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Conceptualising slow tourism: a perspective from Latvia

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Abstract

Slow tourism is perceived as a new type of sustainable tourism and a promising alternative to mass tourism with which tourists, destination managers and tourism service providers are willing to engage. However, inconsistent interpretations impede the clarity of communication between tourism suppliers and consumers. This study re-examines the phenomenon of slow tourism to address this gap in the literature. The focus of the study is Latvia where slowness, until recently, was adopted in tourism branding. This qualitative study revealed that slow tourism is an approach to tourism underpinned by a slow mindset which enhances the core experiential aspect of the phenomenon within ethical boundaries. The environmental and economic aspects appear to be marginal and may fluctuate in intensity according to individuals' perception. This study offers a theoretical perspective alongside some practical implications for slow tourism and enhances industry awareness of the phenomenon, satisfies consumers' expectations and improves marketing communications.

Keywords: slow tourism – sustainability – tourist experience – slow mindset – Latvia

Introduction

Characterised as an ideal way to engage in sustainable tourism (Breakey & Breakey, 2015), slow tourism is still gaining interest among tourists, tourism providers, and academics (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011) and it is often delimited according to “spatial, cultural, psychological and infrastructural differences” (Robbins & Cho, 2012, p. 114). However, previous studies have mainly focused on destinations and supply side practices (Shang, Qiao, & Chen, 2020) while tourists appear to have limited awareness of the phenomenon (Pecsek, 2016). Slow tourism emerged from a worldwide social movement to counter fast food trends and pace of life (Heitmann, Robinson, & Povey, 2011) and it is enacted through objects (local food and wine, eco-compatible building materials), practices (wine making), the environment, culinary events, music festivals, and initiatives aimed at improving the life of local inhabitants (Miele, 2008). Seen as a philosophy, slow tourism implies a unique attitude to travelling and life in general (Honoré, 2005) and a mindful predisposition to experiencing tourism (Mei, 2014).

Slow tourism is believed to have an important impact on the wider economic and social environment of the destination (Timms & Conway, 2011), therefore, it is increasingly valued in the tourism industry (Oh, Assaf, & Baloglu, 2014) because current tourism patterns are believed to no longer be sustainable, due to the growing number of tourists in some destinations, causing not only environmental, but also social damage. Although slow tourism is not a panacea for all the problems that the tourism industry is facing, it is seen as an alternative approach to tourism (Markwell, Fullagar, & Wilson, 2012), hence it is not exempt from contradictions. These include the role of transport for long distance journeys which, at present, employs polluting technology (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010) and, therefore, is inconsistent with the slow tourism philosophy of fostering environmental care.

In addition, the terminology used to address slow tourism may result in different meanings in different societies. In the USA, slow tourism refers to the experience at a destination while in Europe its understanding is multi-dimensional and includes the journey and its environmental impacts (Robbins & Cho, 2012). Furthermore, the idea of slowness is inextricably related to the concept and perception of time (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010), hence the meaning attributed to slow tourism is open to various interpretations.

The differences in interpreting the phenomenon of slow tourism makes its meaning challenging to be understood and adopted by tourists and difficult to convey through marketing communications by tourism providers (Pecsek, 2016). In addition, the perception of slow tourism from a demand perspective has not received much attention in the literature and there is also a lack of commonly agreed definitions for the connotations, perceptions and practices attributed to slow tourism among consumers. It is, therefore, important to further explore the meanings attached to slow tourism to find possible common understandings between its supply and demand sides. This paper aims to explore slow tourism from the perspectives of both tourism providers and tourists who claim to practise it in Latvia. With this approach this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the slow tourism phenomenon, its theoretical development and also identifies and evaluates the extent to which it is currently embedded in the claimed sustainability paradigm. Consequently, this study could provide a new platform for more generalisable research which could improve fluency in communication between suppliers and consumers in the tourism industry and in particular for the dissemination of slow practices via industry marketing activities.

There are also indistinct interpretations of the role of fast transport for slow tourism which is frequently placed in the context of activities at destinations rather than

incorporating transport in its sustainability paradigm (Guiver & McGrath, 2016). Therefore, slow tourism has been used as a potential tool for the promotion of businesses and places at destinations (Conway & Timms, 2010; Pecsek, 2016). Latvia is one of the few destinations which adopted the term 'slow' in its tourism marketing and probably the only one that for several years (from 2010 to 2018) incorporated slowness into its branding. The Latvian Tourism Development Agency (LTDA) positioned the country in the minds of potential tourists using the slogan "Latvia. Best enjoyed slowly" because, they claimed, Latvia is a place where "tourists 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). This branding exercise aimed to encourage people to stay longer in Latvia and to redirect the tourist flow from the cities to the countryside – a common strategy to generate more expenditure per person in different areas of the country (Bel, Lacroix, Lyser, Rambonilaza, & Turpin, 2015). The Latvian tourism branding was a strategic move following an increase in the number of inbound day trip visitors and a decrease in overnight stays (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2014) in order to increase the length of the holidays which is more sustainable not only economically but also environmentally (Gössling et al., 2005).

Therefore, given that the concept of slow tourism had been implemented in Latvia (at the time of the data collection) and, at the same time, tourism in Latvia has been under-researched, this destination was chosen as the focus of the present study. Using a qualitative approach, this research examines Latvian suppliers of slow tourism from both the public and private sectors. It also explores the perception of slow tourism from the perspective of tourists, both domestic and international, including their experiences and reasons to engage in slow tourism in Latvia.

Background of Latvian tourism

The Republic of Latvia (*Latvia*) regained its independence in 1991. Latvia's territory is 64,562 km² with a population of about 2 million people distributed in five regions: Riga region, Kurzeme, Zemgale, Vidzeme and Latgale, each of which possesses different cultural characteristics. 1.7 million foreign overnight tourists visited Latvia in 2017 who came for reasons such as recreation (38.5%), visiting friends and relatives (29.9%) and business (19.7%). They came by air (59.1%), road (36.7%), railway (3.6%) and sea (0.6%) (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2018).

Latvia's top inbound tourist markets are Russia, Germany, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, and Norway and these are the priority markets for marketing communication activities (Investment and Development Agency of Latvia, 2018). Families with children, the middle and silver generation are the key target markets because generally they are more affluent, tend to stay longer, and purchase more products and services during their stays (Bel et al., 2015).

The phenomenon of slow tourism

Slow tourism emerged from the Slow Food movement initiated by Carlo Petrini in 1986 as a form of protest against fast food. This movement advocates the importance of a non-frenetic life, preserving local food traditions, the environment and supporting local food producers (Slow Food, 2013). A shift in focus from food quality to an environmental paradigm transformed it into a social movement appealing to a wider audience (van Bommel & Spicer, 2011). In addition to supporting local arts and crafts, the slow movement encourages modern industries to deliver products that are distinctive to a particular place

while local authorities focus on the implementation of programs and policies to improve the quality of life for their residents (Knox, 2005; Pink, 2008).

However, the phenomenon presents some challenges, for example, travelling locally (for those trips of less than 24 hours) could represent a contradiction to the meaning of tourism and could prove economically disastrous for some regions (Hall, 2006). In addition there is no current universal consensus among practitioners and academics about the meaning of slow tourism (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011) and the terms 'slow travel' and 'slow tourism' are often used interchangeably in literature, mass media, and travel blogs. However slow travel generally refers to the tourist journey while slow tourism is concerned with all tourism activities at the destination (Conway & Timms, 2012; Matos, 2003). In this context, the suppliers of slow tourism services are involved in creating a sense of place and spaces where tourists can feel engaged with the local culture and hospitality (Pawlusiński & Kubal, 2018) while tourists are unhurried throughout the period of time spent on holidays (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011).

Time and temporality

Time, as in 'clock-time', is an essential element of the slow tourism mindset because slow travel means adjusting perceived speed or the pace of the occurrence of the experience (Howard, 2012). Time is considered as an important resource which humans comprehend and manage in different ways (Polegato, 2000). In the modern societies time is divided into spatially, functionally, and temporally organised activities highlighting the scarcity of time, hence, it is regarded as limited, precious and divisible and often used to measure a person's accomplishments (Hassard, 1991). Time is thus perceived as a commodity which is measured and also determines working and leisure periods; consequently, time impacts on

the structure and organisation of the tourism industry capitalising on consumers' free time. In the context of specific temporal parameters, people feel pressured to fulfil their holiday expectations according to their commitments within a predetermined timeframe which may require them to increase the speed of activities and itineraries (Woehler, 2003). Therefore, tourism suppliers may be forced to offer consumers as much sensation as possible in a relatively short period of time (Matos, 2003).

Slow tourism, however, envisages an appreciation of 'personal time' through deceleration (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011) transforming the perception of limited time into an abundance of it (Gardner, 2009) to the extent of reaching a condition where time is not a dominant parameter of the tourism experience (Dickinson & Peeters, 2012). However, slow tourism might involve some fast elements associated with technology such as the internet and air transport (Germann Molz, 2009). This temporal contradiction (Howard, 2012) implies that slow tourism can coexist with fast and/or polluting travel practices within the same journey (Lannoy, 2016; Singh, 2012). In addition, it is unclear how other fast practices could be reconcilable with a slow mindset when many slow tourists take their laptop computers, tablets, and/or phones with them while travelling in order to communicate with the world from which they are trying to temporarily escape (Markwell et al., 2012).

Dimensions of Slow Tourism

Slow tourism encompasses an environmentally friendly attitude and behaviour (Moore, 2012) and an approach to tourism concerned with low carbon emission activities (Dickinson, Robbins, & Lumsdon, 2010). However, transport represents an inherent contradiction for slow tourism because of its carbon emissions (Lipman & Murphy, 2012), unless infrastructure enabling environmentally friendly transport is in place (Lin, 2017).

While self-propelled (walking, running and swimming) and augmented (rowing, cycling and skiing) modes of transport and travelling (Stradling & Anabele, 2008) are certainly compatible with slow tourism principles, fuelled modes cause much disagreement among academics, industry representatives and tourists. According to Dickinson, Lumsdon, and Robbins (2011), only low carbon modes of transport such as train, coach and bicycles should be used for slow tourism. On the other hand, it is recognised that it is not always possible to reach long distance destinations without the use of high polluting means of transport hence the coexistence of both slow and fast modes of travel should be accepted (Oh et al., 2014). This conciliatory argument highlights the tension that exists between the growth of tourism and environmental destruction underpinning the cognitive dissonance of tourism experts who seek solutions to the dilemma (Becken, 2017) by promoting changes in attitude which may impact on the behaviour of tourists (Filimonau, Matute, Mika, & Faracik, 2018). High speed trains in Taiwan, for example, have contributed to the extension of staying in some destinations and consequently they have improved the tourists' experience because the speed of travel saves time and creates the availability of more time at the destination and more opportunities to engage with the locals (Sun & Lin, 2018). Therefore, while on one hand there are long term issues such as the necessity to update infrastructure in several destinations and between destinations, on the other hand, there is the need to influence and modify stakeholders' attitudes and behaviour (Becken, 2017).

The geographical remoteness of some unspoiled locations appealing to slow tourists makes them more difficult to reach in environmentally friendly ways (de la Barre, 2012), therefore, it is not clear whether slow tourism should be seen as limited to intra-continental travel of up to 2,000km (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010) or taking place in any worldwide location provided that tourists stay longer (though the period of time is still undefined) at a

destination (Matos, 2003). This would allow slow tourism to achieve not only the environmental but also the economic benefits (Di Clemente, Hernández-Mogollón, De Salvo, & Campón-Cerro, 2014) that it claims.

The slow movement also advocates a physical slowing down (Lipman & Murphy, 2012) in order to experience a destination, enjoying a deep involvement with the environment and locals (Conway & Timms, 2010, 2012; Singh, 2012). However, local immersion status does not seem always attainable because tourists are often treated as outsiders by the locals. As a result, their engagement with the local way of life is often limited to people working in the tourism industry (Lipman & Murphy, 2012) with some possible exceptions such as participation in community-based volunteer tourism initiatives (Gibson, Pratt, & Movono, 2012). In this context the hosts' lifestyle is presented to tourists by knowledgeable locals who are aware of the sensitivity of people living in the community (Salazar, 2012). Slow tourism, therefore, could be perceived as encompassing the unforeseen and the unknown, experiencing the unexpected (Gardner, 2009) and/or learning to find the extraordinary in the commonplace, being immersed in the quality (Dickinson et al., 2010) rather than the quantity of the experiences (Heitmann et al., 2011).

The authenticity of cultural encounters is another important aspect of slow tourism (Dickinson et al., 2010; Howard, 2012; Timms & Conway, 2011). Authenticity refers to the way of life at the time of the tourists' cultural experience. Local gastronomy, for example, in its cultural function offers tourists a connection with the local way of life (Sims, 2009) while old gastronomic practices, no longer in use, should not be considered authentic and preserved for the sake of tourism (Wearing, Wearing, & McDonald, 2012). As a consequence, artificially sustained authenticity in some destinations could be rejected by slow tourists (De Salvo, Mogollón, & Di Clemente, 2013).

The association of slow tourism with small-scale travels (Markwell et al., 2012), anti-commercialism (Sawday, 2010) and anti-consumerist practices (Fullagar, 2012) means that it generates less economic flow than mass tourism. However, since slow tourism implies the preference of local service providers, it produces revenues for local businesses and communities (Conway & Timms, 2010) for a sustained period of time (Sims, 2009). The use of public transport for slow tourists can potentially enhance the local economy and its surrounding areas (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010) with a 'soft growth' which is the result of advancing efficiency of resources and qualitative development (Timms & Conway, 2011). At a different level, slow tourism could also be conceived as driven by non-economic motives when supported by suppliers' willingness to create tourism demand in line with their values. They offer tourists genuine cultural experiences while caring for their environment and community (Groenendaal, 2012); as a consequence slow tourism would revolve around self-catering accommodation (Intel Academic, 2011), cottages and apartments (The Independent Traveler, 2013) rather than resort-type accommodations which defy the principles of social and environmental sustainability (Heitmann et al., 2011).

Immersion in a local environment and culture and a concern for others' wellbeing (Tam, 2008) makes slow tourism advocating for ethical behaviour (Clancy, 2015) expressed in practising eco-efficiency with a more effective use of materials and energy, in addition to a reduced throughput of products and services. These factors increase the lifespan of tourism products which, in turn, results in sustainable consumption (Cooper, 2005). However, eco-efficient practices in tourism are increasingly challenged by the rules of capitalist markets in developing countries and as a consequence, there is the risk of limited applications of ethical principles in claimed eco-tourism destinations. Therefore, if eco-tourism and slow tourism could be fused into slow eco-tourism, the ethical mindset of

tourists would encompass the principles of both social justice and sustainability to ensure equity for host workers and their communities and quality experiences for tourists (Wearing et al., 2012). Slow eco-tourism should operate within parameters which stand against the mere observation of people and places (Howard, 2012), the simulation of historical cultural customs (Heitmann et al., 2011) and experiences which are regarded as unethical practices (Markwell et al., 2012).

Slow tourists and their mindset

While there is an argument that slow tourism could suit everyone (Mintel Academic, 2011), it is unclear whether unintentional slow tourists can be classified as such (Guiver & McGrath, 2016). Very few studies focus on slow tourists and attempt to characterise them with specific attributes (Dickinson et al., 2011; Robbins & Cho, 2012; Robinson, 2011). A basic description from Matos (2003) defines them as those who want to re-energise in a serene environment away from stress, while other studies limit the slow tourist profile to possible associated behaviours such as being environmentally conscious (Dickinson et al., 2011). Simpson, Gössling, Scott, Hall, and Gladin (2008) characterise such behaviour as staying for a long period of time at a destination, minimising air travel, rewarding airlines with sound environmental management, offsetting flights that cannot be avoided, rewarding pro-environmental and pro-development tour operators and choosing environmentally certified destinations and/or accommodation.

There is also an assumption that slow tourists prefer eating local food, being in an absence of stress and noise, undertaking activities that engage body and spirit, having an interest in local culture, heritage, personal development (Heitmann et al., 2011), cultural authenticity (De Salvo et al., 2013), a relaxed way of travelling, personal enrichment,

satisfaction and well-being (Nijkamp & Baaijens, 1999). Therefore, it is a slow mindset that distinguishes slow tourists from other types of tourists (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011; Sawday, 2010) because of their involvement in “a mental, psychological and behavioural process” (Oh et al., 2014, p. 11) that “represents a way of consumer thinking about tourism” (Dickinson et al., 2011, p. 282). This determines the mentality of slow tourists and their approach to consumption and travelling practices (De Salvo et al., 2013; Di Clemente et al., 2014).

In summary, there is no universally adopted definition of slow tourism and its interpretation is context-specific. The existing definitions include aspects from environmental, experiential, economic and ethical dimensions with ‘slowness’ being the overarching theme. However, even slowness in the context of slow tourism is discussed from two perspectives: the physical mobility of a tourist (physical slowness) and the perception of time while on holiday (mental or attitudinal slowness), while a shared understanding of slow tourism between supply and demand sides is overlooked, which sets the purpose of this study.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was adopted to explore the phenomenon of slow tourism in Latvia using semi-structured in-depth interviews for data collection and gathering detailed information about perspectives, stories, experiences (Lewis, 2003) and a variety of realities (Veal, 2006). It was assumed that information from respondents would vary considerably because slow tourism is a relatively new phenomenon in Latvia. A checklist of topics to be discussed was prepared to ensure that the key information was collected and to enable consistency of data collection (Decrop, 2004). Furthermore, to ensure credibility of the research and that meanings were correctly understood (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003), a 'mirroring' technique was used during interviews which involved using research participants' own words for the formulation of further questions in order to verify meanings and to focus on clarity of language (Myers, 2011). Follow-up questions were also used to stimulate richer and deeper responses (Patton, 2002).

The sample was obtained selecting respondents according to criteria reflecting their association with slow tourism (explained below); this would allow data triangulation because of their knowledge on the subject which provided rich comparable information increasing trustworthiness of the research (Decrop, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The sufficiency of this study sample was determined by the criterion of redundancy (VanderStoep, 2009). Previous studies of slow tourism have used sample sizes which vary considerably, for example, Dickinson et al. (2011) used 8 in-depth interviews with eleven participants, Lumsdon and McGrath (2011) conducted 25 interviews, and Cosar and Kozak (2014) used 24.

Sampling strategy included multiple stakeholders involved in slow tourism (Patton, 2002). Altogether, 37 participants were selected using theoretical and/or criterion sampling:

25 participants were among tourism providers, specifically, 18 from the public sector, five from the private sector, and two from non-governmental organisations; 12 participants were tourists involved in slow tourism (6 local and 6 foreign). These were selected with snowballing and opportunistic sampling techniques due to the difficulty in reaching self-identified slow tourists with other means such as social media and/or specific tourism websites (e.g. LinkedIn, Slow Europe Travel Forums and Facebook). Several hotels in cities and rural areas were approached in order to recruit potential respondents who fitted the slow tourist profile. Copies of a letter explaining the purpose of the research and the slow tourism philosophy were given to hotel receptionists to be distributed among guests who fulfilled the following criteria: stayed at least three nights, wished to explore the place in depth, had a strong interest to experience local culture and interact with local people and their traditions.

All interviews were conducted either in Latvian by one of the authors, who is a native of the country, for those interviews with locals, or in English for the interviews with foreign tourists; the interviews were audio-recorded and their average length was about 60 minutes. All interviews were checked with the respondents for accuracy, transcribed and the Latvian transcripts translated into English; the translated content was checked by a bilingual academic. NVivo10 was used to assist the data organisation into themes and new themes also emerged as the data were examined (Maxwell, 2005).

Findings & discussion

Understanding slow tourism

The meaning of the expression 'slow tourism' was unclear among the respondents, their answers reflected their genuine understanding and interpretation of the terms which, in part, was confused and/or was given a negative attribution.

For me, this word combination – slow travel – seemed very odd. Travelling... is an active way of moving around. Slow sounds like unhurried, sluggish – what can you do, what can you manage at such a pace? I guess this connotation is confusing me, but it is clear that it encompasses something else; it is not about sluggishness or doing nothing (P09, local tourist).

One explanation could be found in the cultural background of the respondents as the terms 'slow' and 'fast' may be perceived differently in different cultures. In fact, speed is "a culturally-loaded term" and could carry a positive connotation in countries like Latvia which once was part of the Soviet bloc (Pecsek, 2016, p. 99). By contrast, tourism providers viewed slow tourism as a generic term of tourism approach which could apply to any form of tourism; however, they clearly associated slow tourism with nature tourism and cultural tourism, emphasising an interest in the local heritage and culture (Hall, 2012; Singh, 2012), green tourism (Murayama & Parker, 2012) and eco-tourism (Wearing et al., 2012).

[I]t is possible to relate it [slow tourism] more with cultural-heritage attractions, also with nature objects or any service where you can learn about the process of how you get from milk to cheese... and you can taste it afterwards too (P32, DMO representative).

Local food emerged as an important aspect of slow tourism confirming the perspective put forward by Heitmann et al. (2011). A link to gastronomy was also expressed by tourists in addition to eco-efficiency (Gössling et al., 2005).

Here we arrive at the precise idea of eco-tourism. That you get to know local, [...] you use local produce, you pay a local service provider who is local [...] (P19, local tourist).

Rural and religious tourism were also perceived as related to slow tourism because of the depth of involvement of tourists in local life.

Activities at the destination which could be incorporated into the slow experience were a controversial topic from both tourists' and providers' viewpoints. Cycling, walking, hiking, boat trips and even skiing and snowboarding were identified as an integral part of slow tourism because they were associated with a healthy lifestyle.

In addition, if you walk or cycle [...] you can burn some calories and do something good for your body, for your health (P01, local tourist).

For me "Best enjoyed slowly" is something that can be enjoyed in nature, either walking or cycling (P28, DMO representative).

The opposite point of view referred to less activity-based slow tourism because of the perception of a physical slowness, therefore, partaking in activities which are framed according to clock-time and not accepted within the slow philosophy:

The things that people are interested in doing here – slowly exploring the place, the destination; learning more about cultural-heritage values, religious values, relaxing near to water [...]. It is holiday time and people enjoy themselves slowly. That totally corresponds with the Latvian tourism image (P10, DMO representative).

People like to do sports here and that might not be this relaxed type of leisure. It is active; it is something opposite (P34, DMO representative).

To some involved in the tourism sector it seemed that 'active' corresponds to 'fast' hence with this perspective 'active' is not compatible with 'slow'. Varley and Semple (2015, p. 87) argue that in the context of slow adventure, "the tourist is an active traveller, not a passive passenger," therefore, active engagement with a place does not have defined temporal boundaries. Both concepts are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary because being active includes not only physical exercise but also being present and taking part in leisurely and cultural moments (Markwell et al., 2012; Moore, 2012).

You can be present, see everything... [...] I think that it is great because... being present and [there is the] possibility to take part and see (P01, local tourist).

But what is slow tourism? If you have time to cycle not just one hour but you can go around on a bicycle the whole day slowly through nice countryside or nice rural roads. Moreover, if you visit rural farmsteads and try local goodies... [then] you are active and slow at the same time. I don't think that slow is literally slow. Active can be slow as well (P25, DMO representative).

The above discussion highlights the complexity of defining a culturally and socially shaped and constructed notion such as slow tourism even in an assumed homogeneous setting such as Latvia. The interpretation of the concepts of both 'slow' and 'active' varied, either associating them respectively to passive and fast and mutually exclusive, or mutually inclusive. While tourists appeared non-committed to identify themselves within a cluster of consumers, the suppliers seemed to consider slow tourism as predominantly associated with nature-based activities and culture, and to a lesser extent with gastronomy and rural tourism. Slow tourism appears to be understood as incorporating attention to the environment (Filimonau et al., 2018), food and authenticity of culture (Salazar, 2012), but being complementary to mainstream tourism practices rather than a different tourism type as suggested by Guiver, McGrath, and Torkington (2016).

Some respondents also disregarded the conventional belief that tourists should expect to see as much as possible while on holiday resonating with the "resistive and subversive roles" that tourists increasingly undertake (McCabe, 2015, p. 26).

I am sure in the time I had I could have seen more. But I decided not to jump from one highlight to the next. I had time to think about what I went to see (P24, foreign tourist).

Likewise, tourism providers acknowledged that the observed patterns of slow tourists' behaviour revolved around being immersed in the physical and social environment of a destination by spending more time in one place than other types of tourists.

I do not run around ten or more attractions in one day but maybe four or five attractions where I spend two hours, three hours. I enjoy what this attraction offers. As a tourist, I do not rush myself; [...] that I have to leave because I have to be somewhere else (P15, DMO representative).

These responses highlight the importance of the attitudinal slowness or slow mindset which is the way that slow tourists approach their travel. By adding the supply side perspective, the findings of this study complement the earlier work among tourists (on the demand side) of Oh et al. (2014) which suggests that slow tourism is a mental activity.

The meaning of 'slow' emerged as qualitative in nature and thus not fixed and mostly not directly measurable (Conway & Timms, 2010) in the same way as the perceived clock time not being restricted by tight schedules (Timms & Conway, 2011). Indeed, 'slow' is "a polysemic term" meaning different things to different people (Bagnoli, 2016, p. 121); this notional ambiguity was also expressed by respondents.

What does slow mean? I think that it is actually very, very individual for each person because what might be unhurried for me might be terribly slow for somebody else, and what is fast for me might be absolutely fine for others (P06, local tourist).

It is very individual, of course (P33, DMO representative).

The tourism providers seemed to associate slowness with limited speed and a relaxed pace to see tourist sights and implying a longer stay at a destination. This aspect was also emphasised by tourists specifying that this was what made a difference to the quality of

their experiences. However, it was evident that the focal benefit of slow tourism was perceived differently by providers, who emphasised longer stays for economic gains, and tourists who identified slowness with a more meaningful experience.

Environmental dimension

While being in a pleasant environment was a high priority, environmental responsibility or environmental concerns did not appear to be high in the tourists' agenda. Only one tourist mentioned environmental concerns:

Also, now all these environmental issues are coming up so people [...] decide to take a train somewhere and to have a few stopovers in between rather than to take a plane because I think that's... I mean, that's a reason for me too, actually, to say – 'OK, that's just not doing so much bad stuff to the environment' (P20, foreign tourist).

In considering attitudes and behaviours towards the environment, Becken (2017) argues that while there is an emerging awareness and sympathy towards low-carbon tourism, it lacks a wider acceptance among tourism stakeholders. Therefore, it is difficult to attribute a label of concern, attitude and behaviour towards the environment within slow tourism.

Although acknowledging the importance of their experience in a pleasurable environment, tourists did not express much consideration about the collective responsibility for the environment. This could be attributed to the differences in the cultural background of the tourists which could impact on their attitude and behaviour (Filimonau et al., 2018).

Similarly, tourism providers highlighted neither environmental concerns nor responsibilities,

although only one supply representative linked slow tourism and longer stays with a reduced environmental footprint (Sun & Lin, 2018).

Currently, green thinking is popular in the world in general – that you do not harm the environment with your activities. Therefore, if you choose to stay in one place for a longer time rather than using transport to travel here and there, then at the ideological level it is possible to link slow tourism with the interests of people to protect the environment and to reduce their environmental footprint (P36, DMO representative).

Overall, limited references to environmental concern were expressed by the respondents, however, the importance of covering less distance per day was identified which, by implication, involves less travelling and therefore reduces carbon footprint. Both fast and slow modes of travel are used in the context of slow tourism in Latvia by local and foreign slow tourists depending on the convenience and availability of public transport. Local tourists often use cars in combination with walking, cycling or boating while foreign tourists often arrive by plane and then use buses, trains or private cars. Both tourists and tourism providers suggested that there are no specific patterns in the use of means of transport in slow tourism confirming current knowledge on this issue (Conway & Timms, 2012; Oh et al., 2014). However, tourism providers highlighted organisational deficiencies in the public transport infrastructure and the limitations of cycling routes and infrastructure in Latvia. Therefore, it is incongruous to attribute the excessive use of transport to limited concern for the environment.

While an interest in the environment is deemed to be an important component in the slow paradigm (Dickinson et al., 2011; Fullagar, 2012; Lipman & Murphy, 2012), its role

in slow tourism is not clearly evident in this study because different perspectives imply the coexistence of multiple interpretations of realities and priorities.

Experiential dimension

The tourists stressed that the importance of their experiences surpassed the significance of the actual visits to places. The recollection and description of their stories converged on the values that these experiences had for them in the context of apparently ordinary events during their immersion with local culture, interaction with locals and their environment. A local tourist expressed it clearly:

I remember the breakfast – even though it was September, it was warm. It was a sunny morning. We were sitting on the terrace in our jackets drinking tea. The sun had risen – or was still rising, I cannot remember. You look at the sea and feel such tranquillity inside you. You are away from the stress of the city, maybe [you have] broken away from [your] daily worries. It is very precious (P01, local tourist).

The description and reminiscences continued:

He [host] met us by the sea. It was half a kilometre to his house. He drove for 10 min. talking all the time about what is what, that there was a house and two sisters live here but they have difficulties with men... He sort of introduces [us to] the village, what there is [there]. [...]
And you already get accustomed to that environment and start to feel a bit like a local (P01, local tourist).

The interaction between hosts and locals is essential to the slow tourism experience. It is about discovering a destination through the eyes of local people with a co-creation of their experience, as emphasised by Scott, Laws, and Boksberger (2009). However, while such interactions are fundamental, they are often unplanned. Gibbs and Ritchie (2010, p. 183) have argued that “memorable hospitable experiences are only truly experienced if the moment is spontaneous.” The depth and the variety of experiences offered in the Latvian tourism context was also recognised by the providers’ understanding of the expectations of slow tourists, though they appeared unclear in relation to the boundaries of the encounters.

However, the experience of the interaction between hosts and guests was described as frequently occurring outside urban areas and the providers from the private sector appeared to be more aware of the dynamics of these encounters and their important role in the context of slow tourism.

They have more interaction outside Riga because very often you are forced to communicate with locals. I think that people in Latvia open up slowly but once they do, they are hospitable and try to help (P04, DMO representative).

The experiences of slow tourists were also seen as shifting away from the ‘traditional’ expected tourism behaviour.

You arrive at a destination with the aim of discovering it from the inside and not by walking alongside a guide and 20 other people where you follow the umbrella... You arrive and communicate with locals. You go to a local restaurant; you stay at a small local hotel and

you meet people there. In such a way, you learn about the culture through local people
(P08, private sector).

Immersion in the local context as well as interaction with hosts and guests are part and parcel of slow tourism. The data in this study strongly support the work of Breakey and Breakey (2015) that connecting to the place visited and feeling like a local is at the core of slow tourism and include tourists who have time limitations. The experience and immersion in exchanges with the locals represent the most valuable aspect of slow tourism.

Economic dimension

The slow tourism philosophy also advocates staying at the destination for a longer period of time rather than a short visit to a place or residing in an all-inclusive holiday resort. Therefore, a longer time may imply spending more money at a destination and contributing to the local economy (Dickinson et al., 2010; Matos, 2003). For private business this also represents further opportunities.

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 (P08, private sector).

This slow travel is in accordance with the economic objectives (P05, DMO representative).

The tourism providers also explained that slow tourism implied the use of local resources and considered that this may result in more expensive prices than in the case of mass tourism.

We have the movement to use everything 'local'. For instance, cafes buy their ingredients not from RIMI [a supermarket chain] but from locals. Of course, it is more difficult, it is more labour-intensive and also the costs are higher (P32, DMO representative).

The tourists acknowledged that their choices of local service providers, often small-scale enterprises, is an essential aspect of their experience and appreciated that the use of local enterprises could generate limited income for the suppliers. However, they believed that money was not the main driver for these business owners. One local tourist referred to such enterprises as:

...small jewels that definitely do not earn money from tourism; they live their own life and have income from something else. I think that they are the most important element in this "Best enjoyed slowly," story. But they are not the ones who will always offer the classical service that tourists would expect (P18, local tourist).

However, to the slow tourists the overall costs of trips can be a limiting factor for longer stays. Therefore, although slow tourism involves preferring local service providers and paying a fair price, the purchasing power of tourists can potentially limit the range of their choices.

Ethical dimension

The interpretation of ethics by the tourists consisted of the belief and externalisation of mutual respect between hosts and guests for the quality of their service environment and acceptance of the cultural norms of the host society.

Here [at a small-scale service provider] tourists cannot come with their ambitions that everything has to be like this or that, item after item like quality, service, and everything. Here there is some interpretation. Here everything works as it works. Of course, the basic requirements – cleanliness and everything – that is there. But the rest is more like interpretation of the subject, how the visit goes in a particular place... (P18, local tourist)

Every tourist has to be friendly to the environment that he is visiting... If he is nature tourist, he is friendly and careful to the nature [natural] environment (P19, local tourist).

The emerging characteristics of slow tourists appear to be an openness to a variety of contexts and an adaptability and respect for the different social, economic and environmental settings of the host country. High expectations were perceived as constraining and pre-empting the experience.

Similarly, the Latvian public sector conceived ethics in terms of reciprocity during the encounters between hosts and guests as well as mutual respects. Indeed, as one provider emphasised:

Here the slogan of wild capitalism – that the client is always right, and he is everything – does not work, right? Maybe it works in commercial tourism but here [in slow tourism] it does not work. Only then it is possible to have the best experience for both parties. Mutual communication, only in that way! Mutual respect (P14, DMO representative).

The ethical dimension of slow tourism also encompasses economic, social and environmental dimensions; the externalisation of these slow tourism parameters was seen by both suppliers and tourists in the context of shared experiences where activities, environment and culture are lived in a framework of mutual respect between hosts and guests.

Conclusion

This research explored the nature of the phenomenon of slow tourism in the Latvian context. It examined slow tourism from both the perspectives of tourism providers (public and private) and the perspectives of local and foreign tourists who believe that they fit within the practices of slow tourism. This comparative approach has not been explored before, hence it was found essential to investigate the perspectives of these stakeholders to find common understandings of the phenomenon and contribute to the marketing efforts of the tourism providers in the communication of the slow philosophy to slow consumers of tourism and fulfilment of their experiential expectations.

The results of the study suggest that slow tourism cannot be confined to specific parameters as an umbrella brand (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010) or a tourism niche (Moore, 2012) and support the Lumsdon and McGrath (2011) definition of an approach to tourism with empirical evidence. Slow tourism can be compatible with any forms of tourism because

it emphasises the value of the experience, it is underpinned by an ethical behaviour and framed within a slow-perceived mindset. While slow tourism has been linked before with cultural tourism (Pecsek, 2016) and gastronomy tourism (Heitmann et al., 2011), links with nature-based tourism and rural tourism have also been found in this study, further highlighting that slow tourism is a practice and a way of experiencing the world.

This study provides evidence that the slow tourism philosophy is characterised by a mental or attitudinal slowness complementing the earlier work of Oh et al. (2014); a slow mindset is the foundation of slow tourism and underpins the tourists' attitudes towards their experiences and the cultural encounters determining the extent of the quality over the quantity of their experience. A slow mindset, therefore, is a particular way of approaching tourism that defines slow tourists.

Slowness can be seen as a state of mind because it is an individually measured phenomenon which encompasses the concept of being active and slow at the same time; therefore, the extent to which physical activities are in harmony with a slow mindset is left to individual interpretation. Travelling shorter distances per day, staying longer at a destination, spending more time in one place and experiencing an in-depth appreciation of the people, places and culture was captured as the fundamental principles of slow tourism.

Dimensions of slow tourism

Although all four dimensions of slow tourism, namely environmental (Dickinson et al., 2010; Lipman & Murphy, 2012), experiential (Gardner, 2009; Heitmann et al., 2011), economic (Conway & Timms, 2010; Groenendaal, 2012) and ethical (Clancy, 2015; De Salvo et al., 2013) have been identified in the literature, they have not been brought together in a single framework of slow tourism.

All four dimensions emerged from this research, yet the level of significance given to them by respondents was not even. Slow tourism in Latvia has very limited associations with environmental consciousness. This is possibly due to Latvia's infrastructure, however, the acceptance of long-haul travel to reach a destination for a slow tourism experience seems to address slow tourism as a destination-related practice rather than encompassing journeys which are not currently possible to envisage in an environmentally-friendly way. The economic aspect also appears to be of marginal relevance in the slow tourism philosophy, not because it is unimportant, but because it is interpreted as a consequential benefit to the priorities of slow tourism local providers and slow tourists which are experience, interaction and exchange. However, the economic aspect could be seen as more relevant for a destination as a whole since slow tourism implies longer stays which contribute to the growth of an economy.

The experiential dimension was found to be as an integral part of slow tourism and the most relevant aspect at the core of slow tourism. The immersion in a culture, the understanding of and interaction with hosts and locals in their everyday lives, the depth of the meaning of their exchange without having to be limited by a time based schedule, but managing the pace of the events according to an individual perception of time, are what make the experience the predominant component of slow tourism. The ethical dimension emerged as an overall context, rather than as a specific dimension because, ethics underpin a behaviour respectful for cultures and reciprocity, for mutual space and environment and for economic exchanges based on fairness.

The phenomenon of slow tourism is represented here in a model in Figure 1 and refers to slow tourism at a destination because of the limited relevance given to international transport in the context of slow tourism. The dimensions do not have clear-cut

boundaries and are interrelated according to an individual experience which is central to the model. The dimensions are underpinned by an ethical setting encompassing the other three dimensions, and contained within a slow mindset, interpreted and lived according to the individual perception of the meaning of time.

Figure 1 here

This study offers an important contribution to knowledge at both theoretical and practical levels. Slow tourism has been examined through the perspectives of both the suppliers and the consumers of tourism and provides a new perspective on the phenomenon and its meaning which is an approach to tourism fundamentally embedded in the value of the individual experience within a destination. Slowness could have a plethora of meanings since time is perceived differently by individuals hence its application to the slow lifestyle is subjective and cannot be measured with universal parameters. Slow tourism is embedded in a slow mindset, in an ethical approach which underpins the experience and impacts on the approach to the place, people and their resources. Therefore, slow tourism is not a type of tourism but a way in which tourists approach their travel.

Given the new perspective of slow tourism, this study also contributes to a practical understanding from both sides of the market and consequently to clearer marketing communications of what a 'slow' destination offers for those tourists identifying themselves with the slow philosophy. The findings of this study are qualitative in nature and not generalisable; these are limited to Latvia at the moments in time when data were collected, therefore, it would be interesting to reproduce this study in different countries and undertake quantitative studies in order to confirm the theory developed by this research.

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