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**THE PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF SLOW CITY (CITTASLOW)  
STATUS ON TOURISM AND LOCAL PEOPLE: A STUDY IN  
AYLSHAM, UNITED KINGDOM<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

There are two extreme cases in the world of tourism. One is seeking happiness by taking vacations in quieter places, while the other is accepting the advantages and disadvantages of mass tourism in a busy environment. The concept of a slow city was initiated to be of help to the former world of tourism while being a crucial response to the latter as well. As there has been limited empirical investigation of the slow city concept and its influence on tourism development in a specific field, the purpose of this study is to investigate the perceived influence of a slow city on the local people in light of tourism development. The study includes a historic market town located in the Norfolk region of the UK and the findings suggest that the perceived benefits of slow city status appear to be neutral, albeit some people are in favour of its economic advantages. In the concluding remarks, the study further compares the results with those of other previous studies and provides both theoretical and practical implications.

**Keywords:** Cittaslow, slow city, slow food, sustainable tourism, tourism development.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Not only the world population but also the international tourist population has had an immense increase over the last few decades. Improved transportation and information technology networks and the introduction of new destinations have played leading roles in such a positive consequence on the industry side (Kozak & Baloglu, 2011). On the supply side, the rapid increase in tourism demand has caused rapid urbanisation, congestion of air, road and rail travel, and noise pollution; and social and natural resources face the risk of deteriorating. This continued until the beginning of the new millennium, and in the meantime, numerous solutions have been considered and included into implementation, such as sustainable tourism, sustainable development, sustainable demand (Fletcher, 2011), and others such as the introduction of destination management practices (Kozak & Baloglu, 2011; Morrison, 2013; Pike, 2004). With the combination of both trends, there are thousands of articles, conference papers and books that have been published in the tourism literature.

On the other hand, over the last few decades, the impacts of the globalisation process have been observed in the areas of economics, culture, politics and social welfare worldwide. With its expansion into all of the living environment of humanity, globalisation has led to the creation of new movements and responses. One of these is the movement of ecotourism that takes into consideration the practice of responsible travel with the primary purpose of conserving the natural resources and cultural values of local communities and building respect both from visitors and hosts (Fletcher, 2011). In the context of sustainable tourism, ecotourism has close ties with the principles of the slow city, which is based on the idea of slow food that was promoted in 1989. The extension of both slow food and slow cities into tourism studies became prominent in the early 2000s. In this context, the literature on tourism in recent years has included research into the close nexus between the management of slow cities and the application of sustainable forms of tourism (e.g., Knox, 2005; Mayer & Knox, 2006). Some of these impressive applications, in various countries across the world, are discussed in a book entitled *Slow Tourism: Experiences and Mobilities* (Fullagar, Markwell, & Wilson, 2012).

As a consequence, the purpose of this study is to investigate the perceived influence of slow city status on the local people in light of tourism development. To accomplish this objective, the study has followed the steps of the qualitative research method, namely by conducting interviews among local residents, owners and managers of tourism establishments. Aylsham, a slow city of the Norfolk region of the United Kingdom (UK) was observed. In light of the assessment of the qualitative data, the study revisits the above-mentioned objectives and provides empirical evidence to understand the extent to which it has been accomplished. In the concluding remarks, the study further provides both theoretical and practical implications.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1997, the first movement of the concept of “slow food” was initiated in Italy, as a response to the widespread influence or multiplier effect of the concept of “fast food”

throughout the world. Successful implementation of this movement led to other forms of additional slow movements. As a consequence, the concept of a “slow city” (Cittaslow) was also introduced in Italy in 1999. The structure of this term comes from the combination of the words “citta” in Italian and “slow” in English and is used with the meaning of a “slow city” (Ekinçi, 2014). In a symposium organised by the fellows of this movement, a network of slow cities was formed with the co-signature of the mayors of four small villages in Italy who reached a consensus on the fact that the problem should be taken into consideration on the basis of urban politics. These villages include Greve, Bra, Orvieto, and Positano. Since then, the concept has spread to other countries worldwide, becoming an international symbol of slow life from Canada to Australia.

The concept of the slow city was highly influenced by the introduction of slow food (Radstrom, 2005). Although the aims of these two movements are distinct, they are complimentary in several relevant respects. For example, both movements emphasise the protection of local and traditional culture, and both envisage spending time in a relaxed, slow and enjoyable manner (Knox, 2005). With less traffic and smaller population sizes, slow cities challenge the trend of the bustling “homogenized world” which results from the consequences of globalisation (Knox, 2005).

Since the years dating back to the end of World War II, migration has caused the emergence of an increase in populations leading to an uncontrollable degree of overdevelopment not only in metropolitan cities but also in tourist destinations (Fletcher, 2011). The “slow city” approach was introduced as an alternative to the concept of “the current modern life,” in order to make it possible for the inhabitants of particular cities to lead a comparatively comfortable life, away from noise and environmental pollution, in a naturally and culturally unspoiled atmosphere (Cosar & Kozak, 2014; Gunn, 2015). In the tourism context, slow cities have been recently seen as an instrument offering first aid to maintain the sustainability of tourist destinations and their marketing efforts (Cosar, Timur & Kozak, 2015).

In current modern cities, called metropolitan areas, working conditions place great restrictions on people’s time, due to the length of time spent travelling from one place to another; in addition, fulfilling one’s daily responsibilities and duties puts pressure on people, and transportation from one place to another causes environmental and noise pollution. As a result, metropolitan residents are rarely able to come into contact with one another on common ground. The basic distinction between the metropolitan life and the concept of a slow city can render a service to tourism, in respect of sustainability. Sustainability is a perspective aimed at conserving living standards, thus making it possible for contemporary people and tourists to benefit from natural, cultural, and economic assets obtained for the fulfilment of their fundamental needs (Aransson, 1994; Liu, 2003).

Conversely, sustainability is also a perspective that will guarantee the fulfilment of the needs of future generations, who can be imagined engaging in similar lifestyles in

the years to come. This perspective has been approached quite differently in recent years and across a range of countries, both due to the way that the tourism industry operates and because natural cultural resources directly supporting tourism are limited. These resources are not only for the use of the current generations, but will also be used by prospective tourists in various periods of time as basic necessities as long as humankind exists (Garrod & Fyall, 1998).

The conducting of empirical studies on the slow city in tourism has been on a steady increase over recent years. Although not common for all slow cities accepted into the family of Cittaslow, there are at least a few representations of empirical investigations in the tourism literature. These studies originate mainly from European countries such as Italy, the UK and Turkey (Cosar & Kozak, 2014; Cosar, Timur & Kozak, 2015; Ekinçi, 2014; Gunn, 2015; Nilsson, Svard, Widarsson & Wirell, 2011). With its increasing number of Cittaslow fellows, Turkey takes the lead in terms of putting more effort into conducting academic studies on slow cities and slow food; although Italy, as the home country for Cittaslow, has been ranked the first place in terms of the number of fellow cities.

In his master's thesis, Gunn (2015) has investigated the major motivations for becoming a slow city and its possible effects on tourism in Aylsham, the representative town of the UK. The findings of this qualitative study carried out among business owners conclude that being in Cittaslow has had very little impact on tourism businesses, but the participants still remain optimistic about increasing their customer numbers and profits as long as the right promotional strategies are to be followed in the future. This study lacks the consideration of the opinions of local residents but looks at the issue from an economic perspective through the eyes of business operators.

According to the results of another empirical study in Turkey (Cosar & Kozak, 2014), the impacts of slow city status on the local people of Seferihisar can be assessed from both the positive and negative perspectives. Firstly, it can be argued that the positive outcomes show parallels with the positive impacts mentioned previously. That is to say, the local people particularly emphasise the economic and cultural outcomes and consider the following as the economic gains: Seferihisar achieved the status of a branded city as a result of running successful promotional campaigns, which in turn increased visitor demand and enabled the implementation of the local market concept. Employment opportunities increased, new areas of employment for housewives were created, and manufactures began to explore new product ideas. Following this, the local economy started to thrive and the local people's income began to rise. Secondly, despite such benefits on the economic side, unfortunately, the town has been under risk of losing its natural appeal due to the uncontrollable number of visitors and the influx of migration that has led to a major impact on the construction business.

Although the tourism products, to a great extent, rely on destination resources, these resources are not under the control of the tourism industry. Because destinations have become popular with the support of their visitors but, at the same time, may follow

a pattern that tourism development can itself lead to the loss of popularity of destinations (Davidson & Maitland, 1997). Therefore, the significant issue is the application of sustainability practices in destinations, and also the establishment of city identity management (Ratcliffe & Flanagan, 2004). The principle of a slow city is expected to play a major role in the accomplishment of these goals. For example, in its recent branding studies, Slovenia has been promoted as a slow tourism destination with its six characteristics, namely slowness, sustainability, time, contamination, emotion, and authenticity (Georgica, 2015), all of which refer to the mission of a slow city. Examples of studies about slow cities listed in the table below.

**Table 1.** Studies about slow city.

No	Author Name	Publication
1.	Knox, P.L. (2005).	Creating ordinary places: Slow cities in a fast world. <i>Journal of Urban Design</i> , 10 (1):1-11.
2.	Mayer, H. & Knox, P.L. (2006).	Slow cities: Sustainable places in a fast world. <i>Journal of Urban Affairs</i> , 28 (4): 321-334.
3.	Bott, H., Sgobba, A. & Busch S. (2009).	<i>Slow City Concepts</i> . Stuttgart: Universität Stuttgart Städtebau-Institut
4.	Milutinovic, S. (2010).	Cittaslow Movement Ludlow UK. <i>Urban Sustainable Development: A European Perspective</i> , 1-10.
5.	Nilsson, J., Svard, A., Widarsson, A. & Wirell, T. (2011).	Cittaslow: eco-gastronomic heritage as a tool for destination development. <i>Current Issues in Tourism</i> , 14(4), 373-386.
6.	Fullagar, S., Wilson, E. & Markwell, K. (2012).	Starting Slow: Thinking Through Slow Mobilities and Experiences, içinde <i>Slow Tourism: Experiences and Mobilities</i> , S. Fullagar, E. Wilson ve K. Markwell (Editörler). Bristol: Channel View Publications.
7.	Knox, P.L. & Mayer, H. (2012).	<i>Small Town Sustainability: Economic, Social and Environmental Innovation</i> . Basel: Birkhäuser.
8.	Pookulangara, S. & Shephard, A. (2013).	Slow fashion movement: Understanding consumer perceptions – An exploratory study, <i>Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services</i> , 20, 200-206.
9.	Cosar, Y., & Kozak, M. (2014).	Slow tourism (Cittaslow) influence over visitors' behaviour. A. Woodside & M. Kozak (Eds.). <i>Tourists' Perceptions and Assessments</i> (pp. 21–29). <i>Advances in Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research</i> , Volume 9, Emerald.
10.	Coşar, Y., Timur, A., & Kozak, M. (2015).	The influence of Slow City in the context of sustainable destination marketing. In A. Correia, J. Gnoth, M. Kozak, & A. Fyall (eds.) <i>Marketing Places and Spaces</i> (pp. 209-220). Bingley: Emerald.
11.	Gunn, C. (2015).	The motivations of becoming a Cittaslow town and its effect on tourism – The case of Aylsham. <i>Unpublished Study</i> . Bournemouth University, UK.

Finally, in response to any possible problems that may occur as a result of slow city status, various cases can be examined. For instance, in Levanto, another representative of the slow city in Italy, the city refused to welcome the American cruise ship travellers as they did not respect the principles of Cittaslow (Nilsson, Svard, Widarsson,&Wirell, 2011). Furthermore, the local municipality of Seferihisar, the first slow city in Turkey, has encouraged the local farmers and housewives to pay more attention to increase the production of the traditional types of organic food, both in the field and in their kitchen, and sell them in the local market (Cosar, Timur,& Kozak, 2015).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

First, the literature was extensively reviewed prior to the development of the structure of this study. As there have been a limited number of empirical studies on the introduction and influence of the slow city concept on the development of the local tourism industry, the use of qualitative research would be appropriate for the investigation of the subject. Qualitative research employs various academic disciplines and has a strong theoretical foundation. It aims to understand human behaviour from different perspectives and conduct the research in natural settings (Whittemore, Chase, Susan,& Carol, 2001). This method is effective for collecting data in order to gain insight into the natural settings and perceptions as they are, without manipulation.

There are various data collection techniques within the qualitative research method. For this research, interview techniques were used to collect the primary data. This involves the preparation of appropriate research questions and then asking the participants of the research these questions (Smith & Eatough, 2007; Brotherton, 2008). The significant feature of this technique is that in-depth face-to-face interviews bring to light the viewpoints of the participants (Smith & Eatough, 2007; Brotherton, 2008). In order to minimise the limitations of this technique and collect the desired data in detail, appropriate research questions were designed for semi-structured interviews and handwritten notes were taken during the interviews. As indicated below, a list of 10 questions was prepared with respect to the data collected as a result of the studies done by the author (Cosar, Y., & Kozak, M. 2014; Cosar, Timur, & Kozak, 2015). Seven questions referred to the meaning or the influence of being a slow city, and three questions included socio-demographic characteristics such as the length of being a resident, profession and age.

1. Do you know if Aylsham is a slow city?
2. Do you know about the meaning of the slow city?
3. What kinds of benefits do you think living in a slow city provide you?
4. Have you observed any negative effects of being a slow city? If, yes, what?
5. How likely are you to be happy with living in Aylsham?
6. Does being a slow city support the improvement of tourism? If so, how?
7. Does being a slow city support economic recovery?
8. How long have you lived in Aylsham?
9. What is your profession?

10. How old are you?

As indicated on Map 1, the application of the slow city concept is accommodated in five locations in the UK, namely Aylsham, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Llangollen, Mold, and Perth. Among these, with its low population of over 5,000, Aylsham is a small village located in the south-east part of the country close to London, the capital city of the UK, and was accepted into the slow city family on 3 May 2008. It is an historical city trying to attract more visitors. Interviews were conducted among 12 people that know about the concept of slow city residing in Aylsham, Norfolk, England. The entire interview process took one full day on 29 August 2015. The participation in the interview was voluntary and the level of the knowledge of participants about the slow city concept was taken into consideration. The length of interview devoted to each interviewee varied between 15 and 35 minutes. As suggested by the literature (Whittemore, Chase, Susan, & Carol, 2001), observations were completed in the natural settings of this Cittaslow town.

**Table 2.** The profiles of interviewees

No.	Profession	Age	Length of residency in town (in years)
1.	Cafe owner	33	5
2.	Florist	49	2.5
3.	Butcher	42	23
4.	Real estate agent	48	30
5.	Second-hand shop owner	52	2
6.	Carpet seller	50	10
7.	Bookstore owner	80	42
8.	Teacher	45	12
9.	Stationery shop owner	71	19
10.	Sales agent	34	5
11.	Service staff	24	3
12.	Restaurant owner	39	17

#### 4. RESULTS

As a part of this research, interviews were carried out in Aylsham, Norfolk. Almost all of the participants highlight that being a Cittaslow town has provided no contribution to the development of tourism services in any way. Only one participant suggests that tourism began to become developed after the slow city status was granted in 2008. Another participant points out that having the slow city status has helped the promotion of the town, and for this reason, the number of visitors to the area has increased and would likely further increase in time:

*Being a slow city helps the promotion of Aylsham. As a slow city, it captures the interests and curiosity of visitors.* (Participant 6)

*There has been an increase in the publicity of the town. Tourism has already developed in its neighbouring locations, but is partially supported in Aylsham, too.* (Participant 7)

In addition, as suggested widely by a number of respondents, there are several nearby facilities and beaches that attract tourists and this is likely to create a spillover effect on further intentions to visit Aylsham as a complementary location for the purpose of shopping and dining at cafes and restaurants that serve homemade food. The respondent state that:

*There are several touristy places in the neighbourhood such as Blinking Hall so that Aylsham had attracted tourists prior to being granted status as a slow city. Aylsham is more attractive for its slow food image and local markets.* (Participant 1)

Although it is a small town, the residents are perceived to be friendly towards foreigners, and appear to be happy living in Aylsham because it has a wide variety of facilities to meet the needs of its residents. In addition, Aylsham is considered to be an easy town to travel around locally, and one that is noise-free and tranquil. Despite the fact that it is a tranquil town, it is also pleasant as festivals, local markets, farmer's markets and food festivals are organised on a regular basis. Although these events boost the local economy and the level of the quality of life, the local products and festival organisations had been supported and become significant prior to the slow city status being granted. Two respondents explain that:

*A variety of festivals are organised on a regular basis. These festivals create dynamism for the local economy. I personally have already sold out all my flowers in the shop for an upcoming event.* (Participant 2)

*I am so happy and proud of living here. The life in Aylsham is comfortable and enjoyable. Festivals are organised and as a result, the number of visitors is increasing these days.* (Participant 3)

To sum up, the interviewees in the first stage confirm that being a slow city has had a limited influence on the development of the welfare in Aylsham and its residents. However, the influence of other organisations such as festivals have had a greater



influence on the economic welfare of the town but the organisation of such festivals is not closely linked with the slow city status, rather such festivals have been occurring for a longer period of time in the history of the town.

As to the second category of the data analysis that summarises the perceived negative consequences of being involved in tourism activities, generally speaking, the residents have observed no significant influence. However, only one respondent claims that the town has been likely to become busier due to the consequences of more incoming visitors particularly during the festivals being held (Respondent 3). This may create the reluctance of dealing with traffic problems that the residents are not used to in other periods of the year.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Since Aylsham became a slow city, there has been no considerable change in the living standards or welfare of its local people, although it did not create any influence on raising their expectations, either. Additionally, no tangible impact has been observed in the town. Furthermore, the slow city status did not have any visible effect on the development of tourism; however, this is expected to change in the future. In his recent similar study carried out in Aylsham, Gunn (2015) also reached similar conclusions. On the basis of our personal observations, Aylsham in general is a better fit to the criteria of being a slow city. There are dynamic activities organised particularly for maintaining the conservation of local products and local cuisine. The organised festivals, local markets and cafes and restaurants selling homemade food contribute to the boosting of the local economy.

As suggested by Ekinçi (2014), many locations, such as those in Turkey, lack the capacity for the rules to fulfil the official requirements of being accredited as a slow city. However, the comparison of the findings with other similar studies reveals that Aylsham fulfils the criteria to become a slow city. The results of the observations and interviews reveal that having slow city status has had partial positive impacts on Aylsham. These include a rise in the number of festivals organised and the promotion of the town. Participants predominantly believe that the slow city status has had no meaningful impact on the town as well as no undesirable impact, either. The research discovered that the local people in Aylsham have received the information that Aylsham is a slow city, but are not very well informed about the meaning of being a slow city.

On the other hand, in another study in Seferihisar, a Turkey-based slow city, all participants had some kind of knowledge about the concept of slow food and the local people in Turkey are better informed about the concept of a slow city. They are aware that they are living in a city that has been accredited as a slow city (Coşar & Kozak, 2014). However, prior to the period that Aylsham was awarded the status of slow city, the cooking of homemade food, operation of local markets and organisation of local events had already developed. However, in other slow cities like those in Turkey, these have begun to be developed and events have begun to be organised since the slow city status was awarded.

It is also interesting to note that Seferihisar and Aylsham are distinct from each other in terms of the size of the population and the land area, the former being much larger than the latter. Such a difference can be expanded to include the variations in the benefits sought. For instance, Seferihisar, like any other slow cities in Turkey, has taken advantage of being a slow city, which has resulted in more visitors, more facilities and more opportunities to generate income. Among the disadvantages, there are the increasing population size, increasing price levels and the loss of the natural environment, resources and local traditions, etc. Aylsham appears to have experienced neither such advantages nor disadvantages as its planning does not rely on the consequences of being a slow city nor of tourism development; rather it has created and followed its own practices in town planning.

As to the implications for the practice, the study findings together with their comparison to other similar destinations suggest that slow city status is not a single factor itself in maintaining sustainability in any destination. Furthermore, destinations can successfully adapt their own practices or measures into place regardless of the whether they are a part of the slow city family or not. Departing from this point as a theoretical implication, the implications for the practice may underline the fact that destination authorities should always be prepared to implement the best practices for the sake of the welfare of their local residents and of their tourism services even though there is no factor that can be externally driven such as slow city status. Externally-driven practices, such as observed in many slow cities of Turkey, may not be as influential or as welcomed as those practices that are developed within a location's natural settings.

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**Map 1.**List of slow cities in the United Kingdom