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## **Title**

### **Slow philosophy in tourism development in Latvia: the supply side perspective**

## **Abstract**

Slow philosophy, which has gained popularity in recent years, is used to inform tourism development. Yet, its actual implementation is limited mostly to Cittáslow (Slow Cities) and Slow Food related projects. Therefore, it is questionable whether the ideas of slow philosophy are viable in tourism development outside the Cittáslow and Slow Food contexts. This article attempts to identify opportunities and challenges for using slow philosophy in tourism development in Latvia focusing on the supply side perspective. This article contributes to the tourism destination development literature and gives practical insights for tourism destination managers.

Keywords: Slow Philosophy, Tourism Development, Latvia, Destination Management Organisations

## **Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to identify opportunities and challenges for using slow philosophy in tourism development from the supply side perspective in Latvia. The application of the slow philosophy in tourism development and destination management has been analysed mostly in relation to Cittáslow (Cosar & Kozak, 2014; Ekinci, 2014; Mayer & Knox, 2006; Nilsson,

Svärd, Widarsson, & Wirell, 2011; Pink, 2008). Examples of its application at a regional level are scarce (de la Barre, 2012; Murayama & Parker, 2012) and empirical research on the application of a slow philosophy in tourism development at a national level is lacking in the academic literature.

At the time of the research, the ideas of slow philosophy were used to promote Latvia as a tourism destination. The national tourism brand “Latvia. Best enjoyed slowly,” which was introduced in 2010<sup>1</sup>, invites tourists to “have an opportunity to change the tempo of their lives and enjoy unhurried leisure, thus tasting new experiences, aspiring to harmony and revealing true values” (Latvian Tourism Development Agency, 2010, p. 15). Slowing down is the key message of the tourism destination brand (see Figure 1) which is in line with slow philosophy. This makes Latvia a suitable destination for studying the understanding, perception, and willingness of the supply side to use the ideas of slow philosophy in tourism development outside the Cittáslow context.

*[Figure 1 about here]*

### **Tourism in Latvia**

The Republic of Latvia (*Latvia*) is the middle of three Baltic countries in the northern Europe comprising of 64 thousand km<sup>2</sup>. It regained its independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and is currently a member of the European Union, Eurozone, and Schengen Area. It borders Estonia, Russia, Belorussia, and Lithuania and has nearly 500km long coastline along the Baltic Sea. This coastline together with relatively untouched nature, rich cultural and

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<sup>1</sup> This brand was replaced by a new brand “Magnetic Latvia” from 2018 onwards.

historical heritage, and rural areas are Latvia's main tourism resources (Latvian Tourism Development Agency, 2010).

The travel and tourism industry play an important role in Latvia's economy. In 2017, it constituted 4.1% of Latvia's GDP and provided jobs for more than 36,5 thousand people (World Economic Forum, 2017). The number of border crossings by foreign travellers has increased from 1,7 million in 1996 to 7,7 million in 2017 and tourism was the purpose of trip for half of them (3,9 million) (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2018). However, the majority are same-day visitors (5,7 million); the average length of stay of non-residents was 1.9 nights. Out of nearly 2 million overnight foreign tourists, the majority come from Lithuania (15.4%), Germany (13.1%), Russia (12.5%), Estonia (9.8%), and Sweden (4.0%); these countries also represent the biggest spenders (ibid.). Yet, the majority of tourists stay at tourism accommodation establishments in Riga, the capital of Latvia. The share of foreign visitors staying in Riga has been high for the last decade, fluctuating between 74%-79% during 2008-2017 (ibid.). Consequently, the development of tourism in Riga alongside the rest of the country has been a challenge for national tourism authorities.

Riga is the largest city in Latvia and accommodates approximately one third of Latvia's total population (1,92 million) or half of its urban population (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2019). Promotion of Riga as a tourism destination is managed by Riga Tourism Development Bureau. Since 2009, the brand "LIVE Riga" promotes Riga as an open, dynamic, friendly, and lively city.

The national tourism brand "Latvia. Best enjoyed slowly" was introduced by Latvian Tourism Development Agency<sup>2</sup> (LTDA; national tourism destination marketing organisation)

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<sup>2</sup> Latvian Tourism Development Agency was a government institution responsible for implementation of Latvian tourism policy. It was reorganised as Tourism department in 2016 and is now under Latvian Investment and Development Agency.

in 2010 to encourage tourists to visit the rest of Latvia, not just Riga. By inviting to enjoy unhurried leisure, the brand aims to increase the number of tourists staying in the country for more than three days. While both destinations are competitors, their brands and respective offerings are complementary.

## **Literature review**

### ***Slow philosophy and its origins***

Although philosophers, poets, and travel writers have been advocating a slower approach in various areas of life throughout the last century (Matos, 2003), slow philosophy has gained momentum only in the last few decades as a response to fast living, eating, travelling, parenting, doing things fast and advocates the slowing down of the pace of life (Honoré, 2005). Its origins can be found in the Slow Food and Cittáslow (Slow City) movements. The idea of Slow Food was born in 1986 when Carlo Petrini and his confederates protested against the opening of the first McDonald's 'fast food' restaurant in an historic part of Rome; the Slow Food movement was officially founded in Paris three years later (Slow Food, 2019). Cittáslow movement, a derivative movement of Slow Food, was born in 1999 when the Mayors of four Italian towns in conjunction with Slow Food decided to take the philosophy of Slow Food into everyday life in local towns (Cittáslow, 2019).

Both movements are institutionalised in formal organisations; members of Slow Food and Cittáslow have to implement number of policies and practices to obtain the membership of these organisations. These two movements can be seen as catalysts for further initiatives where the main concepts of slow ideology are adapted; yet, these concepts can seldom be transferred directly into other areas and are therefore adjusted individually to each particular case.

However, the main idea – “addressing the issue of time poverty and fast solutions by encouraging more thorough connections to people, places and life” (Heitmann, Robinson, & Povey, 2011, p. 117) – remains the same across areas where the principles of slow philosophy are applied.

The slow movement as such is not institutionalized in a single organization, and the slow philosophy is formed from a collection of ideas rather than a set of prescribed rules. According to Honoré (2005), who was among the first advocates for slow philosophy, the main idea of the slow philosophy is to find the right mix of fast and slow; therefore, the slow philosophy can be summed up in one word – balance. The slow movement is also described as “a lifestyle revolution” (ibid., p. 15) that allows people to live, work, and also travel differently from the established norms of fast life (Fullagar, Markwell, & Wilson, 2012). Similarly, other authors note that the slow movement is about a change of mindset and a re-evaluation of priorities in life (Heitmann et al., 2011). One of the new priorities includes a slower approach to life; one that strives for simplicity, mindfulness and embodied experience to facilitate personal reflection, renewal, and growth (Howard, 2012).

In the context of tourism, new priorities include: low impact tourism, engaging with people, giving something back to the communities visited, and being aware of carbon footprints (Gardner, 2009). These ideas are embedded in slow tourism; yet, there are various interpretations about where it could fit in the overall tourism system. Slow tourism is seen as a guiding principle for travel, as a particular tourism niche or as an umbrella term that encompasses various tourism types, such as responsible tourism (Timms & Conway, 2011), ethical tourism (Clancy, 2015), alternative tourism (Moore, 2012), or green tourism (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010; Murayama & Parker, 2012). Several authors also link slow travel with sustainable tourism (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010) and discuss how both concepts can be successfully integrated (Sidali & de Obeso, 2018). For instance, Timms and Conway (2011, p.

405) refer to slow tourism as an inclusive alternative tourism model that “encompasses the environmental sustainability concerns of ecotourism, addresses the social and cultural sustainability interests of community-based tourism and pro-poor tourism, and advances economic sustainability ideals such as maximizing local linkages through agri-tourism.”

There is a debate on whether slow tourism is a viable concept on its own or whether it is part of a wider sustainable tourism concept and just ‘an old wine in a new bottle’. Yet, instead of debating new definitions and discussing the terminology (slow vs. sustainable tourism), there is a call for tourism industry to rather focus on implementing the goals of sustainable tourism in practice (Dodds, 2012).

### ***Slow philosophy in destination management & tourism development***

Destination management practices in Cittáslow member cities are discussed in relation to their six policy categories: environmental policies, infrastructure policies, technologies and facilities for urban quality, safeguarding autochthonous production, hospitality and liveability, and Cittáslow awareness (Cittáslow, 1999). It is suggested that Cittáslow status has a mainly positive effect on tourism development and consequently the development of the local economy (Cosar, Timur, & Kozak, 2015). The studies of Hatipoglu (2014) and Presenza, Abbate, and Micera (2015) show that the Cittáslow certification is relevant for sustainable development of destinations as it has a potential to improve the quality of life for both inhabitants and tourists. Park and Kim (2015) suggest that the Cittáslow philosophy has the potential to enhance the empowerment of the local community through encouraging local participation in decision-making process and revitalizing the locality through promoting local specialities and products.

Some also see a potential in using the ideas of slow philosophy in tourism development also outside the Cittáslow context. For instance, Pawlusiński and Kubal (2018) suggest that the

creation of a 'slow tourism quarter' in Krakow (not a member of Cittáslow) could facilitate development of competitive tourism products under the umbrella of creative tourism. It is acknowledged that the application of a slow philosophy in destination management fosters not only sustainable tourism and economic development in the region (Matos, 2003) but also empowers local stakeholders (Conway & Timms, 2012).

Despite the positive benefits, the application of the slow philosophy in destination management and tourism development can be controversial (Semmens & Freeman, 2012). In the context of Cittáslow, there is often a lack of support from local people for Cittáslow initiatives (Nilsson et al., 2011) and only a minority of them become involved. There are also conflicts about finding the right balance between preservation and development in Cittáslow member cities (Cho, 2011). Several studies report mixed attitudes towards Cittáslow status among visitors (Cosar & Kozak, 2014) and local residents (Semmens & Freeman, 2012). The drawbacks include an increase in the number of visitors and overcrowding, increasing property prices, problems with car parking and commercialization, deterioration in natural and cultural values, as well as unnecessary administrative burdens. Not everyone favours the ideas of slow philosophy and hence its practical implementation in tourism development can be challenging.

### ***Slow philosophy and consumption***

As mentioned earlier, slow philosophy includes protest elements and resistance against the modern virus – the fast life (Slow Food, 1989). Slow Food has emerged as a counter-reaction to fast food and the Cittáslow movement has emerged as a counter-reaction to fast life (Mayer & Knox, 2006; Miele, 2008). Similarly, slow tourism stands against 'mere gazing upon people and places' (Howard, 2012), the commodification of local culture (Heitmann et al., 2011) and experiences (Markwell, Fullagar, & Wilson, 2012), which are regarded as unethical practices.



De Salvo, Mogollón, and Di Clemente (2013) refer to the new mentality of the slow tourists in terms of their consumption and travelling practices. Slow consumption is even proposed as a response to overconsumption which could help to reduce the negative impacts of tourism industry (Hall, 2009). Consequently, it is questionable whether the ‘slow’ label is appropriate for any tourism products (McGrath & Sharpley, 2018).

Yet, slow philosophy is linked with consumption practices in the context of Cittáslow and Slow Food. Tomlinson (2007, p. 147) notes that both Slow Food and Cittáslow movements “have found their niche within the material and cultural economy of western modernity.” Parkins (2004) in her analysis of discourses of slowness in the context of Slow Food shows that ‘slow’ is in fact associated with consumption and material pleasures; yet, it is regarded as more considered and mindful form of consumption.

Similarly, slow tourism is linked with sustainable tourism products and consumption practices. According to Timms and Conway (2011, p. 398), the “slow tourism model [...] offers a more sustainable tourism product that is less alienated (and alienating), more culturally sensitive, authentic and a better-paced experience for hosts and tourists alike.” Likewise, Osbaldiston (2013, p. 79) talks about “the consumption of spaces that enhance the authentic self” as an example of alternative consumption practices in cities that have adopted slow culture. Finally, Clancy (2015) refers to slow tourism as an ethical consumption movement or an alternative consumption movement and argues that instead of giving up tourism completely, the only way to reduce the negative impact of tourism is to choose alternative products that provide the opportunity to enjoy a holiday while at the same time respecting the environment and local communities.

The supply-side plays a vital role in enhancing slow tourism. Di Clemente, Hernández-Mogollón, De Salvo, and Campón-Cerro (2014) argue that slow tourism as an alternative

mindset or mentality is adopted not only by tourists but also by tourist planners and tour operators. Lin (2017, p. 392) suggests that “tourists should be led to engage in slower travel rhythms, and thus become more engaged in the local culture and with local people,” which can be achieved through forming dynamic partnerships between tour operators and destination managers in order to provide potential slow travellers with necessary preconditions for slowing down (adequate tourism information, professional guides, and a relaxed atmosphere during tours).

Although there is a commercial opportunity in tourism products that encompasses the ideas of slow philosophy, the current literature on the slow tourism products is somehow limited with only a few studies focusing on slow tourism from the supply-side. For example, the role of micro-scale tourism entrepreneurs in encouraging slower approach to tourism has been acknowledged by Groenendaal (2012) who suggests that a non-commercial and personal approach is the best way for both the supply and demand side. Her study was conducted among Dutch lifestyle entrepreneurs who have emigrated from Holland to France.

While stakeholders’ perspectives on tourism development often vary (Poudel, Nyaupane, & Budruk, 2016), their better understanding can facilitate its further development. This paper focuses on supply side perspectives on using the ideas of slow philosophy in tourism development. How does the supply side perceive this message? Do they see value and potential in using it? Can the ideas of slow philosophy be used in tourism development? These are the questions that this article will try to answer.

## **Method**

In order to achieve the aim of this study, an ‘interpretivist’ or ‘constructivist’ approach was chosen which generates an empathetic understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

The semi-structured in-depth interview was chosen for data collection as it allows an exploration of the phenomenon of the study in depth and detail while also allowing the personal context to be understood (Lewis, 2003). The interviews with 29 tourism supply side representatives were conducted in 2014-2015. The respondents included members of private sector tourism organisations (e.g. accommodation establishments, farmsteads, travel agencies), public sector organisations (e.g. national and regional tourism destination marketing organisations (DMOs)), and third sector organisations (e.g. associations). Several respondents represented multiple sectors simultaneously. For example, the same person was representative of a public and a private sector (e.g. member of a DMO and running a private tourism business) or a representative of a public and a third sector (e.g. a member of a DMO and a tourism association). The respondents were recruited using theoretical sampling (based on the theoretical needs of this study) and snowball sampling (research participants recommended other participants) (Patton, 2002). All interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

The analysis started with categorizing the data (Saldaña, 2009). The main categories included interpretation of ‘slow’ philosophy, current destination governance practices as well as development opportunities and challenges. They were later used to inform the structure of Results and Discussion section. A thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data (Boyatzis, 1998). Themes were derived from the codes that are often used to analyse free-floating text (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The themes and sub-themes were developed under the main data categories. The data analysis and interpretation was then organized around the key

themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The results of the data analysis and interpretation are presented in the following section.

## **Results and Discussion**

### *Interpretation and attitudes towards slow philosophy*

Despite the fact that slow philosophy has been used in tourism destination marketing through the national tourism brand, most of the respondents have not previously thought about the concept nor considered its possible implementation in tourism development. The majority of respondents regarded ‘slowness’ as an implicit message rather than explicit message which open for **individual interpretation** both among tourists and supply side.

All supply side representatives associate the ideas of slow philosophy with **an approach to travel** and do not see it as a separate tourism type, i.e. slow tourism or umbrella term. The slow approach is compatible with **nature-based tourism** and **culture or cultural history tourism**, which was a common understanding among the respondents. A large majority linked slow philosophy with gastronomy tourism and rural tourism, and a few respondents – with active tourism. The above tourism types are relatively well-known and recognized in Latvia whereas slow tourism is not. Therefore, it is more appropriate to promote the ideas of slow philosophy within the existing types of tourism rather than to introduce slow tourism as a new type of tourism in destinations like Latvia where it can be challenging and perhaps even unnecessary.

The respondents uniformly agreed that Latvia is a **‘slow’ destination** as the environment – both natural and built and especially the Latvian countryside – is appropriate for

implementing the ideas of slow philosophy in tourism development. These positive attitudes show that there is a support for tourism development that would be in line with slow philosophy.

***Destination governance: current practices***

The results show that currently there is a **limited application** of ‘slow’ philosophy in destination governance at various levels. The majority of respondents from DMOs acknowledged that the slow philosophy is not used to inform tourism development at regional and local levels. Only two respondents said that they have thought about the application of slow philosophy practically. One respondent mentioned that they have identified four main types of tourism for their destination and “Best enjoyed slowly” can be best related to nature tourism. Hence, the slow philosophy is emphasized when talking about nature tourism.

Another respondent reported that they have come up with their own interpretation of slow tourists, identified them as one of their target markets and are working towards attracting them by offering specific tailor-made tourism products like visiting castles and manors. This was a part of a wider regional co-operation project where several municipalities have come together to attract more tourists to the region and encourage them to stay longer. This approach is described by Presenza et al. (2015) who suggest that Cittáslow philosophy can be helpful for tourist destinations in identifying a specific market segment that they would like to target and considering particular products that would appeal to this segment.

Little support for using the ‘slow’ philosophy in destination governance among the public sector can be explained by two factors. Firstly, the application of slow philosophy in tourism development at regional and local level is voluntary and it is up to DMOs to decide on whether and how to use it. The regional and local DMOs are neither subordinated nor reporting to the LTDA meaning that the recommendations of LTDA are not legally binding for them.

Secondly, while the LTDA has suggested that regional Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) make use of the message of national brand in tourism development, there are no clear guidelines about how to do that practically. This shows the lack of integration between national and local level tourism strategies which is important for sustainable development of tourism (UNWTO & UNEP, 2005).

### ***Development areas (opportunities)***

#### *'Slow' tourism offerings*

There was a sense of agreement among the respondents that it is the private sector which could use the ideas of 'slow' philosophy in tourism development and thus benefit from it the most. The large majority of the respondents emphasized the role of local service providers in creating 'slow' tourism offerings, i.e. the tourism offerings that are compatible with slow philosophy. Indeed, supply side plays an important role in facilitating 'slow' tourism. While some tourists may deliberately choose 'slow' experiences, they might represent only a fraction of tourists visiting a destination. Yet, hosts or service providers have a potential to 'slow down' tourists who are not intentionally 'slow' by, e.g. triggering situational interest (Hidi & Renninger, 2006) and creating experiences that provide them with "opportunities for learning, positive affect and meaningfulness through visitor participation" (Dahl, 2014, p. 80).

When asked about particular examples of 'slow' tourism offerings, the respondents mentioned service providers of various types and size. The typical examples included gastronomy offerings, visiting rural farmsteads or craftsmen, guided tours in towns, cities or nature parks and sauna rituals. The respondents also gave location-specific examples such as offerings by synagogues, fishing villages and visits to different local events. Very often, the

examples were the best practices – active entrepreneurs who constantly think about diversifying their tourism offerings and encouraging tourists to stay longer.

However, the majority of existing tourism offerings are not promoted as ‘slow’ nor have been made with ‘slow’ philosophy in mind which was a common observation among respondents. As one DMO representative explained:

*We have not talked with service providers about promoting, developing or emphasizing any product under this [slow tourism] label. There are some service providers who have managed to do it unintentionally. [...] It is possible that many things are actually related to it [slow tourism] but they are not [promoted] in this way... (R20)*

As the above quote shows, offerings compatible with ‘slow’ philosophy exist but it is not attributed to any top-down initiative facilitated by public sector. Besides, the offerings that would correspond to the idea of slow tourism are not marketed under ‘slow’ label.

At the same time, a couple of respondents argued that ‘slow’ is an ethos or mindset of travellers and questioned whether there is a need for specially designed ‘slow’ tourism products as the following quote illustrates:

*Personally, I have the impression that it is not that much a producer-directed process as much as it is a consumer-directed process, since it is based on some kind of conviction or ideological platform (R04).*

One respondent even argued that there is no need to develop specific ‘slow’ tourism offerings because everybody in the countryside can offer them.

*It's not that we would be thinking about it specifically, because in our rural region I think that we have only 'slow' tourism. We can all offer it (R18).*

No doubt, the way of life in countryside contrasts with “the more utilitarian and materialistic values in urban areas” (Bramwell, 1994, p. 1) and is therefore ‘slow’ per se. This also shows an assumption that slow has more to do with the way of life rather than a commercial product. In fact, slow tourism is associated with rural areas (Murayama & Parker, 2012), remote areas (de la Barre, 2012), and geographical margins (Conway & Timms, 2010; Timms & Conway, 2011).

Yet, while it is acknowledged that the natural environment can promote slower and more meaningful lifestyles, cities can also encourage “alternative modes of experiencing space” and consequently slow mindset (Osbaldiston, 2013, p. 89). A few respondents emphasized that slow tourism is not environment-specific and can also take place in the capital. As one of the respondents noted:

*[Slow tourism] is certainly associated with sustainability or nature... However, you can also sit and read a book slowly in an urban environment – in Old Riga, for example (R19).*

One explanation of this could be that slow tourists have different needs to satisfy; therefore, different environments for slow tourism are chosen. Another explanation could lie in the fact that for some tourists the environment at the destination is the main reason for travel while for others it provides only a background to which tourism behaviour takes place (Fridgen, 1984). In the case of the latter, rather than seeking a holiday at a specific destination, many tourists



seek a particular holiday ‘experience’ that can possibly be found at a variety of destinations, some near to, or far from, the home (Scott, Peeters, & Gössling, 2010).

### *Storytelling*

Another area of development was related to the ability of the service provider to tell stories that entertain, educate and provide a better understanding of the place visited. The role of storytelling in facilitating ‘slow’ tourism was emphasized by a number of supply side representatives.

*[I]f you have a story, you will have slow [approach in] travel. [...] He [the host] talks and he shows all this. The standard tourist who follows a guidebook would not see or hear anything like this (R05).*

Storytelling facilitates engagement, immersion and slowness which are essential components of the experiential philosophy of ‘slow’ (Heitmann et al., 2011). It also fosters understanding of local cultures which is a pre-requisite for socio-cultural sustainability (Singh, 2012).

The importance of storytelling in tourism has been emphasized in the literature (Bryon, 2012; Mossberg, 2008). Stories can be told not only by tour guides (Bryon, 2012) but also by service personnel who can facilitate consumer immersion into experiential context (Carù & Cova, 2007) and be a mediator between the ordinary and the non-ordinary (Mossberg, 2008). A theme or a story about the destination can give tourists a more meaningful experience and at the same time can be used to promote tourism products (Mossberg, 2007). The importance of storytelling in the context of ‘slow’ philosophy has been overlooked in the academic literature.

While ‘slow’ tourism experiences are created by tourists themselves, supply side representatives can provide prerequisites that facilitate such experiences through the use stories and storytellers. Although ‘slow’ tourism is not about entertainment *per se*, stories can make it more entertaining and at the same time slow down tourists.

### *Partnerships and cooperation*

A number of respondents suggested that the development of tourism using slow philosophy is directly related to the capability of the tourism industry to form partnerships and cooperation between various service providers for two main reasons.

Firstly, since slow tourism implies staying at a destination for longer, many respondents indicated that there is a need for complex tourism offerings that often can be developed among several service providers. Necessity to provide a more comprehensive tourism product by offering a range of activities and services in order to keep tourists interested also has been recognized in other contexts, e.g. rural tourism accommodations (Grefe, 1994). Creating more opportunities for tourists to spend more money is associated with the concept of ‘economies of scope’; it differs from the concept of ‘economies of scale’ where the emphasis is on attracting more tourists (ibid.). This is especially relevant in slow tourism where the focus is on quality rather than quantity; however, this does not necessarily imply that slow is about fewer experiences (Heitmann et al., 2011).

Secondly, the necessity for partnerships and cooperation among tourism industry was linked with the willingness of tourists to look for and enjoy different experiences during the same trip which was expressed by the majority of respondents. The assumption that tourists who travel in a similar way share the same experiences has already been questioned in the literature (Uriely, Yonay, & Simchai, 2002). There is also a growing notion of “the tourist

experience as a diverse and plural phenomenon” (Uriely, 2005, p. 205), i.e. tourists are looking for a variety of experiences while on holiday. This is also relevant in slow tourism as tourists look for various and varied ‘slow’ activities.

### ***Development barriers (challenges)***

#### *General challenges*

One of the main challenges for slow tourism was related to the general accessibility of the destination and moving around it. The majority of respondents highlighted that limited availability and poor organization of public transport – both bus and train – create significant barriers for slow tourism. The public transport traffic goes through Riga from which tourists can reach other big towns and cities in Latvia. However, it is complicated to travel between towns and cities within the regions and to reach many visitor attractions using public transport – even top ones such as Rundale Palace (used for the set of TV series ‘War and Peace’). The lack of sustainable mobility is one of the main barriers for slow tourism (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011) which should be addressed if one wants to develop tourism using ‘slow’ philosophy and encourage people to travel around Latvia in a slower and more environmentally friendly way. A good example in this regard is Taiwan; in order to promote slow tourism, collaboration between governments and the tourism industry has been established resulting in the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle – a public transportation system that is financially supported by the government (Lin, 2017).

While cycling was mentioned as an alternative to public transport, the poor cycling infrastructure was mentioned as another barrier to slow tourism. There are few cycling paths and where they do exist, they are not comfortable for cyclists to use. Poor cycling infrastructure as a constraint for cycling has been acknowledged in the literature (Downward & Lumsdon,

2001). Finally, the poor quality of the general road infrastructure was identified as a barrier for slow tourism.

The availability of basic infrastructure such as roads and public transport is important not only for slow tourism but tourism in general as building a prosperous tourism industry cannot rely solely on the destination being ‘available’ for tourism. The supply-side factors such as natural endowments, technology and infrastructure play an important role in influencing international tourism flows (Zhang & Jensen, 2007) and accessibility of the destination has a positive impact on tourism flows (Marrocu & Paci, 2013).

Furthermore, the respondents noted that fragmented information about individual service providers or tourism information in general causes barriers for slow tourism. As one of the respondents explained:

*If you start planning yourself... [...] In short, you will need lots of time and energy to plan such a trip “Best enjoyed slowly”... such slow tourism (R03).*

Comprehensive information about tourism service providers is essential both for tourists and the service providers. Lin (2017) suggests that ample tourism-related information is one of the facilitating factors for slow tourism. The importance of good information about the activities at a destination is also supported by the fact that tourists’ plans regarding the on-site activities are subject to change (Stewart & Vogt, 1999) which often is the case with slow tourism.

#### *Dual nature of slow tourism offerings*

The large majority of respondents acknowledged the need for ‘slow’ tourism offerings; yet, some of their characteristics reflected conflicting views among the respondents.

**Commercial vs. non-commercial.** A few respondents regarded slow tourism products as more sophisticated, exclusive, expensive and high-quality tourism offerings. This idea was also expressed indirectly by mentioning offerings provided by castles and manor houses or acknowledging that slow tourism offerings are expensive as represented by the following quote.

*Of course, it is not cheap [...]. It does not cost 5 EUR, it costs more... Unfortunately...  
But at the same time, it is something unique (R22).*

Slow Food as a brand is used to justify higher prices that arise due to higher production costs. Slow tourism also has a price premium. Yet, this price premium conflicts with “ethic of frugality” that slow tourists as ethical tourists might have (Clancy, 2018, p. 72). Consequently, tourists will not always choose discounted products or choose slow travel.

At the same time, some respondents associated slow tourism with non-commercial or less-commercial tourism offerings (Markwell et al., 2012) that are provided by small, family-owned businesses and feared commodisation of slow tourism experiences as retailed experiences for tourism consumers.

*As I understand it, when it [the slow tourism offering] becomes very commercial, it starts to lose its appeal in slow tourism (R12).*

This mirrors the viewpoint of Pawlusiński and Kubal (2018) who refer to slow tourism as opposite to commercialized tourism found in the Old Town of Krakow and emphasize the small size of the enterprises as integral factor for slow tourism. The concerns about the

commodification of places that are facilitated by the external tourism interests has been expressed in the context of rural tourism (Bramwell, 1994). Similar concerns have been expressed in relation to Cittáslow and Italian culture, which could “force a homogenized ‘slow’ identity on residents” of Cittáslow member towns (Semmens & Freeman, 2012, p. 371).

Other respondents pointed out that slow tourism offerings are based on the hobbies of service providers and not money. Slow tourism provides an opportunity for locals to do something that is interesting for other people as well and service providers can pursue their hobbies. A few respondents noted that slow tourism offerings are often just a side business or only one part of the tourism offerings that the service providers offer. However, without reciprocal beneficial returns, i.e. beneficial financial returns for the hosts for the experiences they provide to their guest, it is hard to sustain such slow offerings (Conway & Timms, 2012).

***Planned vs. non-planned: Time & time management.*** One of the characteristics of slow philosophy is the lack of strict plans and schedule while travelling. This involves a high degree of flexibility in decision making (Conway & Timms, 2010) and traveling without strict itineraries and planning ahead, caring only about being ‘in the here and now’ (Tiyce & Wilson, 2012).

Yet, the majority of supply side representatives indicated that although ‘slow’ tourism cannot be put into strict time plans, they also emphasized that time management is important if tourists plan to visit service providers, i.e. ‘slow’ tourism offerings need to be pre-booked as the following quote illustrates.

*These entrepreneurs don’t just stand there and wait, they are busy doing other things.*

*If you say [that you want to come], they have time to prepare (R26).*

This duality shows paradox that slow tourism requires time management meaning that slowness very often cannot be improvised (Lannoy, 2016). This contradiction between the interests of tourists and tourism industry creates challenges for tourism development using the ideas of slow philosophy.

***Fair price vs. affordability.*** Slow tourism as a sustainable practice includes buying local products and supporting local businesses (Lowry & Back, 2015); yet, this comes with a price tag. The respondents acknowledged that ‘slow’ tourism offerings involve paying fair prices which are often higher due to the use of local resources. The quote below represents a common viewpoint of the respondents.

*Maybe the tours are more expensive than mass tourism excursions but the clients are such [people] who are ready to pay more in order to see more than in a mass event (R07).*

At the same time, several participants acknowledged that the willingness to pay or rather the lack of it creates barriers for slow tourism as not everyone is ready to spend money for ‘slow’ tourism offerings. It is important that customers learn to appreciate quality and understand a higher price that comes with it not only in the context of Slow Food (Petrini, 2001), but also in the context of slow tourism.

### *Economic viability of slow tourism and its barriers*

The economic viability of developing tourism offerings using the ideas of slow philosophy caused disagreement among the supply side representatives. From one side, almost all respondents linked 'slow' tourism with longer stays at the destination and hence more spending as the following quote demonstrates.

*Of course, from the economic aspect, we would like it [if their stay] would be longer, that they [tourists] would stay here longer, spend more money and so on (R01).*

It is acknowledged that increased length of stay can strengthen local prosperity; yet, this should usually be complemented with promoting the availability of spending opportunities and increasing visitors' awareness of them (UNWTO & UNEP, 2005).

Longer trips are not only economically beneficial but could also provide environmental benefits (Gössling et al., 2005). Peeters and Schouten (2006) suggest that people who stay longer at the destination have less time pressure for transport and could opt for slower yet more environmentally friendly modes of transport like train and bus.

From the other side, respondents acknowledged that slow tourism means more work for the same money for the supply side. Many respondents highlighted the importance of interaction between the customer and service provider which allows discovering a destination from inside. In fact, engaging with local culture is important aspect in slow tourism (Gibson, Pratt, & Movono, 2012). While spending more time with tourists can provide meaningful interactions for both parties, it is also regarded as a time-intensive activity for no additional money from the point of view of service providers. Therefore, many respondents questioned the economic viability of slow tourism offerings.



*But slow tourism requires time [from the service provider]. Which entrepreneur or businessman – I don't know – will drive me around seaside villages in his BMW? Who will show me, tell me (R05)?*

The above quote reflects a common belief among the respondents that service providers regard time as a scarce, constrained resource. Consequently, service providers consider slow tourism as a superfluous sacrifice of their time which they would spend elsewhere, especially if slow tourism offerings are just their side business. Therefore, drawing parallels with sustainable tourism, slow tourism can then be considered as “a sacrificial touristic niche” (Moeller, Dolnicar, & Leisch, 2011, p. 155) from the supply side perspectives.

In the context of Cittáslow, the application of ‘slow philosophy’ in tourism development has the potential to generate economic sustainability (Mayer & Knox, 2006), in particular among small local businesses (Pink, 2008). This is supported by the study of Hatipoglu (2014) which shows that the residents of Vize town, Turkey see Cittáslow certification as an economic development opportunity, including increased tourism traffic. Yet, the study of Park and Kim (2015) shows different results; the implementation of Cittáslow in Goolwa, South Australia has contributed to social, psychological, and political empowerment of local community but the evidence of significant change in its economic empowerment, i.e. the fair distribution of economic gains is limited.

## **Conclusion**

This article aimed to identify opportunities and challenges for using the ideas of slow philosophy in tourism development from the perspective of the supply side in Latvia.

In general, the supply side representatives are supportive of slow philosophy which can be integrated in the existing types of tourism. They also consider that Latvia as a tourism destination is appropriate for implementing it.

The study shows that the current application of slow philosophy in tourism development in Latvia by the supply side is inconsistent. Although slow philosophy is used in destination promotion through the national tourism brand, the concept has varying level of support from internal stakeholders and consequently its application in tourism development is limited. This indicates that the public sector sees little potential in using slow philosophy in tourism development. Yet, there is a potential to use the ideas of slow philosophy in tourism development in Latvia by the private sector for whom such approach could be beneficial.

In terms of practical implementation, this study provides some insights into the opportunities and challenges related to development of slow tourism offerings. From one side, there is a potential to develop slow tourism offerings; yet, the opinions vary about the type of offerings that could be compatible with slow philosophy and consequently about their economic viability. Slow philosophy can encourage the tourism service providers to think about how to slow down tourists and drive the development of complex tourism offerings that would allow tourists to enjoy different experiences during the same trip and encourage them to stay longer at the destination. This is in line with slow growth principles where the emphasis is on developing local resources and improvements in qualitative efficiency (Conway & Timms, 2012).

From the other side, this study shows that the application of slow philosophy in tourism development present some challenges for the supply side. Firstly, the study also shows that slow philosophy is not an easy concept to engage with because of its dualities (e.g. commercial vs. less commercial, planned vs. unplanned). These conflicting discourses indicate that there is

a lack of universal understanding of the concept among the supply side representatives which makes the practical implementation of slow philosophy challenging. Hence, slow philosophy can be regarded as both a facilitating and hindering factor for tourism development depending on personal understanding and interpretation of the concept. Secondly, while slow philosophy contributes to social sustainability, its contribution to environmental and economic sustainability is currently ambiguous.

In conclusion, it is questionable whether the ideas of slow philosophy are viable in tourism development outside the Cittáslow and Slow Food context and can be a guiding philosophy to inform tourism development at a national level. One might argue that top-down approach in implementing slow philosophy in tourism development through policies might face criticism from the local community and tourism industry (Semmens & Freeman, 2012); therefore, the bottom-up approach would be the best option for the tourism destinations. If slow tourism is regarded as a “development-from-below” initiative (Conway & Timms, 2010, p. 330), it is down to the private sector to develop the offerings using the slow philosophy. Yet, this study shows that if slow philosophy at the destination is used without any governance from the public sector, its application in tourism development is solely dependent on the understanding and willingness of individual supply side representatives to engage with this concept.

### **Disclosure statement**

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