Sensing the Destination in a Slow or in a Fast Style? – The Lessons of a Hungarian Survey

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Abstract

Several trends exist while living the world with some extremities: there is a scale from a modern, little superficial, self-serving, belief in the omnipotence of social media philosophy of life till a much deeper concept that guarantees living the experience. It is present in every field of life - so travel is no exception, either. The slow philosophy sensing the spirituality of the place is also gaining ground in tourism - as a kind of counterpoint to modern "Instagram" tourism. The article examines the validity of this concept today and presents a survey conducted among Hungarian respondents. It examines, how important it is for respondents to avoid destinations visited by the masses, to travel in an eco-friendly way or to become a part of the place while sipping on the culture of the place.
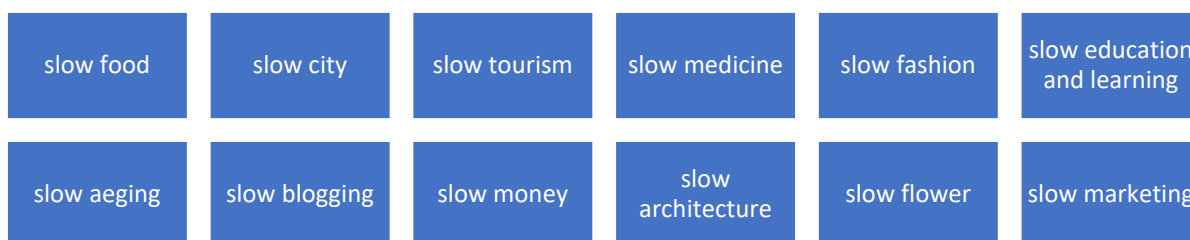
Introduction

Slow movements as cultural revolutions?

People live their lives in an extraordinary speed. The virtual reality interweaves and spans every minute, the instant life has become typical for most people.

However, there is a revolution in society against the speedy lifestyle – which is incorporated in the slow movements, the roots of which dates back to the 1970's. The slow philosophy of life started with the slow food movement, which emphasizes, that the food must have good quality, should be tasty and must serve the health. It should not contain any pesticides, and the production should be environment-friendly as well, furthermore, the producers themselves should also get a fair profit. Figure 1 presents the appurtenance of slow concept in different areas of life.

Figure 1
The appearance of slow concept in different areas of life

slow food	slow city	slow tourism	slow medicine	slow fashion	slow education and learning
slow aeging	slow blogging	slow money	slow architecture	slow flower	slow marketing

Source: own compilation based on Blackshaw (2009); Ernszt and Lőrincz (2017); Lewis (2004); Slow Flowers (2020); Slow Medicine (2020).

Finally, the protection of regional traditions and the joy of gastronomy are also in the focus. However, this originally quite narrow movement has extended to several areas of life (Slow Food, 2015). Now we know and can enjoy among others the concept of slow city, slow medicine, slow fashion, slow blogging, slow industry or money (See table 1) (Blackshaw, 2009; Ernszt & Lőrincz, 2017; Lewis, 2004; Slow Flowers, 2020; Slow Medicine, 2020).

Slow movement has also appeared in tourism as well, which can be considered as a counterpoint of mass tourism.

Several trends confirm and strengthen the validity and actuality of the concept:

Figure 2
Trends justifying the growing demand for slow tourism
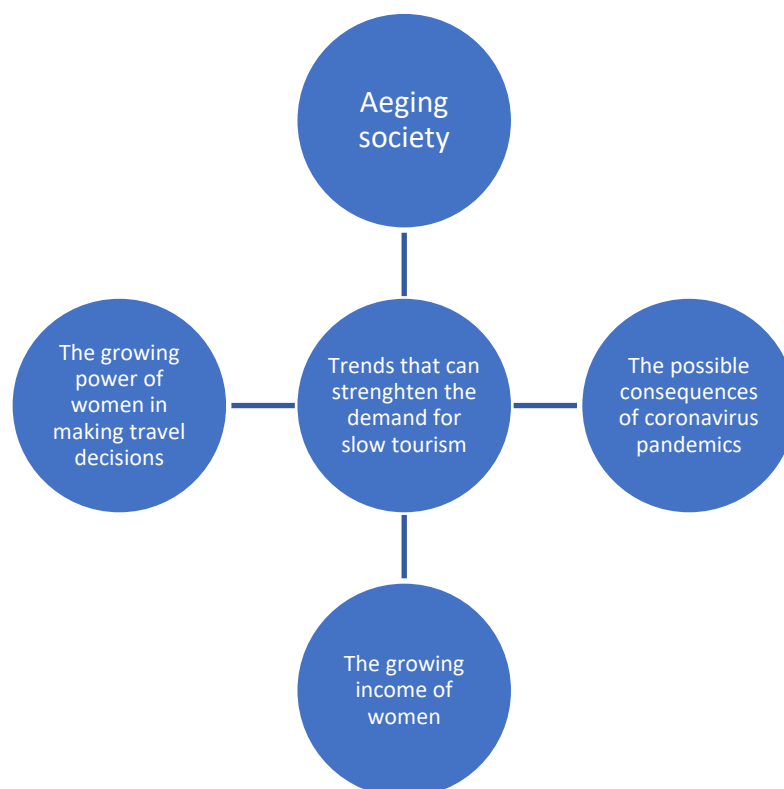
Source: own compilation based on Ernszt (2016), Ernszt and Lőrincz (2017).

The research goals and the nature of the problem

The above-mentioned tendencies seem to justify our hypothesis, that people are opened for slow elements. We examined, what are the attitudes of Hungarians towards the topic and this special philosophy of tourism.

The article examines the legitimacy of this concept today, when Instagram tourism is boosting, and analyses the results and lessons of the survey conducted among Hungarian respondents.

RQ: What is the attitude of Hungarian respondents towards different "slow" elements of a journey?

However, slow tourism draws the attention of researchers, tourism professionals and the general public as well, we are still lack of systematic researches on this field (Fullagar et al, 2012; Oh et al., 2016). The existing literature concentrates on the descriptive, qualitative approach from different aspects (Cosar et al, 2015; Oh et al., 2016). In Hungary the situation is very similar to this: Only Pécsek (2018) has carried out a systematic empirical research about the issue. There are more possible reasons for that: the topic is relatively new. Furthermore, it is severely criticized even by tourism professionals. According to Weaver it is merely a good promotional tool. (Duignan et al., 2018; Weaver, 2007). Besides only some of its elements are researched, but not concept as a whole (Oh et al., 2016). With our research we would like to contribute to the enrichment of knowledge about the attifude of Hungarian people towards this special type of tourism.

The results can serve as a starting point for tourism service providers – with special regard to the fact, that after the coronavirus epidemics the whole tourism industry must be rebuilt. In this process, taking into consideration the possible future trends –

avoiding the places of mass tourism -, creating tourism products in a slow way can be a potential way (Bothe, 2018).

Tourism in a slow style

Slow tourism does not have a generally accepted definition. In the 1990's the sustainable features of slow tourism were emphasized, meanwhile today it is obvious, that it embraces much more than that. It can contribute to the personal fulfilment and well-being of the traveller (Oh et al., 2016).

According to Lumsdon and Mcgrath slow tourism is a "social, cultural phenomenon"(Di Clemente et al., 2014). Dall'Aglio (2011) considers slow tourism products as a part of "new generation" tourism products, where the total involvement of the travellers is possible as a third step after the traditional city breaks and theme packages. It represents a special approach to the touristic practices of our days by speaking for the interests of the local population, extending the number of the days spent at a destination, thus creating a more unique tourist experience (Losada & Mota, 2019).

Lumsdon and McGrath (2011) summarize its most important elements: slowness in connection with taking time as a value; special, slow type of transport; activities and the importance of "the local"; finally environmental consciousness (Di Clemente et al., 2014; Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011).

In the tourism industry, which can be considered to be the "economy of experiences", the demand for authentic experiences is constantly growing (Quan & Wang, 2004). The perceived factor of authenticity is an important element already at the decision-making process, when choosing the destination (Meng & Choi, 2016).

In this respect there is a shift from the services to the personal experiences: the feelings, senses, emotions, minds, spirituality must be awakened to reach tourist satisfaction (Morena et al., 2017; Uriely, 2005; Williams, 2006).

Pécsek (2014, 2018) draws the model of slow tourism, which is based on four pillars, the following components should be emphasized: Locality, sustainability, social well-being and experience-based approach (See Figure 2).

Figure 3
The four components of the slow tourism model
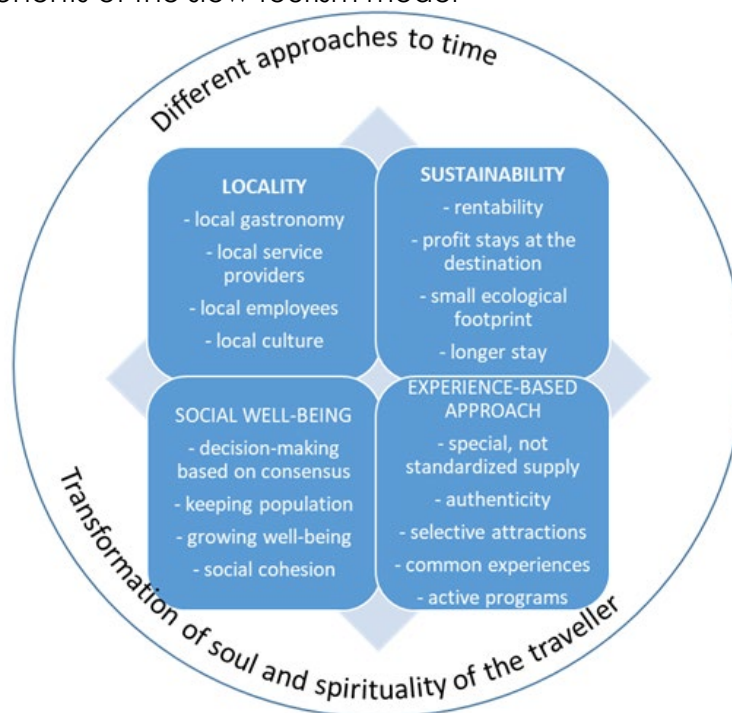
Source: Own compilation based on Pécsek (2018)

Locality is a central element: tourists should get to know local culture, gastronomy, meanwhile local service providers come under focus. All services are provided under the aegis of sustainability, tourists should consider their ecological footprint. This all contributes to the concept of slow tourism (Figure 3).

The stay of tourists should be longer, this way they are able to "live" the local experience and become a little bit „part of the destination", they experience it in a deeper way. They do not get standardized, boring experiences, but something unique from the destination.

This approach does not only concentrate on the tourists' side, but as the other side is also important, the social well-being, cohesion and decision-making possibility of the local population is in the spotlight (Pécsek, 2014, 2018). The active involvement of local society into the „process of tourism" is in the centre. They should not be simple supplies or victims of tourism, but active „participants" who profit from the appearance of tourists.

In slow tourism the journey itself is the goal. The journey transforms the soul and spirituality of the traveller, so in fact these slow journeys can become a kind of pilgrimage (Tiyce & Wilson, 2012).

Slow travel is also a part of the slow tourism experience. It can be considered to be rather several connecting ideas, a kind of attitude regarding travel (Lumsdon & McGarth, 2011). It „constitutes a framework which creates the alternative of travelling by car and flights, this way people travel on a much slower way, use local transportation and discover local food, traditions and culture, meanwhile their attitude is environment friendly" (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010).

This kind of tourism is based on flexible, bottom-up initiations. Instead of pure materialism it has a strong connection with spiritualism. Further it is sustainable: eco-tourism, green tourism, agritourism, health, cultural and gastrotourism are perfect examples for that – they can be reviewed in a slow key (Pécsek, 2014).

However, there are some contradictions as well: the travellers who are devoted to slow tourism get to the place often by flights, car or coach, where they can start their „slow journey". Furthermore, laptops and other smart, modern technical devices are inevitable necessities of the suitcases even of travellers who want to escape most from their modern life. Then later they keep connection with the world they wanted to escape from with social media+, blogs, web pages. Of course, we can say that that's how they get information and share experiences (Markwell et al., 2012).

Methodology

This study draws on quantitative data from an online survey conducted with 386 Hungarian respondents under an omnibus research in Autumn 2019. Regarding the demographics of the survey sample, the 71,2 percent of the respondents was female, 28,8 percent was male. Most of them (69,9 %) belong to the youngest age group (18-25). The 61,7 percent of respondents travel once or two times a year, 22,5 percent travel three or four times.

We have researched, what are the attitudes of the respondents towards different slow elements. Survey questions were compiled based on the model of slow tourism presented in Figure 2. We have examined, how important different aspects are for respondents. These factors have covered all main components of slow tourism.

Descriptive and simple statistical relationship analyses were done. The statements had to be evaluated by the respondents on 5-point Likert scales.

Table 1
Demographic profile of the sample

	n	%			n	%	
Age group				**Gender**			
18-25 years	270	69,9	%	**female**	275	71,2	%
26-35 years	32	8,3	%	**male**	111	28,8	%
36-45 years	45	11,7	%				
46-55 years	21	5,4	%	**Education**			
55-65 years	13	3,4	%	Primary school	11	2,8	%
> 65 years	5	1,3	%	Secondary school	302	78,2	%
				College/ university	70	18,1	%
Occupation				Postgraduate/ PhD	3	0,8	%
Student	240	62,2	%				
Entrepreneur	9	2,3	%	**Frequency of travel**			
Public sector employee	42	10,9	%	not every year	8	2,1	%
Private sector employee	88	22,8	%	1-2 times a year	238	61,7	%
Retired	1	0,3	%	3-4 times a year	87	22,5	%
Other	5	1,3	%	> 4 times a year	53	13,7	%

Source: Authors' own edition

Results

Respondents were the most opened for "taking time in a different dimension", since they are even willing to modify their original schedule to admire a nice landscape

(avg. score = 4,04). The "local" pillar has avg score=3,65 based on the importance of the three related statements, then the well-being of the local community (avg. score = 3,3) was the next in the row. Finally, the least important pillars are the personalized services (avg. score = 2,74), spirituality (avg. score = 2,67) and the matter of sustainability (avg. score = 2,61). Table 2 presents these results.

If we examine each statement one by one, it can be seen, that the most characteristic of the respondents is their willingness to stop for the sake of a beautiful landscape to admire that – since the vast majority of them (73,1%) have answered this, only 6,5% said it was not typical for them at all. It was otherwise true for all age groups.

The second most important factor is related to eating: the vast majority of the respondents (63,9%) like to try the local specialities. The 63,4 % of the respondents like discovering the destination very thoroughly, which is also a significant manifestation of the "slow attitude. In a significant ratio (56%) they prefer buying from local producers if they have the opportunity. (Only 16,8% of the respondents are not interested in this at all).

It is important for around half of the respondents (47,6%) to get to know local culture, local people and to take part on their programs; only 20% says the opposite. 36,8% of the respondents is happy to visit the local market, however, a bigger ratio of them (38,9%) is not interested in that.

Table 2
The importance of different slow elements for respondents

Item	Average score
TIME DIMENSION – DIFFERENT APPROACH TO TIME I modify my original schedule to admire a nice landscape.	4,04
LOCALITY	3,65 (average of items)
I like discovering my destination as much as possible.	3,77
I like meeting local people, their lives and their cultures.	3,41
I like to try the local specialities.	3,79
SOCIAL WELL-BEING I go to the local market if I have opportunity. I prefer buying from local producers if I have opportunity.	3,3
EXPERIENCE-BASED APPROACH Getting personalized services is important for me.	2,74
SPIRITUALITY The target destination should provide spiritual experience.	2,67
SUSTAINABILITY I avoid crowded tourist places as much as possible	2,61

Source: own research

Spirituality, getting personalized services is not so important, either, since nearly half of the respondents do not demand it on a holiday (45,9%). Sustainability is the least important, since only 15,2% of the respondents would choose environmental-friendly transportation. It is quite sad, since the CO2 submission, the carbon-footprint of vehicles creates a significant environmental burden. Furthermore, only 21,5% of the respondents would avoid crowded, touristic places, so most of them are not really opened for hidden, calm destinations.

Figure 4
The attitudes of respondents towards slow elements – detailed data
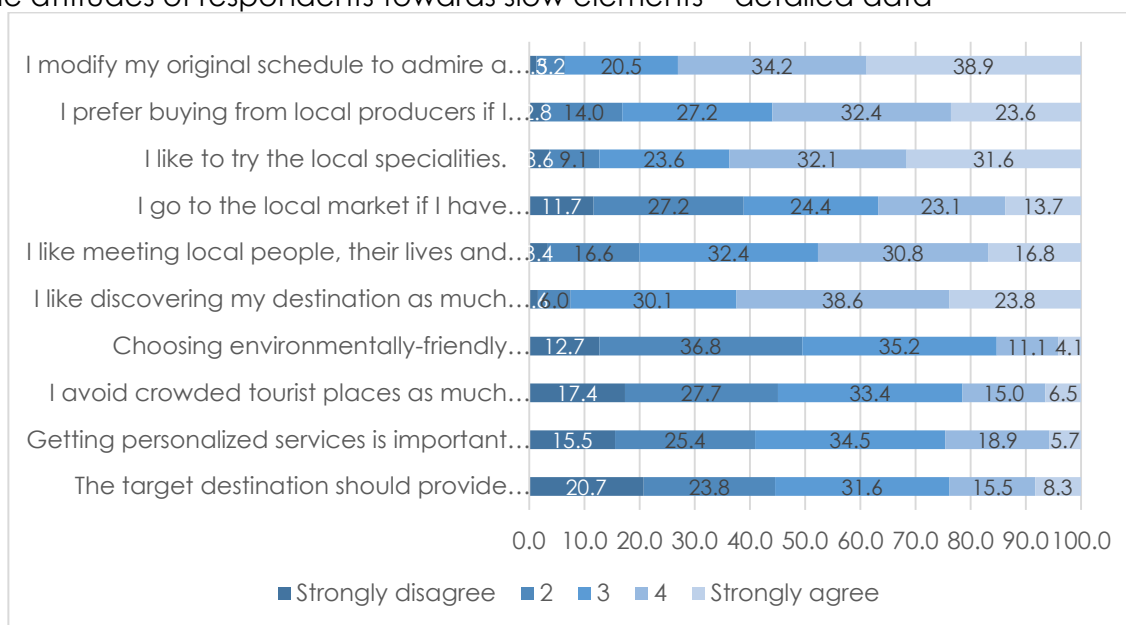
Source: own research

Figure 4 presents the attitudes of respondents towards slow elements, while the table 3 presents the attitude of Hungarian responders towards slow tourism elements according to age groups.

Table 3
The attitude of Hungarian responders towards slow tourism elements according to age groups

Descriptives	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	55-65	65+	Total
I modify my original schedule to admire a nice landscape.	4,04	3,91	3,98	4,19	4,23	4,20	4,04
I like to try the local specialties.	3,81	3,41	3,78	3,95	4,00	3,80	3,79
I like discovering my destination as much as possible.	3,79	3,78	3,64	3,76	4,08	3,40	3,77
I prefer buying from local producers if I have opportunity.	3,56	3,50	3,71	3,86	3,92	3,20	3,60
I like meeting local people, their lives and their cultures.	3,39	3,22	3,47	3,57	3,85	3,40	3,41
I go to the local market if I have opportunity.	2,84	3,09	3,33	3,33	3,92	4,00	3,00
Getting personalized services is important for me.	2,76	2,59	2,76	2,71	2,62	3,00	2,74
The target destination should provide spiritual experience.	2,78	2,00	2,58	2,76	2,38	2,00	2,67
I avoid crowded tourist places as much as possible	2,51	2,78	3,13	3,10	2,69	3,40	2,66
Choosing environmentally-friendly transportation tool is important for me.	2,60	2,41	2,44	2,62	2,85	2,40	2,57

Source: own research

Discussion

Based on the above analysed survey results, the respondents are opened for certain slow factors, but not for the whole concept in general. Most of them are opened to take time in a different approach, like to get to know local culture, people and cuisine and to buy from local producers – which seem to fit into the general stereotypes about Hungarians. However, the respondents are lazier to go to the local market, and they do not really desire personalized services, spiritual experiences at the destination. Besides, sustainable approach got really low scores – showing, it is the least important from the examined factors.

The questionnaire survey was carried out by snowball sampling technique that resulted in a non-representative sample. This fact also can be regarded as one of the limitations of the research.

Furthermore, the research was accomplished before the COVID pandemic, which has the potential to change travel patterns and attitudes. Based on this, the results may not reflect the present situation. It would be worth re-making the research to see the possible changes in attitudes.

Conclusion

To give an adequate answer for the challenges of today in tourism, "a transformation of consciousness of all stakeholders" is inevitable; slow tourism can be a good basis for that (Sheldon, 2020). However, it must be added, that we should not have illusions: „absolute escape" is possible only for a few.

Based on the research results, we can conclude, that certain slow elements are important factors for the Hungarian respondents. The "local" components are essential for them, they are looking for authenticity in the destination, should it appear in the local cuisine, local products or in the marketplace. They love to dive into the depth of the destination – and not adhered to the original schedule and itinerary for the sake of a beautiful landscape.

However, spirituality is far from them, only 23,8% said the opposite. Personalized services do not really matter, either, merely 24,6% desires that. It shows strong connection with the fact, that only 21,5% of the respondents avoids crowded destinations, so visiting hidden, calm destinations is only a perfect holiday scene only for a few.

The present coronavirus epidemics may change the travel patterns of people significantly. As our research was conducted in 2019, before the pandemics, it would even be worth repeating the research to investigate, if this expected change in the attitude towards "slow tourism" has appeared or not.

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