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June 2011

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## **CittaSlow, Slow Cities, Slow Food: Searching for a Model for the Development of Slow Tourism**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Slow Tourism, a new trend that originated in Italy, is now traversing the globe. This study traces its evolution, synthesizes existing definitions, and develops a conceptual model for the stages of Slow Tourism development. It uses a qualitative, exploratory framework situated in the paradigms of constructivism and critical theory and a critical, interpretative form of inquiry and analysis. Data sources included various types of secondary data as well as primary data collected during personal interviews conducted in November of 2010 with key leaders in the first two CittaSlow designated cities in the U.S. Findings suggest that Slow Tourism, which can occur in both rural and urban settings, is an outgrowth of the Slow Food Movement and is tied to CittaSlow through the explicit guarantee of unique slowness offered by these officially designated cities. The presence of Slow Food Convivia, a critical mass of CittaSlow designated cities, and practices of socio-political consumption emerged as important stages in its development.*

**Keywords:** CittaSlow, slow cities, slow food, slow tourism, special interest tourism, sustainable development

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

Is it special interest tourism, political consumption, a new form of sustainable tourism development, or all of the above? At first glance, it might appear that Slow Tourism is synonymous with Soft Tourism that was coined in the 80's (Broggi, 1985; Krippendorf, 1987) and used as a way to differentiate alternative types of tourism which are perceived to be more environmentally and socially acceptable (e.g. rural, eco, green, agricultural, individual, smaller scale) from the 'harder' forms of mass, packaged or large-scale tourism (Alejziak, 1999; Lane, 1994; Slee, Farr, & Snowden, 1995,1997; Snowden, Slee, & Farr, 2000; Williams & MacLeod, 2006). The authors of this study concur with Snowden, et al. (2000) that the many terms that are used to characterize alternative forms of tourism that have arisen in opposition to the genre of mass tourism or as a result of the need for more sustainable development suggested by the Bruntland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) should not be regarded as synonymous. Although the various forms of alternative tourism may share similar ideology with regard to the social, cultural, and physical environment (i.e. more awareness and

concern), they may originate from different social/political movements, take different paths of development, and attract different market segments. In this study, Slow Tourism is treated as a unique phenomenon with its own particular origin, set of characteristics, and praxis.

Spawned by the Slow Food Movement which began more than two decades ago in Bra, Italy, CittaSlow (Cittaslow International, 2010a) has played a leading role in creating the trendy new form of tourism – Slow Tourism (World Travel Market & Euromonitor, 2007). Like all new forms of tourism, it lacks a universally agreed on definition as well as a clearly identifiable market segment or model for its development. The aim of this paper is to trace its evolution, synthesize the existing definitions and build a conceptual model for the development of Slow Tourism.

Political activism is the foremost goal of the Slow Food Movement which was founded in 1989 as a protest to the proliferation of the fast food industry invading Europe. Its Slow Food Manifesto which was written by founding member Folco Portinari, on December 10, 1989 and approved by delegates from 15 countries explicitly reveals the political nature of the movement. The authors of this study believe that the Manifesto shown in Table 1 is the genesis not only of Slow Food but also of Cittaslow, ‘Slow City’ design, the Slow Movement, Slow Tourism, and Slow Tourism Development:

**Table 1: Slow Food Manifesto 1989**

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“We are enslaved by speed and have all succumbed to the same insidious virus: *Fast Life*, which disrupts our habits, pervades the privacy of our homes and forces us to eat Fast Foods. To be worthy of the name, *Homo Sapiens* should rid himself of speed before it reduces him to a species in danger of extinction. A firm defence of quiet material pleasure is the only way to oppose the universal folly of *Fast Life*. May suitable doses of guaranteed sensual pleasure and slow, long-lasting enjoyment preserve us from the contagion of the multitude who mistake frenzy for efficiency. Our defence should begin at the table with *Slow Food*. Let us rediscover the flavours and savours of regional cooking and banish the degrading effects of *Fast Food*. In the name of productivity, *Fast Life* has changed our way of being and threatens our environment and our landscapes. So *Slow Food* is now the only truly progressive answer. This is what real culture is all about: developing taste rather than demeaning it. And what better way to set about this than an international exchange of experiences, knowledge, projects? Slow Food guarantees a better future. *Slow Food* is an idea that needs plenty of qualified supporters who can help turn this (slow) motion into an international movement, with the little snail as its symbol.” (Portinari, 1989, p.1)

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Slow Food (hereafter referred to as SF) now has over 100,000 members in 1,300 local chapters called *convivia* and a network of 2,000 food communities who practice the sustainable production of quality foods (Slow Food International, 2011). Italy has the most number of *convivia* (285) followed by the U.S. with 250 local chapters. Today, the key tenet of SF is that “everyone has a fundamental right to the pleasure of good food and consequently the responsibility to protect the heritage of food, tradition and culture that makes this pleasure possible” (Slow Food International, 2010, para. 1). In addition, food should be ‘good’ (i.e. fresh and local), ‘clean’ (i.e. produced in an ecologically sustainable way) and ‘fair’ (i.e. available for all and with fair pay for small-scale producers) (Slow Food International, 2010, para. 4).

Although the current rhetoric of SF is less strident than its 1989 Manifesto, it is no less political in nature. Sassatelli and Davolio (2010) have developed a compelling analysis of SF from an institutional and a cultural perspective as well as its position in the field of critical consumption. They found that SF plays a role in consumption practices that are alternative, ethical, or political in nature and note that these types of consumers “use their power of choice to modify market relations, in order to make them fairer and more conducive to a good life for all” (p. 205). In addition, they found that consumption politics associated with SF are complex (p. 207) and bring into question the problem inherent in a middle-class movement such as SF. They posed the question: Is it an alternative and subversive form of consumer activism or is it a type of consumerism available only to the elite (p. 208)? Their conclusion was that it is a hybrid (p. 228) and the authors of this study concur. The SF movement is predicated on the notion of co-production through consumer choice and consumers with the true ability to make consumption choices are educated, informed and have the financial means to purchase products from local, small-business which are often more expensive than mass, fast produced products.

Cittaslow, an Italian based initiative, was established in 1999 by the mayors of four towns (Greve in Chianti, Bra, Orvieto, and Positano) and the president of Slow Food. These four towns became the first Cittaslow certified cities. Not only was Cittaslow’s goal “to enlarge the philosophy of Slow Food to local communities and to government of towns, applying the concepts of ecogastronomy at practice of everyday life” (Cittaslow International, 2010a, para. 2); they also developed a Charter which is now called the Cittaslow International Charter (hereafter referred to as Charter) (Cittaslow International, 2009).

Although the Charter has 54 criteria, 24 of which are obligatory requirements, grouped into six different sections (Environmental policies; Infrastructure policies; Technologies and facilities for Urban Quality; Safeguarding autochthonous production; Hospitality; and Awareness), that are part of the Cittaslow certification process, none is more important than a city’s involvement with SF. Specifically, “to achieve the status of ‘Slow City,’ a city must agree to accept the guidelines of Slow Food and work to improve conviviality and conserve the local environment” (Cittaslow International, 2010b, para. 1) and have a population of 50,000 or less (Cittaslow International, 2009, pp. 23-24).

According to Articles 25 and 26 of the Charter, nations or territories with at least three member cities can establish a National Coordination Group which reports directly to Cittaslow and is responsible for various activities, projects, and events in that country as well as verifying new applications from cities within their country (Cittaslow International, 2009, p. 17). This country level committee helps to decrease the length of time it takes for a city to become certified and increases the country level awareness of the Cittaslow movement.

Other cities slowly followed the first four and were subjected to a rigorous and typically slow certification process much like the rigorous process associated with becoming a designated World Heritage Site. Currently, Cittaslow (Cittaslow International, 2011) lists 141 certified ‘Slow Cities’ in 23 countries. As of January 2011, countries with three or more certified Cittaslow Cities included: Italy (69), Germany (10), United Kingdom (9), South Korea (8), Poland (6), Spain (6), Belgium (4), Portugal (4), Austria (3), Holland (3), Norway (3), and the United States (3).

## METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The aim of this study was to trace the evolution, synthesize existing definitions, and develop a conceptual model for the stages of Slow Tourism development. As an emerging phenomenon, Slow Tourism has been studied on a limited basis. Most of the available data are of the case study, place specific variety or provide critical or interpretative analysis of different aspects of Slow Tourism. As a result, this study had few data or research models to build upon. In order to achieve the aim of this study, the authors used a methodological framework that was qualitative and exploratory and situated in the nonpositivist paradigms of constructivism and critical theory and used a critical, interpretative form of inquiry and analysis (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

### Affordances and Limitations

This methodological framework was chosen as it is well suited to the study of “what” and “how” and could provide a richer understanding of the phenomenon which evolved from a socio-political movement. It was also a suitable framework for the inductive process involved in building a conceptual (i.e. theoretical) model.

The researchers used triangulation techniques (see Decrop, 1999; see also Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) to investigate and illuminate how the phenomenon has evolved and how it has been defined. The first area of triangulation involved the use of several types of data sources. These included: secondary data (e.g. case studies found in the literature and on the World Wide Web and web sites of relevant organizations) and primary data collected during personal interviews conducted in November of 2010 with key leaders in the first two CittaSlow designated cities in the U.S. The second area of triangulation involved two types of qualitative techniques: critical interpretation of the data (i.e. understanding of the phenomenon through the process of interpretation) and participant observation (i.e. interpretive fieldwork). The final area of triangulation encompassed both multiple researcher and theoretical triangulation. The authors of this study, from different countries, cultural backgrounds, and theoretical and philosophical grounding worked together on this inductive, interpretive study and jointly conducted the fieldwork in in November of 2010.

Two of the key limitations of this study are its stage in the iteration process (i.e. it is the first phase of the process) and its scope (i.e. it focused primarily on Slow Tourism Development in Europe, South Korea, and the U.S.).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Unique Attributes of the Cittaslow Movement as they relate to Cittaslow Certified Cities

Cittaslow embraces the notion that all cities are unique and each will exemplify “slowness” in its own way while also meeting the requirements of the Charter. Knox (2005), Lee and Yhang (2008), Mayer and Knox (2009), Miele (2008), Milutinovic (2010), Pink (2008), and the authors of this study (based on interviews conducted in 2010) found that one of the most important aspects contributing to the growth and success of the movement is the fluid manner in

which different interpretations of ‘slow’ create uniqueness and sense of place. Two examples of the general types of ‘slowness’ found in these studies were: (1) alternative, slower visions of urban living developed through new practices to create this lifestyle and, (2) preservation of traditional culture, crafts, and the environment through the mindful choice to keep these places ‘slow’.

Unlike the concept of being an ecotourism destination, which can mean as little as just a tag line on a brochure or website, a Cittaslow designated city must go through a rigorous certification and periodic review process. The authors of this study as well as Knox (2005), Lee and Yhang (2008), and Mayer and Knox (2006b, 2009) found that the certification process is an important attribute of the Cittaslow movement that contributes to its success. Mayer and Knox (2009) and the authors of this study also found that the network of Cittaslow cites and the National Coordinating Groups that provides a formalized way for cities and towns to communicate with and learn from each other is an additional attribute that helps the movement to grow and be successful.

Another attribute that was commonly identified as important to the spread and success of the movement is its value as an alternative approach to both urban design and sustainable development (Knox, 2005; Lee and Yhang, 2008; Mayer & Knox, 2009; Miele, 2008; Milutinovic, 2010; Pink, 2008, and the authors of this study (based on 2010 interviews). Lee and Yhang (2008) also found that it is a valuable tool for developing regional tourism.

### **Slow Tourism, Slow Travel and the Slow Foods Movement**

In addition to Cittaslow, another natural outgrowth from the SF movement is Slow Tourism (hereafter referred to as ST). The World Travel Market Euromonitor Global Trends Report 2007 (World Travel Market & Euromonitor, 2007) predicted that ST would be the new trend in Western Europe. They said that it “will continue to grow in popularity, becoming an alternative to more traditional beach and culture holidays” (p.14) and that the impetus for the trend was the desire by consumers to “escape their hectic lifestyles and enjoy life’s simpler pleasures” (p. 14). They forecasted that ST would increase at “an estimated 10% Compound Annual Growth Rate” (p. 15) between 2006 and 2011 and that the main beneficiaries would be Germany, the UK, Italy, Spain, and France (p. 15). They also noted that the trend of ST was spreading to the U.S. and Latin America (p. 15).

Matos (2004) also said that the trend that is emerging from peoples’ need to escape their fast lifestyle and holiday practices is ST (pp. 95-96). He described the components of ST as simple accommodations, a healthy diet, a leisurely pace, local culture, a peaceful atmosphere, and respect for the natural environment (p. 96). In addition, he said that “to be genuine, slow tourism must follow two essential principles: ‘taking time’ and (2) attachment to a particular place” (p. 100). He noted that ST combines “slowness, time for living, and quality of life with modernity and contemporary technology” and should not be viewed as a negative or backwards concept (p. 101).

Chaffyn ( 2007), who worked with various cities and organizations in the UK, defined ST as “tourism which involves making real and meaningful connections with people (i.e. local

community, your companions, yourself), places, culture, food, heritage and the environment” (slide # 11). Wilkening (2008) aptly named the Slow Tourism (ST) trend as “the stepchild of slow food” (p. 1) and Molz (2009) described ‘Slow Travel’ as an “offshoot of slow food” (p. 277). The authors of this study believe that, while intrinsically linked, ‘Slow Tourism’ (ST) and ‘Slow Travel’ are not necessarily one in the same. This is a debate that has occurred for a number of years and will probably never be resolved. However, for this study, the authors treat them as separate, but linked together.

Imagery produced by the definitions of Wilkening (2008) and Molz (2009) suggest this separation. Slow Tourism (ST) lives with the other offspring of the SF movement (i.e. Cittaslow; various web-site based organizations such as SlowMovement.com, and SlowTourismClub.eu; and online communities such as TravelMole.com and the travel blog of whl.travel.com). These offspring take the tenets of SF and make the ‘slowness’ aspect uniquely their own. Slow Travel, on the other hand, focuses almost entirely on the locavore aspect of SF which is buying and eating local, sustainably produced food that has not traveled long distances. By staying “rooted” to this narrow SF concept, Slow Travel sets up the explicitly problematic choice of only traveling close to home in a sustainably responsible way. Hall (2006) noted that the issue of mode and distance of travel inherent in Slow Travel is problematic and that rural areas that are not within a day-trip radius from metropolitan areas would suffer from lack of visitors (p. 304). The World Travel Market Euromonitor Global Trends Report 2007 (World Travel Market & Euromonitor, 2007) said that Slow Travel is associated with ethical commitment on the part of the travelers who make a conscious choice to minimize any negative impact that they might have on the environment or the community as well as their choice to purchase from local providers (p. 14).

The questions to be asked here are two-fold: (1) Can travelers fly or drive to long-distance destinations and then walk, cycle, or take available public transportation (i.e. sustainable, low impact forms of traveling) and still be considered as Slow Travelers? or (2) Must true Slow Travelers fully adopt the “local” and make the responsible choice to travel locally by driving short distances and by walking and cycling? If Slow Travel is a narrowly defined political agenda based on conscious choice, then it is the latter. If it is one of the aspects of ST, then it is the former. It is difficult to imagine a world in which we are only able to travel in our own back yard for fear of leaving a negative carbon footprint.

The current reality is that most travelers do not care what they are labeled by others and they plan and execute their travels based on multiple, and complex motivations. Some of their trips may be short and fast while other trips may be long and slow or some other combination. They may also utilize various forms of transportation to reach their destination or while staying in their destination. This reality was also supported by the findings of Dickinson (2009), Hall (2006), and Molz (2009). The authors of this study believe that these choices are based on personal needs and values; time constraints; and the availability of and knowledge about unique places that will satisfy their travel requirements. Cittaslow certified cities provide alternative destination choices that guarantee a unique experience of place and community that can be enjoyed at a leisurely pace and that has good food, and the opportunity to purchase locally produced products from small-scale local providers.

## Searching for a Model for the Development of Slow Tourism

A critical analysis of the literature and personal interviews conducted in November of 2010 with key leaders in the first two CittaSlow designated cities in the U.S. suggest that ST is a new, alternative, and viable form of sustainable development. Its derivation from the SF movement and its linkage to Cittaslow cities ties it implicitly to political consumption. Should it be considered a form of special interest tourism (SIT)? This depends on how one defines this construct (see Trauer, 2006). A full discussion of the numerous and nonhomogeneous definitions of SIT is beyond the scope of this paper.

Based on the notions posited by McKercher and Chan (2005) and McKercher, Okumus, and Okumus (2008), ST could be described as a form of special interest tourism when travelers are motivated to engage in this form of tourism as a result of their political and ethical viewpoints and that their travel activities and consumption practices are directly related to their motivations. It could also be considered as a form of SIT if travelers are motivated to engage in this form of tourism because they believe that taking this trendy, new type of vacation is a way to signify social status and their consumption practices are motivated by their desire to appear trendy (see Trauer, 2006).

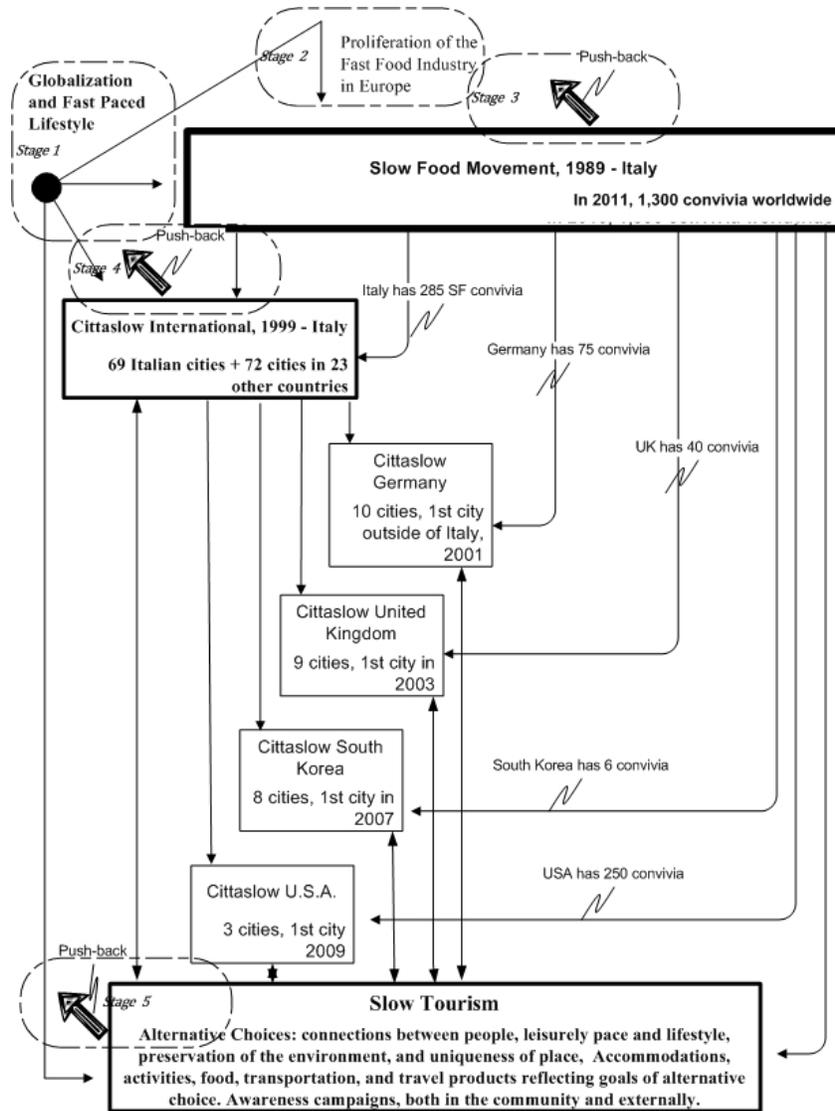
The authors of this study acknowledge that some researchers will consider ST as a form of SIT and others will disagree with this characterization based on their own construction and interpretation of the construct. This study takes the position that ST is a form of SIT for a growing number of tourists who consciously choose all or part of their travel activities; mode and speed of transportation; and destination(s) based on their socio-political values and consumption practices. Said another way, tourists who opt for this type of tourism are pushing back against the fast pace of life and the ills (i.e. practices that contribute to unhealthy and unsustainable ways of life) that have befallen society in its race to modernity.

The Model for the Development of Slow Tourism (see Figure 1.) that evolved from this study captures its evolutionary nature and its connection to the Slow Food Movement, Cittaslow, and peoples' growing need to escape from their fast paced, hectic lifestyle. The small connecting, one-way arrows represent the influential flow of ideology and praxis; larger, multi-dimensional arrows represent the socio-political push-back against specific ideology and praxis; the double pointed arrows represent a symbiotic relationship; and the six-pointed symbol represents potential.

Stage 1 of the model depicts modern society's fast paced life style and Stage 2, the proliferation of the fast food industry, is one of its byproducts. Stage 3 represents the Slow Food Movement's push-back against "fast food", both a real and symbolic icon of unhealthy modern living. Small, one-way connecting arrows show the development of SF convivia in Italy, Germany, the UK, South Korea, and the U.S. Stage 4 shows how Cittaslow evolved from the ideology and praxis of the Slow Food Movement while simultaneously having its own push-back agenda as an alternative to the fast paced and unsustainable life styles and practices of modern society. In the cases of Italy, Germany, the UK, and South Korea; the number of SF convivia was positively related to the number of cities that chose to undergo the process of becoming Cittaslow certified cities and the year of a country's first certified CittaSlow city was also

positively related to its number of certified cities. Double pointed arrows connect the Cittaslow cities in these countries to Slow Tourism and represent the symbiotic relationship between each Cittaslow city's guaranteed (i.e. certified) uniqueness of slowness and place through both ideology and praxis and special interest tourists who share a similar ideology and choose to engage in travel activities that match this particular type of socio-political ideology. The country level Cittaslow coordinating groups in these countries provide ST information and help to promote awareness of Cittaslow in their respective countries.

**Figure 1: Model for the Development of Slow Tourism**



A small, one-way connecting arrow from the Slow Food Movement to Slow Tourism represents the ideology and praxis of the movement that resonates with consumers and impacts not only what food (e.g. certified organic or fair trade or grown by a local farmer) they purchase but also how they choose to live their life (e.g. fast or slow paced) and ultimately what type of a

vacation they choose to take and what destinations will meet that criteria. Stage 5 shows Slow Tourism's push-back against the fast pace of modern life and the practices inherent in that lifestyle that contribute to unhealthy and unsustainable ways of life.

The six-pointed symbol connecting the U.S. Cittaslow with Slow Tourism represents potential for development. Although the U.S. currently has only three certified Cittaslow cities and a newly formed National Coordinating Group, Cittaslow USA, that launched its own website in late December of 2010 (CittaSlow USA, 2010), it is the country with the second largest number of Slow Food convivia. Is the U.S., an icon for all that is fast, ready for Cittaslow and will U.S. consumers embrace Slow Tourism? Mayer and Knox (2006a) found indicators to suggest that it is ready. They said that the U.S. is "becoming more open to the idea of slowness" (p. 2), has many farmers markets and options to buy local organic food, and is concerned about urban design that focuses on "place making and human interaction" (p. 3). The authors of this study also found enthusiastic community leaders as well as changing lifestyle trends that suggest that the U.S. is well poised to establish many unique Slow Cities and to develop Slow Tourism experiences for tourists.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Findings suggest that Slow Tourism is a type of special interest tourism that can occur in both rural and urban settings. It is an outgrowth of the socio-political ideology and consumption practices of the Slow Food Movement and has developed as an alternative to or push-back against the fast paced, unhealthy, and unsustainable lifestyle of modern society. In other words, ST is also a form of political consumption and a new form of sustainable tourism development that is based on the push-back from fast lifestyle, ideology and consumption practices and not as an alternative to mass tourism (e.g. the "soft/hard" dichotomy). In addition, this study identified three important aspects of Slow Tourism Development: (1) it is more fully developed in countries with high concentrations of CittaSlow designated cities such as Italy; (2) it develops in different ways in different countries and cities; and (3) it develops in stages.

Will Slow Tourism continue to evolve and attract a growing market share in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Choosing a ST type of holiday at a CittaSlow designated city would be similar to purchasing "certified" organic or fair trade products. Numerous Governmental Agricultural Bureaus/Departments as well as media sources report that the demand for organic, fair trade, and locally produced products are increasing. Yoeman, Brass, and McMahon-Beattie (2007) described this trend as consumers need for the "real or authentic" and noted that the "rise of the Slow Food movement has a direct correlation with people changing their diet across all social grades, indicating a growing health consciousness and also a desire to change their ordinary lives to accommodate something that is perceived as incorporating more goodness for their bodies" (p. 1135). ABTA (2011) reported that sustainability issues are vital to the travel industry and they developed a Travelife Sustainability System that can help travelers make informed choices when choosing ethically motivated holidays (pp. 40-41). They also reported that a third of senior executives in the tourism sector believe that over the next five years there will be an increase in the number of environmentally aware types of vacations (p. 41). Euromonitor International (2010, September 17) noted that consumers are reevaluating and changing their lifestyle and consumption practices in order to have a better quality of life as well as enriching experiences

and describe this as a change from conspicuous consumption to calculated consumption (p. 4). These trend patterns suggest that more tourists will consciously select their travel practices based on their socio-political ideology and that CittaSlow designated cities will be attractive destinations for these socially conscious special interest tourists.

## Implications

Through exploratory, critical interpretive inquiry and analysis, this study added to the limited knowledge about Slow Tourism by providing a composite definition and a model for the stages of its development. Changing lifestyle trends, value systems, and consumption practices suggest that a growing number of tourists will seek the type of travel experience that Slow Tourism provides. The Model for the Development of Slow Tourism that evolved from this study provides a conceptual framework that illuminates the socio-political development processes and socially constructed viewpoints embedded in Slow Tourism. The fast/slow dichotomy inherent in this model moves the analytical discourse from mass vs. alternative tourism (i.e. large numbers of people going to well know places vs. individuals going to lesser known places) to that of lifestyle choices, personal values, and socio-political consumption practices. Future research that would benefit from a framework that uses the fast/slow dichotomy illuminated by this study includes: studies about traveler choice with regards to types of trips, modes of transportation, destinations, and interaction with a host community and studies that examine the types of development that are occurring at a particular destination.

More research is need in this growing area of tourism. The potential for the rapid development of CittaSlow designated cities in the U.S. also suggests a need for an empirical study to determine if U.S. travel consumers are aware of the Slow Tourism travel option and if they would intentionally choose to visit a destination that is designated a ‘Slow City’?

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