of time as an intangible and irreversible commodity. Its long-term scarcity began to manifest itself in the deteriorating mental health of workers, which logically triggered the need to slow down and the desire to escape, at least for a while, into a bubble-free of time stress. One of the reactions to the described problem was the emergence of the Slow Food movement in the 1980s and 1990s (Slow Food as a response to the expanding fast-food culture), and later Slow City (the Citaslow movement promoting slow lifestyles in cities; Fullagar et al., 2012; Hall, 2012; Oh et al., 2016; Bujdosó et al., 2019; Spilková, 2016). These initiatives were the basis for the more broadly construed Slow Movement, built on the principle of slowness. However, the goal is not slow movement but finding its natural pace, or rather the appropriate speed for everything we do. Thus, the main idea of the philosophy of slowness is not the cult of slowness but the search for a balance between fast and slow so that we achieve an optimal ratio between performance (activity goals) and speed (also in terms of effort; Honoré, 2005). A return to the natural pace of everyday activities and the attempt to gain control over their management in terms of appropriateness adapted to current individual needs is an essential assumption for a slow and healthy society. Slow Movement is seen as a cultural trend encouraging healthy personal development of individuals, with the support of the use of time-saving technologies.

It aims to "slow down" life on our planet and offer a sustainable alternative to the mainstream culture of a consumption-driven society fueled by disproportionately increasing pressures for efficiency and performance. Advocates of the slow lifestyle point to the unsustainability of the current fast pace of life and, in the long run, also its threats to the health of the population (Ilieş and Rogovská, 2015; La Fabrica del Sol, 2021). According to Calzati and de Salvo (2018), building a "slow society" means paying more attention to the quality of life, ethical responsibility and the value of solidarity between different social groups of the population. One of the important pillars of this ideology is, mindfulness and responsibility as collective ideals shaping harmonic relationships between people, culture, food and work, with reflection in new tourism practices (Howard, 2012). The philosophy of moving slowly, or slowing down, is one way of maintaining and managing life at a controllable pace, without the hectic, stressful and superficial practices characteristic of the cultural mainstream of today. The popularity of the cult of slowness has spread over the years to almost all walks of life, including travel, leisure and has led to the formation of Slow Travel and Slow Tourism. In addition, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has also added an unprecedented crisis in the tourism economy, given the immediate and immense shock to the sector (OECD 2020). In this context the review article assesses the conceptual underpinnings of slow travel in tourism, potential and limits in the context of post-pandemic recovery.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

In the context of the outlined tendencies, the review article aims to outline the main conceptual frameworks of slow tourism. Based on existing empirical studies, we will attempt to reconceptualise the main theoretical bases of slow tourism and elaborate an overview of distinctive attributes in relation to the "fast" mode of tourism products. We will point out both the possibilities and the limits of the concept with respect to the emerging opportunities in the process of post-pandemic recovery of the sector. Methodologically, we draw on a set of nine empirical studies from the pre-pandemic period, namely Shang et al., 2020; Serdane, 2020; Fusté-Forné and Jamal, 2020; Pawlusiński and Kubal, 2018; Özdemir and Çelebi, 2018; Lin, 2017; Lannoy, 2016; Lowry and Back, 2015; Park and Kim, 2015; Marrocu and Paci, 2013.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Slow travel and slow tourism in the context of its development potential**

In the area of seeking consensus on the definition of Slow Travel, we base our definition on the essence, meaning and main

motivation of travel for tourists, which is to relax by changing the everyday stereotype and the established way of life, to seek distraction, entertainment, relaxation and regeneration of physical and mental strength, or balance. The adjective 'slow', despite its genesis in the gastronomy environment as a counterbalance to fast food, should be understood more broadly in this case.

A key is a proper understanding of time perception, not necessarily as the opposite of "fast" but as an attribute absent in ordinary life, for a sufficient depth of experience of activity (Oh et al., 2016). Slowness is understood attitudinally rather than behaviourally (Oliver, 1999). Nor is it necessarily the opposite of mass tourism. The emphasis is not on the volume in the sense of its quantity but on the quality of the experience, or the experience of the tourist journey, regardless of whether it is undertaken en masse or individually. According to Oh et al. (2016), both slow and fast modes of travel often form a dichotomous whole. In their coexistence, they constantly interact within the same travel unit, for the same traveller, and within and between destinations. That is, the dichotomy of slow and fast tourism is more a matter of categorising convenience (Oh et al., 2016), reflecting a general pace, mode or pattern of tourism within which the traveller deliberately chooses either a slow or fast mode of travel, or combines them to maximise the goal of travel, be it satisfaction, personal well-being or self-fulfilment (Moore, 2012; Singh, 2012; Ilieş, and Rogovská, 2015). Rather, fast vs. slow travel should be seen as competing and complementary simultaneously, but not as mutually excludable choices aimed at achieving the goal of travel and smaximising comfort and relaxation (Weaver, 2013).

Slow travel can thus be understood as a mental model based on the subjective perception of the time required to achieve the set goals of the participants. In this case, transport to the destination can also be perceived as a goal, i.e. part of the travel experience, and to a significantly greater extent than in 'fast travel'. Slowness here is perceived attitudinally rather than behaviourally (Oliver, 1999). Fast and slow travel are not mutually exclusive within slow travel but rather coexist and complement each other in each travel unit to maximise the achievement of travel goals (Oh et al., 2016).

In other words, slow travel involves travel to and from the tourist destination, with the focus on the quality of both the travel and the experiences during the trip being consumption-oriented. That is, it primarily focuses on the demand issues of slow travel tourists, while not considering the industry's differentiation and dynamics or the supply dimensions of growth (Conway and Timms, 2012). Under certain conditions within the broader conceptual framework of slowness, Slow travel can also be understood as the antithesis of fast 'inventory' travel (in the sense of having 'been there') within the bubble of one's own culture (tourist ghettos; Honoré, 2004; Andrews, 2006), which it fundamentally avoids.

Slow tourism, of which Slow travel is a key attribute, can also be seen in this context. Slow travel determines the approach to cognition, which can thus acquire more depth and a higher degree of spontaneity. According to Peters (2006), slow tourism has three pillars that are perceived as differentiating attributes in relation to fast tourism: (1) doing things at the right speed, (2) changing attitudes towards time and its use, and (3) sprioritising quality over quantity.

In the academic field, many authors from different branches have tried to define and sconceptualise the theoretical basis of slow tourism, but so far there is only a partial consensus on its three distinct aspects:

(a) The hedonistic and experiential dimension - the enjoyment of the journey as an essential attribute of the experience - links enjoyment throughout the journey, including travel at the destination, with interaction with local stakeholders as an important determinant of the quality of the experience (Conway and Timms, 2012; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). In this sense, the following can be considered as relatively universal criterial variables in assessing the outcome effects of Slow tourism: satisfaction, intention to return in the future, or recommendation intention (Baker and Crompton, 2000; Bowen et al., 2005; Lam and Hsu, 2006; Bowen and Clarke, 2009).

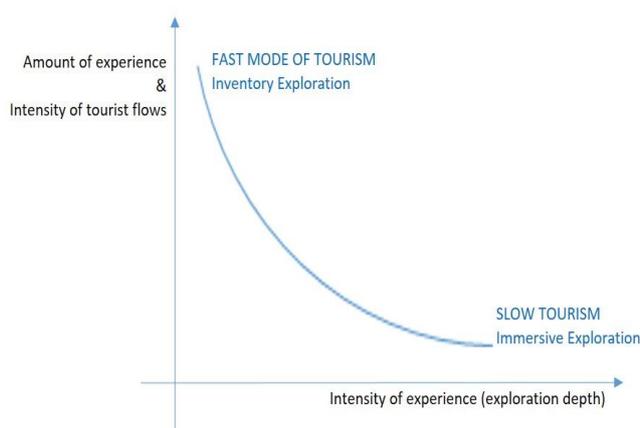


Figure 1. Slow tourism from the perspective of experience intensity and tourist flows

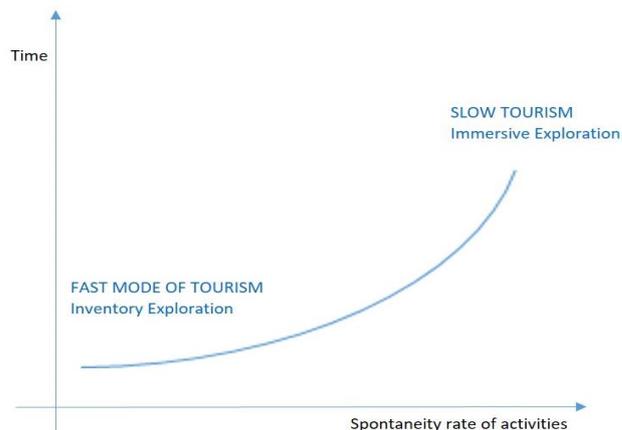


Figure 2. Slow tourism from the perspective of the dependence of the degree of spontaneity and the length of stay

(b) Positive impact on health and the spontaneous - soft mobility in the form of relaxed and unhurried movement that is not tied to a strict schedule reduces time stress, and induces a natural feeling of well-being that is beneficial to one's health. The slow pace of travel allows for a higher level of intensity of experience, quality and depth of exploration of the visited areas, based on interaction with local people (Sonia, 2015). The differentiating moment between mass tourism and immersive exploration within slow tourism is the motivation and the way of achieving relaxation. While in the first case the main

objective is a physical change of location, in the case of Slow Tourism the change is primarily on a mental level. Avoiding the pressure of time stress, i.e. allowing oneself enough time to process all stimuli within the travel in order to achieve the most intense experience of the activity, is also referred to as immersive travel (e.g. Fullagar et al., 2012; Iliş and Rogovská, 2015).

(c) Environmental sustainability - the use of slower eco-friendly means of transport with a low carbon footprint throughout the stay - so-called Low Carbon Travel, e.g. public transport, cycling, walking, animals (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Dickinson and Lumsdon, 2010; Dickinson et al., 2010, 2011; Sonia, 2015; Acharya et al. 2021, 2022). Conscious tourists who are environmentally aware and have sufficient time at their disposal also largely use eco-friendly



Figure 3. Slow tourism from the perspective of environmental sustainability and length of stay

means of transport (e.g. Serdane, 2017; Lochman and Wagner, 2022). Exceptions may be remote destinations where it is not possible to reach by such modes of transport, or it takes too long, and therefore even slow-oriented tourists may choose to use a fast mode of travel, i.e. air transport, as a necessary partial part of the transfer, despite their principles (Lumsdon and McGrath, 2011; Mika et al., 2019). At their destination, they may revert to the responsible, i.e. slow mode of travel (Conway and Timms, 2012). The above review shows that the defining attributes of slow tourism are time, distance and motivation, with the strongest emphasis on different modes of environmentally sustainable transport. Slow travel is considered an immanent attribute of Slow Tourism, which may lead to confusion between the two terms. In this context, some also argue that there is no distinction between Slow travel as a journey and Slow tourism as a way of enjoying and experiencing a destination (e.g. Conway and Timms, 2012; Lumsdon and McGrath, 2011). In contrast, another group of authors (e.g., Sonia, 2015; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Dickinson and Lumsdon, 2010; Dickinson et al., 2010, 2011)

consider Slow travel to be the central differentiating point of Slow tourism, setting it apart from other forms of 'fast' tourism. We are in favour of this view and provide a set of differentiating attributes of Slow Tourism in relation to 'fast' tourism in support of this view (Figure 4).

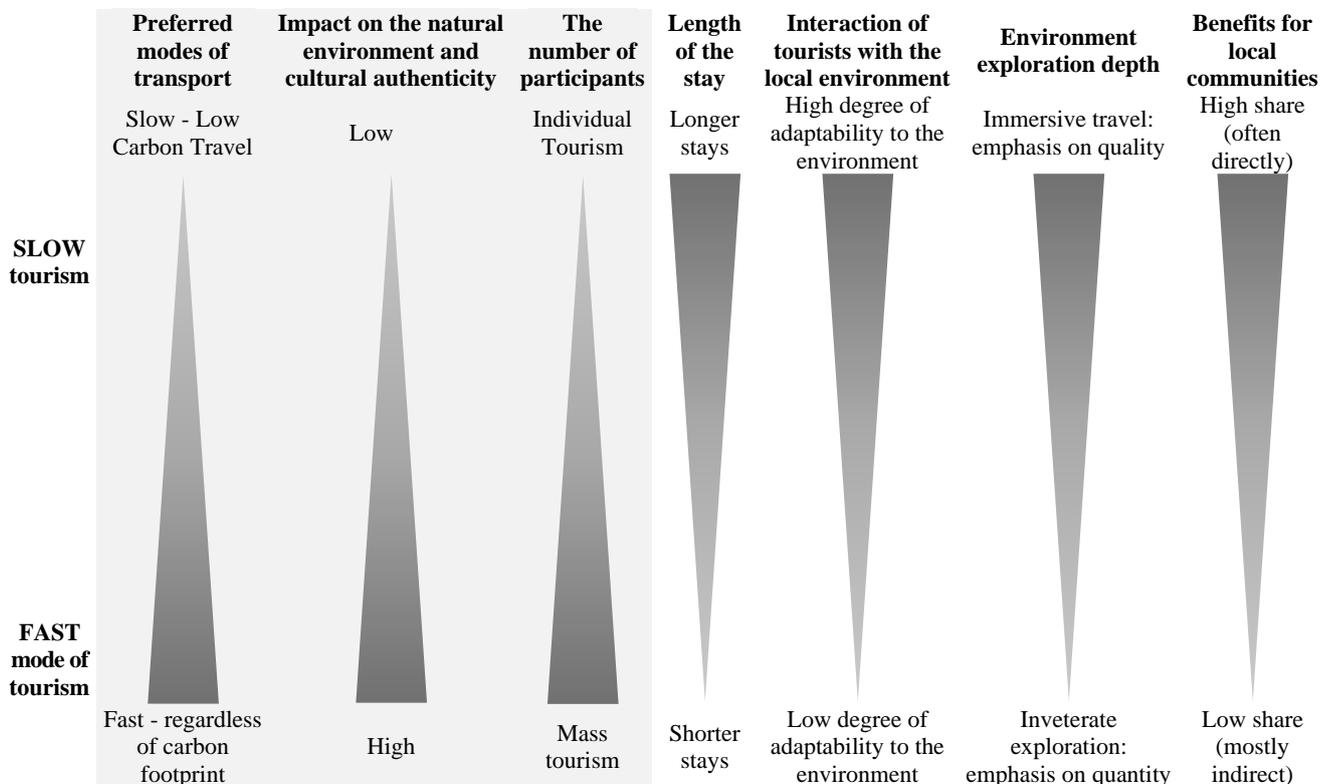


Figure 4. Differential attributes of slow and "fast" mode of tourism

The overview was based on nine empirical studies from before the pandemic, namely Shang et al., 2020; Serdane, 2020; Fusté-Forné and Jamal, 2020; Pawlusiński and Kubal, 2018; Özdemir and Çelebi, 2018; Lin, 2017; Lannoy, 2016; Lowry and Back, 2015; Park and Kim, 2015; Marrocu and Paci, 2013. In this case, it should be noted that this is a highly

sgeneralised svisualisation that aims to highlight differences, especially at the extremes. Most forms of tourism are a combination of both forms, with the mix of attributes mentioned varying at the individual level. For this reason, we outline each characteristic as intervals of transition between its extremes.

° **Preferred modes of transport**

As mentioned earlier in the text, the key differentiating attribute, according to most authors, is the preferred modes of transport. Slow tourists prefer so-called Low Carbon Travel as much as possible. They reject the use of air transport as a representative of unsustainable modes of transportation, or they allow its use only when necessary and to the minimum extent possible.

° **Impact on the natural environment and cultural authenticity**

In a wider context, we also consider the impact on the environment of the follow-up set of activities related to the srealisation of tourism in the destination. Numerous studies address these, e.g. Edgell, 2020; Leung et al., 2018; Hammitt el al., 2015, Mccool and Bosak, 2016, Heberlein, 2012, Stern, 2018 and many others. Slow tourism in this context has emerged as one of the possible alternatives to sminimise its impacts. We consider both its impact on the natural environment but also its socio-cultural impacts. The aspect of the impact of tourist activities on the authenticity of local culture is considered in terms of the negative impacts of mass tourism on the scommercialisation of local culture and the loss of its authenticity. This occurs in the case of disproportionately high demand and the attempt to make the most of the business opportunity offered by local communities (staged presentations of local customs and traditions, ad hoc demonstrations of traditional crafts in open-air museums, etc.).

° **The number of participants**

There is a direct causal link between the intensity of tourist flows and the environmental impacts mentioned above. While the increased concentration of population that mass tourism leads to is a preferred option in terms of economic efficiency and profitability of the sector (e.g. economies of scale), it runs into the problem of sustainability in all its aspects (environmental, social and, consequently, economic; e.g. Caciora et al., 2021; Chakrabarty and Sadhukhan, 2020; Matlovičová and Husárová, 2017).

° **Duration of stay**

The length of stay is determined by the objectives of the stay. Most mass forms of tourism are targeted at inventory exploration conditioned by sminimising the time required for transfers, or using fast modes of transportation (from/to as well as within the destination) without considering environmental or social impacts. Slow tourism, on the other hand, prefers "slowness" in this respect as a prerequisite for immersive and conscious cognition.

° **Tourists' interactions with the local environment and depth of exploration of the environment**

Slow tourists are, in some way, more demands on the quality of the experience. To gain an authentic experience, they are willing to interact more with local communities and adapt to them in terms of temporarily adopting their way of life (in terms of both culture and natural environment; Sumarmi et al., 2021; Herman el al., 2019; 2020, Susilo et al., 2021). Adaptability to local conditions often requires accepting a degree of inconvenience as an inherent part of the experience.

° **Benefits for local communities**

Immersive cognition ultimately has the potential to sustainably support local communities whose living conditions and way of life are only minimally affected. In this context, we are thinking in particular of poor communities for whom slow tourism activities could provide an acceptable way of income and support for their sustainable development.

**Limits of the slow tourism concept**

Although the possibilities described for the development of a slow approach to tourism development indicate a considerable, as of now, the insufficiently developed potential for sustainable tourism development, the application of the concept faces many problems. One of the most frequently mentioned limitations is the inconsistency of information about the possibilities of slow tourism, misunderstanding of its nature and ultimately the failure to meet expectations both on the supply and demand sides. The interviews conducted with tourists (e.g. Serdane, 2020; Shang et al., 2020; Serdane, 2020; Fusté-Forné and Jamal, 2020; Pawlusiński and Kubal, 2018; Özdemir and Çelebi, 2018; Lin, 2017; Lannoy, 2016; Lowry and Back, 2015; Park and Kim, 2015; Marrocu and Paci, 2013) have shown that the perception of slow tourism products is largely marked by stereotypical thinking about its sorganisation and an unwillingness to take the risk associated with the spontaneity of ad hoc planning. For example, Serdane, 2020 describes that tourists approached the arranged stays as pre-planned stays. They perceived the slowness as a burdensome aspect of organising a stay arranged individually (they describe that they planned and organised individual activities in advance with farmers, etc.).

This in turn led to a perception of 'slow' tourism products as merely more sophisticated, exclusive, expensive and higher quality tourism offerings. The supply-side planning aspect has led to certain distortions of the natural way of life, in an attempt to maximise income from tourism and thus exploit the commercial opportunity offered by the presence of tourists at the expense of authenticity. Ultimately, this has led to a contradictory perception of the different attributes of

slow tourism in terms of the ambivalence of the experience of commercial vs. non-commercial. Indeed, the growth in demand causes a natural commodification of slow tourism experiences (Serdane, 2020). A problem with the aforementioned approach to the implementation of slow tourism activities is the described frustration of tourists with the inordinately long time needed to plan a trip and the absence of the necessary supporting information that was essential from their point of view to secure their stay (list of accommodation and catering providers, transport options, etc.). However, in this case, the spontaneity aspect of planning in the sense of ad hoc decision-making on the spot and according to the circumstances disappears. A misunderstanding of the nature of slow tourism as a form that considers preparation and travel time as part of the tourist experience is also described by Moeller et al. (2011).

According to them, tourists perceived the time to plan and organise a trip as a waste of time - literally as more work for the same money (Serdane, 2020). The more conscious among them perceived it as an increased price that they inevitably have to pay (sacrifice) as their contribution to the sustainability of this tourism experience.

The question then arises about how to regulate the intensity of tourist flows so that they do not have an impact on changing the way of life of local communities or affect the character of the natural environment? The last two years have shown that tourist flows can be redirected in terms of sustainable transport to destinations that do not require the use of air transport. On the other hand, it has also shown the need to regulate flows so that the absorption limits of the environment are not exceeded in terms of environmental and socio-cultural sustainability.

Implicitly, it is possible to regulate the intensity of tourist flows by slowing them down, or by excluding fast forms of transport (currently mainly air and individual car transport), with a consequent reduction of the radius of action of tourism on the surrounding areas generating tourists. In this case, however, it is necessary to ensure adequate transport accessibility in the places of perception, while respecting the principles of Low Carbon Travel. This aspect of slow tourism is also gaining importance in the context of the current crisis in the availability of fossil fuels, which is forcing the public sector to reconsider plans for the development of transport infrastructure towards the promotion of green mobility (cycling infrastructure, walking, shared transport, public transport, e.g. based on hydrogen or green electricity, etc.).

## CONCLUSION

In the context of the theoretical frameworks outlined in the definition of the concept, slow tourism can be seen as a beneficial addition to the tourist offer of the places, which has an interesting differentiation potential in the process of branding a tourist destination. We consider slow travel to be an immanent attribute of slow tourism, in which slowness is understood as a mental model based on the subjective perception of the time required to achieve the set goals of the participants. We perceive travel to the destination as part of the experience. Thus, slowness is perceived attitudinally rather than behaviourally (Oliver, 1999). Fast and slow travel coexist within slow travel and they are complements to each other for maximising travel goals (Oh et al., 2016). An advantage of the 'slow' organisation of tourism in a tourist destination is also a certain degree of implicit regulation of the intensity of tourist flows due to the limits of the means of transport used. Thoughtful planning of transport infrastructure has the potential to direct tourist flows so that they can be dispersed over space and time. An undeniable benefit of 'slow' tourism products is the exploitable innovative potential of existing products that can be offered in a 'new' slow way. The emphasis is on their hedonistic and adventure dimension.

Existing tourism resources are thus used with a view to their environmental and socio-cultural sustainability (Dehoorne et al., 2019; Bujdoso et al., 2019). Finally, the slow pace of travel allows for a higher intensity of experience, quality and depth of knowledge of the areas visited (immersive exploration), based on interaction with local people (Sonia, 2015). Soft mobility in the form of relaxed and unhurried travel eliminates time stress, inducing a natural state of well-being beneficial to health. In the context of unprecedented anti-pandemic restrictions and the subsequent impacts on tourism, there is also an opportunity to shape tourists' attitudes and motivations to travel by diversifying the service providers offer. The current tourism acceleration, fuelled by frustration with long-term travel restrictions, can thus be seen as an opportunity to shift product offerings towards environmentally conscious sustainable travel (e.g. through the promotion of Low Carbon Travel; Sharma et al., 2021). From a socio-cultural perspective, the current situation can be seen as an opportunity for the development of slow tourism aimed at supporting local communities, especially groups that are particularly at risk of poverty (poverty reduction through Pro-Poor Tourism). This aspect of the development of slow tourism in local, especially marginalised communities, brings numerous socio-economic benefits: the revitalisation and support for the preservation of cultural heritage or the maintenance of local cultural specificities (e.g. the revitalisation and development of forgotten traditional crafts, traditions, local art, etc.), as very valuable differentiating attributes of tourist destinations, increasing their competitiveness with the consequent enhancement of social ties (Ilieş et al., 2021). As mentioned above, caution is needed in this regard, as inappropriate commodification of cultural heritage can lead to a loss of authenticity and a consequent reduction in the destination's attractiveness.

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