

SLOW TOURISM IN THE POST-COVID ERA: THE CASE OF MONTENEGRO

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Abstract This chapter explores slow tourism as a sustainable tourism concept with the potential for slow tourism offers in Montenegro. Namely, the post-Covid tourist faces an accelerated pace of life and often a stressful daily routine. They need relaxation and a vacation that cannot be found in the tourist offers containing lots of sightseeing tours in as short a time as possible. Accordingly, a new concept of travel has been developing in recent years, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, one which promotes relaxation and "deep" exploration of the tourist destination - slow tourism. The slow tourist is usually not attracted to the established routes and ready tourist products. Instead, the focus is placed on traveling to the destination, using slow means of transportation, as well as on avoiding large hotels. Slow tourists are trying to get to know the local culture and establish contacts with the locals. Montenegro enables all that.

Keywords:

post-Covid era,
slow tourism,
sustainability,
culture,
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1 Introduction

In the globalized post-Covid era of an ever-increasing competition, under the surge of information technologies that impose rapid pace of life and instant responses, time is becoming a scarcer and more valuable resource. Under the stressful everyday life, even vacations, which have long been considered as an escape from the everyday routine and the pursuit of rest and relaxation (Dillette et al., 2018), are turning into a race against time. Driven by the desire to see and experience more and more, modern tourists are constantly in a hurry. The period of the Covid-19 pandemic in the years 2020 and 2021 and very strict travel policies (Fotiadis et al, 2021; Ahmad et al., 2022), along with low consumer trust (Orîndaru et al., 2021) brought tourism almost to a standstill, but in 2022 many destinations reported about increasing numbers of tourists. Undoubtedly, the Covid-19 pandemic strongly influenced the tourism sector and, according to Ahmad et al. (2022), the behavior of tourists. Even before the pandemic, sustainability and more sustainable concepts of travelling were gaining significance in tourism, and especially among the tourism academics, but the pandemic, however, gave a significant boost to the sustainable approach. One of the significant factors contributing to that were climate changes. The tourism sector, in fact, declared a climate change emergency in 2020 (Scott & Gössling, 2022) and ever since, reduced carbon footprint, sustainable mobility and sustainable handling have received increasing attention.

The concept of sustainability is, of course, not new. As one of the responses to the pressure of mass tourism and to mitigate the effects of Covid-19, a different concept of travel called slow tourism appeared based on some social movements such as slow food and slow cities that started in Italy in the 1980s and 1990s (Hall, 2012, Oh et al., 2016), and as Fullagar et al. (2012) observe, should be understood in a wider sociocultural sense and in the context of slow movement (Jovanović, 2013). This new philosophy of travel highlights above all the ambition to restore tourism to its original, source values: pleasure and relaxation (Jovanović, 2013). Montenegro, which humorously has a reputation of a country whose inhabitants are proverbially lazy (Potočnik Topler, 2022), seems an ideal destination for slow tourism. And especially the town of Cetinje as the old Montenegrin royal capital.

Undoubtedly, the so-called Covid crisis, which has influenced travel habits and emphasized the importance of hygiene and health conditions (Orîndaru et al., 2021) at a destination, speaks in favor of slow tourism. Also the current changed economic situation favors this relatively new concept of travel, which is not only an approach to travel, but also an emerging tourism niche, related to sustainable development (Moira et al., 2017) and to responsible consumption. Slow tourism destinations are less distant and slower, and non-polluting means of transportation are favored, as well as private accommodation, allowing tourists to meet and interact with local residents and encouraging learning the local language, which is also in accordance with the “experience economy” (Pine & Gilmore, 2011).

The main aim of this research is to present the concept of slow tourism and its advantages for Montenegro in the post-Covid era. Jovanović (2013) argues that the research topic is relevant for the three reasons, presented further on. Firstly, the slow approach to life is significant not only in travelling and tourism, but in life in general incorporating sustainability and achieving well-being. Secondly, many nowadays’ tourism practices are not suitable and they lead to overtourism and irresponsible consumption and pollution, which makes us believe that slow tourism is the concept for the future because it offers an alternative to the existent practices. Thirdly, the quality of tourism experience is gaining importance, and we believe that slow tourism enables tourists to deeper experience a destination.

This research perceives slow tourism from perspectives of a tourist and a destination manager, and offers both, a theoretical background and some practical implications.

2 Resisting globalization through slow tourism and Città slow cities

In the context of opposing globalization, several European cities have created a network of Città Slow cities in order to improve the quality of life of their fellow citizens in terms of space and nutrition (Jovanović, 2013). This is an organization established in Italy as a counterpart of the movement called Slow Food, which had emerged as a protest against fast and low quality food. This international organization of cities of good living nowadays has 287 members across the world, most of which are located on the territory of Italy, where the first city of this type was proclaimed in Tuscany, in the commune of Greve in Chianti, in 1999 (cittaslow.org, 2022). Città Slow brand is reserved for cities with fewer than 50,000

inhabitants in which the locals are advocating the adoption of corrective measures aimed at creating a more humane urban culture (cittaslow.org, 2022). The philosophy of the inhabitants of these cities is based on several principles: the preservation and affirmation of the local traditions, fostering of hospitality and attention to the arrangement of space, where the priority is the already existing material heritage as opposed to the new construction (Jovanović, 2013).

In the network of Città slow cities, the Manifesto, containing 70 recommendations and obligations, is in effect (cittaslow.org, 2022). It insists on reducing the energy consumption, promoting green areas in order to meet the necessary energy requirements, reducing waste and developing various recycling programs (Jovanović, 2013). The focus is on the necessity of expanding pedestrian areas that are not supposed to be exclusively intended for commercial activity, on the collective infrastructure adapted to the disabled people, as well as on the different age groups (cittaslow.org, 2022). The concept seeks to expand and build green areas for relaxation and insists on the development of genuine citizen participatory democracy; the cleanliness of cities, as well as the development and preservation of local customs and regional products; public transport is preferred, as well as all non-polluting means of transportation (pedestrian areas, bicycles) in order to reduce the use of cars (Jovanović, 2013). Fast food restaurants are strictly prohibited (cittaslow.org, 2022).

In order to observe this Manifesto and the obligations assumed under it, the Città slow city networks make available a group of inspectors that periodically exercise control and perform necessary checks (cittaslow.org, 2022). The cities obtain the Slow certificate and present its logo (a snail carrying a town on its shell) at the entrance to the city, as well as in all public places (cittaslow.org, 2022).

The advocates of Slow Cities are opposed to large agglomerations unsuitable for human capacities of perception and movement. They are trying to valorize their environment and promote their culinary specialities, as well as to encourage direct contacts between the fellow citizens and between the locals and the tourists (cittaslow.org, 2022). Jovanović (2013) mentions Ivan Illich, a great critic of the industrial society and the author of the booklet-Manifesto, *Energy and Equity* (*Energie et équité*), published in French in 1973, and then in other languages, who is considered to be the conceptual forerunner of this movement. By his vocation,

Ivan Illich was a philosopher with origins from the ex-Yugoslavia area, who lived and worked in America, and who was interested in political ecology (Jovanović, 2013). Reassessing the concepts of comfort and human needs, Illich drew attention of the humanity to the physical limitations of the planet Earth, believing that every consumer action represented a sort of an act of destruction (Illich, 2005). At the end of the 20th century, an urban design project called Illichville was created, with strongly pronounced environmental connotations, as opposed to the so-called auto city model, represented by LA (Jovanović, 2013). According to Jovanović (2013), this city project, based on walking, cycling and using public transportation, condemns the model of consumer society and cars as means of transportation, promoting hospitality above all.

3 The concept and philosophy of slow tourism

While only about a decade ago a large number of tourists coming from the developed countries had the ambition to visit and experience as many things, as quickly as possible, during their vacations, the contemporary trends, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, are different. The postmodern tourist or we can also say the post-Covid tourist, who prefers slow tourism, seeks to slowly enjoy the "degustation" of the chosen destination on a holiday. While resting, they want to live by the pace of the local population, to communicate with them and to eat at the same places as the locals. Xavier Pavié, the professor of philosophy and marketing at the Paris-Ouest University, in the paper entitled *Le slow tourisme, un apprentissage du Kairos*, who reminds the readers of the different notions of time by the ancient Greeks; while the notion of Chronos denotes the time that passes, the stream of which we cannot influence, the notion of Kairos is bound to a specific moment in time to be seized (*carpe diem*), that is, the time that we "degustate" (Jovanović, 2013). When it comes to slow tourism, this author points out that it is in vain to chase and fight the time that irreversibly flows, even when we are on vacation, and believes that one cannot be simultaneously in the office and at the beach, alluding to various IT tools that we also use during our vacations (Jovanović, 2013). Leaving for a vacation is a decision we make for ourselves and for others so that we can seize the days that to us appear different when on vacation. Philosophy, as pointed out by this professor, represents this path towards wisdom, with an emphasis on the notion of time that is no longer experienced as something to be suffered and tolerated, but as something that is to be experienced and seized (Jovanović, 2013). Therefore, slow tourism with such

perception of time depicts a different spiritual state of tourists and represents a new type of travel.

The concept of slow tourism is closely related to happiness, which is a concept with a long tradition, and thus, with various interpretations. Nawijn (2010) believes that holiday happiness is basically well-being. Besides well-being, also the terms wellness, and health are used (Hartwell et al. 2016), all of them related to healthy lifestyle and healthy choices. Also McCabe and Johnson (2013) discuss the happiness factor in tourism, and relate it to subjective well-being and social tourism. According to Chen and Li (2018, 257), life satisfaction is a complex concept, composed of “various life domains”, and holidays, i. e. tourism can contribute to life satisfaction positively. Tourist happiness, in fact, consists of life satisfaction, affect, and eudaimonia, all of which have been related to tourism (Dolnicar et al, 2012). Filep and Deery (2010, 407) established that “tourists’ happiness is as a state in which the tourist experiences positive emotions (joy, interest, contentment, and love), is engaged in and derives meaning from his/her holiday activities in the three main phases of the tourist experience (anticipation, on-site, and reflective phases)”.

4 Enjoying in the very act of traveling

The concept of slow tourism is characterized by longer journeys and longer stays at the destinations. The tourists travel to the destinations mostly by slower means of transportation, although the air transportation is not ruled out, if the selected destination is too far away.

The journey to the desired destination itself is not considered a waste of time by a slow tourist, but rather a synonym for a new experience and adventure; the very act of traveling somehow turns into the goal by itself, because during the time the tourists travel to a destination, or from a destination to a destination, they have opportunities to truly enjoy the landscapes, they can stop whenever and wherever they want, having sufficient time for thinking about and absorbing everything that they have experienced and seen on the journey (Jovanović, 2013). In addition, slow tourists will often opt for those means of transportation that are used by the local population, as this would allow them numerous encounters and communication with the locals.

As far as the destinations are concerned, some authors (De la Barre, 2012; Timms & Conway, 2011; Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010; Conway & Timms, 2010) believe that marginal, remote and perhaps underdeveloped destinations promote slow tourism because they have better conditions and predispositions for that (i. e. outdated infrastructure).

5 Freedom and pleasure in chilling out (relaxation) and immersion in local cultures

Slow tourism is a reaction to mass tourism and after the Covid-19 pandemic also to travel restrictions and other measures, and it is the opposite of a ready package tour that denies the visitor the freedom of movement. While on journey, slow tourists, as Jovanović (2013) points out, do not opt for pre-defined itineraries and precisely fixed schedules; they are not attracted to the established tourist routes, on the contrary - they like improvisation. Their aim is not to tour and see as much as possible, but are focused on the quality of experience. They often travel without a definite plan and they rely on the locals whom they meet along the way for direction and guidance. They are looking for unusual experiences and authentic adventures.

The basic rule for a slow tourist is: Never ever rush ... Just very slowly soak up the spirit of the place, listen, watch, marvel, explore ... Improvise, walk aimlessly ... Such approach to the destination, with curiosity, stimulates and arouses all senses, enabling the tourists to make unusual acquaintances and discover unknown places, away from well-trodden paths (Jovanović, 2013).



Figure 1: Mountaineering at the Lovćen National Park

Source: Jasna Potočnik Topler, 2021.

When on vacation, slow tourists slow down the rhythm with the ambition to immerse themselves in, and merge with the place they want to thoroughly discover. For this reason, they avoid large chains of hotels operating in accordance with strictly established standards and mostly opt for private accommodation, camping or couch-surfing. This type of accommodation enables them to engage in conversations and exchange experiences with the locals. The owner of the French tour operator *Voyageurs du monde*, specialized in individual and personalized journeys, believes that accepting the pace of life of the local population, sharing the everyday life with them, is the best way to get acquainted with another culture (Jovanović, 2013). The concept of slow tourism is, thus, very close to the philosophy of the famous phrase: ‘When in Rome, do as the Romans do’.

According to Professor Xavier Pavie (2009), slow tourism implies a strong communication dimension, because it requires intensive interaction between the tourists and the local population, as well as the establishment of a close relationship with the hosts (Jovanović, 2013). In essence, this profoundly altruistic approach requires the tourists to familiarize with and learn at least some basic phrases of the local language. Support for cultural diversity implies understanding and respecting the basic foundations of each nation, and it rests on the use of language - the medium that determines each nation and connects them with their previous generations, national history and a different perception of the world. Therefore, many agencies of this type, along with tour packages, also offer short local language courses to the tourists. Finally, slow tourists enjoy visiting the local markets and discovering regional products where they can also learn many words of the local language, through communication with local sellers. When they choose to buy local food products (Figure 2), later they prepare the food themselves, or with the assistance of their hosts in the temporary accommodation where they reside. If they still opt for meals in restaurants, they choose the places where the locals eat.



Figure 2: A poster in the main avenue in Budva, advertising the Njeguši prosciutto
Source: Jasna Potočnik Topler, 2021.

6 Montenegro as a slow tourism destination

Montenegro is an attractive destination for all slow tourists, especially those coming from the neighboring countries and countries of the European Union. Apart from being a destination that is not remote, one which does not require exclusively travelling by plane to reach it, and despite covering only small territory, Montenegro is very diverse when it comes to landscape, culture and language. The latter is nowadays called Montenegrin - the language of Montenegro. Before the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia dissolved in 1991, the majority of people in the region generally spoke a language known as Serbo-Croatian.

The analysis in the frame of the bilateral project between Slovenia and Montenegro (BI-ME-21-22-20) confirmed what Gričar and colleagues (2021) claim in their article, namely that few empirical research on Montenegro exist. Still, the smallest Balkan country that has around 600.000 inhabitants, represents an interesting

research example. Especially, when it comes to monitoring, analyzing and predicting associations between the tourist arrivals and the growth of the economy (Gričar et al., 2021). Gričar and colleagues (2021) state that in the period between 2010 and 2019 the GDP of Montenegro tripled – arrivals of tourists in Montenegro increased by around 80% domestically and 300% for foreign tourist arrivals.

In the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Montenegro that gained its independence in 2006 after the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia dissolved, tourism is a priority sector. It brings around 22 % of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and is expected to reach 30% in the near future (Cerović Smolović et al. 2018). Tourism definitely stays an important factor in the Montenegrin economy. It generates revenue from tourist consumption of services and products, from taxes that are collected by the tourism industry, and it provides employment opportunities in the service public and private industry (Gričar et al., 2021, 3401). It also serves as promotion of cultural heritage, but, of course, faces challenges of its future development, where sustainability and innovation are two significant guidelines.

Slow tourism has good options for further evolving in Montenegro. Once tourists reach Montenegro, they do not have to travel long distances in kilometers and they do not have to change their accommodation on a daily basis if they want to fully acquaint themselves with the country. In addition, it is a destination with still very preserved nature, especially in the hinterland, and a country that, according to many tourists, offers high-quality local food and regional products.

It should as well be mentioned that Montenegro has the following sites listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List: the natural and culture-historical region of Kotor in the Boka Kotorska Bay (Figure 3), Durmitor National Park in the northern part of the country, which is a limestone massif belonging to the Dinarides, Stećci Medieval Tombstone Graveyards (monolithic stone tombstones that were created in the period from the second half of the 12th century to the 16th century), and Venetian Works of Defence (fortified systems) built between the 16th and 17th centuries (Unesco World Heritage List, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>). In 2021, the heritage of the Boka navy was included in the list of intangible assets of UNESCO (ich.unesco.org).



Figure 3: Old Town of Kotor in March (before the main tourist season)

Source: Jasna Potočnik Topler, 2018.

The hinterland of Montenegro is predominantly mountainous (Figure 1) with peaks over 2500 meters and is still less visited than the coastal part. It consists of 5 national parks, one of which is under the UNESCO protection. This is also the area that is home to the largest lake in the Balkans – the Skadar Lake, which is on the list of

protected wetlands and attracts ornithologists from across the world. Krivokapić (2022, 399) argues that rural areas in the Northern part of Montenegro are more than suitable for slow tourists since they have managed to preserve authenticity. As such, they are able to offer unique experiences to visitors and tourists (Figure 4). Krivokapić (2022) emphasizes authentic accommodation and natural landscapes that enable biking, hiking, tracking, riding horses, fishing, kayaking, a wide range of culinary activities, visits to archeological and cultural centres, etc. All these activities are ideal for active holidays and relieving stress.



Figure 4: Kayaking on the Slano jezero (Salt Lake) near Nikšić.

Source: Ivona Jovanović, 2021.

Reception agencies in Montenegro recognize new trends in the development of tourism and try to follow them. The most numerous tourists from the EU after the Covid-19 pandemic are the Germans and French. It has to be pointed out that there are already some positive examples of encouraging slow tourism in Montenegro. Namely, the receptive travel agency Luminallis DMC Events, based in Budva, has the ambition to follow the latest tourist trends and has specialized for many years in working with individual guests, mainly from French-speaking countries. This agency is a member of the French association ATR (Acting for Sustainable Tourism) and co-operates in France with the travel agency Voyageurs du monde specialized in tailored travels. In the interview with the director¹ of this agency, it was found out that these are high-spending visitors who come to Montenegro mainly by plane, then use rent-a-car services on the destination and make tours on foot, with kayak, boat or bicycle, looking for meetings with the local population and unusual places away from mass tourism. When it comes to accommodation, the agency points out that there has been an increase in demand for staying in eco-katuns (mountain shepherd settlements) or ethno villages in recent years, primarily in the north of Montenegro. In addition, in comparison with the previous years, the demand for longer stays in Montenegrin destinations is noticeable, so that the majority of the Luminallis visitors stay in Montenegro for 15 days, or about 3 weeks, taking into account the total length of stay in the region. Apart from that, the tourists visiting through the Voyageurs du Monde tour operator are used to paying attention to possible degradations of the living space by inadequate construction, waste or too much tourism, as well as possible irregularities related to the working conditions of local tourist workers and, upon returning to their home countries, they fill in the questionnaires in which they state their observations on the issues.²

Certain Montenegrin cities, such as Danilovgrad or Cetinje, could apply for inclusion in the list of small towns. We are discussing cities with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants, which still remind us of cities from the time of Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia and where life, compared to European cities, takes place at a much slower pace. People in those cities almost all know each other and help each other,

¹ Aleksandar Milivojević

² Some of the questions featured in the questionnaires for the tour operators *Voyageurs du monde* passengers:

1. Have your guides, escorts or staff at the hotel provided you with the information related to environmental protection?
2. Have you seen any evidence of space devastation in the places that you have visited? (too crowded, waste ...)
3. Have you noticed any irregularities related to the working conditions of the local staff?

the patriarchal heritage is still omnipresent and family relationships are nurtured and great attention is paid to the care of the elderly as well as to raising children. Cetinje stands out among the mentioned cities. Surrounded by two national parks (Lovćen and Lake Skadar), it has beautiful parks dating from the period of rule of Nikola I, a lot of museums and the National Library of Montenegro, National Archives, old buildings from the end of the 19th century, while there are still plenty of parking spaces as well as pedestrian zones. Walking through Cetinje in the summer with the pronounced smell of linden trees, which are the trademark of this city, you are able to meet residents playing chess or bridge in the streets of the town center (Figure 5), full of inns and an environment where even in the era of globalization an individual never feels lonely.



Figure 5: Locals playing cards at the main street in Cetinje

Source: Ivona Jovanović, 2022.

7 Conclusion

Due to the long and complex history of the country, Montenegro as a destination has developed a specific and unique identity. Rich and diverse heritage, and well preserved natural landscapes in the hinterland offer many opportunities for distinctive slow tourism products. Although traveling by plane, (especially since the appearance of the low-cost airlines) is still very popular, and the car is still the most popular means of transport, an increase in the number of so-called slow tourists in recent years is the evidence that the destination can be reached in different ways. This is confirmed by tour-operators that are increasingly offering to their customers not only tour packages that encourage them to protect the environment, but also to travel by the means of transportation that in themselves represent a kind of tourist attraction. In this regard, we believe that the resources of Montenegro have not been sufficiently valorized. The natural beauty of Montenegrin national parks, the highest railway viaduct in Europe (Most na Maloj rijeci – Bridge over the Mala River), as well as unique scenes that can be experienced when travelling by the Bar-Belgrade railway (especially on the section to Kolasin) or Podgorica – Shkoder/Skadar (on which the transport of passengers never took hold), and experiencing the Kotor-Njeguši-Cetinje road quite certainly fit into the concept of slow-travel. Being aware of the problems caused by mass tourism and overtourism, many travel agencies are members of organizations acting in favor of sustainable tourism. The aim of all involved stakeholders is to minimize the negative impacts of tourism, trying to adopt sustainable tourism practices and reducing the carbon footprint. However, apart from offering a different way of travel and advocating for sustainability and the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, slow tourism is primarily the promotion of human encounters and contacts between the locals and tourists. The goal is that the slow tourist merges with the local culture and the local population. Such vacations, of course, need timely and responsible preparations, but are – in the end – rewarding. They not only relieve stress and have the ability to strengthen individual identity, but are also a part of lifelong learning experiences.

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