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## Slow Tourism as a Tourism Alternative to Sustainable Development

Bruno SOUSA

CiTUR - Centro de Investigação, Desenvolvimento e Inovação em Turismo  
Instituto Politécnico do Cávado e do Ave, Portugal  
[bsousa@ipca.pt](mailto:bsousa@ipca.pt)

Rossana SANTOS

CiTUR - Centro de Investigação, Desenvolvimento e Inovação em Turismo  
University of Madeira, Portugal  
[rossana.santos@staff.uma.pt](mailto:rossana.santos@staff.uma.pt)

Adrian LUBOWIECKI-VIKUK

SGH Warsaw School of Economics, Poland  
[alubow@sgh.waw.pl](mailto:alubow@sgh.waw.pl)

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### Abstract:

Sustainability is a topic that is currently being discussed and constantly adapting, since it is related not only to an ecologically correct posture and strategy but also economically viable and socially equitable. Therefore, the importance given by the media to the theme of ecology, sustainability has led to a growing concern among the population. In this context, slow tourism is based on the concept of speed. It involves traveling for a prolonged period at a slow pace, allowing the tourist a deep, authentic, and cultural experience. This paper presents theoretical considerations that aim to understand how "slow tourism" can become a destination for future sustainable tourism trips.

**Keywords:** slow tourism; tourism; hospitality; marketing; tourism product; consumer behavior.

**JEL Classification:** M31; Z30; Z32.

### Introduction

The concern leads to greater environmental awareness (Ngo *et al.* 2018), which ends up influencing the purchase, that is, they verify whether a product is ecological and compatible with sustainability (Pinto da Silva *et al.* 2019). For instance, regarding the environment, it promotes incentives for the preservation of nature, education on environmental ethics, and the defence for the preservation with development within the environmental perspective (Roseta *et al.* 2020). In this context, and according to Oh *et al.* (2016), the concept of slow tourism is gaining attention, and this study provides new insights into the phenomenon from the perspective of a goal-driven consumption process. Sustainable tourism is often discussed in terms of a balance between economic and environmental concerns, and this is especially the case if tourism utilizes the environment as a resource (Eslami *et al.* 2019). Concerns about sustainability and "green" development in the future are trends that have emerged in tourism and hospitality management. Environmental concerns are a hotly debated issue in the academic community and professionals worldwide. In this context, this manuscript will be strongly focused on the concern of "slow tourism". From an interdisciplinary perspective, this manuscript presents inputs around tourism (special forms of tourism), marketing and management (segmentation perspective) in a slow tourism perspective.



## 1. Slow Tourism and New Trends in Tourism Contexts

According to Lubowiecki-Vikuk and Sousa (2021) Special Forms of Tourism (SFT) can be operated both on a first level, through a network of small companies (tour operators, hotels, among others), making use of low barriers to entry, characteristics of the tourism industry, and employing information technologies as a form of “home industry”, as at another level, on a larger scale, through transnational companies). Tourism has various forms based on the purpose of visit and alternative forms. These are further divided into many types according to their nature. Some SFT are the result of technological developments (e.g. virtual tourism, e-tourism, or emotional intelligence) or using highly developed specialist systems that can provide a greater variety of tourism products and tourism services (e.g. dark tourism, pilgrimage, agri-tourism, military tourism, safari tourism, wedding tourism, wine tourism, accessible tourism, cruise tourism, film tourism, voluntourism, youth tourism, red-tape tourism, luxury tourism, wellness tourism) (see Lubowiecki-Vikuk *et al.* 2021b). However, concerns about sustainability and “green” development in the future are trends that have emerged in tourism and hospitality management. Environmental concerns are a hotly debated issue in the academic community and professionals worldwide. In this context, this manuscript will be strongly focused on the concern of “slow tourism”. Slow tourism is a form of tourism that respects local cultures, history, and environments, while at the same time values social responsibility by celebrating diversity and the connection that a tourist gets from sharing and engaging in a space with other visitors and the host community (Heitmann *et al.* 2011; Lumsdon and McGrath 2011; Oh *et al.* 2016; Sun and Lin 2018; Wilson and Hannam 2017).

Slow Food Movement was founded in 1989 as a protest to the proliferation of the fast food industry invading Europe (Lowry and Lee 2011). Slow Food is not anti-consumption or anti-capitalism and is predicated on ethical modes of production and consumption, or what it terms “eco-gastronomy” and “virtuous globalization” (Clancy 2018; Williams *et al.* 2015). Slow food has spurred many others and their principles are the founder of all the movements that arose subsequently (see Ferreira *et al.* 2014). One salient offshoot is the advocacy of slow travel as an alternative to mass tourism’s fast-paced, escapist vacation. Embracing similar sentiments to slow food’s culinary focus, it concentrates on the enjoyment of the journey rather than just physical travel as a mode of transport to a destination (Tims and Conway 2012). Since the 1980s, the traditional mass tourist has been increasingly replaced by post-modern tourists who, through their leisure and vacation, search for experience, diversity, and confirmation of their own identity (Zago 2018). In this context, Hernandez-Mogollón *et al.* (2018) have argued that the traditional approach to travel experiences through mass tourism is unavoidably insufficient to fulfill the new expectations of tourism activities and to ensure the overall satisfaction of tourists. The growth of alternative forms of tourism confirms the importance of the dimension of consciousness, as knowledge of self and others and as awareness of the impact that the presence has on the environment (Zago 2018). In other words, the new tourism is a response to problems that have arisen from the previously predominant mass tourism. They include environmental, social, and cultural degradation, unequal distribution of financial benefits, the promotion of paternalistic attitudes, and even the spread of disease (Clancy 2018).

The potential for tourism to contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development and its principles has been gaining momentum since the 1990s but has not yet succeeded (Manella 2018). International organizations suggest that there is still a misconception that only ecotourism can be considered sustainable tourism, when in fact all forms of tourism should move towards becoming more sustainable by focusing on the three pillars of sustainability: economic, environmental, and sociocultural. In this respect, much of the early focus on slow tourism has generally supported the concept with strong environmental arguments, defending slowness as a valuable opportunity to reduce tourism’s high pollution and carbon footprint. Instead, the tourism industry has mainly focused on the experiential and regenerative power of the slow tourism experience (Sidali and Obeso 2018). When slow tourism appears in the first decade of 2000, it takes advantage of two innovations produced a few years before. The first has to do with the effort made regarding coastal sustainability in the Mediterranean and the Caribbean area, because of its massive tourism development in the 1960s and 1970s (Calzati and de Salvo 2015). Slow tourism movement is a type of special interest tourism that can occur in both slow and urban settings (Lowry and Lee 2011).

It is an outgrowth of the socio-political ideology and consumption practices of the Slow Food Movement and has developed as an alternative to or push back against the fast-paced, unhealthy, and unsustainable lifestyle of modern society. In other words, slow tourism is also a form of political consumption and a new form of sustainable tourism development that is based on the push-back from fast lifestyle, ideology, and consumption practices and not as an alternative to mass tourism (e.g. the “soft/hard” dichotomy) (Lowry and Lee 2016). The concept of slow living aims to use the principles of slow functioning in various areas of everyday life, e.g. in food,

city, travel, work, design, education. As highlighted by Lubowiecki-Vikuk *et al.* (2021a, p. 97) slow living is oriented towards sustainable development by avoiding the limitations of modern civilization and the negative effects of globalization. Slow living relates to the zero/less waste initiative, which involves minimizing the production of waste, reducing consumerism, and increasing the reuse of objects, *e.g.* by repairing them. In other words, it is living according to the 5Rs principle (refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle, and rot). The second innovation is based on the great advances made around the quality of services and the Servqual implantation (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985, 1988).

Dickinson and Lumsdon (2010) and Miretpastor *et al.* (2015) have established the difference between slow tourism and the traditional tourism model. According to them, slow tourism refers to: (1) slower travel times, (2) wider range of modes including bus and train, (3) slowness, (4) resource reduction, (5) journey is the thing, (6) localness, (7) authenticity, (8) unique, (9) sensations, (10) you make your journey, (11) vacation rentals, (12) committed to local culture and history, (13) quiet, (14) treat the tourist as a temporary resident, (15) joining, (16) as best as possible, (17) staying awhile, (18) low carbon, (19) de-commoditization, (20) slow food and beverages, and (21) discover. The same authors also have argued that the opposite of slow tourism is the standard model characterized as (1) speedy transit, (2) prevailing modes of the car and airline dominant, (3) immediacy, (4) resource-intensive, (5) journey is a corridor, (6) consumption of many attractions, (7) standard, (8) replicable, (9) miles, (10) you by the journey, (11) hotels, resorts, (12) indifferent to the local culture and history, (13) stressful, (14) treat the tourist as a visitor, (15) see, (16) as much as is possible, (17) maximizing visits, (18) high carbon, (19) commoditization, (20) standardized hospitality dominates and visit and (21) visit.

According to Dickinson, Lumsdon and Robbins (2011), there are three identifiable behavioral categories of what can be termed slow tourism. Firstly, some studies focus on modes of transport that have environmental impacts and less travel (alternatives to air and car travel). The second emphasizes better tourism experiences, where visitors engage in a deeper experience of the place. The third focuses on transport as a tourist experience. Others have argued that slow tourism is better seen attitudinally rather than as a category of behavior (Oh *et al.* 2016, p. 208, cited by Folgado-Fernandez 2018). Fullagar *et al.* (2012) argue that yet there is a tension that is not easily resolved within slow philosophies about the carbon footprint created by air or car travel. In this context, slowness is not a simple answer to the broader issue of predicted growth in global travel and middle-class consumption in emerging economies (Fullagar *et al.* 2012).

Molz (2018, p. 30) argue that whether fast is seen as a valuable attribute of the productive citizen or slow is seen as a more centered or sustainable mode of travel has less to do with speed itself, and more to do with the way experiences and representations of pace are shaped by race, class, gender, and nationality. The author concludes that what people “travel for” is not necessarily to arrive at a particular destination, but to be on the road and in the world in a particular way. What matters is not how fast or how slow, but how we orient ourselves within the complex temporal landscapes of travel, and how we harness pace as a way of making sense of ourselves, of our travel companions, and the world. In this context, the slow tourists may choose a physically slower mode of transport to facilitate the necessary deceleration or may take solace in a flight that detaches them from the stresses and strains of daily life and instead offers an opportunity to become reconnected with their thoughts (Calzati and de Salvo 2018; McGrath and Sharpley 2018).

According to Hernández-Mogollón *et al.* (2018), the critical question to pose is how slow tourism is economically viable. The author argues that the idea that consumers actively choose smaller producers, over more corporate entities, assumes the ability to afford the often-higher prices that local retailers may charge for goods/services due to their lack of economy of scale (Folgado-Fernandez 2018). If we are what we eat, then the same could be said of our travel choices (Lowry and Black 2015). Slow tourism has inspired new ways of doing business. However, it is difficult to quantify the economic impact of this type of tourism since it is an emerging market (Miretpastor *et al.* 2015). In any case, Miretpastor *et al.* (2015) argue that the number of slow movement members, its variety, and its rapid international growth, do augur important opportunities for the tourism supply seeking a position in this market.

## 2. Conceptual Model Proposed

This study aims to understand some of the main trends in tourist segmentation in the context of sustainable tourism, with an emphasis on slow tourism. The research study brings together a proposed conceptual model to test empirically to understand some of the main determinants of tourist demand in slow tourism environments and their behavioral intentions (*i.e.* satisfaction and loyalty). For slow tourism managers to work out appropriate solutions, it is necessary to understand the relationship between current risk knowledge and the behavioral intention towards slow tourism, as well as the focus of potential tourists on the risks of slow tourism under the

context of the new coronavirus epidemic. As revealed by their research, pneumonia risk knowledge can influence behavioral willingness to accept slow tourism (e.g. nature tourism). With an increasing rate of infected respondents, the total number of deaths will, of course, be much higher, if the population is not aware that social isolation is the only way out of the spread of contagion, reduction, and recovery of infected respondents. Therefore, the orientation is for respondents to stay at home, regardless of age group, and, in this period, try to think a little outside the box, looking for innovative ideas to offer to the post-COVID-19 market. In this sense, and specifically, tourism has been one of the main sectors of the economy that has suffered the most from the effects of the pandemic.

Preliminary research was conducted to develop the research instrument. Details of the preliminary research are given below. After the collection of the preliminary data, empirical data would be collected through fieldwork. This study discusses the growing phenomenon of slow tourism and the perspective of relationship marketing associated with specific contexts of pandemic scenarios. The literature highlights that satisfaction tends to favour the development of behavioral loyalty. These results are particularly evident in tourist contexts, such as the importance of satisfaction in revisiting or recommending family members or friends. This aspect was corroborated in our empirical study. Based on this discussion, the conceptual model presented is proposed, which describes that, in a context of slow tourism, the increase in the quality of service, trust, cooperation, perceived value, and commitment facilitate the development of behavioral satisfaction and loyalty. Thus, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

H1: The quality of service, trust, commitment, perceived value, and cooperation has a positive effect on the satisfaction of slow tourism.

H2: The quality of service has a positive effect on the value perceived by the slow.

H3: The quality of service, the perceived value, and satisfaction have a positive effect on the loyalty of the slow tourist.

### 3. Final Considerations

This study discusses the growing phenomena of sustainable tourism (specifically slow tourism) and the perspective of relationship marketing. Based on the literature review, we propose a model that connects the dimensions of relationship marketing (that is, commitment, trust, and cooperation) with the consequent satisfaction with the slow tourist and the behavioral intention to repeat the experience or reinforce it with a marketing focused on "sustainable" motivation. Several studies in marketing and tourism contexts have discussed the association of relationship marketing with destination and consumer buying behavior, including the study of satisfaction, loyalty, or quality of service. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been most strongly felt by the tourism sector, which forms a part of the tourism economy and thus is very vulnerable to any changes resulting from crises and disasters. As a result of the pandemic crisis, the tourism perspective went from over-tourism to 'no tourism' (Lubowiecki-Vikuk and Sousa 2021). Travel restrictions and barriers during the COVID-19 pandemic have had negative, often irreversible, economic, social, and environmental consequences. Therefore, the concept of slow tourism is gaining attention, and this study provides new insights into the phenomenon from the perspective of a goal-driven consumption process. Sustainable tourism is often discussed in terms of a balance between economic and environmental concerns, and this is especially the case if tourism utilizes the environment as a resource. For instance, and according to Valls *et al.* (2019), the approach to slow tourism usually occurs either when traditional destinations exhaust their life cycle with an evident reduction in sustainability, or when newly emerging destinations decide to develop in this way. The case of Madeira is different; the island has several decades of tourism development without excessive pressure or overcrowding, and in planning for the future it wants to sustain these conditions. From an interdisciplinary perspective, this manuscript presents inputs around tourism (SFT), marketing, and management (segmentation perspective) from a slow tourism perspective.

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