



CITTASLOW – NEW POSSIBILITY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL CITIES IN SERBIA

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to present the significance of the innovative tourism product development, the so-called cittaslow or the slow cities. The paper also aims to show that it is possible to develop such a tourism product in Serbia, which, at the same time, would be a pioneer attempt in Southeastern Europe.

The inclusion of a city into the Cittaslow association offers numerous advantages and provides possibilities for the formation of a new tourism product and an entirely new image of a specific tourism destination, whereby the increase in the travel demand for such a place, inevitably ensues.

The research subject of this paper is to explore the possibilities of forming a completely new tourism product on the territory of Serbia, the so-called slow cities. Serbia has both places and cities of rich history, culture, customs, and this poses a good way to form a travel destination included in a world association of slow cities, using the existing tourism resources.

The research methods to be used in this paper are data analysis and synthesis, statistical data and mapping methods. It is expected that the results acquired through the SWOT analysis and case analysis shall ascertain the possibility of a cittaslow “creation” in Serbia.

Keywords:

cittaslow, slow food, slow life, slow tourism, sustainable tourism, Serbia.

INTRODUCTION

The development of a country's economy is influenced by several factors and elements. In the contemporary world, tourism represents one of the key development factors of certain countries and tourism destinations, as well as of the global economy (Holloway & Humphreys, 2012). It is considered that many countries turn to the development of tourism, bearing in mind its economic influence on the development of the entire economy (Bakić, 2010). With the changes in social environment, as well as with the advancement of modern technology and the changes in the manner of operation and business, so have the changes of a contemporary tourist emerged and tourism itself has thus changed. Mass tourism was typical for the end of the 20th century and later gave way to thematic tourism, as one of the forms of alternative tourism which marked the beginning of the 21st century.

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Earlier, the term “tourist destination” implied entire areas, regions and even countries. Nowadays, an entire region or a state can hold a whole range of smaller tourist destinations each of which has its own characteristics, culture, customs, and promotion strategy, as well as its own brand and particular tourism product which represents them thus creating a specific form of thematic tourism (Jovanović, 2013). Not rarely do tourism products overlap in one place and such overlaps are desirable so as to satisfy the needs of modern tourists.

The movement of slow cities – Cittaslow – was founded in Italy in 1999 with the intention of confronting the current pace and manner of life. The idea of this, now, International Association of Cities, is to support the sustainable development of certain cities or places by expressing their own characteristics, cultural-historic heritage, customs, local food, etc. (Slow City Association, 2013). By including cities or urban areas in this international association, the increase in the tourist demand and its recognisability inevitably occurs, both in Europe and around the world.

This paper displays a case study which refers to a city in Serbia in order to see how possible it is to form slow cities in Serbia and to include them in the international association. Through analysis and synthesis of the obtained data, the benefits which a city would derive from becoming a part of the cittaslow association, would then emerge.

Before continuing with the analysis and concluding whether it is possible to develop a cittaslow in Serbia, it is necessary to point to some of the experiences from Europe and around the world. One should also bear in mind that the tourism market of Southeastern Europe should be considered as a tourist destination which has not been sufficiently researched, and that speedy development of tourism in this region is yet to be expected (Unković, Čačić, & Bakić, 2002)..

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cittaslow concept

Due to the development of modern technology and the fast way of living and business in general, the contemporary tourist becomes overwhelmed and again, starts resorting to nature, the intact one, starts visiting spas, smaller places, and areas, thus escaping the crowds, noise, and the fast way of living (Popesku, 2011). It is exactly at this point, when rural tourism, ethno villages, wine tours, and health tourism start its rapid development that the ideal circumstances for the slow cities emerge so as to develop a different form of tourism – slow tourism.

The idea of the Cittaslow was born in 1999 as devised by Paolo Saturini, who at that time was the mayor of the Greve municipality in Chianti, and the founders of the movement were Francesco Guida, mayor of the Bra municipality and Stefano Cimicchi, the Orvieto Mayor and Positano Mayor – Domeniko Marrone. The idea was also adopted by the president of the Slow Food Association, Carlin Petrini (www.cittaslow.org). These four municipalities were at the same time the first members of the Cittaslow Association. The primary goal of this association was to promote and develop the idea of a better way of living by applying a range of various solutions for a better work organisation. “Maintaining the identity, memories, protecting the environment, justice and social inclusion, the community and citizens’ activities are the values that the association represents.” (Cittaslow, Nuovo statuto) In order for a city to become part of this international association, a range of criteria from the Manifest needs to be fulfilled, which contains 6 key areas, i.e., 52 criteria.

It should also be emphasized that the Slow food movement emerged more than two decades ago, also in Italy, in Bra, the role of which was crucial in the formation of an entirely new form of tourism – Slow tourism. Slow tourism supports staying in sustainable, rural, cultural, or eco-tourism destinations, where the social, economic, and environmental components of a destination’s sustainability have the same impact and should all be considered equally (Božović *et al.*, 2022).

The primary goal and idea to create such a movement speaks volumes of the protest against the spreading and invasion of the fast-food industry. The basic principle of the Slow Food Association is “for everyone to have the right to enjoy quality food, and thus be responsible for the protection of heritage, tradition and food culture, without which this pleasure would not exist as such” (Slow Food International, 2014). In other words,



the food has to be good, i.e., local and fresh, produced in an ecologically sustainable and healthy manner. The primary aim of the Cittaslow movement is to spread the philosophy of the Slow Food association to local communities and city administration, by applying the concept of eco-gastronomy in everyday life.

Cittaslow manner of life and the sustainable development of tourism

The life in a cittaslow city is one that is slow, safe, with no rush, nor productive, and at the same time undoubtedly more humane and ecological. The idea is to have the society focus more on villages, mountains as well as smaller islands, rather than on districts of bigger cities. In a way, the cittaslow represents the protection of food products as well as the protection of the traditional cuisine and local tastes. The cittaslow as the new and unique form of existence does not solely refer to food, culture, and society, but to town planning, surroundings, energy, transport, tourism, and agriculture as well. (Lowry & Maisoon, 2011). The local society should accept the modern concept of “quality life” and be able to consciously accept the modern tourist. “To live in a cittaslow as well as to govern it, implies being in the centre of slowness, as the basic value which provides a complete and specific meaning to the time revolution, of the one who due to history, culture and the surroundings has succeeded in resisting and continues to resist the acceleration brought about by the twenty-first century...” (Cittaslow international, 2014).

The cittàslow criteria

The municipalities which belong to this association are primarily led by the idea that a man is a protagonist of a slow and easy way of life, respecting the health of its citizens, regularity of food products and quality cuisine. The admirers of the unpolluted regions, old, forgotten trade, stores, restaurants, good homemade food and coffee, art lovers and theatre goers can be found in such municipalities. They are also characterized by spontaneity when it comes to religious customs, respecting tradition and joy of the peaceful and easy way of living (www.cittaslow.org). The key idea is life in harmony with nature, which leads to prevention of unconscious use of space for tourism purposes and further prevents unplanned construction which may destroy entire regions and ecosystems.

Pursuant to the statute of the Cittaslow Association, 54 criteria exist, 24 of which are mandatory and grouped into six different categories:

1. Ecological surroundings
2. Infrastructure
3. Technology and facilities which refer to the urban planning quality
4. The protection of the original production
5. Hospitality
6. Conscientiousness

The criteria and categories are part of the accession process to the Cittaslow movement, and they are all equally important.

“In order to acquire the cittaslow status, a city must entirely comply with and adopt the principles of the Slow Food Association and to work on the improvement of hospitality and to cherish the local, ecological surroundings” (Cittaslow International, 2010b, para. 1). Also, it should not count more than 50 000 inhabitants. (Cittaslow International, 2009, pp. 23-24).

Pursuant to the Articles 25 and 26, nations and territories with at least three cities which are Cittaslow members, may establish the National Coordination Group which is directly involved with the International Coordination Group and is responsible for all activities, projects and events regarding the cittaslow in the subject country as well as the verification of the new application of all cities which are beyond their territory (Cittaslow International, 2009, p. 17). This state-level committee helps reduce the time necessary for a city to be acknowledged and to increase the awareness of the Cittaslow movement on state level.



Other cities have followed the first four which have joined the Cittaslow association and have been subjected to the rigorous and typically slow process of acknowledgment, such as the condition to be placed on the World Heritage Site.

The international network of slow cities

Today, the Cittaslow association comprises of 192 acknowledged slow cities in a total of 33 states (Figure 1): Australia (3), Austria (3), Belgium (6), Brazil (1), Canada (4), China (2), Columbia (1), Croatia (1), Denmark (2), Finland (1), France (8), Germany (23), Great Britain (5), Hungary (1), Iceland (1), Ireland (1), Italy (75), Japan (1), Luxembourg (1), Netherlands (7), New Zealand (1), North Cyprus (5), Norway (3), Poland (36), Portugal (6), South Africa (1), South Korea (11), Spain (6), Sweden (1), Switzerland (1), Taiwan (5), Turkey (21), United Kingdom (5), USA (3) (Cittaslow list, 2023).

By comparing the aforementioned data with the data from January 2011, significant changes in the number of slow cities may be observed. In January 2011, 141 cities joined the cittaslow association, from a total of 23 states. Some states have increased the number of members, such as Italy from 69 to 75, whereas Great Britain has had 9 member cities and now has 5, which means that 4 of the cities have lost the status, and the United States of America have remained on total of 3 member cities. It is also interesting that on the territory of Eastern and Southeastern Europe, there is not one city, i.e., a Cittaslow association member, except in Croatia which has one city, and, on the other hand, Europe is a continent with the greatest number of cities to obtain the cittaslow status.

Serbia is a country which has many natural resources, monuments, rich history, wonderful landscapes, and recognizable gastronomy. It can therefore be assumed that the adequate use and sustainable development of tourism of specific cities and places could create a good foundation for the development of slow cities and a new form of tourism on our territory, the so-called slow tourism.

Figure 1. Cittaslow in the world.



Source: Google Maps.



METHODOLOGY

The research subject of this paper is to research the possibilities of forming a new tourism product in Serbia, i.e., the slow cities. There are places and towns in Serbia which have a rich history, culture, and customs and this would pose an excellent way to form a tourist destination which would be included in the world association of slow cities, by using the current tourism resources (Koutoulas, 2004). Apart from promoting a slow and calm life and a slow and healthy diet, this association promotes the sustainable development of tourism of certain places and life in harmony with nature, and not against it. One should have in mind that the tourism product, around which the entire association of cities has been formed, is not a separate one, but is related to other tourism products stemming from a specific destination, whereby cities are further related to cultural tourism, nature tourism, rural tourism, gastronomy, mountaineering, health tourism, and other (Hall, Kirkpatric, & Mitchell, 2005).

This paper aims to show how a new tourism product can be formed from the existing tourism resources and how such product combined with other tourism products can form a new sort of tourism. A case study conducted for the purpose of this paper represents the urban area of Mačvanska Mitrovica and the analysis of criteria shows whether slow cities are possible to be formed on the territory of Serbia. Also, the aim of this paper is to show how development of a new form of tourism, the so-called slow tourism, has influenced development, employment, visit and generally the economic development of the places that have been made part of the cittaslow organisation (Datzira Masip, 2006).

The paper poses a hypothesis that the development of slow cities in Serbia as well as their accession into the world association distinctly recognized under the name of cittaslow would significantly influence the development of tourism both of the less distinctive places and areas and of the whole country. The scientific research methods used in this paper, primarily refer to the analysis of the existing documents, scientific papers and research that deal with the creation of slow cities and the development of new form of tourism – the slow tourism. The Italian Manifest is analysed in particular, including the key points and criteria which need to be met for the location where a cittaslow is planned. Also, the paper displays the synthesis of the obtained results, together with the statistical data and mapping methods.

RESULTS

The results of this research are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Tourist visits to Serbia and Sremska Mitrovica in August 2023.

Region – city	Tourists			Tourist overnights			Average number of tourist overnights	
	Total	Domestic	Foreign	Total	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign
Serbia	486298	233570	252728	1558431	954647	603784	3,6	2,2
Sremska Mitrovica	1571	595	976	4432	2368	2064	2,5	1,4

Source: Republic Institute for Statistics.

Mačvanska Mitrovica as a tourist destination

Mačvanska Mitrovica, a not very well-known destination, is an urban area of the Sremska Mitrovica Municipality in the county of Srem. According to the data of the Republic Institute for Statistics from 2022, this place has a population of 3896, which suits the cittaslow criteria.

For a place to develop its tourism, it needs to have and develop specific tourism resources which influence the creation of the image of the tourist destination. In modern tourism, one could say that authenticity and uniqueness are the key factors for the promotion, development, and dedication of a specific tourist destination to tourism (Cowan, 2010). Following the criteria and the classification of the tourism resources in line with the World Travel Organisation, the paper represents the urban habitat of Mačvanska Mitrovica (Figure 2.).



Figure 2. Mačvanska Mitrovica.



Source: www.sremskamitrovica.org.rs.

1. Of the natural tourism resources, Mačvanska Mitrovica has a special natural reserve – Zasavica. Zasavica is a reserve rich in rare plant and animal life, and the intact nature of the reserve is a true tourist attraction. The area of the reserve covers 1825 ha, and 675 of it is under the first category of protection. Native breeds of domestic animals can be found within the reserve, such as the Podolian cattle and the Mangalitsa pig. The reserve is the only place in Serbia where beavers can be found, which were hard to find in these areas for a long time, and this year marks 10 years from their successful recolonisation on the territory of Serbia. Also, the largest donkey farm in Europe is located here. The reserve possesses a huge tourism potential given that it can become an ideal place for admirers of intact nature, who can find just the right place for relaxation. It can also provide educational programmes for pupils and students by researching and getting acquainted with the rich plant and animal world. Specially designed locations have been provided for sports fishermen who can catch a carp, spike, or crucian carp. For those in love with photography, a photo safari can be organised within the reserve on a boat ride. Of course, there is an abundance of gastronomical specialities. The Mangalitsa meat as well as the donkey milk, which the locals use to prepare true culinary specialities, are well known for their top quality. The reserve also organises numerous interesting events such as the “Dani mangulice” (Mangalitsa days) or “Štukijada” (Pike days), a competition in preparing a donkey stew and many other specialities. When visiting the reserve, tourists can buy various products, which are 100% organic and produced in the reserve itself, such as cheese and cosmetic products made of donkey milk, bearing in mind that donkey milk is deemed to be the healthiest in the world. (www.zasavica.org.rs) The river Sava flows through Mačvanska Mitrovica, separating it from Sremska Mitrovica. The Shipyard Sava is in Mačvanska Mitrovica, as well.
2. Rich cultural-historic heritage can be experienced, primarily by visiting Sirmium, which was the capital of the Roman Empire and is situated in the area of today’s Sremska Mitrovica. Tourists can also visit the remains of the imperial palace, which represents an exceptional archaeological deposit. The Municipality of Sremska Mitrovica is the territory where several churches and monasteries are located. In Mačvanska Mitrovica itself the Church of St. Irinej was built way back in the 2nd century. The church was demolished and rebuilt four times. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Church of St. Father Nikolaj was built and in 1939 it was sanctified by Bishop Simeon Stanković.
3. Climate, just like in the rest of Serbia, is moderate continental and characterised by warm and dry summers, and moderate winters and rainy changes of the seasons.
4. The infrastructure of Mačvanska Mitrovica poses its greatest advantage. It is located in the north-western part of Serbia and the south-western part of Vojvodina. Mačvanska Mitrovica is situated at the meeting point of three plains: the plain of Srem, the plain of Mačva and Fruška Gora foothills. It is 75km far from Belgrade, or more precisely, the airport Nikola Tesla and it is connected to Belgrade via the E-70 European route. It is situated 50km from Novi Sad and 35km from the national border with Croatia.



5. As far as the accommodation capacities are concerned, numerous lodges can be found, as well as ethno houses and farms where one can stay and feel the authentic atmosphere of the old times and taste the gastronomical specialties of Srem, prepared according to the old recipes and from the ingredients grown by locals. Accommodation can be found in numerous village households and farms, which cherish the spirit of old times. Also, there is a completely organised car camp with 42 pitches in the Zasavica reserve itself (Travel Organisation of Sremska Mitrovica).

The lack of heavy industry, and modern industry in general, the intact nature, the numerous indigenous types, a small number of inhabitants, ethno households – these are all the characteristics that Mačvanska Mitrovica with its Zasavica reserve possesses and fulfils in order to apply for the cittaslow title. Of course, a lot more needs to be done so as to improve the potential of this place. Other criteria necessary for acquiring this important status also need to be met.

Mačvanska Mitrovica as cittaslow – the SWOT analysis

The entire paper was based on research aiming to find out whether some cities in Serbia, in this case, Mačvanska Mitrovica, could become members of the association and what sort of influence it would have on the development of tourism. This section pays special attention to the SWOT analysis of Mačvanska Mitrovica (Table 2), i.e., the analysis of criteria and whether it fulfils them in order to become a cittaslow. Also, a proposal of measures to be taken in order for Mačvanska Mitrovica to fulfil the conditions for becoming a member of the association of slow cities are provided, and those are primarily based on the sustainable development of tourism (Ryan, 2001).

The SWOT analysis is “a situation analysis in which internal strengths and weaknesses of an organization, and external opportunities and threats faced by it are closely examined to chart a strategy”.

Applying this situational analysis should help us determine strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that Mačvanska Mitrovica faces as a tourist destination.

Strengths - Mačvanska Mitrovica has a favourable geographical position. It is located in the vicinity of E70 highway and in between two big cities and cultural centres – Belgrade and Novi Sad. Its position could influence the increase of the number of tourists, both foreigners who are in transit and this could be the perfect spot for a short break and local ones coming from bigger cities looking for relaxation. Mačvanska Mitrovica could become the first oasis of peaceful and slow way of living. The moderate continental climate, the intact nature and the Zasavica reserve, the ethno edifice “Zmaj od Noćaja” and the river Sava, all represent the tourist attractions which are developed in line with nature and the local tradition.

Weaknesses – Mačvanska Mitrovica is a completely unknown place (Weiermair, 2004). This could be its advantage, but its weakness as well. As was already mentioned, Mačvanska Mitrovica is an urban settlement in the Municipality of Sremska Mitrovica. It does not have its website, nor a travel agency, and thus is not media promoted. It is not even certain whether its population is aware of the tourism potential of this place and how ready it is to actively participate in its tourism development. The local population needs to be trained and educated in regard to tourism so as to use the potential of this place.

Opportunities – In the vicinity is Sremska Mitrovica, rich in archaeological deposit dating from Roman periods, as well as the most famous imperial palace. The other possibility is the visit to the monasteries of Fruška Gora and the Fruška Gora National Park which offers numerous sport and recreational activities and the opportunity to spend time in nature. Not far from Mačvanska Mitrovica is the famous wine tour Erdevik-Šid-Morović which attracts numerous oenologists and wine lovers. Mačvanska Mitrovica is also specific for its authentic gastronomy which forms good basis for the development of slow food and domestic restaurants.

Threats – The fact that Sremska Mitrovica is near could be an advantage, but also a drawback, given that Mačvanska Mitrovica does not have a developed image of a tourist destination, but the numerous attractions of Mačvanska Mitrovica itself are often connected to Sremska Mitrovica and the surrounding places. Insufficient engagement in the tourism sector both of local population and local self-government could be a threat to the tourism development of this place. Mačvanska Mitrovica is not a well-known place, not even for the inhabitants of Serbia, and its promotion would be a prerequisite for further activities



Table 2. The SWOT analysis of Mačvanska Mitrovica as a slow city destination.

Strenghts	Weakness
• geographical position • location (vicinity of E 70 highway) • the moderate continental climate • the intact nature	• a completely unknown place • it does not have its website, a travel agency, not media promoted • insufficiently trained local population
Opportunities	Threats
• rich archaeological deposit • the monasteries of Fruška Gora • the Fruška Gora National Park • the famous wine tour Erdevik-Šid-Morović • authentic gastronomy and domestic restaurants	• insufficient engagement in the tourism sector • insufficiently developed image of a tourist destination • Mačvanska Mitrovica is not a well-known place

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

According to the research, a modern tourist becomes overwhelmed and starts searching for new and undiscovered places. The fast way of living has driven the tourists to search for a peaceful place to rest. That is why slow cities are the ideal place to escape the fast city life. The tourism sector envisages the expansion in development of tourism of Southeastern Europe, and a greater number of tourists can be expected in our country in the years to follow. Given that Mačvanska Mitrovica has tourism resources and potential to become a cittaslow, it is concluded that it could be included in the cittaslow world association thus automatically being promoted on the world tourism market. For all of the aforementioned to realise, the local self-government needs to take part and the locals need to invest, both for the purpose of creating a new image of the tourist destination of Mačvanska Mitrovica, and the image of a slow city which would be the first of its kind on the territory of Southeastern Europe (Ferreira Lopes, 2011).

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