



Is It Possible to Really Slow Down in Our Everyday Lives? The New Challenges of the Slow Movement and Why Has the Slow Food Movement Approach Been Exceeded?

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Abstract. The unknown, yet increasing negative effects of the digital era, the wishes and dreams sold by the media and big corporations, the instant solutions provided by the banks and the psychology behind it, together with our lack of self-awareness and an unwillingness to take responsibility for our own decisions, lead us to a rat-race-like, consumerism-based life, the maintenance of which is so energy-consuming and stressful that we can hardly believe there is a slow way out of it. The author, leader of the Slow Budapest movement, got on a mission to find the way to a successful Slow Change.

Keywords: Slow Movement, slow change, awareness, self-motivation, ability to change, Slow Budapest

'We are in a hurry because we don't want to miss out on the important things. Or do we miss out on the important things because we hurry?'

The (re)definition of 'being slow' in our day and age, and the complexity of the problem of 'being fast'

Thanks to the already existing word 'slow' with all of its fixed negative connotations,² one of the first challenges according to the slow movement is the adaptation and thus redefinition of the notion: being slow. A slowdown usually equates with something decreasing, diminishing, decelerating, or declining.³ It

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2 The Free Dictionary (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/slow>, last visit on 23 July 2015).

3 Oxford Dictionaries (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/slowdown>, last

does so in economic terms too; so, whenever we hear this at a company meeting or on the news, it does not mean too much good is coming, does it? Even when it comes to describing someone and we use the word ‘slow,’ that person is actually being called lazy or less brighter or intellectually challenged.⁴

No wonder that all of the committed slow organizations, talkers, or service providers spend quite a lot of effort and time on explaining why slowing down does not mean anything bad that we (people, companies, society) need to fear. *The task is not smaller than changing the pervading viewpoint that fast is success and slow is failure.*

Here is a statement from Cecile Andrews (2006, 9) that might make you wonder about challenging your traditional point of view:

Fast and Slow do more than just describe a rate of change. They are shorthand for ways of being, or philosophies of life. Fast is busy, controlling, aggressive, hurried, analytical, stressed, superficial, impatient, active, quantity-over-quality. Slow is the opposite: calm, careful, receptive, still, intuitive, unhurried, patient, reflective, quality-over-quantity. It is about making real and meaningful connections – with people, culture, work, food, everything.

What we can also see here is the confirmation of the coexistence of slow and fast: ‘Slow’ has always been defined as the opposite of ‘Fast’ and vice versa – these two notions do not exist without each other. That might be the reason why Carl Honoré (2005, 15) says that slowing down is rather about finding a balance between the two opposites: ‘Be fast when it makes sense to be fast, and be slow when slowness is called for’.

And here lies the second challenge of the slow movement: it is actually really hard to decide wisely what is good or bad for us, what is necessary or enough and when. We live in a society where we will not ever be told not to consume more. We will not ever be reassured that as people we are enough. Think about the messages coming from the media or the advertisement campaigns run by big corporations. We are constantly bombed with unmissable offers; so, we are likely to think it is okay (not even okay but a must) to buy a house, the most expensive cell phone or laptop and one or two cars... things we actually cannot afford. No problem, we take on loans, a common activity of our society, which is clearly a sign that means we over-consume big time.

And if this is not enough there is that fact too that we live in the world of limitless possibilities thanks to the digital shift that enables us to gather information, learn a foreign language, set up a business, or sign up to a course anytime and anywhere in the blink of an eye. As promising and rewarding this situation is, it is not hard to start thinking that we are missing out on something.

visit on 23 July 2015).

4 Cambridge Dictionaries (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/slow>, last visit on 23 July 2015).

The FOMO (fear of missing out)⁵ is an existing source of stress nowadays and an important accelerator in the developed and developing world.

You might be one of the increasing number of people (now 54%; in 2050, it is projected to be 66%) living in big cities.⁶ Among the several challenges that are put on the local governments by this phenomenon, there is the individual problem of it too: people get de-attached from nature; for them, it must be a pre-planned programme to go out to the trees and connect to the nature. We miss the change of seasons in our climate-controlled flats, offices, and cars, and we are exposed to light and noise pollution, which affect the quality of our sleep. Living in a big city does not provide us with the rest that is essential for allowing us to stop, reflect, and process. This altered lifestyle and the new kinds of jobs (like web engineering, application development, administration... that have outrageously increased in the fast world) put us in our heads – we cannot touch anything anymore, the results of our jobs are not tangible. This leads to the lack of a sense of achievement and decreased production of happiness hormones. No wonder we start to look for it in other ways, like by spending more money and piling up stuff or doing endurance sports, i.e. further accelerating our lives.

The unknown, yet increasing negative effects of the digital era, the wishes and dreams sold by the media and big corporations, the instant solutions provided by the banks and the psychology behind it, together with our lack of self-awareness and an unwillingness to take responsibility for our own decisions, lead us to a rat-race-like, consumerism-based life, the maintenance of which is so energy-consuming and stressful that we can hardly believe there is a slow way out of it.

How can we find the slow way? The building of the Slow Movement.

The foundations of the Slow Movement were laid down in an activist approach, which meant and still means questioning the government, defining principles, organizing group events for the affected actors, sharing information, creating and educating communities all over the world, and co-operation with governmental and EU institutions. Ever since, they have been forming representative groups in the interest of the people, and practising pressure on the ones at the top of the food chain. Just like a traditional NGO would do.

This is how the Slow Food Movement has been building itself since 1986, when a gastroblogger, Carlo Petrini (now the head of the Slow Food Movement), demonstrated against the opening of a McDonald's at the Spanish Steps in Rome.

5 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fear_of_missing_out (last visit on 23 July 2015.).

6 <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/news/population/world-urbanization-prospects-2014.html> (last visit on 23 July 2015).

At this time, the movement's focus was only on food, with the initial aim of defending regional traditions, good food, gastronomic pleasure and a slow pace of life, thus its name: a movement against fast food.⁷

Here is the simple advice that they have been giving to people and communities:

Go Slow in your life: 1) Buy whole ingredients. Cook them. Eat them. 2) Avoid processed stuff with long ingredient lists. Eat real food. 3) Grow some of your own food. Even if just on your windowsill. 4) Whenever possible, know the story behind the food you buy. 5) Buy local food; find out what is in season!

Go Slow in your community: 1) Cook and eat with others – not just family and friends. Bring new people and perspectives to the table. 2) Join a community garden and grow food with others. 3) Connect with your local Slow Food chapter. 4) Shake the hand that feeds you. Meet the people who grow your food. Shop at a farmers' market, visit a farm or buy shares from a farm that offers a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programme. 5) Learn about your local or regional food history and cultural dishes.⁸

With a lot of effort, expertise, and commitment put into it, now the Slow Food Movement consists of more than 1,500 *conviva* (which are the local representative forces) in more than 150 countries involving millions of people, who either support (1 million) or pay membership fees (100,000) to the leading organization in Bra, Italy.⁹ Together they are working on thousands of projects and undertake such topics as: animal welfare, bees, family farming, food waste, GMOs, indigenous Terra Madre Network, land grabbing, slow meat, slow cheese, slow Europe, slow fish, or slow wine.¹⁰

With Petrini at the top, they run a university¹¹ where you can earn an undergraduate or master's degree in Gastronomic Sciences, Food and Culture Communications, the Slow Art of Italian Cuisine and Italian Wine, at a fee of 12,500–23,200 euros. He also governs a publishing company, Slow Food Editore,¹² and an event organizer company, Slow Food Promozione,¹³ that organizes the famous Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre gatherings every second year. They reinvest all income into the building of the Slow Food Movement. Petrini also helped to launch the Slow Cities (in Italian: Cittaslow) movement in 1999.¹⁴

The designation 'Slow City' will become the mark of quality for smaller communities (only those with less than 50,000 residents may apply). Slow Cities are

7 Slow Budapest, 2015. 07.23. <http://slowbudapest.com/about-slow-budapest/> (last visit on 23 July 2015).

8 <http://www.slowfood.com/international/27/be-a-coproducer>.

9 Slow Food (<http://www.slowfood.com>, last visit on 23 July 2015).

10 Slow Food (<http://www.slowfood.com>, last visit on 24 July 2015).

11 University of Gastronomic Science: <http://www.unisg.it/en/> (last visit on 23 July 2015).

12 <http://www.slowfood.com/international/food-for-thought/publications/79792/slow-food-editore/q=123> (last visit on 23 July 2015).

13 <http://www.slowfood.com/international/6/faqs> (last visit on 23 July 2015).

14 <http://www.cittaslow.org/section/association> (last visit on 23 July 2015).

not state capitals or the seat of regional governments, but they are strong communities that have made the choice to improve the quality of life for their inhabitants.¹⁵

The Cittaslow movement relies on the actual towns and their governing board. A town can be accepted as a slow city if it 'scores at least 50 percent in a self-assessment process against the set of Cittaslow goals (= accepting the guidelines of Slow Food and working to improve conviviality and conserving the local environment), and then applies for admission to the appropriate Cittaslow national network. An annual membership fee of 600 euro is payable by towns.'¹⁶ There are now 199 cities from 30 countries in the network,¹⁷ where they implement programmes such as recycling projects, Presidia (= to sustain quality production at risk of extinction, protect unique regions and ecosystems, recover traditional processing methods, safeguard native breeds and local plant varieties.),¹⁸ after-school programmes, and information for tourists that helps them have a real "local's" experience.¹⁹

So, now we know better what is good and bad for us thanks to these global movements. But a question still remains: how can we implement a good habit into our own lives when the children have to be taken care of, when we cannot quit our demanding jobs because of money issues, when we live in a big city surrounded by supermarkets?

A simple advice about going to the farmers' market or spending more time in the nature will not be enough.

Self-motivation and the ability to change: two important elements in creating the slow life. And why have the global slow movement's challenges exceeded the Slow Food and Cittaslow approach and practice?

The Slow Food and Cittaslow movement initiated the global slow movement and made it possible to slow down in gastronomy and (to a lesser extent) small-town living. But thanks to the new challenges of the fast world, they do not necessarily answer its challenges anymore. There are new topics to be taken care of as well as another important thing, i.e. the Food and Cities approach is rather about macro-changes on a society level, and they have got extremely good results

15 <http://www.cittaslow.org/section/association/philosophy> (last visit on 23 July 2015).

16 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cittaslow> (last visit on 23 July 2015).

17 http://www.cittaslow.org/download/DocumentiUfficiali/CITTASLOW_LIST_July_2015.pdf (last visit on 23 July 2015).

18 <http://www.fondazioneSlowFood.com/en/what-we-do/slow-food-presidia/> (last visit on 23 July 2015).

19 <http://www.cittaslow.org/section/association/how-to-become> (last visit on 23 July 2015).

there, but they have got limitations with regards to supporting the slowdown of the individual's actual pace of life.

For instance, the Slow Food organization helps the producers develop and finance themselves, it helps the consumers, chefs, and the world of gastronomy acquire more knowledge on healthy eating and access good quality food in more and more places in the world. It helps everyone become more conscious of what kind of food they should produce, eat, and pay for. They participate in breeding the best quality of seeds and protecting rare species. They bring attention to the actual value of the food that one eats, the fair compensation of the farmers, and the individual responsibility of the consumer. They are mission-oriented, and for this they built a global organization with connections and dialogues on every level of the food chain. And it is a very great thing! No wonder Carlo Petrini has been honoured with so many prizes and titles, including the '50 people who could save the planet' by *The Guardian*.²⁰

The Slow Food and Cittaslow movement, however, do not give an answer for the individual struggling in the world of digital frenzy and in a big city, which could actually be the root cause of choosing fast food over seasonal and local products or cooking too. These two base movements function well under relaxed conditions and (actually together with the Slow Design²¹ or any other approaches²² that stop on the same level too) were born to create sustainable possibilities and to share knowledge, but they do not provide advice on how and why the actual change happens in our own everyday lives. They still keep people on a certain level of inertia, i.e. they do not deal with the emotional and psychological causes of our hurried lifestyle and do not help to solve the lack of the ability to change our habits, reach out for the better, set up a plan, and realize it.

The question of slowing down is still out there: how can we slow down our own over-hurried lives when we do not operate under ideal conditions and a change is necessary?

The slow change

In the past 3 years since I launched Slow Budapest,²³ I have been trying out different tips and practices and continuously discovering the solutions and answers provided by other actors in the global slow movement. In 2012, I started my NGO

20 <http://www.slowfood.com/international/7/history> (last visit on 23 July 2015).

21 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slow_design (last visit on 23 July 2015).

22 <http://www.slowlivingtoday.com>, <http://www.slowmagazine.com.au> (last visit on 23 July 2015).

23 Slow Budapest is a team of 15 volunteers including communicators, foodies, coaches, photographers, graphic designers, and travellers. The movement has 3 years of operation and more than 15 slow events, more than 40 contributing partners, more than 10,000 Facebook likes,

with the aim of slowing myself down. At that time, I was leading a very stressed-out life in the Hungarian capital, Budapest, and I did not feel happy. I knew that a lot of things were not right in my life and that a change was necessary – but I did not know which way to start. Then I randomly bumped into an article written about the slow movement, and I suddenly realized that my life was too hurried to be enjoyable and that I was on a wrong track, but until then I had not even had enough time to find this out. I felt that slowing down could be a simple answer to my problems. I felt it would be simple because nobody else or no money seemed necessary to slow myself down – the success was upon me. At the beginning of my slow change, the principles and the topics undertaken by the slow movement helped me on my way: I knew that a fast lifestyle affects our way of eating (= Slow Food Movement) and commuting (= cittaslow movement), our holidays (= slow travel), our relationships with nature and other people, our reading and parenting habits (= low reading and slow parenting movement) and usage of objects (= slow design), our way of working (= slow work movement), even our e-mailing habits (= slow e-mail movement). So, I started to change my habits in these areas and without knowing it I started on my journey about self-awareness.

In the following years, I managed to change the way I eat and live in the big city: I switched from fast food to farmers' food and cooking, and from public transport and taxis to cycling and walking. I started to switch off and I de-cluttered my life, I gave a lot of speeches, including two TED talks about the movement and my experiences; I was building my organization and got 40 volunteers by my side, with whom we organized several events and communication projects, such as the world's first Slow Week²⁴ or Budapest's first Farmers' Market Map,²⁵ to help spread the goodness of Slow in Hungary. I quit my old, stressful job, took up yoga and meditation, and swapped back to a dumb phone.

But as good as it was going for me I could see a lot of people around me still struggling in their fast lives despite our work at Slow Budapest. I got interested in the psychology of change and the functioning of the mind and the reason why it is so hard to pay attention to ourselves and bring goodness into our lives. With my team, and especially with Györgyi Sudár,²⁶ a life coach, art therapist, and psychology student, we got on a mission to find the answers. Together with her we elaborated a long-term slowdown programme based on positive psychology, coaching methodology, and the slow philosophy.

and more than 50 media appearances including in Marie Claire, The Economist Intelligent Life, We Love Budapest, etc. We edit the Slow Budapest newsletter: the monthly summary of our news (in Hungarian); we have Facebook, Pinterest, and Instagram pages. More details at: <http://slowbudapest.com/about-slow-budapest/>

24 <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.608605855830909.1073741826.466006833424146&type=3> (last visit on 23 July 2015).

25 <http://slowbudapest.com/termeloi-piacok-budapesten/> (last visit on 23 July 2015).

26 <http://sudartcoaching.com> (last visit on 23 July 2015).

We like to think about ‘being slow’ as a balanced way of living. For us, it means to take a slower pace in every area of our lives. To do fewer things and to do them well. It is not about living at a slow speed; rather, it is a mindset, a way of life where quality is more important than quantity. It allows us to arrive back at our natural pace, to connect, and feel more at peace.²⁷ Slowing down does not mean travelling back in time, neither it is about setting up our own eco-farm in the middle of nowhere, nor about escaping to backpack in South America for a year. A lot of us can not or do not want to make such changes. For example, if you live in a big city and have got a demanding job that you can not quit because of money issues, you should not and could not start changing your life by giving up everything. In the search for balance, one thing is really essential: try to avoid extremities that cause more stress. When you would like to de-clutter your life and mind, it is not helpful to maintain the same attitude from where you want to escape. So, the first step towards ‘being slow’ is to try to avoid extremities and the second is to try to shift from our perfectionist attitude to a more patient and understanding one.

It is recommended to map the problem and our current situation as well as to be aware of the outer world’s (not just the media’s but even our family’s too) contradictory expectations and accelerating messages, like working overtime is the way to success in our career.

We then must put effort and time into getting to know ourselves. And I think this is by far the biggest challenge. As Henry T. Ford says: ‘Thinking is the hardest work there is, which is the probable reason why so few engage in it’ (Honoré 2013).

Building self-awareness is so essential in our opinion that our long-term slowdown programme revolves around it. With the question of a slow change, there comes a lot of issues, wishes, and beliefs hidden deep inside ourselves. Why can we not be patient? Why can we not take that step? Why do we schedule up our days? Why do we not respect our body and mind and give them a rest? Why do we blame others for our situation? Why do we always live in the past or in the future? Why do we always procrastinate? Why can we not switch off? What are our strong points and motivations that can help us in a slow change? What are the pitfalls that we need to watch out for? What can be our real goals with slowing down?

With Slow Budapest, we have put ourselves on a mission to find these answers and help the change really happen. We are at the beginning of the journey and we will surely learn a lot about the slow change in the coming years. One thing is for sure: in this superficial world where everyone is just talking instead of doing, where products come out without being tested, where there is no time for development and perfecting, it is still possible to live slowly in a successful

27 A quote from my article at: www.yogiapproved.com/life-2/the-slow-movement/ (last visit on 23 July 2015).

way. But it requires time, patience, and knowledge – things that we actually miss in our fast lives.

For now, I would recommend these: 1) Be honest with yourself and acknowledge that you do not feel well and that a change is necessary. This can be hard, but it is essential for the change. The revelation will give you motivation that will trigger you in the following steps. 2) Get to know the problem. Collect knowledge, check out the slow websites and resources! By reading them, you will get to know the conditions surrounding you: it is not necessarily your fault that you are speeding up, you know? So, do not wind yourself up! 3) Stop, and make time for the change. Let go of that belief that if you say no to things and opportunities you would be left behind. 4) Prepare! We are likely to jump this step, but, hey, we are about slow down; so, give time for the preparation! On preparation I mean, for example, finding new habits instead of the ones to give up. Write a list about what you like, what you do not like, and what you would like in life. 5) Be open to changes, trust in the unknown and the belief that everything will work out well. Slowing down can be seen as a passive activity, but it actually requires stamina and courage. This step can be helped by doing yoga and meditation. 6) At the beginning of forming a new habit, let yourself fall into the situation and stay there, even if you feel a bit scared of it. Give it a chance! 7) Search for groups and friends who are supportive in this case. Search for professional programmes that can enhance your own journey. They will help you be ready for the pitfalls too. Because there will be pitfalls for sure! 8) Reflect! Sometimes new situations and challenges can come up that make us forget about the real goals. It is important to be alert. 9) Finally, do not forget to be happy about the little joys and successes.

You will go through different phases, i.e.: 1) The level of awareness: when you learn about yourself and the environment surrounding you. 2) The survival with ad-hoc slowdowns: you will know you will want to slow down and you will have slow moments or days, weekends, but the theory will still be hard to implement into practice on the long term. 3) Be slow in your free time but fast at work or in other areas of your life: you have changed your free time (where you are the boss), but in the other areas of your life, where you have to adopt to certain expectations, especially at work, it will still be a challenge to stop. 4) Balanced and hurried periods follow each other in your life: you can manage your slow life in a successful way and you can feel the good effects of change, but the new situations (e.g. having a child or changing jobs) will still be a challenge. 5) Being slow every day: here, slowing down is the goal, not the tool. You subordinate your decisions to it. You might change your profession, move out of your city, make new friends, and create your own community.

There will surely come feelings of doubt, fear, anger, courage, success, love, and peace with this. And you will eventually find out which stage you want to get at and how much it is worth for you to change. We are not the same and we

are not at the same stage of our lives. So, one thing is for sure: even the most professional programmes cannot help you if you economize on making your own decisions. Develop self-awareness and reflect on what is happening to you and on how you feel – that is the most important element of a slow change.

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2013. *The Slow Fix: Solve Problems, Work Smarter, and Live Better in a World Addicted to Speed*. Toronto: Knopf Canada.

Resources on Slow Budapest

- Nelli Krajcsó's TED talk: Slowness, the Way to Completeness: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvhHOUpLxr0>.
- Nelli Krajcsó's article on the slow movement: Why Is It Time to Take a Slower Pace? <http://www.yogiapproved.com/life-2/the-slow-movement/>.
- On Slow Budapest: <http://slowbudapest.com/about-slow-budapest/>.