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Cittaslow

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Cittaslow is an international network of towns united by their commitment to preserve local identity, improve quality of life, and promote sustainable development. The project was launched in Italy in 1999 and has expanded ever since, especially in Europe. The member towns adopt policies consistent with the organization's philosophy, share ideas and experience with other members, and organize activities involving the local population. Research suggests that the project brings economic, social, and environmental benefits to member towns. However, the extent to which these benefits can be achieved in towns in developing countries is open to debate.

Concept

Cittaslow originated from the Slow Food movement, launched by Carlo Petrini in 1986 in Italy to promote local gastronomic traditions and sustainable agriculture. The Slow Food organization was founded in 1989 and has inspired other movements with the same philosophical approach of slowing down other aspects of life. Cittaslow is one of these movements, applying the "slow philosophy" to urban planning. The project's name is a compound of the Italian word *città* (city) and the English word *slow*, and its symbol is a snail carrying a town on its shell. The movement was founded in 1999 by Paolo Saturnini, the mayor of the Italian town of Greve-in-Chianti, with the support of Petrini and the mayors of three other towns (Orvieto, Bra, and Positano).

The base of the Cittaslow philosophy is the recognition that economic and cultural globalization is leading to the homogenization of urban areas around the world. Towns and small cities face increased pressures to integrate in the global economic system and to be competitive, forcing governments to adopt policies to increase economic efficiency, sometimes at the expense of social and environmental considerations. The need to attract large multinational businesses contributes to the diffusion of a standardized culture that threatens the identity of each town. In the face of these pressures, there is an urgent need to preserve the "sense of place" and to enhance the factors that make towns distinctive and that are a fundamental part of their history and culture.

According to the Cittaslow philosophy, the ultimate aim of urban policies should be the improvement of people's well-being and quality of life. A successful town is one that provides conditions for local residents and visitors to eat healthy food, exercise, engage in leisure activities, participate in the local culture, and build meaningful social relationships.

The improvement of quality of life can only be achieved through sustainable development. Local governments should support the production and distribution of products that are unique to the locality. This involves, for example, the creation of networks of local shops, the development of links between shops and customers, the renovation of the town's commercial areas, and the organization of activities to encourage local residents to learn skills related to local food and crafts. The environment is seen as a component of the town's sense of place, contributing to the well-being of local people. As such, governments should strive to preserve natural areas and public green spaces and to control polluting activities. The synergy between economic and environmental aspects can be explored by promoting changes in patterns of production and consumption, for example, supporting the use of local products for cooking and the development of organic agriculture and community gardens.

The promotion of nonmotorized modes of travel is seen as a priority, as they contribute to people's health and well-being and have low environmental impact. Urban planning and

design should give special attention to the needs of pedestrians and cyclists and to places' accessibility to children, older people, and individuals with disabilities or restricted mobility. Urban streets should be considered as places for relaxation and social interaction, instead of mere links connecting other places. This is especially the case for areas with historical and cultural interest. The revitalization of local streets requires the control of motorized traffic and the improvement of the public realm. Sensory aspects are particularly important. The reduction of visual pollution can be achieved by removing street clutter and controlling commercial signs. The regulation of noise also becomes necessary, not only in town centers but also in areas where people live and work.

Hospitality is another pillar of the Cittaslow philosophy. The goal of improving the attractiveness of a town for tourists is partly achieved as a positive side effect of implementing policies to improve the quality of life for residents. In addition, towns should aim at improving the services especially directed to visitors. However, the development of tourism should take into account the quality of services a town provides, rather than only the quantity or the diversity of those services.

Organization

As of October 2014, the organization had 191 member towns in 29 countries. The large majority of these towns (87%) are in Europe, with 39% in Italy alone. However, there are also members in Australia, Canada, China, Japan, New Zealand, South Africa, South Korea, Taiwan, and the United States. The network is growing rapidly: 44 new members joined Cittaslow from June 2011 to October 2014. The organization is supported by an international coordinating committee, responsible for the definition of goals and strategies, and by a multidisciplinary scientific committee, which reports scientific information of relevance to the aims of the project.

The network operates at the level of local governments. Towns wishing to become members of the network need to have fewer than 50,000 inhabitants. However, larger towns and other administrative areas, such as regions, can be "Cittaslow supporters." A third type of membership is "friend of Cittaslow," open to organizations other than governments. Member towns also need to meet a series of criteria regarding their commitment for implementing policies addressing the goals of the network in six areas: environment, infrastructure, urban fabric, local produce and products, hospitality and community, and Cittaslow awareness. The assessment of the membership criteria is done by the town itself, but needs to be approved by the international coordinating committee and is subject to a periodic review.

The most visible aspects of the project are the events organized in the member towns. Many of these events are linked to the Slow Food movement and aim at promoting local gastronomy and providing opportunities for socializing. Other common activities include guided tours to local attractions, courses and workshops about local subjects, and events directed at specific groups such as children or older adults.

An important component of the project is sharing knowledge among members and disseminating information about the Cittaslow philosophy. The project has a central website and national websites in 10 countries, which document the progress in the implementation of policies and advertise and report the activities organized in each town. In addition, local governments also commit to raising awareness about the project in their local area.

Impacts

While the development of policies and the organization of events are done at the level of each town, membership in the Cittaslow network brings added value, as it helps to brand the towns and their products and services, which become associated with the image of quality constructed by the network. The benefits increase as the network expands around the world and the project's ideas and their symbols become more well known. The emphasis of the project on improving the conditions of economic activities in which the town has a competitive advantage also stimulates the creation of new local business and contributes to the vitality of existing businesses. However, there are also concerns that the reliance on small local businesses may limit employment and economic growth.

The social and environmental impacts tend to be positive. The project may increase the degree of participation of the local community in the political process, as it disseminates ideas that are simultaneously relevant to local governance and to wider social change, and because local communities are involved in or lead many of the activities. The attention given to sustainable development and quality of life also contributes to the improvement of the natural and built environment.

Despite the growth of the network and the evidence about benefits it brings, the Cittaslow project remains relatively unknown. It has been pointed out that only a minority of local residents are usually involved in the project's events and that many people are not even aware that they are living in a Cittaslow town. The network also has no members from developing countries. It is unclear how the project's philosophy can be applied to towns in these countries, where economic growth and the provision of basic services are still the main policy concerns.

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See also [Culinary Tourism](#); [Slow Tourism](#); [Slow Travel](#); [Sociocultural Issues Related to Tourism](#); [Sustainable Development](#)

Further Readings

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Websites

Cittaslow: www.cittaslow.org

Slow Food: www.slowfood.com

- town

- slow food
- sustainable development
- tourism
- slow food movement
- quality of life
- networking

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