

SLOW TOURISM AS A NEW TOOL FOR THE DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS

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Abstract:

Slow tourism is a new form of tourism that is very difficult to define in a few behavioral categories. For this reason, the paper focuses on its characteristics with the aim to observe the impact of this form of tourism on the local community and on the territories that is very widespread.

A relevant literature review shows that slow tourism is a kaleidoscopic phenomenon that uses the resources and attractions of tourist destinations in many ways. This form of tourism is followed by many people, and for this reason, the paper aims to draw attention to the fact that the choice of destinations in slow tourism is a way to competitiveness. The methodology used to analyze this form of tourism is the qualitative method and the case studies. The paper aims to verify that the elements that form slow tourism are a source of competitiveness and how those elements are implemented in destinations. Case studies help discern how slow tourism is implemented in destinations, pointing to the competition with the others that haven't implemented slow tourism. It is the first research for this category, and more studies are needed for a proper understanding of this form of tourism as a new tourism product and a competitive element in the tourism sector.

Keywords:

sustainability, tourism competitiveness, slow tourism, experience tourism, local development.

INTRODUCTION

The phrase slow tourism was created to define the tourism phenomenon which, to emulate the romantic nineteenth-century tours, prolongs the practice of vacations and tourism in time and space so that tourists can learn and be in contact with the local reality in a different way than “mass tourism”, as the following literature review demonstrates.

The article focuses on defining this phenomenon as the constituent element of slow tourism, which will serve the subsequent analysis of the competitiveness of destinations that practices slow tourism. For this reason, starting from some drivers that constitute the pillars of slow tourism, we intend to identify if these are present in slow tourism destinations. We try to highlight whether their compliance with slow tourism is an element of competitiveness.

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The findings of this research will contribute to all those destinations that are being regenerated, and to re-planning tourism, as the study reported here offers the possibility of parameterizing slow tourism with qualitative criteria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Slow tourism differs from mass tourism with its often unstated, undesirable attributes, and distinguishes it from other types of unconventional tourism, such as eco, pro-poor or responsible tourism (McGrath & Sharpley, 2017).

In opposition to mass tourism, slow tourism focuses on the following aspects: regionality, authenticity, uniqueness, sensations, creating one's journey, vacation rentals, joining in as much as possible, staying awhile, de-commoditization, slow food and beverage choices, and discovery. Slow tourism can be identified within three behavioral categories. First, some studies focus on modes of transport that have reduced environmental impact and travel (alternatives to air and car travel). Others point out visitors' engagement in a *profound experience* of the place. The last category focuses on transport as a part of a tourist experience. (Miretpastor *et al.*, 2015)

Although the concept 'slow' indicates a temporal category, within the area of slow tourism, it is derived from the term used by Cittaslow, the slow food movement (Lumdsen & McGrath 2011). Many authors consider enjoying local food and drink an essential aspect of slow tourism (Caffyn, 2012). In this way, local people also contribute to the destination (employing, preserving traditions). Conway and Timms (2012) claim that slow tourism offers an alternative to the homogenization of a holiday experience, destinations, and their tourism provision by conventional tourism and package holidays. Considering their travels superior to those of others, many of them presented their identities as alternatives and their travels as following a more fulfilling and worthwhile way of life. (Smith, 2012). For some authors (Caffyn, 2012), conscious choice is an essential attribute of being a slow tourist. Slow travel is about making conscious choices (Gardner, 2009). Besides the location, one of the most important components of slow tourism is holiday duration. Caffyn (2012) argued that one of the advocated ways to experience a place more profoundly is to stay there longer.

What are the benefits of slow tourism? According to many authors, the benefits of slow tourism are focused on environmental motivations. If principles of slow tourism have been adopted, a destination may reduce the financial leakage to foreign suppliers and generate more income and employment for local people (Caffyn, 2012). However, tourists themselves also benefit from slow tourism, experiencing relaxation, escape from home and work, having deeper holiday experiences, and better knowledge of the place they visit (Caffyn, 2012).

For destination and social and environmental campaigners, it presents a label to sell personal, even hedonistic benefits or more ethical and sustainable forms of tourism whilst avoiding the "greater good" that has, so far, proved ineffective in changing tourism habits. (Caffyn, 2012).

IMETHODOLOGY

The article is directed at building a theoretical system from which then it is possible to analyze slow tourism. For that reason, through qualitative criteria, the authors will build that interpretative framework, which is useful to verify whether slow tourism is the distinctive element of destinations. To this end, the authors, after analyzing the literature, will try to individuate those distinctive elements characteristic of slow tourism. For this reason, the authors will analyze the different local realities to verify which human, natural, cultural, and social resources are most involved in slow tourism, but also what prevails in tourist activities and services in the destination (Nunes & Cooke, 2021). To this end, the authors will go to classify destinations by analyzing the compliance of destinations in slow tourism to assess their untapped potential. Basically, the methodology used is case study analysis and analysis of qualitative criteria useful in defining slow tourism in destinations, as shown in Table 1.



Table 1. The characteristics of slow tourism

Characteristic	Slow Tourism
Overview	Defined on the basis tourist behavior
Idea of Development	The development is linked by the improved tourism
Objectives	To increase the time spent at the destination
Potential Impacts	Lengthened cycle of life of tourist resources
Tourist involvement	The tourist is more involved than in other tourism forms
Cooperation and participation	All local communities can be involved in slow tourism and the more a community is a part of tourism, the higher growth and development
Link between tourists and local community	The staycation of a tourist for a long time in a destination needs to link the community and tourists. It is possible that after a long time, the demonstration effect can effort the conflict between tourists and locals.
Innovations	The weak sustainable is back to the nature, so the innovation in this slow tourism is not applicable so much

Source: Authors' analysis

RESULTS

The results of this analysis are indispensable to verify that slow tourism is a way to competitiveness for destinations and can offer tourists high-quality services for well-being and happiness. Slow tourism offers experiences that can contribute to the tourism product, which will be composed of a series of tertiary activities creating a supply chain with high-added value at a local level. The competitiveness depends on the level of development and growth of the destinations. The various services and the several tourist experiences during the holidays depend on the level of tourism supplies and the quality of the enterprises. For this reason, the destination that improves the slow tourism as the economic sector will be competitive when two elements occur: the first, the all-tourist supply chain is involved in tourism, and the second, the empathy of the local community with tourists. The different levels of engagement of the local community can contribute to a different level of competitiveness and inhibit updated and strategic visions. The current model of slow tourism related to new experiences and alternative use of the resources needs special skills and competencies, often not available locally, losing in part the added value.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The discussion is still very open on how slow tourism could be “designed” as the development model of tourism. The destinations need new experiences and updated tourist services to improve slow tourism so the tourists can stay longer. Therefore, the use of technologies is now a driving factor for the economy, and tourism needs to be investigated and discussed especially in a vision of social and economic cohesion and inclusion (Bizzarri, 2019) in slow tourism.

Another very important issue is the accessibility in slow tourism, which is a very important cultural factor opening new opportunities not only from an economic point of view, but also social and cultural (Bizzarri, 2019), both for residents and tourists who have all kinds of diversity and fragility (the most well-known being: sensory, dietary, religious, physical, and mental). Slow tourist destinations are those more than any other deputed to welcome people with fragility, but it is necessary to delete infrastructural, social, and cultural barriers that to date are not so welcomed in a climate of serenity and community.



At the scientific level, the paper, after dealing with the quantitative and qualitative analysis of slow tourism, tries to propose a new sustainable model of development of slow destinations, thanks to which the territory and the heritage town can achieve balanced growth.

At the operational level, the opportunity of developing destinations as slow tourist destinations makes a difference to consumers: not only for those tourists who have a lot of time to visit the country, but also for the tourists that aim to embrace it as a hobby and desire to stay a long time in the destination (linked to a healthy, comfortable, and relaxing lifestyle). This demand for slow tourism together with all other types of tourism allows us to activate a long-integrated supply chain, and, consequently, competition increases.

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