



PRAY, EAT AND DRINK. THE ART OF SLOW HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM IN PANNONHALMA

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the possibility of developing religious tourism in the context of slow tourism. Religion has always been a motivation for travel and is more popular than ever, showing signs of hypertourism. However, this issue related to religious tourism has yet to be addressed in scholarly work. This research presents the case of the Benedictine Monastery in Pannonhalma, Hungary, which has a well-functioning monk community managing a school, running a publishing house and a winery, as well as producing quality food and cultural products. They also organize cultural and natural events and tours to attract visitors to the area. This paper examines the hospitality and tourism offerings of this Christian order using the four-pillar slow tourism model prepared by the author. It aims to show a viable option for other religious orders to stay relevant in our society today by embracing the entrepreneurial spirit while maintaining the core activity of spiritual guidance and faith education intact.

Keywords:

religious tourism, slow tourism, voluntary simplicity, entrepreneurial spirit.

INTRODUCTION

Today's society is accelerating at an unprecedented pace with no evident signs of slowing down. However, when there is a mega trend, there is always a micro trend that can be a niche, a special interest, or an alternative perspective within the realm of tourism. As an antidote to the speed culture, the concept of slow has gained widespread recognition, popularized by Honoré (2005), as well as the Slow Food and the Città Slow movements established in Italy in the 1980s. In the field of tourism, slow tourism has been defined by various scholars, including Dickinson & Lumsdon (2010), Lumsdon & McGrath, (2011) Caffyn (2012), Fullagar *et. al.*, (2012), Pécsek, (2014, 2018) and Clancy, (2017) among others. However, the slow concept has not previously been associated with religious tourism. While it is true that religious travels such as pilgrimages have naturally been slow, the acceleration of modern life has also impacted our spiritual needs and preferences. Alongside traditional long walking pilgrimages, alternative mini pilgrimages have emerged, incorporating mixed types of transportation and shorter journeys. Some religious attractions have become so

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popular that they are struggling to manage the tourist influx. Using the example of Pannonhalma, this paper illustrates how a religious order can get relevant today by reverting to traditions such as manufacturing food products, organizing programs and enhancing the tourism potential of their hometown.

LITERATURE REVIEW

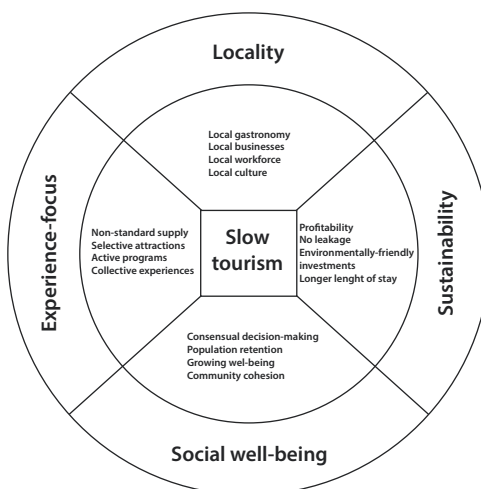
Trends and countertrends in society

The acceleration of modern society has been a focal point in contemporary academic discourse for decades, resulting in a wealth of literature connected to overwork, which in turn, has led to social ailments, including overconsumption. This phenomenon has given rise to the McDonaldization of society, where uniqueness disappears (Ritzer, 1993). Unfortunately, the technological acceleration has not provided more leisure time, resulting in more depression, burnout and alienation (Harmut, 2013). Simultaneously, a countertrend called downsizing (Hamilton and Mail, 2003) has emerged. It involves accepting a lower income and a reduced level of consumption, in exchange for more time and freedom to pursue other life goals, such as spending more time with family, personal time, self-actualization or spiritual exploration. Downsizing is associated with voluntary simplicity, which involves decluttering one's life (Ballantine & Creery 2010), and generally seeking non-materialistic sources of satisfaction and meaning (Alexander, 2011). Among the various discussions on voluntary simplicity, the most accepted concept is when it is used as a sustainable alternative to overconsumption (Burgiel *et. al.*, (2015) rather than as an equivalent to living in poverty or renouncing all the advantages of science and technology, and it is with no relation to eccentric outsiders (Alexander, 2011), living on the fringe of society.

Fast tourism and slow tourism

According to the Hungarian Statistical Office (KSH, 2022) the average length of stay in the EU27 is 3.1 nights, while in Hungary it is 2.6 nights. Ireland notably increased its average length of stay from 2.2 days to 3.9 days between 2000 and 2022, whereas Cyprus experienced a decrease from 6.9 to 4.6 nights. Considering that 963 million people took trips in 2022 (Statista, 2023), it indicates that many people spend very few nights at a destination. The dichotomy of fast and slow can be observed in religious travel as well, as pilgrimages were originally strenuous journeys in the Middle Ages. As society has become faster, so have religious travels. These days, both visiting Vatican City by plane and the long walk of Kumano-kodo pilgrimage are popular pursuits. The slow tourism model (2014) aims to provide a tool for professionals to assess their touristic offerings against the elements of the model (Figure 1.)

Figure 1. Slow tourism model.



Source: Pécsek, 2014.



METHODOLOGY

Pannonhalma Archabbey was chosen as a research site because, through its example, it can illustrate how a UNESCO World Heritage Site of religious nature can be successfully developed and managed. A qualitative approach was employed, using autoethnography to create an illustrative case study. The study utilizes the slow tourism model of Pécsek (2014) and critically assesses the offerings in Pannonhalma against those criteria. The carefully selected factors of the model enable scholars to conduct replicable research related to the planning, management, and promotion of religious tourism in a sustainable way.

RESULTS

The autoethnographic account yielded the following results:

Locality – Archabbey produces various types of food products (liquor, chocolate, tea, wine), as well as cosmetics and books, all made from local resources. It employs over 300 people, equivalent to a medium-sized company in Hungary, which makes it a substantial employer.

Experience-focus – Each of the programs offered can be enjoyed in groups. In addition to the typical guided tours in the buildings, the labyrinth symbolizes repentance and the path to salvation; navigating through the maze provides a unique experience. The scent museum and the herbal garden offer herbs beneficial for both body and soul. The inn exudes a spiritual simplicity set amidst a forest.

Sustainability – The natural surroundings include a 22-acre garden, home to over a thousand species of plants and nearly 150 bird species. Walking, horse-riding, and cycling are ideal ways to explore the neighbourhood, all of which are zero-emission modes of transport. The local production and the employment of the local workforce make the Archabbey economically sustainable. There is no leakage, profits stay within and can be allocated according to the wishes of the monastery.

Social wellbeing - The town of Pannonhalma with its 4,000 residents revolves around the Archabbey, its programs and products. Without it, tourism traffic would be negligible. Job opportunities provided by the Archabbey contribute to retaining the town's population. The availability of healthy products directly benefits the residents, and the popularity of the order provides locals with an incentive to work together.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The existing slow elements contribute to the strong brand of Pannonhalma as a religious tourism destination. Thanks to the variety of the local products, visitors can take home several gifts as a reminder of their visit (Wilkins, 2011), which is key for repeat visits and word of mouth advertising. Authenticity and aesthetics influence buying behaviour in a positive way (Meitiana *et. al.*, 2019). The unusual experiences strengthen the authenticity angle and contribute to reaching a state of flow conceptualized by Csikszentmihályi (2021), realizing the interdependence of human and nature. Environmental and economic sustainability allows for long term planning, crucial in tourism where the return on investment takes longer. The well-being of locals ensures the nonconflictual relationship between visitors and locals.

This paper explored the possibility of developing religious tourism within the context of slow principles. The topic is more than timely, considering that the originally slow religious tourism has been showing signs of hypertourism. It is a dangerous path as this trend can undermine the spiritual experience, which is the core motivation for visiting these destinations in the first place. Using the case of Pannonhalma, the study proved that applying the author's slow tourism model can make religious destinations more versatile in their demand, which can result in a branded destination that can be more resilient amid the volatility of tourism trends.



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