The Tourist’s Perception about Slow Travel - A Romanian Perspective

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Abstract

One of the current trends in tourism is the so-called "slow travel". This trend corresponds to the needs of a segment of tourists regarding waiver for quick and stressful tourism with a quiet interlude to regain energies and to enjoy holidays. The theoretical concept of "slow tourism" summarizes the original idea of "wellbeing", developed in 1959 by the American doctor Halbert Dunn affirms Chon, (2012). His idea of "welfare on High Level" is based on four concepts: a healthy diet; motion; relaxation; cultural and spiritual renewal. Tourists could discover Slow Travel through simple pleasures such as: the flowers scent, flavors, "simple peace" and the beautiful landscapes. This new vision of tourism includes not only accommodation (which should be simple) and diet (healthy), leisure (peaceful), culture (local culture), services (provided in a simple atmosphere) and respect for the natural environment. Starting from these theoretical considerations I made research among Romanian tourists through which I tried to identify how they perceive the concept of Slow Travel. I use SPSS to perform the statistical analysis of the results. This research was conducted in Romania and its results will be a starting point for future research in this area.

Keywords: Slow Travel; tourism; romanian tourists.

1. Introduction

Slow travel is a component of the slow food movement, which was initiate in Italy in the 1980's as a protest opposing the opening of a McDonald's in Rome. The slow food movement aims to preserve regional cuisine, local farming, communal meals and traditional food preparation methods. This cultural initiative has since spout into a whole way of life known as the Slow Movement, which emphasizes relation - relation to food, relation to families

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and, in the case of travel, relation to local peoples and cultures affirms Wed, (2014).

Discovering peace and calm, letting go, grant impressions to sink in - travelling deliberately and slowly. “Slow travel” puts conscious enjoyment before hectic consumption according to Info, (2014). To sit on a secluded dock and gaze at the reflection of clouds chasing each other’s shadows in a calm lake. To stroll through an outdoor market and revel in the busy atmosphere. Or to accept the spur-of-the-moment invitation of a wine grower among idyllic vines to sample one of his wines, accompanied by a comprehensive homily on the evolution of the wine from grape to wine glass. These are memories that will still come back months later and bring smiles to tourists. Slow travel is not so much a particular mode of transportation as it is a mind-set. According to Yurtseven and Kaya (2011) slow tourism follows in general two main facets: taking time and attachment to a particular place. Rather than attempting to squeeze as many sights or cities as possible into each trip, the slow traveller takes the time to explore each destination scrupulously and to experience the local culture. Per the slow travel philosophy, it's more important to get to know one small area well than it is to see only a little bit of many different areas according to Traveler, (2014).

The designers of tourism products (tourist agencies, national parks, municipalities, local development agencies, etc.) offer slow tourists activities that proudly bear the ‘slow’ designation; these include hot air ballooning, dog sledding, pleasure trips and hiking, bicycling (mountain biking), equestrianism, snowshoeing, rowing and other water sports, discovering subterranean caves (caving), visits to numerous protected areas, bird watching, paragliding, cross country ski running, etc. (Fig. 1).

According to a site that promote tourism from Slovenia, (2014) the tourist product of slow travel is characterized by six main elements: time, slowness, cohabitation, authenticity, sustainability and emotiveness (Figure 2). Providers included in the slow tourism network have found added value in this product and have enriched the classic offer with the above elements.

- **TIME**
- **SLOWNESS**
- **CONVERSION**
- **AUTHENTICITY**
- **SUSTAINABILITY**
- **EMOTION**
Thomas (2014) affirms that slow travel is about taking your time back and to establish connections with any choice and value its qualities. He emphasises that SLOW is an acronym:

- S comes from sustainability
- L comes from locally
- O comes organic
- W comes from whole

1.1 Benefits of Slow Travel

Gheorghe et al (2012) affirms that traveling more slowly allows you to form a stronger connection to the place you're visiting, and you'll feel much less rushed. With a "slow" itinerary, you won't experience the stress of attempting to knock out every site in your guidebook. Instead, you'll stay in one place long enough to recognize your neighbors, shop in the local markets and pick a favorite coffeehouse. Few societies move as quickly as Americans do, so slowing down in other countries not only allows us to escape our own stressful day-to-day life but also to slip naturally into the pace of another culture.

Slow travel is often kinder to tourist budget. By staying in one place for a week or more at a time the transportation costs are reduces, and vacation lease are often more cost-efficient than hotels since they allow travelers to cook their own food instead of eating out for every meal.

1.2 Slow Travel destinations

According to Schlichter, (2007) Europe is the most popular destination for slow travelers because vacation rentals are plentiful, public transportation systems are efficient, historic attractions are relatively close together and English is widely spoken. Outside the Europe we have Australia/New Zealand, the Caribbean, Canada and the United States. Canada is well known as an excellent destination for long cross-country train journeys.

In terms of accommodation slow travelers generally stay in vacation rentals, which tend to be more cost-efficient than hotels for longer stays as well as more spacious and comfy. For eating tourist are seeking out local ingredients and experience the local cuisine of the place they are visiting. For transportation they use rail which is a relaxing and often luxurious way to see the countryside, road trip which is considered slow travel if tourists take the back roads instead of the highways, biking, river barge, walking.

Cirule, (2014) and Gardner, (2012) affirms that slow travel is about becoming a part of local life of the destination that tourists visit. It’s about connecting to a place, its people and culture. It is something totally different from trips where travelers just follow the list of all ‘must-sees’ and after getting home they realize that actually they need a holiday to recover.

2. Research Methodology

Based on these aspects, prior underlined I tried to identify how the Romanian public perceive the concept of Slow Travel. I asked myself the following questions: Romanians tourist knows / has heard of slow travel concept; if they practice consciously or unconsciously activities specific to slow travel; and what profile has the tourists who practice slow travel.

This research was done in Romania. The study has a pilot character and is intended to be use in future research for my doctoral thesis.

2.1 Sample

The sample was formed randomly, is made up of woman and man aged over 18 years and they are coming mostly from urban area of Romania (Table 1)
Table 1. Demographic details

| Sex          | Education | Area of residence |
|--------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Woman        | Man       | Secondary studies | University Studies | Postgraduate Studies | Urban areas | Rural areas |
| 70%          | 30%       | 11%               | 52%                 | 37%                 | 89%         | 11%         |

Number of respondents: 228  The average age of respondents: 29 years

Source: made by author, based on research

2.2 Materials

To execute the research we used a questionnaire consisting of 21 questions. It had two types of questions, that is: demographic questions and research related question. The aim of the research was to find out where in Romania this type of tourism can be practice.

2.3 Procedure

For the research, a questionnaire was elaborated, which was randomly applied to respondents.

2.4 Data analysis

The date obtain in the research were analyzed using SPSS.

2.5 Results and discussion

We collected 228 valid questionnaires. After the analysis of the results we found the following data:

a) Based on the response we found that before leaving on vacation tourists choose their destination taking in consideration various sources of information. From findings resulted that the main source of information for tourists is represented by the Internet (82% of respondents chose this), followed by recommendations of friends and relatives (62% of respondents chose this). The answer provided corresponds with reality/statistics. Various reasons contributed to this result: the cost of connectivity, the high speed of broadband connectivity. Popescu (2012) affirms that Romania it is in the top 15 countries according to average internet speed connection.

It stands out the low contribution of written mass media, only 10% of respondents chose this, which make us think that Romanians do not read newspapers or magazines. We can note that only 1/3 of them are using catalogs and tourist guides.

b) We wanted to find out respondents’ opinion about the exploitation of natural and anthropogenic resources from Romania.

Table 2. Exploitation of resources

|       | Nr. | %  |
|-------|-----|----|
| Yes   | 19  | 8  |
| No    | 201 | 88 |
| Don’t Know | 8 | 4  |

Source: made by author, based on research

Asked if resources are properly harnessed the majority of respondents consider that this does not happen (88% believe that). The respondents’ perception is that possible causes might be: poor infrastructure, lack of interest from local and central authorities, occult interests.

c) Vacation in a secluded place

Table 3. Interest for secluded areas

|       | Nr. | %  |
|-------|-----|----|
| Yes   | 193 | 84 |
| No    | 13  | 6  |
| Don’t Know | 22 | 10 |

Source: made by author, based on research
As the participants report 84% of them would accept an offer for a holiday in a secluded place where the number of incoming tourist is low. This situation highlights the fact that the tourists desire to escapes from everyday life, due to the need of forgetting the worries of tomorrow at least for few days.

d) Why tourists choose a secluded destination? Based on the responses received the respondents prefer a secluded destination due to natural attractions (24.2% of respondents chose nature) due to local culture and traditions (21.6% of them choose this) and due to the uniqueness of locations (15.4% of respondents). Tourists want to be energized - and where better and easy place to obtain that, if not in the nature.

For only 1 in 10 respondents the quality of service presents importance when choosing a secluded destination and also the fact that the place is isolated from modern civilization. Respondents don’t put too much importance on having a wide range of option (3.6% of them choose this), also on establishing relations with local people (5.5% of them choose this).

Surprising is the fact that tourists don’t want to do things that are different from what they are accustomed (only 7.6% of them want to do something different from what they are accustom to do), they want to be only spectators and not to be involved as participants in the activities done by the hosts.

e) Slow Travel an alternative form of tourism

Table 4: Degree of knowledge for the term of Slow Travel

| Nr. | Yes | No |
|-----|-----|----|
| 81  | 36  | 64 |

Source: made by authors, based on research

36% of respondents had heard of this form of tourism. This is gratifying and hope-giving by the fact that Romania has, in our opinion, a high potential for this form of tourism especially in rural areas. In our country slow travel it is only beginning, but becomes to have significant proportion. More and more people give up mass tourism for slow movement and recreational activities, trying to find new ways to appreciate life.

f) Defining elements of slow travel?

According to respondents the most important defining elements of Slow Travel are: concern for quality and not quantity (49 % of the consider so); the relations between tourists and hosts (46 % of them consider so); the interest in culture, customs and traditions (46 % of them consider so). These defining elements outlined are consistent with the definition of Slow Travel fact which shows that respondents understood pretty well what is meant through the practice of this form of tourism. Les importance is given to the fact that this form of tourism contributes to a better valorization of local resources (only 1 in 5 respondents consider so). 1 in 3 respondents consider that slow travel has a low environmental impact.

g) Romania a Slow Travel destination

Table 5. Romania as a Slow Travel destination

| Nr. | %  |
|-----|----|
| 78  | 96 |
| 3   | 4  |

Source: made by author, based on research

Approximately 96% of the respondents consider Romania as a possible destination for practitioners for this form of tourism. Romania is a patchwork of regions, traditions, beliefs and customs of different origins. In addition, the country roads can be seen wagons pulled by horses or donkeys, or gig that you remembers you of the older rural areas of Romania from the '60s. Tourists can get acquainted with: the archaic village, customs that are not altered and traditions of the local people.
3. Conclusions

Marshall, (2013) emphasize that in a world where speed is essential Slow Travel is seen as a way to escape from this "crazy" rush present in all sections of the society in which we live. „The only thing for certain is that everything changes. The rate of change increases. If you want to hang on you better speed up. That is the message of today. It could however be useful to remind everyone that our basic needs never change. The need to be seen and appreciated! It is the need to belong. The need for nearness and care, and for a little love! This is given only through slowness in human relations. In order to master changes, we have to recover slowness, reflection and togetherness. If we rely want to go slow Honore, (2009) says that “we have to become less neurotic about time, and start putting the twenty-four-hour to more sensible use”.

We discover the profile of tourist who knows and wants to practice “slow travel”, it is a person with university studies (49.4%), comes from Bucharest (30.4%), uses the internet in a proportion of 84.8%, travels for recreation, and its average age is of 30.91 years old (greater than the average age of the all respondents – 29 years old).

Slow Travel in Romania it is developed at a low scale, although our country still retains for decades old traditions and customs. Our country continues to lack of trained people which can provide and promote tourism services.

This research was aimed to determine the interest of tourist from Romania for slow travel, and the possible destinations of slow travel within the country, and constitutes a truly starting point for more correlated future research.

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