Chapter 1

Starting Slow: Thinking Through Slow Mobilities and Experiences

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Slow food, slow cities, slow living, slow money, slow media, slow parenting, slow scholarship and...slow travel. It seems that wherever we look, the prefix 'slow' is being added to another sector, phenomenon or industry. Being slow was once an entirely derogatory term that signified one's inability to 'keep up' in the competitive spheres of work and leisure. Yet curiously, the meaning of slow is now starting to shift, as slowness today is invoked as a credible metaphor for stepping off the treadmill, seeking work-life balance or refusing the dominant logic of speed. Slowing down has become an antidote to the fast paced imperatives of global capitalism that urge the entrepreneurial self to speed up, become mobile and work harder in order to be valued as successful, productive and conspicuous consumers (Humphrey, 2010; Rose, 1999; Schor, 2010).

One only has to glance at recent television programming to note the increased interest in slow and alternative forms of travel. In addition to programmes detailing travellers trekking over vast landscapes, there has also been a proliferation of shows documenting intercontinental travels via vehicle. The most popular perhaps are 'Long Way Down' and 'Long Way Around', which follow celebrities Ewan McGregor and Charlie Boorman as they motorcycle over multiple continents engaging the locals at every opportunity.

Another indication of consolidation of this phenomenon is observed through the products and the services that are now available under the banner of slow tourism. Several websites make claim to the phenomenon offering ‘slow travel’ experiences, ranging from fully booked tours to long stay accommodation. In addition, there is a range of full length slow travel guide books titled for different cities around the world, which state ‘The Slow Guides are for anybody who wants to slow down and live it up. They celebrate all that's local, natural, traditional, sensory and most of all gratifying about living in each of these corners of the world’ (The Slow Guides, n.d.). Clearly, for those fed up with fast, the goals of slow are to explore the possibilities of being different, working differently, playing differently and, in the context of travel in particular, moving differently.

In this book, we ask: what do slow mobilities mean for tourism? What effects do slow mobilities have and how do they evoke different ways of engaging with people and place? And, how are we also ‘moved’ by slow travel experiences in ways that lead us to question, connect with and desire to know the world differently? This book arose from our shared interest in thinking ‘through’ the multiplicity of experiences and representations of slow travel. In both our personal and professional lives, each of us has strived – and continues to strive - to maintain a sense of slow, whether it be through a choice of rural and alternative lifestyles, installing solar panels, growing our own vegetable gardens, going part-time to look after young children, or trying to eat and travel in a more sustainable manner. We also yearn for a sense of slow scholarship, as we continue to question our roles and privileges in the knowledge production system that has become higher education. We wanted to embrace a critical ethos that questioned the unsustainable pace of consumerism, the

demands of work and the desire for alternative mobilities (Fullagar, 2003;Humphrey, 2010;Sheller & Urry, 2006;Urry, 2002).

In this introductory chapter, we consider how ‘slow mobilities’ figure within the historical emergence of the slow living movement as a constellation of diverse ideas and cultural forms relating to food, cities, money, media and travel (Cresswell, 2010;Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010;Honore, 2005;Parkins & Craig, 2006;Tasch, 2008). With our focus on the experiences of travel and tourism we understand slow mobilities in Cresswell’s sense as ‘particular patterns of movement, representations of movement, and ways of practising movement that make sense together’ (2010: 18). Slow ideas are permeating the contemporary tourism imaginary, eliciting a range of nostalgic and future oriented desires for local/global connectedness, low carbon options and journeys that value embodied experiences of time. A plethora of slow travel narratives, images and discourses now circulate globally through the popular press, travel blogs and magazines as well as guidebooks, marketing for tours and destinations (see Funnell, 2010;Germann Molz, 2009;Sawday, 2009; 2010).

Slow tourism has been the focus of recent discussion in the tourism literature about how to conceptualise ‘slow’ in relation to the principles of sustainable tourism, as well as how to identify the range of slow practices, motivations and supply issues (infrastructure, regulation and markets) for tourism development (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010;Dickinson *et al.*, 2010;Hall, 2009;Lumsdon & McGrath, 2010). Lumsdon and McGrath’s research has identified some parameters around slow tourism in terms of ‘slowness and the value of time; locality and activities at the destination; mode of transport and travel experiences; and environmental consciousness’ (2010: 2). A number of typologies has emerged to categorise the environmental practices of slow tourists through metaphors of ‘hard or soft’ and

‘heavy or light’ (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010). Yet there is little consensus on what ‘slow’ actually means, and how it is practiced or interpreted in relation to different tourism contexts, cultures and mobilities.

Our aim in this book is not to attempt to pin down the mobile meaning of slow travel experiences, but rather to explore from different vantage points the dimensions of slow that draw out the complexities of local-global, time-space, nature-culture, self-other and personal-political relationships. Crucial to developing different insights the contributors to this book have also employed a range of research methods to explore questions of slow mobility and the mobility of meaning in tourism (Watts & Urry, 2008).

Experiencing Slow Mobilities

The notion of slow mobilities emphasises more than movement, or transport, between places. Rather, the term ‘mobilities’ encapsulates a range of spatio-temporal practices, immersive modes of travel and ethical relations that are premised on the desire to connect in particular ways and to disconnect in others. Slowness is more than anti-speed, however. Rather, slow is embodied in the qualities of rhythm, pace, tempo and velocity that are produced in the sensory and affective relationship between the traveller and the world (Cresswell, 2010). A slow relation to the world has been shaped by a number of social movements in specific parts of the world that have become mobile and virtual forms of social connection and identification.

In particular, the concept of slow travel has emerged from the Slow Food and Slow Cities (CittaSlow) movements that both originated in Italy in the 1980s and 90s. The Slow Food movement was initiated in the 1986 by Carlo Petrini as a response to

the opening of a McDonald's restaurant in an area of cultural significance in Rome. As can be assumed, Slow Food was a collective retaliation against the phenomenon of increased global consumption of fast food. Officially constituted three years later in 1989, the movement has now expanded to 132 countries with 100,000 members of Slow Food International organisation (Slow Food, 2010a). Slow Food International's Mission Statement is 'to defend biodiversity in our food supply, spread taste education and connect producers of excellent foods with co-producers through events and initiatives' (Slow Food, 2010b). As with Slow Food, Slow Cities focus on 'the development of places that enjoy a robust vitality based on good food, healthy environments, sustainable economies and the seasonality and traditional rhythms of community life' (Knox, 2005: 6). 'Slow Cities' has also become institutionalised as a movement (CittaSlow) and progressed into a topic of academic inquiry ((Knox, 2005; Parkins & Craig, 2006; Tasch, 2008). As Pink (2008: 97) explains, 'CittaSlow emphasises local distinctiveness in a context of globalisation and seeks to improve quality of life locally'.

Like the Slow Food and CittaSlow movements, slow forms of tourism embrace this emphasis on the local consumption of food that draws upon culinary heritage or organic principles, as well as the sensory embodiment of the journey (taste becomes as important as sight). Slow travellers are often distinguished by a desire to experience a different temporality to that of the 'bucket list' of places to stop over and move on from. Slow immersion in the particularity of place can evoke and incite different ways of being and moving, as well as different logics of desire that value travel experiences as forms of lived knowledge. Against the high environmental impact of the aeroplane and car, a range of s/low carbon modalities figure as

alternatives (walking pilgrimages, canoeing, leisurely cycling, place based experiences) that value nature and cultural traditions.

The multiple desires for slow travel often play out in complex and contradictory ways through discourses and narratives of travel. Slow travel is marketed in the representations of high status travel magazines (for example, the *Australian Gourmet Traveller*) to signify the accumulation of cultural capital. The glamorous ‘gourmet slow’ traveller consumes high quality food and wine as a reflection of cultural taste achieved through commodified experiences that are distinguished from mass tourism. While commodified forms of slow constitute a niche market, it is not surprising that the slow movement has come under criticism as an elitist preoccupation of the harried middle classes (Heldke, 2003; Wilson, 2010).

Yet slow importantly signifies anti-consumerist displeasures associated with unsustainable lifestyles and eco-desires for different kinds of identities (Schor, 2010; Soper, 2008). In his book *Go Slow Italy*, Alistair Sawday (2009: 13) describes the shift towards slow politics as ‘a bridge from panic to pleasure’. In this sense slow mobilities can be understood as part of a broader ‘life politics’ (Rojek, 2010; Rose, 1999) where negotiations occur around values of freedom and responsibility, behaviours that are sustainable or consumerist, and social relationships that enable engagement rather than observation, respect rather than exploitation, and reflexivity rather than status seeking identities. Slow travel practices are informed by a diverse range of ethical sensibilities that bring together pleasurable modes of engaging with nature, or culture, and a politically reflexive sense of identity that is critically aware of the impact of one’s own tourist behaviour. As Dickinson and Lumsdon (2010) have identified in their research, however, there exist many tensions between an individual tourist’s concerns about environmental impact and the desire for slow experiences in

the context of a global tourism system premised upon economic growth. While slow travel practices reflect a range of ethical-political positions, they are yet to be fully explored in the academic literature despite the growth of industry and popular discourses.

The slow movement aims to revalue quality leisure time, sociality and non-consumerist experiences that aim to minimise environmental footprint (Dawson *et al.*, 2008;Honore, 2005;Mair *et al.*, 2008). Yet there is a tension that is not easily resolved within slow philosophies about the carbon footprint created by air or car travel that is generated (especially if one travels anywhere from Australia or New Zealand). Slow travel can contribute to debates about sustainable tourism and the search for alternative mobilities in relation to the pressing issues of peak oil, food security and transnational flows. However, it would be naïve to see slow as a simple answer to the broader issue of predicted growth in global travel and middle class consumption in emerging economies such as India and China. The constellation of ideas that connect through the principles, philosophies and practices of slow mobility potentially offer creative and culturally diverse ways of moving in the world – both at home and away.

Structure of the Book

This book is organised in four major parts. Each chapter contributes conceptually, or empirically, to thinking through the multiplicity of slow tourism and travel (we use these terms interchangeably rather than perpetuate a dualistic conceptualisation). Contributors to the first part, ‘Positioning Slow Tourism’, consider questions about temporality and how time is experienced differently through slow mobilities. In their respective Chapters 2 and 3, both Chris Howard and Kevin Moore

reflect critically on theories of time in relation to issues of wellbeing and pleasure that are evoked by travel desires for the good life and slow journeys such as secular pilgrimage. In Chapter 4 Stephen and Michael Wearing and Matthew McDonald contribute to a critical analysis of the commodification of the time-space of travel within global capitalism. They point towards the potential of eco-tourism to generate sustainable and pleasurable experiences that connect tourists and host communities.

The second part of the book, 'Slow Food and Sustainable Tourism', is organised around the emergence of slow food tourism and its connections to sustainability and ecogastronomy. In Chapter 5 Michael Hall provides a succinct summary of the Slow Food movement, critically examining its paradoxes and contradictions in relation to sustainable tourism. That is, how do we continue to emphasise the local, regional and environmental within the context of an ever-globalising and mobile world? As Hall warns us quite bluntly, we must ensure that 'slow' does not become merely another institutionalised method of 'screwing the Earth'. Turning to a more micro, nation-specific context, Fabio Parasecoli and Paulo de Abreu e Lima in Chapter 6 present a case study of how a group of local food producers, restaurateurs, and media professionals in the Brazilian town of Paraty have launched a sustainable gastronomy program. The Paraty chapter demonstrates how slow tourism can allow visitors to enjoy and participate in food production and culinary traditions 'as embedded and embodied performances of living cultures'. Moving to Australia, Margo Lipman and Laurie Murphy in Chapter 7 explore the growth of WWOOFers (Willing Workers on Organic Farms) in terms of the potential to connect sustainable food production with more environmentally-friendly ways of travelling.

‘Slow Mobilities’ is the third part of the book, consisting of four chapters which explore distinct examples of slow mobilities and ways in which tourists can experience the spatio-temporality of the journey. To begin with in Chapter 8, Simone Fullagar offers a gendered approach to slow travel through her ethnography of Australian women’s experiences of an annual mass cycle tour event as a form of ‘alternative hedonism’. Cycling as a slow mobility is defined here as much more than a means of transport from A to B; rather, it offers a potentially transformative experience or journey of self revelation about the social and natural world. In Chapter 9 Margaret Tiyce and Erica Wilson also employ ethnography, this time to document the experiences of long term travellers who define themselves as ‘wanderers’. These wanderers drive around the country, in search of a slower pace, time and speed that might offer up a sense of meaning, wellbeing or way of engaging more deeply with people and place. This wandering also allows travellers a sense of resistance to the ‘status quo’ of fast-paced life back at home.

In Chapter 10, Michael O’Regan, explores the tourist habitus of hitchhiking as a self-powered mobility through the tension that exists between slow and competitive desires (European hitchhiking competitions) that embraces risk taking, local engagement and mastery. Julia Fallon in Chapter 11 completes the focus on slow mobilities in this section of the book by documenting the history of canal development and canal tourism in England. Fallon argues that the very nature of moving by canal, particularly given their narrow structure in much of the country, deliberately encourages a slow mobility, where the traveller can become more relaxed and in tune with the environment around them.

The final part of the book, ‘Slow Tourism Places’, is organised around the theme of tourist destinations and places that represent some of the concerns identified

by the Slow Cities movement. Taking readers to a very particular climate and culture in Chapter 12, Suzanne de la Barre writes about the marketing of ‘Yukon time’ as a destination value in northern Canada. Questions about the process of Othering Indigenous peoples are raised in this analysis of how slow travel values are used in marketing discourses to reformulate potentially negative infrastructural deficiencies or cultural idiosyncrasies as quaint and charming aspects of life or travel in the territory. In Chapter 13, the theme of bridging traditional and contemporary cultures is also addressed by Meiko Murayama and Gavin Parker in their analysis of fast and slow Japan. Tourism authorities have begun to realise the potential of slow travel in marketing rural tourism as a part of a regeneration strategy.

In Chapter 14, Dawn Gibson, Stephen Pratt and Apisalome Movono explore how sustainable practices are experienced by tourists taking part in the ‘Tribewanted’ project on the island of Vorovoro in Fiji. Learning about traditional Indigenous customs, food production and consumption practices, Tribe members express a deeply felt and memorable connection to place and people through ‘slow’ community-building activities. Slow travel experiences are also recreated through a virtual tourist community on-line where the immediacy of time and space are transcended. Exploring a cross-cultural context in Chapter 15, Esther Groenendaal examines why Dutch tourism lifestyle entrepreneurs have moved to France to open B’n’B accommodation that reflects a slower pace of life. She considers how these personal choices about working in tourism are also shaped by broader socio-political movements that value culture, creativity and environment. As the final contribution to the book in Chapter 16, Sagar Singh explores the significance of traditional and more modern forms of slow tourism (pilgrimage, yoga tourism) within Indian culture and history. Western misconceptions of Eastern practices, such as yoga, are also explored

in ways that question ethnocentric assumptions about what slow means and how it figures in a globalised tourism market.

In conclusion, the collection of chapters in this book broaden and deepen the academic research on slow tourism, demonstrating the connections, contradictions and complexities inherent in the concept of 'slow' as it relates to travel. Drawing on a range of disciplines including sociology, anthropology, history, food studies, cultural geography and cultural studies and tourism/hospitality management, the contributors to this book also reveal the diverse and multidisciplinary nature of slow travel. We hope that this collection will add to the body of knowledge concerning this emerging tourism phenomenon which, we believe, has the potential to challenge the ways that tourism is performed and organised.

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