Chapter 17

Reflecting upon slow travel and tourism experiences

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In his ground-breaking book, *The Holiday Maker: Understanding the Impact of Leisure and Travel*, first published in German in 1984, Swiss academic Jost Krippendorf set out what he called his ‘credo for a new harmony’ (1987:10-11). Concerned about the impacts that modern, mass tourism had inflicted on destinations, communities and also on tourists themselves, Krippendorf asked ‘Must we in the future, in order to get on, run twice as fast as before...? Shouldn’t we instead take the foot off the accelerator if we want to win the race?’ Anticipating the movement towards alternative tourisms that embraced ecological sustainability and fair exchange between local and tourist by about a decade, Krippendorf’s work can also be read as an argument for forms of tourism practice that encourage a more genuine and sustainable engagement with places, cultures, natures and peoples. Not only did he anticipate the emergence of sustainable tourism, but he also anticipated the emergence of the slow movement, and slow travel and tourism in particular.

Following the publication of *The Holiday Makers*, an extensive and sustained body of work has been published that has reported on, critically examined, or advocated for, alternative tourism practices that seek to minimise social, cultural and environmental impacts while at the same time creating a greater level of quality experience for the local and the tourist. Beginning with ecotourism, which first entered academic discourse as a named form of tourism in the late 1980s, the nomenclature has included ‘alternative tourism’, ‘sustainable tourism’, ‘new tourism’ ‘responsible tourism’ and ‘pro-poor tourism’. These tourisms were

not seen only as new forms of 'special interest tourism', although of course, each does have a place within the special interest or niche tourism umbrella, but also as forms of tourism that challenged the dominant model of mass tourism that developed following the ending of the second world war. The growth in mass tourism reflected the rapid rate of economic growth enjoyed by many developed economies, advances in transportation technology, ready availability of oil, and an optimistic desire by the affluent middle classes to acquire cultural capital through travel. The work of researchers, community advocates, environmentalists and policy makers has, however, uncovered the inherent unsustainable basis for conventional mass tourism.

Running parallel to these concerns about mass tourism has been the development a growing Slow Movement that rejects what might be called the hegemony of speed (see Virilio, 1986; McGuire, 2000) and its concomitant affects on the quality of social, cultural and environmental relations. The Slow Food Movement that began with Carlo Petrini's organised protests against the imposition of a McDonald's fast food restaurant in his home town has developed into an all-embracing slow living movement. Slowness works as a metaphor that brings into question the cult of speed and embraces an approach to life that values time in terms of relationships between people and place. Apart from the work of on-the-ground advocates, the Movement's success in America and the UK is evident in the huge popularity of Carl Honoré's (2005) social commentary *In Praise of Slow*. Honoré argues that we are living in an era where speed has assumed greater importance than in the whole of human history. Elite athletes compete within a hundredth of a second with each other as the technologies to measure such miniscule differences in speed have been developed. Answers to once complicated and difficult questions are now a computer search engine away that can deliver us with answers in a nanosecond. A recent survey in Britain found that 60% of teenagers and 37% of adults are 'highly addicted' to their smart phones, never wanting to part

from them for an instant - even when in the bathroom or in bed - in case they miss something important (Halliday, *The Guardian*, 4 August 2011). Tabloid newspaper reports inform us of the latest incidents of road rage, queue rage which reflect our growing impatience for delays of any sort. Speed is our god. It is no wonder that the growth of counter movements like 'International Take Back Your Time Day' have arisen to question whether a fast life is a life well lived.

Along with slow food a number of other slow entities and movements have emerged, such as the slow city, slow money, slow parenting, slow sex, slow work and of course, the focus of this book, slow travel and tourism. The project of slow travel/tourism encompasses a philosophical position that resists the homogenising forces of globalisation and the notion of tourism as a commodified experience of mobility and instead offers an alternative vision that celebrates the local; small-scale travel utilising transport modalities that minimise the impacts on the environment and facilitate a closer and more genuine connection with local people. Slow tourism foregrounds the notion of convivial hospitality as being crucial elements in the slow tourism experience and as such strengthens the relations between local and visitor (Conway and Timms, 2010). While there has been an explosion of slow tourism websites and blogs over the past few years, and 'products' are now available that provide for the slow tourist, there has, to date, been little critical attention paid to the concept by academics.

Perhaps the first author to argue for a slow approach to tourism within an academic context was Rafael Matos, an economic geographer, who wrote a chapter titled 'Can slow tourism bring new life to alpine regions' published in the book *The Tourism and Leisure Industry: Shaping the Future*, published in 2004 (Weirermair and Mathies, 2004). For Matos, slow tourism was founded on two principles: 'taking time' and 'attachment to place' (Matos, 2004:100) and his chapter rehearsed the arguments for slow travel and tourism that underpin much of the more recent work in this area. Putting into practice his theories, he even

suggested that a form of hotel that he termed 'slowtel' could develop that embraced and celebrated the slow ideal. A focus on slow travel as a response to the crisis of climate change and growing carbon pollution has been at the heart of a number of recent publications by Janet Dickinson and Les Lumsdon, including their book, *Slow Travel and Tourism* (2010). Michael Hall has also contributed to the literature through his analysis of the slow movement, and, in particular slow food, in relation to sustainable tourism (see Hall, 2006). Jennie Germann Molz (2009:283), in her examination of the relationships between tourism, pace and modernity, found that acceleration was associated with concepts such as 'success', 'beauty' and 'freedom' while slowness was seen to be associated with 'incorrect' or 'undesirable' ways of travelling. Finally, Conway and Timms (2010) argued that slow tourism is a sustainable alternative to mass tourism in the Caribbean islands and provide a series of case studies of what they see as examples of slow tourism that are already operating, with some success, in that particular region.

The genesis of this book, then, is situated in this emerging literature on slow travel and tourism. However, our aim has not been to provide a definitive account of slow travel as that would be antithetical to the mobility of meaning which characterises different cultural practices, interpretations and methodological explorations. Instead, the diversity of contributions in this collection explored different dimensions of slow that may continue to open up new ways of problematising and examining emergent tourism practices and systems. As we hinted at in our introductory chapter, we came to the topic with a mixture of intellectual curiosity as well as a personal interest in the slow ethos which is reflected in various ways in our everyday lives. For one of the editors, it was his reflections on his and his partner's experiences as a host property listed on HelpX's website, (an organisation very similar to Willing Workers on Organic Farms) that led him to seriously consider the concept of slow travel and tourism. Over the past couple of years, he and his partner have hosted

nearly 30 young travellers who have spent between four days and five weeks staying with them, exchanging their labour for accommodation in their house and inclusion in the routines and rhythms of the household. None of these travellers has mentioned the term 'slow tourism' of course, but many of them, when asked why they decided to travel this way, have identified the desire to stay somewhere for a longer period of time, to get to know a smaller place in the country, and 'close to nature', and to gain a better understanding of what it means to live in Australia. For some, these desires, understandably, intersected with a need to also save money.

The experiences have been mutually beneficial and both 'host' and 'guest' have enjoyed this form of cultural exchange framed, in part, in a context of hospitality. Yet, the paradoxes and contradictions, inherent no doubt, in any form of alternative tourism, have become increasingly clear. This 'slow' component of their overall travel experience (for some it will be the only one, for others it will be one among many) is inevitably situated within a more orthodox or conventional 'fast' tourism. They have all been international tourists who have boarded jet aircraft to travel to Australia as quickly and as inexpensively as they could. Most have travelled within Australia by coach, but some took flights if they could, while some others bought their own vehicle to give them greater flexibility and to save on travel costs which could be more easily shared through joint ownership of a vehicle. Probably the most striking thing, however, has been the inclusion of a laptop computer or e-tablet amongst their luggage. Only a handful of travellers haven't travelled with one.

It is ironic that these computers are the means to retain the connection to the fast world from which these travellers are seeking a temporary escape. Using instantaneous messaging or Skype (email is deemed too slow), they maintain contact with their family and friends via an exchange of digitised data that facilitates communication in nanoseconds from rural Australia to towns and cities in the northern hemisphere. Indeed, it could be argued,

following Poon (1994) that this new practice of slow tourism is in part dependent on the super-fast communication technologies. The Internet enables consumers to learn about the slow movement, to locate slow tourism products and to interact with other slow tourists through blogs. Space-time compression may still be a necessary, if 'backstage' component of slow travel and tourism.

The editors approached the concept of this book cognisant of the inconsistencies, paradoxes and contradictions as well as the opportunities for a more equitable and sustainable tourism that characterise this different way of doing tourism. Indeed, it is the paradoxes and inconsistencies that demand the critical attention of scholars who can interrogate slow travel and tourism from a range of disciplinary perspectives. The 'elephant in the room' for any discussion of the ecological sustainability credentials of ecotourism, sustainable tourism or slow tourism, is of course, the energy source used to move the tourists from origin to destination and back again. It is an inconvenient truth that the trip commences upon departure from the origin, and that usually involves the use of non-renewable energy that emits carbon into the atmosphere. As Fullagar outlined in her chapter, some of the cyclists she studied acknowledged the environmental impact that they produced as they travelled, sometimes from interstate, sometimes, internationally, to begin the cycling event. Hall, and Parasecoli and de Abreu e Lima, pointed out in their respective chapters, that while slow food events and destinations serve as desirable attractions for slow travellers, what proportion of these travellers are using low-technology modes of transport to travel to these places to experience slow food?

Negotiating a 'slow life' that embraces slow travel and tourism as lived experience within an otherwise 'fast world' is difficult and complex and bound to draw attention to inconsistencies of practice and contradictions in ethos. The long-term wanderers who were the subject of Tiyce and Wilson's chapter are all dependent on their own private motor

vehicle (in this case, motorhomes) to move them (slowly) around Australia, while the hitchhikers of O'Regan's chapter are dependent on the motor vehicles of others to transport them. Lipman and Murphy's WWOOFers also highlight the inconsistency of slowing down, becoming more closely connected or even integrated into local communities, while still usually being dependent on non-renewable energy to reach the destination in the first place. The matter of mode of transport was taken up by several other authors in this book, who examined pilgrimages undertaken through the practice of walking (Howard, Singh) or through boating on the canals of England (Fallon). Each of these chapters reminds us of the significance of our choice of energy that powers our slow tourist experience.

The opportunities to create a new form of tourism practice that potentially reduces our environmental and social impacts, while simultaneously enhancing our individual experiences, were the focus of a number of chapters in the book. Moore argues for an ethic of travel that creates a deeper sense of meaning through a rejection of overly-materialist values and an understanding of well-being that connects individuals, communities and the environment. A rejection of materialism and of capitalism's propensity to commoditise relations among people and between communities and the environment underpins Wearing, Wearing and McDonald's chapter.

These themes relating to travel, time, sustainability, connectivity and identity are then taken up and explored in a number of case studies of particular destinations. de la Barre's study explored the mobilisation of discourses around 'slow time' to market a destination that might otherwise been faced with access and infrastructure challenges. However, by taking this approach, the marketing strategies were seen to be implicated in the process of Othering the Indigenous peoples of the region. The opportunities for rural development in Japan were the focus of the chapter by Murayama and Parker, who assert that such tourism does have considerable potential for economic and social development, even in a nation that has been

emblematic of 'fast living'. A nascent desire to escape fast living on the part of an increasing number of urban dwellers is seen to be fuelling an interest in slow modalities. Gibson, Pratt and Movono's example of the 'Tribewanted' project in Fiji is an interesting case of slow tourism embracing volunteerism and sustainability, supported in part by an on-going cyber-community of past and potential volunteers. Finally, the idea of lifestyle entrepreneurship is explored in Groenendaal's examination of Dutch people emigrating to France to open B&B accommodation. She found that these lifestyle entrepreneurs gained considerably by the fact that they themselves were living away from their homeland and that they played an important role in helping to shape slow tourism as an economic practice.

The chapters in this book, ranging from philosophical and theoretical explorations to empirical case studies, contribute to scholarship into slow travel and tourism and help to extend our understanding of its potential for creating a more sustainable and equitable tourism practice. But many questions still remain and these form the basis of future investigations. The extent to which slow tourism is regarded as just another form of special interest or 'adjectival' tourism or whether it is able to help transform tourism, is open to speculation. Is 'slow time' yet another 'foreign country', to invoke David Lowenthal, to be explored and colonised by our insatiable quest for novelty? Is it simply the 'next hot thing' as Parasecoli and de Abreu e Lima (in this volume) ask? Or, alternatively, is slow the new 'small', in the words of E. F. Schumacher in his popular 1973 book, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*? Could slow tourism lead to a fundamental transformation in tourism? Will the drivers of such change paradoxically include the limits of fast growth (peak oil for example), the rise of glocalisation where travelling closer to home is revalued or a health related scenario in which slow travel arises from a desire to recoup from intensified work and economic pressures? And yet, how could this possibly happen given the rapidly growing consumer markets in China and India which will crave the same kinds of travel

opportunities that developed economies have been enjoying for the past half century or so? Will slow tourism become polarised into either a boutique form of travel experienced by those who have the ‘luxury’ of travelling slow or a mobility decision (such as the bicycle) that arises from economic constraints and the challenge of frugality?

In keeping with the case studies in this book, there is a need for a range of studies that document the emergence of slow travel and tourism as an alternative form of tourism within the broader context of the Slow Movement. A case studies approach could also enable useful examinations of approaches to ‘product development’ and marketing from a slow tourism perspective. Ideally, these case studies would go beyond the dominant Anglo-American centrism of much tourism scholarship and include examples from a range of nations from both developed and developing economies. From the demand side, there is much research to be done examining the propensity for consumers (from different socio-economic backgrounds) to embrace the ideals and philosophy of slow tourism. How might slow travel be experienced as a form of alternative hedonism (Soper, 2008) that evokes pleasure through practices of ‘treading lightly’ rather than status oriented consumerism? What are the reasons that lead to some people accepting the proposition that slow tourism brings with it: that conventional ways of doing tourism are inherently unsustainable and inequitable? Why are others so resistant to change? These questions are about travel and tourism at one level, and at another level they are about our very way of living within and relating to the world in the search of the ‘good life’, ‘wellbeing’ and ‘sustainability’. Importantly the metaphor of slow resonates in a number of ways to open up a discursive space that may continue to fuel the popular, tourism industry and academic imagination.

There may be no easy or, dare we say, ‘quick’ answers to these questions. As we stipulated in the introduction to this book, we did not set out to identify one easily recognisable definition for slow travel and tourism. Rather, we wished to open up the concept

of 'slow tourism' to critical analysis and to encourage further research in order to gain a more nuanced understanding. Ultimately, it is our hope that this book will contribute to ongoing debates concerning slow tourism and the search for alternative mobilities.

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