

FESTINA LENTE: TRACKING THE SLOW MOVEMENT IN A GLOBALISED WORLD*

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Abstract: *In the era of “fast-everything”, more and more people are becoming attracted by the charm of the Slow movement, originating in Italy. In its famous book, “In Praise of Slowness”, the Canadian journalist Carl Honoré offered the most sensitive description of what this phenomenon is all about: “it is a cultural revolution against the notion that faster is always better. The Slow movement is about seeking to do everything at the right speed (what musicians call tempo giusto). It’s about quality over quantity in everything”¹. An integral part of the phenomenon, the Slow Food Movement has become more and popular in Romania too, promoting tradition and local production, sustainability and responsibility. In this paper we will outline the various popular concepts of the Slow movement, constructing an image of how do they relate to our daily life. We will present a balanced debate on the topic, relying on both for and against arguments. The approach will focus on a historical, comparative and critical analysis.*

Keywords: slow movement, slow food, slow city, slow education, globalization

The end of the Cold War and the fall of the Communist regimes in Europe have slowly attracted the rapid pace of globalization and adoption of foreign elements in people’s daily life. The *Slow* movement began its story with the Italian food writer and founder, Carlo Petrini, reacting to the opening of a McDonald's restaurant in Piazza di Spagna, Rome, in 1986. “Adding a large, yellow “M” sign would have aesthetically

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¹ Cass Dunn, *Why the ‘Slow’ Movement Is Gaining Momentum*, October 5, 2014, <https://thriveglobal.com/stories/why-the-slow-movement-is-gaining-momentum/>, accessed September 17, 2020.

„Anuarul Institutului de Istorie «George Barițiu» din Cluj-Napoca. Series Historica”, LIX, 2020, Supliment, 2, *Lucrările conferinței internaționale online „ROMANIA-ITALIA-EUROPA. Evoluții istorice - Dinamici culturale - Relații internaționale”, 16-18 septembrie 2020*, p. 567-575.

disfigured this cultural and historic place”², he said.

The *Slow* movement nevertheless operates with a wide range of specific concepts. Perhaps the most complex one is *slow living*, which is quite self-explanatory. Individual dimensions deriving from the movement are as follows: *slow food*, encouraging the production of regional, organically-grown food, “advocating historical food culture and defending old-fashioned food traditions”³; *slow fashion*, encompassing traits of "sustainable", "eco", "green", and "ethical" in its attempt “to maintain ecological, social and cultural diversity, (...) to meet human needs by co-creating garments and offering fashion with emotional significance”⁴, as we may find in *The Slow Fashion Movement* essay, by Maureen Dickson, Carlotta Cataldi and Crystal Grover.

In *The Ideology of Slow Food*, Luca Simonetti brought forth this type of gastronomy as being rooted in the “heritage of the counterculture and anti-consumerism of the Sixties and Seventies”⁵. He observed defining elements such as “the blunting of the senses and of the conscience”, the “transmission of stimuluses”, the “conditioning”⁶ that are fought against, defending what the “System” tries to erase, that is man's primitive sensoriality. Spontaneity, genuineness, authenticity do not only account for “a simple act of individual protest”, they are as well “a truly privileged political act”, “a revolutionary act”⁷, his argument goes. The man endowed with the capacity to distinguish and seeking ‘non-industrial’ food is displaying, in fact, a political operation to subvert the System and to “direct the future”⁸.

Then there is also *slow travel*, implying the idea of letting yourself guided by local residents and a strong engagement with the communities and also particular aspects of ecotourism. *Hidden Europe* magazine published in 2009 *A Manifesto for Slow Travel*, which states at some point that “slow travel is not about money or privilege. Slow travel is a state of mind. It is about having the courage not to go the way of the crowd”⁹. Therefore, some guiding principles include starting your journey

² Sarah van Gelder, *Italy's "Slow Food" Pioneer: How My Love for Food Ripened into a Life's Work*, Dec 21, 2013, <https://www.yesmagazine.org/issue/food-health/2013/12/21/an-interview-with-carlo-petrini/>, accessed September 17, 2020.

³International Movement For The Defense Of And The Right To Pleasure, *Slow Food Manifesto*, 1989, [<http://www.slowfood.com/about-us/key-documents/>], accessed September 17, 2020.

⁴Maureen Dickson, Carlotta Cataldi, Crystal Grover, *The Slow Fashion Movement*, 7 May 2011, [<https://www.notjustalabel.com/editorial/slow-fashion-movement>], accessed September 17, 2020.

⁵Luca Simonetti, *The Ideology of Slow Food*, June 2012, pp. 4-5, <http://italiansustainablefood.weebly.com/uploads/3/1/0/9/31091855/the-ideology-of-slow-food2.pdf>], accessed September 17, 2020.

⁶*Ibidem*.

⁷*Ibidem*.

⁸*Ibidem*.

⁹ Nicky Gardner, *A Manifesto for Slow Travel*, in “Hidden Europe”, Issue no. 25, March/April,

at home, preserving the connection with the surrounding landscape by avoiding airplanes, savoring café culture, enabling you to become part of the cityscape and not just simple observer, learning a few words and phrases in the language of the country or region you are visiting and also not forgetting to find something interesting that you can give to the locals on your return back home.

To continue, *slow media* basically refers to the promotion of the concept of *Prosumers*, i.e. “people who actively define what and how they want to consume and produce”¹⁰. This type of media is discursive and dialogic, listening being equally valued compared to speaking. It respects its users, cultural and local features of diversity, and also chooses to go social, “for instance a living author exchanging thoughts with his readers or a community interpreting a late musician’s work”¹¹.

A special trait of the *slow media* is that it is distributed through recommendations and not through advertising methods. Of course, this part of the *Slow* movement shares the principle of sustainability with some other ones, in terms of the raw materials, processes and working conditions accounting for the basis for media production. Orhan Emre Caglayan, in its doctoral thesis entitled *Screening Boredom-The History And Aesthetics Of Slow Cinema*, offers us an insight into this concept, which means a cinematography style with a calculated slow rhythm to the public while promoting a resistance to action and emotion, an absence of causality and a preference for realism¹².

Extremely interesting is also the concept of *slow education*, somehow a reactionary movement to actual course content requirements coming out of the nationalized curricula and that the teachers might not be able to cover properly during a single year of study. The kind of change it would bring about relates to free, democratic home schooling systems, with fewer pupils integrated in a class and having their motivation to solely “pass exams in order to get the grades to pass more exams to get you into university, where you will get a degree which will get you a job”¹³ reoriented.

2009, [<https://www.slowtraveleurope.eu/slow-travel-manifesto>], accessed September 17, 2020.

¹⁰Benedikt Kohler, David Sabria, Jorg Blumtritt, *The Slow Media Manifesto*, Stockdorf and Bonn, Jan 2, 2010, [<http://en.slow-media.net/manifesto>], accessed September 17, 2020.

¹¹*Ibidem*.

¹²Orhan Emre Caglayan, *SCREENING BOREDOM-THE HISTORY AND AESTHETICS OF SLOW CINEMA, A Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Film Studies*, University of Kent, February 2014, [<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/43155/1/Screening.Boredom.Caglayan.pdf>], accessed September 18, 2020.

¹³Peter Stanford, *Why pushy parents fail to make the grade in education. Tiger Mums hold children back, says the Eton master behind a 'slow' approach to learning*, in “The Daily Telegraph”, 25 October 2012,

[<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/9630771/Why-pushy-parents-fail-to-make-the-grade-in-education.html>], accessed September 18, 2020.

This kind of education supports “a much heavier dose of music, sport, arts and community-based projects”, as Mike Grenier, Eton house master and *slow education* advocate argues in a *Daily Telegraph* article published by Peter Stanford in 2012. As one might expect, while some parents would definitely support the prospect of home-schooling, there are also critical perspectives on the matter, some of them arguing that this system is “a great idea in principle, but a luxury in real terms”¹⁴.

Slow reading was firstly referred to by the famous nihilist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in the preface to *Daybreak*, dating from 1887. He opinionated in this book that “it is not for nothing that one has been a philologist, perhaps one is a philologist still, that is to say, a teacher of slow reading”¹⁵. Along with the *Slow* revolution, the concept has again being exploited as the intentional reduction in the speed of reading, for a better understanding and for pleasure's sake. But other specific characteristics are reading light materials or pieces of literature signed by local authors¹⁶.

Nahm Yoon-ho presents the definition for another concept, *slow architecture*, in *The value of slow architecture*. It actually means building structures in a gradual manner, considering not only the functional character of the work but also the surrounding factors, the need to be in a perfect harmony with the environment. The constructions are thus valuing historical and cultural features, using natural materials as much as possible¹⁷.

Cittaslow, *citta lente* or *slow city*, is probably one of the most famous among the *Slow* movement concepts worldwide. The same name is used to define an organization founded in Italy in 1999 and nowadays operating globally. The brilliant idea of Paolo Saturnini, ex Mayor of Greve in Chianti, Tuscany, saw a rapid development all over the country, Bra, Orvieto and Positano becoming proud models of *slow cities*. The main goal of this units is “a recovered time, where man is still protagonist of the slow and healthy succession of seasons, respectful of citizens' health, the authenticity of products and good food, rich of fascinating craft traditions of valuable works of art, squares, theaters, shops, cafes, restaurants, places of the spirit and unspoiled landscapes, characterized by spontaneity of religious rites, respect of traditions through the joy of a slow and quiet living”¹⁸.

¹⁴*Ibidem*.

¹⁵Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak-Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, 1887.

¹⁶K. J.-A. Badley, K. Badley, *Slow Reading: Reading along Lectio Lines*, in “Journal of Education and Christian Belief”, 2011, 15(1), pp. 29–42. doi: 10.1177/205699711101500104, accessed September 19, 2020.

¹⁷Yoon-ho, Nahm, *The value of slow architecture*, in “Korea JoongAng Daily”, June 21, 2004, [<http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=2431090>], accessed September 19, 2020.

¹⁸*About Cittaslow Organization*, [<http://www.cittaslow.org/section/association>], accessed

In the article for *Spiegel Magazine Slow Cities: Taking Life Easy in Urban Italy*, Stephan Orth discusses the medieval charm of Umbrian Orvieto, intercepted in a dialog with Stefano Cimicchi, mayor of this town from 1991 to 2004, and also president of the "Slow City" movement for several years. The author underlines that this type of cities struggle "to preserve the civic structures from medieval or Renaissance times, while at the same time incorporating the most recent scientific findings of ecology and sustainability. Even modern technology is allowed if it helps to meet the city's goals"¹⁹.

The book *Community Quality-of-Life Indicators: Best Cases III*, edited by Joseph Sirgy, Rhonda Phillips and Don Rahtz, also mentions "the town willingness and commitment to work towards slowing down the pace of life, increasing the uniqueness of the urban experience while at the same time being committed to sustainability"²⁰ as assessed by the Slow City charter and its indicators.

Sometimes it's the case when local people fight to let the authorities know the importance of adopting a slow way of living but here in the same book we are given the example of German *Slow Cities*, where membership was encouraged and carried out by a group of stakeholders bringing together mayors, community non-profit groups and business representatives. And without the involvement of the citizens, the *Slow* movement would definitely not become a reality of the day-to-day lifestyle.

Historically tracking the process of going slow in a fast world that started 30 years ago, Paul Knox and Heike Mayer mentioned in *Small Town Sustainability: Economic, Social, and Environmental Innovation* that in 2001 there were 28 *slow cities* certified, all of them Italian cities, mostly located in northern and central Italy. Seven years later, in 2008, the number had raised to 70, according to these authors. Australia, Austria, Belgium, Germany, The Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom added to the list²¹. Currently, there are more than 1,600 *convivia* all over the globe.

September 19, 2020.

¹⁹Stephan Orth, *Slow Cities: Taking Life Easy in Urban Italy*, in "Spiegel", October 5, 2007, [<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/slow-cities-taking-life-easy-in-urban-italy-a-509189.html>], accessed September 19, 2020.

²⁰Joseph Sirgy, Rhonda Phillips, Don Rahtz (eds.), *Community Quality-of-Life Indicators: Best Cases III*, Springer, 2009, p. 36, [<https://books.google.ro/books?id=UBmMR9EHhIC&pg=PA36&dq=criteria+for+a+slow+city&hl=ro&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewicwdB6r7NAhWC6xQKHQjPCSoQ6AEIJTAA#v=onepage&q=criteria%20for%20a%20slow%20city&f=false>], accessed September 19, 2020.

²¹Paul Knox, Heike Mayer, *Small Town Sustainability: Economic, Social, and Environmental Innovation*, Birkhauser, 2009, p.44, [<https://books.google.co.uk/books?>

The *Cittaslow list*, as updated in March 2016, drew our attention to a number of 213 cities, from 30 countries around the globe. Besides the ones previously mentioned, nowadays Canada, China, Colombia, Denmark, France, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Poland, South Africa, Taiwan, Turkey, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and the United States are members of the organization. As for March 2016, Italy was still leading the movement, with no less than 80 *slow cities*²².

Carlo Petrini, taking part at an event organized by the Adept Transylvania Foundation in Bucharest, remarked that hotels in the capital used to serve different specialties of foreign cuisine at the breakfast table and he draw the audience's attention that "Romanian people should eat more Romanian food, to buy products from local farmers. We all have the duty to strive for a local economy and not for a globalized one"²³. He appealed especially to the young generation, which he deemed as entitled "to preserve the Romanian biodiversity, the villages, the traditions, the local products, the Romanian identity as a whole"²⁴. Petrini urged for these, for awareness and value attribution to the products as "Romanians are sleeping on a gold mine"²⁵ that is unique in the world.

Despite this overall perception of the *slow food* movement in Romania, the Italian cultural revolution has arrived in our country, too. It has several *convivia*, located in Alba county, Bran-Moeciu, Brusturoasa-Palanca, Bucharest-Taste of Wallachia, Sibiu, Cluj, Turda, Iași, Maramureș, Țara Bârsei, Țara Făgărașului, Țara Silvaniei, Târnava Mare, Viscri, Saschiz, Târgu-Mureș and Dobrogea²⁶.

The region of Transylvania has many unique, resourceful places, where locals continue to manufacture artisanal food, at a slow pace. In a vibrant landscape and a relaxed atmosphere, one can escape the fast-tracking of the ordinary and experience the richness of living simple, in deep connection with the environment and the community.

Slow Food Târnava Mare (formerly SF Sighisoara) was the first Slow Food Convivium in Romania, established in 2005. ADEPT organization located in Saschiz

[id=ZzZO8wtdTb0C&pg=PA44&dq=cittaslow&hl=en&sa=X&ei=XyYXVLM0Lq2w7Ab064C4Bw&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=cittaslow&f=false](https://www.cittaslow.org/download/DocumentiUfficiali/CITTASLOW_LIST_MARCH_2016.pdf)], accessed September 19, 2020.

²²Cittaslow International Network, *CITTASLOW LIST*, updated March, 2016, [http://www.cittaslow.org/download/DocumentiUfficiali/CITTASLOW_LIST_MARCH_2016.pdf], accessed September 19, 2020.

²³Liliana Sime, *Președinte italian: Românilor, dormiți?! De ce în România nu se mănâncă românește?!*, March 15, 2016, [<http://www.agroinfo.ro/vegetal/presedinte-italian-romanilor-dormiti-de-ce-in-romania-nu-se-mananca-romaneste>], accessed September 20, 2020.

²⁴*Ibidem*.

²⁵*Ibidem*.

²⁶Slow Food International, *Convivia in Romania*, [<http://www.slowfood.com/nazioni-condotte/romania/>], September 19, 2020.

has supported this initiative. The visit paid by the Italian representatives of Slow Food in 2005 in Târnava Mare, encouraged by HRH Prince Charles, had as consequence the creation of Saxon Village Preserves, a Slow Food Project rejoicing marketing assistance to participate at the Internal Biennale Festival in Torino.

Slow Food Cluj Transilvania was founded in April 2009, convinced that local producers are an integral part of the regional and national cultural identity. Its leader is Lucian Cuibus, professor at the University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine.

Between 22th and 24th of March, 2019 the First Slow Food Conference in Romania took place in Sibiu. Local gastronomy and sustainable tourism took center stage.

The European Union supports financially the *Slow Food* Movement. The article *Slow Food Hosts the Informal Meeting of EU Ministers for Agriculture and Fisheries at the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pollenzo* stressed the important role of European institutions in shaping the future of agricultural products within the European Union and notes Petrini's remark that "Slow Food and the European Union can and are morally obliged to move towards this objective, first and foremost by supporting small-scale, traditional food production destined for the local market"²⁷.

The EU's upcoming Farm to Fork Strategy (F2F) that Commission President Ursula von der Leyen presented in her *Political Guidelines for the next EU Commission 2019-2024*, aims to make the entire food chain greener and more sustainable²⁸.

Nevertheless, Slow Food Europe review on the legislative proposal to reform the EU's Common Agricultural Policy has underlined that it has limited potential to support "a real transition towards sustainable food and farming policies"²⁹, because "the responsibility of deciding the future of European farming is delegated to Member States (MS), without a mechanism to be held responsible at supranational level and with questionable timings to prepare and implement the quality CAP Strategic

²⁷Slow Food, *Slow Food Hosts the Informal Meeting of EU Ministers for Agriculture and Fisheries at the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pollenzo*, 30 SEPTEMBER 2014, [<http://www.slowfood.com/slowlife/en/slow-food-ospita-consiglio-informale-dei-28-ministri-europei-dellagricoltura-pesca-pesca-luniversita-scienze-gastronomiche-pollenzo/>], accessed September 19, 2020.

²⁸ Ursula von der Leyen, *A Union that strives for more-My agenda for Europe, POLITICAL GUIDELINES FOR THE NEXT EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2019-2024*, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/political-guidelines-next-commission_en.pdf, accessed September 18, 2020.

²⁹ *Slow Food's CAP review Our recommendations for a Common Agricultural Policy that is good for people and planet*, 28 June 2018, p. 1, <https://n4v5s9s7.stackpathcdn.com/slowlife/wp-content/uploads/Slow-Food-CAP-Review.pdf>, accessed September 21, 2020.

Plans”³⁰.

The controversies have not surpassed the *slow food* revolution, as it frequently happens with activist movements. There are articles, such as *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About the Slow Food Movement*, by Debra Ronca, that present also the other side of the coin, as depicted by the critics. They mostly referred to the elitist character of the initiative, since ”not everyone can afford to buy organic, locally grown food. (...) Slow Food could potentially lead to deforestation, as we would need more farmland to produce more food”³¹.

The response coming from the proponents of the movement is that we only have ”to reprioritize our feelings about food”³², that is to value a healthy lifestyle more than expensive houses or garments. The American environmental activist, writer and farmer Wendell Berry, quoted in the *Wall Street Journal* article *The Challenges of Eating 'Slow'* with the occasion of 2008 Slow Food festival in San Francisco, believes that describing pleasure-as related to the movement-is done in a limited perspective. Treating pleasure as a specialty leaves the impression of ”<<a form of idleness>>”, which leaves out the possibility that good work could also be pleasurable”³³. Limiting the ideas to ”tasteful consumption” makes the movement ”limited in its growth”³⁴.

Carlo Petrini remarked the progress made by the United States, while remembering that on its first visit in the early 1990s, he was told his theories and beliefs would never find a fruitful ground to become reality there.

In *The Ideology of Slow Food*, Luca Simonetti recalled another critique being associated with ”slow-eaters” that they used to be suspected as a band of gluttons. Additionally, he put forward again the counterargument that slow food products are actually ”luxury goods”, even if consumers of such, willingly or not, do not consider themselves as being ”a minority”, ”a niche”. Moreover, he offered another critical point, i.e. ”if one claims that SF knows the secret formula for protecting biodiversity, solving the problem of world hunger, and even for creating a new sustainable growth, then there is really a danger that <<the best for the few is the enemy of the good for the many>>”³⁵.

To conclude, despite the fact that globalization has the unquestionable benefit of connecting people and facilitating access to many aspects of our daily life, we strongly

³⁰*Ibidem*, p. 5.

³¹Debra Ronca, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About the Slow Food Movement*, August 11, 2009, [<http://recipes.howstuffworks.com/slow-food-movement.htm>], accessed September 20, 2020.

³²*Ibidem*.

³³Bobby White, *The Challenges of Eating 'Slow'*, in “The White Street Journal”, September 2, 2008, [<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB122022613854086965>], accessed September 20, 2020.

³⁴*Ibidem*.

³⁵Luca Simonetti, *loc. cit.*, p. 25.

believe that the *Slow movement* has all the reasons to continue be valued worldwide, as we all need to distinguish between the things that has to be done hastily and those that deserve more attention. We all need balance. The local is as important as the global. The preservation of the local spirit and tradition is an integral part of our local, regional and national identity.

Slow Food is the most popular concept of the Slow Movement. It has the advantages of being locally grown and produced, at a slow and natural pace, and not taken from faraway places. We consider that everyone should afford adopting this lifestyle, as envisioned in the Slow Food International philosophy that is “good, clean and fair”³⁶ food, where “fair” means “accessible prices for consumers and fair conditions and pay for producers”³⁷. *Slow Food* might not have an revolutionary impact in the short term but it can definitely encourage us all to start locally and bring our individual input to a much broader, long-term mission for humanity, “to be the change we wish to see in the world”, in Mahatma Gandhi’s words.

³⁶ Slow Food, *Our philosophy*, <https://www.slowfood.com/about-us/our-philosophy/>, accessed September 21, 2020.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

