

Sensory global towns: an experiential approach to the growth of the Slow City movement

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Abstract. This paper explores, through the example of the Slow City (Cittaslow) movement, how an analytical focus on the experiential dimensions of urban experience adds new layers of knowledge to our understandings of how and why town leaders engage with urban frameworks and principles. The global growth of the Italian-based Cittaslow movement has been explained both as part of a deceleration narrative and as a transferable urban development framework. We show how an approach that takes the experiential as its analytical starting point offers an alternative interpretation of the movement's contemporary growing global membership. Cittaslow aims to ensure quality of life in its towns and seeks to create an environmentally sustainable and pleasurable future. Drawing on research in Spanish Cittaslow towns, we examine the terms upon which town leaders engage with the movement's ideas and framework. We propose that Cittaslow is appealing to town leaders because it enables them not only to identify the qualities of their towns against its membership criteria, but also to invest in its framework normally unspoken, embodied, sensory, and tacit dimensions of their towns. A focus on the experiential, we suggest, is key to understanding the movement's appeal to town leaders across diverse cultural and national contexts.

Keywords: Cittaslow, towns, sensory anthropology, ethnography, urban planning, sustainability, urban social movements

Lekeitio (figure 1) is a small town nestled in the coastline of the Basque country about one hour's drive, along winding roads, from the city of Bilbao. When in 2006 some representatives of the town council encountered the International Cittaslow movement through a magazine article, they saw their own town mirrored in what Cittaslow stood for. Nekane Irusta, the town's officer for economic development (responsible for the tourist offices, grants, and businesses, amongst other things), told us that they became interested in joining Cittaslow because there was such a good fit between the seven areas of urban development the movement focuses on and, as she put it, with "*what we are*". She stressed that "anyone can do sustainable urbanism", yet in Lekeitio there was something more to it. We interviewed Nekane, sipping a late-morning coffee outside one of the local bars that faces onto the small harbour from which, she told us, the fishermen still sail out every morning (figure 2). When the boats return, the fishing families sell their catch right opposite where we were sitting. There are "practically no intermediaries" and the fish is fresh; you do not eat frozen fish in Lekeitio.

The Cittaslow movement was established in 1999 and has since expanded to have, by April 2011, 142 member towns in twenty-four countries, including South Korea, the United



Figure 1. [In colour online.] The town of Lekeitio, in the Basque Country (Northern Spain), looks out to the sea. Early every morning its remaining fishing boats sail out from the small harbour, beyond its landmark island, to return with fresh fish (© Sarah Pink 2011).

States, South Africa, and New Zealand.⁽¹⁾ Like the other member towns of Cittaslow's international network, Lekeitio is committed to almost sixty criteria, divided into categories of environmental and infrastructure policies, the quality of the urban fabric, encouraging local produce, hospitality, and community, and creation of Cittaslow awareness. The town had to achieve over 50% in a detailed self-evaluation against these criteria in order for the movement's Italian headquarters to approve its membership, and must pay an annual membership fee. In a context where, as Amin argues, "contextual influence makes it highly problematic to assume that models of the good city can travel unmodified across space and time" (2006, page 1010), the increasing popularity across national and cultural contexts of the Cittaslow framework would seem surprising. Although the Cittaslow framework is inherently flexible, it nevertheless travels intact.

The relationship between the local and global is a central theme for contemporary scholars, and has particular relevance for urban studies. Writing mainly of London, a rather different locality (or set of localities), Massey has noted how "The idea that the local is a product of the global has become common currency ... but it is less often recognised that the global is also, conversely locally produced" (2007, page 10). The local is, of course, everywhere and equally constitutive of world cities like London and small towns like Lekeitio. Similarly, as Massey puts it, "'The global' so often is imagined, implicitly, as somehow always out there, or even up there, but as always somewhere else in its origins. In fact it exists in very concrete forms in local places" (page 10). This idea applies to world cities and small towns

⁽¹⁾ See http://www.cittaslow.org/download/DocumentiUfficiali/CITTASLOW_LIST_last_updated_april_2011.pdf



Figure 2. [In colour online.] The old fishing boats are still represented in Lekeitio harbour, which is at the heart of the town (© Sarah Pink 2011).

alike and, following recent calls (eg, Bell and Jayne, 2006) for urban scholars to incorporate a greater focus on smaller municipalities, with our study we seek to bring the question of how the global and local intersect in towns to the fore. The example of the Spanish Cittaslow member towns offers an opportunity to develop such an analysis precisely because their civic leaders have implicated them in an increasingly global movement. This does not make Cittaslow towns ‘more’ global than others, but it opens up an analytical entry point through which to explore a case study in how connections between specificities of local policies and experiences and the flows and model associated with a global movement are forged. Conceptualising this through a theory of place, conceived as Massey puts it as a “constellation of processes” (2005, page 141), ‘open’ and changing, we might say that the example is an examination of how diverse flows become entangled to form intensities of place, of which Cittaslow is a part.

In this paper we approach this through a focus on how the town leaders who have joined the movement conceptualise their relationship with Cittaslow in relation to the experiential—rather than quantifiably measurable and modelled—dimensions of urban living. This requires us to understand place not only as constituted through intersections between global and local flows, power relations, and the like, but as where human experience and perception are equally important, thus, accounting for Ingold’s point that

“Places, then, do not so much exist as occur—they are topics rather than objects, stations along ways of life. Instead of saying that living beings exist in places, I would thus prefer to say that places occur along the life paths of beings” (2008, page 1801).

We will argue that it is this intertwining of the experience of the local with the global agenda and framework of Cittaslow that engages town leaders with the movement’s model

and explains its cross-cultural appeal and continuing global growth. Our approach, which is broadly what Lorimer refers to as “more-than-representational” (2005), offers a way to understand the contemporary popularity of the Slow movement, that goes beyond explanations that situate it and seek to evaluate its ‘transferability,’ either as part of a ‘deceleration’ trend (Tomlinson, 2007) or as an urban development model (Mayer and Knox, 2006). Instead, by shifting the focus to the sensoriality of urban sustainability (Adams et al, 2009), the normally unspoken, and the experiences that are found in the routine, ongoing, and habitual experiences of the everyday, we are able to understand the movement’s global growth through a focus on its appeal to the specificity of locality. In so doing we are also able to develop insights into the ways in which human perception and experience participate in how place comes about.

On being slow: decelerating, developing, or sensing

The Slow movement is a broad category of organisations, groups, and individuals who seek to live in ways that evade or contest elements of modern life. The Slow Food and Cittaslow movements—the most established and globally connected ‘slow’ organisations—are related institutionally and through shared goals and principles. Cittaslow’s agenda focuses on issues concerning quality of life and environment, with an emphasis (through its Slow Food links) on local produce, maintaining local uniqueness, and sustainable urban economies. Member towns must have a population of under 50 000, although larger entities (eg, regional councils and other organisations) can apply the movement’s principles as Cittaslow Supporters. The membership accreditation process requires towns to score over 50% in a self-assessment process and inspection of approximately sixty ‘requirements for excellence’ which fall into the following six areas: (1) environmental policies; (2) infrastructure policies; (3) technologies and facilities for urban quality (eg, plan for controlling noise pollution, promotion of telework, programmes for planting public and private places with important environmentally suitable plants); (4) safeguarding autochthonous production (eg, programmes for educating taste and nutrition in schools in collaboration with Slow Food, census of the typical products of the territory, and support of their commercialisation); (5) hospitality (preparation of slow itineraries of the city); and (6) awareness (education of citizens regarding what a ‘slow city’ is). Member towns have belonged to the movement for an average of five years, making it quite young. Although small, these towns are growing: the average increase in the number of residents over the past ten years has been 12%. Town councils (not individuals) become members of Cittaslow. Yet it is the personal commitment of town leaders that drives and maintains this process.

The movement is based in Italy and is structured into a series of national networks, each having a lead town that accredits new member towns within its own country. National networks afford local sites a significant amount of latitude in terms of how they interpret the ‘requirements for excellence’. Cittaslow leaders clearly recognise that the ideals of the movement meet the ground in different ways in different places, and they deliberately enable that diversity within the context of the larger aims of the movement. In Spain interest in Cittaslow was sparked in 2003, although its six member towns—Pals, Begur, Lekeitio, Mungia, Rubielos de Mora, and Bigastro—joined between 2006 and 2008. Spanish member towns, with an average population of 6408, are considerably smaller than the typical Cittaslow, which has an average population of about 14 000. Since 2003 a Spanish national network has been under development and at the moment of our fieldwork Lekeitio was waiting to confirm that all the towns would remain committed to this project in the event of political change after the then imminent elections of 2011 before finalising this process.

In existing scholarship Cittaslow has been variously analysed as a characteristic of modernity—a way to slow down in a fast world (Tomlinson, 2007), as a form of reterritorialisation (Parkins and Craig, 2006), and evaluated in terms of its merits as a

sustainable urban development model (eg, Knox and Mayer, 2009). These approaches offer different assessments of how effective Cittaslow might be in implementing wider change. Tomlinson, who locates Cittaslow as part of a modern ‘deceleration’ narrative, argues that Cittaslow, “in promoting the development of small towns ... represents the interests of a particular spatial–cultural constituency and a related localised form of capital” and might “be seen as defending enclaves of interest, rather than offering plausible models for more general social transformation” (2007, page 147). He stresses that Cittaslow is not a “grassroots” organisation in that it arises from “local municipal development” and has found its “niche within the material and cultural economy of western modernity” (page 147). We concur that Cittaslow is not a grassroots activist movement involved in direct action against global capitalism. Yet the temptation to interpret Cittaslow and the Slow movement as representing simply the interests of the few (Tomlinson, 2007, page 147) or as limited to the bourgeois (Cresswell, 2010, page 24) misses the potential of such *indirect* forms of activism (Pink, 2009a). Indeed, it is by situating Cittaslow theoretically within a narrative of modern Western capitalism and deceleration that its transformative potential is rendered ineffectual. Moreover, to place these discussions in an updated context, Cittaslow’s increasing global membership, which includes networks in South Korea and Turkey, reinforces its appeal, and thus also its transformative potential, well beyond the ‘bourgeois’ enclaves of Western modernity.

In contrast, Parkins and Craig have interpreted Cittaslow through a theory of reterritorialisation as a form of “resistance” (2006, page 82) and “an active and critical interrogation of” the “values, practices and ideologies” of what they call “contemporary global life” (page 83). This approach also enables them to see Cittaslow as a successful urban development model and they, like others who take this stance, have been careful to build their arguments on the basis of an understanding of the significance of the concept of ‘slow’ to the movement itself. The meaning of ‘slow’, as originally intended, “is based upon the Italian cultural interpretation inherent to Slow Food and goes far beyond a simple notion of speed” (Radstrom, 2011, page 95; see also Parkins, 2004). Anticipating misinterpretations, Mayer and Knox (2010) write that “One obvious critique of the Cittaslow movement is that it could all too easily produce enervated, backward-looking, isolationist communities: living mausoleums where the puritanical zealotry of slowness displaces the fervent materialism of the fast world” (page 1555). They stress how, in fact,

“the Cittaslow movement hopes to propagate vitality through farmers’ markets, festivals and the creation of inviting public spaces. It aims to deploy technology in air, noise and light pollution control systems, modern energy systems, waste-cycling plants and composting facilities. It seeks to encourage business through ecologically sensitive, regionally authentic and gastronomically oriented tourism” (page 1555).

Thus conceived, Cittaslow is regarded as a successful framework for sustainable urban development (see, for example, Knox and Mayer, 2006; Parkins and Craig, 2006). Mayer and Knox see Cittaslow as “perhaps the most innovative of current networks” in part due to its flexibility both in how its “principles can be interpreted and applied by different interest groups” and in allowing for differences between towns (2010, page 178).

The definition of Cittaslow’s potential as a model for sustainable urban development that resists, or at least tempers, the encroachment of global corporate capitalism certainly provides a perspective more firmly rooted in empirical investigation than that which situates it within a deceleration narrative. It convincingly emphasises that being Cittaslow is embodied in a mindfulness of the qualities of the relationship between local policy, residents, and the urban environment, and hints at the experiential qualities of this. Our aim is to add to this a theoretical understanding of the experiential to explain how the movement’s appeal goes beyond the strictly measurable and material elements of life. For Cittaslow leaders in

Spain, Cittaslow membership went beyond simply making a commitment to the movement's framework as a development model and, as we have already indicated, our research has shown that they explained this with reference to the experiential dimensions of their towns. To explain this, we propose a turn to the senses associated with nonrepresentational theories as developed in phenomenological anthropology (eg, Ingold, 2000; 2011). In developing this argument we join scholars of the related Slow Food movement who have likewise called for greater attention to implications of experiential, aesthetic dimensions of its appeal. In this sense the work of Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2010) and Sassatelli and Davolio (2010) is particularly relevant. Drawing from cultural geography and feminist theory, Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy engage a notion of the "visceral"—"the body realm in/through which feelings, sensations, moods, and so on are experienced" (2010, page 2957)—to focus on how "relations between bodies and their social and material environments manifest as feelings/sensations/moods which can encourage or inhibit participation" in groups like Slow Food (page 2957). This idea that participation in Slow Food can be understood in relation to forms of embodied engagement corresponds well with our findings relating to Cittaslow. Sassatelli and Davolio also attend to Slow Food's "aesthetic approach to the politics of food". They point out that this approach has little potential for "tackling famine, environmental risks or obesity, if we take the view that these ills may be treated only by sustained structural policies" (2010, page 226). Yet, they suggest that "if we consider that something may also be done by middle-class consumers in the West, by their willingness to consider ways of gaining pleasure from food which are more aware, fair and respectful, perhaps SF's [Slow Food's] hybrid nature may be interpreted as a potentiality" (pages 226–227). In this vein we concur with these authors and suggest that the appeal of Cittaslow membership, and its growing dissemination, uptake, and thus broader influence need to be explained not simply through its potential for practical applications in urban planning but also in the appeal of the experiential qualities that are associated with it. This, moreover, offers an alternative to understanding Cittaslow through the cultural studies emphasis on material and economic elements framed through a universalising deceleration narrative, to focus instead on how nonrepresentational elements of 'slowness' might be seen as part of a process through which local difference can be rendered meaningful within a global project.

A multisensory methodology

Our fieldwork was undertaken in 2011 in the towns of Lekeitio (the Basque Country), Pals, Begur (Catalonia), and Rubielos de Mora (in Teruel). We visited each town and undertook in-depth exploratory interviews with between one and three town leaders or council officers depending on availability (these participants had very busy agendas). The interviews focused on how Spanish town leaders had encountered Cittaslow, its appeal, their perceived benefits of membership, the ways in which they identified their towns with the Cittaslow principles, their work towards the national network, and their visions for the future. We shared activities with participants, by eating local food and touring on foot with them in two towns (Lekeitio and Rubielos de Mora). We also followed activities to which our hosts invited us as ways of experiencing these towns, and photographed and collected printed and web materials concerning town-based activities and the movement nationally and internationally.

Our analysis of these research encounters follows a sensory ethnography approach as previously developed by one of us (Pink, 2009b). In the context of this project, this means that our analytical interest falls into two areas. First, we are concerned with how research participants engaged categories and actions to express and communicate to us their experiences of being in and part of their local environments, in relation to the discourses of Cittaslow. In this we are guided by the phenomenological anthropology of Ingold, to understand the senses as:

“not keyboards or filters that mediate the traffic between mind and world. They are rather—as Gibson (1966) always insisted—aspects of the functioning of the living being in its environment. And their synergy lies in the fact of their being powers of the same organism, engaged in the same action, and attending to the same world (see also Merleau-Ponty 1962: 317–18)” (Ingold, 2011, page 315).

Therefore, if we return to the scene of the opening passage of this paper, our first interview, with coffee, surrounded by the everydayness of the harbour, constituted an experiential context that we encountered and shared at the participant’s choice as part of being in/learning through the town. Moreover, our interviews allowed us to examine how participants sought and created experiential categories through which to communicate verbally and performatively in ways that often evaded or surpassed the five-sense sensorium. Sharing further activities with participants offered us a route through which to seek to understand how they move through and know in ways that are embodied and affective in their everyday environments.

We analysed the interviews with Spanish town leaders to examine how they narrated and described the Cittaslow qualities of their towns, their experiences of being in the towns and their historicity. We paid particular attention to how participants used sensory categories and metaphor to describe experiential, embodied, dimensions of their lives and towns. For example, when we asked José M^a Cazalis (then Mayor of Lekeitio) what the benefits of joining the Cittaslow movement were he told us:

“you cannot apply this philosophy like that, we can’t value it in terms of its benefits, but rather we have to think about the value of the commitment that we make. It’s not to say that ‘I am Cittaslow so I have this or that’. No, no, no: ‘As I am Cittaslow, I benefit in that I commit myself to work even more. I commit myself to suffer’. *I don’t know how to say it.* What is the benefit of winning a 100-metre running race? Well if it’s the Olympics and you are a great athlete then you’ll earn money. What is the benefit for people who just run on the road? It’s simply to suffer. Well this is a bit like that, what is the benefit? If there is a benefit, the benefit is that you differentiate yourself.”

Like other participants in our research, José searched for metaphors to express the experience and practice of *being* Cittaslow. As Amin and Thrift argue, “An everyday urbanism has to get into the intermesh between flesh and stone, humans and non-humans, fixtures and flows, emotions and practices” and, moreover, “needs to know the city beyond the powers of cognition, venturing into the realism of poetic invocation and sensory intimation” (2002, page 9). It is precisely the fact that a concrete representational definition of what it is to be Cittaslow eluded participants in interviews that informs our use of the notion of *being* Cittaslow as an analytical category. It is, indeed, not an exact or predefined ‘thing’ that we are seeking to identify but, rather, an open category in which, as we demonstrate below, we are able to collect participants’ stories of unique ways of being a Cittaslow town. In describing their towns in relation to Cittaslow, they all gave accounts of the qualities of the town that make it Cittaslow that are normally unspoken and hard to put into words. These were ways of seeking to express the active and ongoing embodied ways of knowing and sensing a town, “beyond cognition” (Amin and Thrift, 2002, page 9).

In addition to our interviews, we sought out, and were invited to, sensory embodied encounters with elements of the towns. Following methods used to research UK Cittaslow towns (eg, Pink, 2007; 2009b; 2011; 2012), we used photography to record our situatedness in, and to reengage with, these experiences later. Touring, conversing, and eating in the towns enabled us to learn through our own sensory embodied engagements, with the nonmaterial dimensions of the towns, as we tasted local foods, felt the sun over our heads and the ground beneath our feet. As a research technique, such engagements offered a way of seeking to understand other people’s experiences through an imaginative form of empathy, using our

own experiences as a route to understanding. They also provided us with examples of how participants communicate about their towns in ways that go beyond words.

Following the invocations of research participants, and attending to their ways of narrating, showing, and sharing the experience of their towns, we thus sought to draw out the relationship between the town as an experienced environment, the way town leaders conceptualised and mobilised this and the principles of Cittaslow. In the following section we outline in more detail how *being* Cittaslow was portrayed in the interview narratives.

Being Cittaslow

According to the town leaders we interviewed, any number of Spanish towns could measure up to most of the almost sixty criteria against which prospective Cittaslow member towns are evaluated. They were already self-consciously seeking to identify what made a town Cittaslow, beyond being aligned with Local Agenda 21 and complying with sustainability regulations. Indeed, such imported sustainability models were not necessarily seen as directly applicable to Spanish towns, as José explained:

“the difference between the Mayor of Innsbruck and the Mayor of Lekeitio is that the Mayor of Lekeitio has to invest in cleaning the streets, while the Mayor of Innsbruck does not have to worry about the people making the streets dirty. That is the difference. We cannot apply theories from central Europe and from countries that are more developed. Or yes we can, or we should try to, but it is not easy. It’s different. They are different cultures, the years they have spent developing are different, the number of years that they have been democracies are different.”

Cittaslow, in contrast, the Spanish town leaders told us, stood for what they already *are*. They spoke of Cittaslow as a “*way of being*”, and thus a way of experiencing and sensing. Therefore while sustainable urbanism might be associated with Cittaslow membership, this membership clearly also meant something more, which can be expressed only through the metaphors that connect being Cittaslow with a way of experiencing the town that is sensory, embodied, and affective.

Given the historical similarities between Southern European urbanisms stressed by 20th-century urban anthropology (eg, Kenny and Kertzer, 1983), one might jump to the conclusion that Spanish towns could more easily adopt models developed in Italy than those developed in Northern Europe. Yet this would not explain why, as in Spain, UK Cittaslow committee members likewise claim their towns “were already or always Cittaslow” (Pink 2012). Cittaslow presents what Mayer and Knox (2010) identify as a ‘flexible’ framework in which local uniqueness can be invested and valued. Therefore, joining the movement does not imply importing a model that is *applied to* towns but, rather, gives town leaders a means of objectifying what they believe they *already are*. In so doing they identify and value elements of difference, authenticity, and uniqueness that are experiential, best expressed through metaphor, performance, or creative media. Their participation in a network not only enables them to *be* Cittaslow locally, but also to *make* Cittaslow—nationally and internationally.

In the following two subsections we discuss how these experiential elements of being Cittaslow emerged in our interviews and tours of the towns through an exploration of two interrelated themes: how participants engaged topography and the built environment to invoke historical and environmental experiences of being slow; and how local practices and materialities were understood as ways of being slow. These narratives, moreover, affirm and preserve the local by flexibly interweaving its experiential qualities with the principles of a global movement.

Topography and the built environment

Our interviews and the documents and plans we reviewed revealed how Spanish town leaders have interpreted the concept of 'slow' through very local, place-specific elements. In doing so, they identified the built environment, the topography, and the geographic location as forming a key part of the identities of their towns and have drawn these elements together as part of the logic and rationale for claiming a connection to Cittaslow—often emphasising the historicity of these processes. For example, José described how Lekeitio is locked in by the sea on one side and by the land on the other. Its municipal boundaries are small, at 1.8 km² with a population of 7500, making it a compact town with no possibilities for expansion. In such a context the only route to grow is upwards, and Nekane pointed out the existence of the town's four-floor buildings. This built environment, José stressed, shapes residents' and visitors' experiences of the town:

“traditionally, people spoke from one balcony to the other ... because there is no distance between the balconies, they didn't have to go down to the street.”

These proximities and the acknowledgement of how they were lived in the past thus enabled leaders to refer to a sense of an authentic, unique way of experiencing the town. This built environment also contributes to the 'slow' identity in that it allows Lekeitio to have only one small supermarket. The Mayor explained:

“Here there is no physical space to have supermarkets with big shopping centers, and we don't have any intention of developing those either. ... Bringing in lorries at two in the morning to unload in these narrow streets ... making noise ... which generates problems with the logistics, because the streets are problematic for loading and unloading.”

Likewise the 'Slow' focus on small local businesses and produce was seen as coherent with an authentic built environment in other towns. In Rubielos de Mora the Mayor told us that developers who want to build more housing and bring in chain businesses constantly approach him, but he has maintained a careful line in order to develop in what he feels is a more balanced way. In Begur zoning regulations prohibit the construction of shops of over 400 m² and large apartment blocks in the centre. Here, Joan, the Mayor, told us that although, due to these policies, many shoppers go to the nearby larger town of Parafrugels, where larger shops have cheaper products, they are willing to accept this trade-off.

Town leaders also associated their slowness with their geographical locations: for instance, Joan described Begur as “an end point” that does not lead to anyplace else, and in Lekeitio town leaders recognised the value of being located one hour's drive from Bilbao, which deters many tourists from venturing there. In both these towns the proximity to the sea was also important. In Lekeitio we learned how the sea has structured the economy—first fishing, now tourism—as well as shaping how it feels to be in the town, as we learnt when discussing the town's strategy for tourism publicity. While such associations are certainly pertinent for many seaside towns and promotional materials are, by definition, mediated versions of a city's identity, in Lekeitio, town leaders took an approach that they identified as unique and mobilised to explain their slowness. Whereas typical advertising campaigns display sunny beaches, a recent Lekeitio brochure depicts a couple huddled under an umbrella in the pouring rain. This brochure was not designed to attract mass tourism. Rather, as Nekane told us, it was “a real novelty” because, José continued, “it shows the rain ... no one sells rain”. He explained that the photographs of rain represented Lekeitio at its best, that is, when one can experience the “strongest sensations”. In the summer, José told us, the experience of going to the beach is good, but he said:

“if you come in February, when the sea is enormous, one of those periods when you can see the waves from there ... and there are these waves that are 25 metres high, and you are here. And I ask you 'how was the view', and you will say 'well look it was marvellous,

there were waves 25 metres high'. If you come in February at night and you hear the sea, which goes [he imitates its roar], and there is no one else. It's as if there was a giant."

In this description the specificity and specialness of the town is rooted in a sensory embodied experience that is part of a particular seasonal physical environment. The interview with José and Nekane, however, was only a verbal preface to the way we were to learn further about the importance of the experience of the sea. Although we did not visit Lekeitio during one of the storms José described, after lunch Nekane and her colleague Xabier Gabiola took us to the new Maritime Heritage Centre, in a renovated lighthouse on the western part of the coastline. One feature of the Heritage Centre lies in its use of digital technologies to create a virtual experience of the town and sea during different seasons and in different weather conditions, and through oral histories contributed by elderly residents. It precisely mediates the 'strongest sensations' associated with the town.

We had already learnt about this part of the town in our interviews. In fact, we had anticipated visiting it since Sarah's first telephone conversation with Nekane when she had told her that they had created a Maritime Heritage Centre. The day we walked in Lekeitio was a sunny warm day—unusual, we were told, for a town that was often rainy. While it was hard to imagine the weather being different, our fourth excursion invited us to do just that. The heritage centre, Nekane told us, was carefully designed with attention to local oral histories, with getting the detail exactly right, and with finding a way to create an experiential and interactive environment that exceeded conventional models for small museums. We entered a series of darkened rooms where visual and aural narratives of this history of navigation from Lekeitio were evocatively projected, before we found ourselves in a boat (figure 3).

The intensity of the experience of the sea, its danger and enticement, and its role as a provider of food and wealth, had already been invoked. But those remained the experiences of other people, cultures, and historical periods. How could we get closer to the sensory and affective nature of the encounter with the sea?

Our hosts sent us on a virtual excursion (figure 4), as Sarah's notes describe:

"The boat proceeded out of the harbour into the sea, going west as we had by car, from the harbour towards the lighthouse. The sea was, at first, calm. Yet to someone who does not know the sea it did not feel safe. We sailed through the film projected onto the three walls around us while dolphins jumped in the water in front of us. The weather started

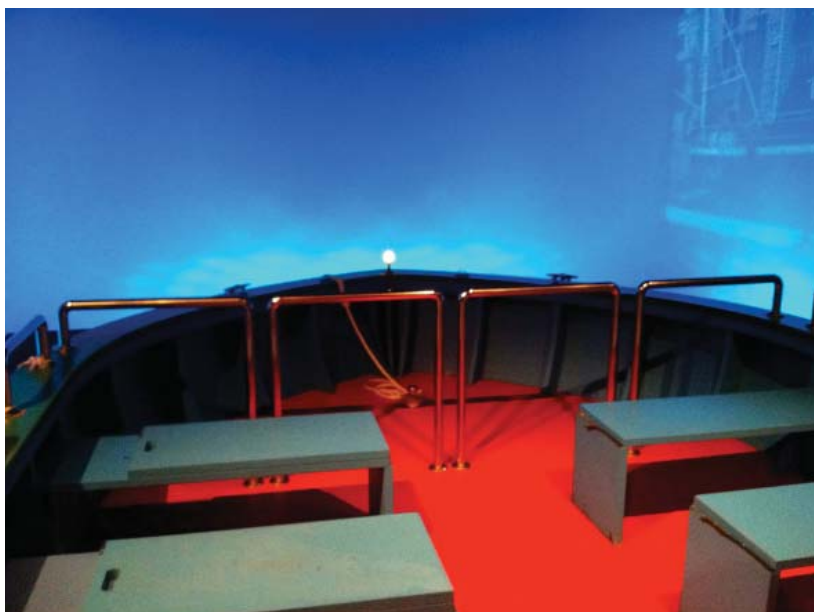


Figure 3. [In colour online.] The boat (© Sarah Pink 2011).



Figure 4. [In colour online.] Sailing towards the lighthouse (© Sarah Pink 2011).

to change as the mist descended and I took out my notebook. The boat's contemporary digital control panel projected on the screen located us using GPS, giving me some sense of safety in assuming we would be able to return. But the weather worsened and rapidly developed into a storm, I saw and heard thunder and lightening and felt rain falling on me as a cold wind blew at me from my left. The waves were enormous. I shivered while the narrator sang a seafaring song. We finally arrived at the lighthouse. The storm had ended. 'Imagine if that had been real' said the narrator as we headed to the port."

Back in the safety of a simulation of the same harbour where we had enjoyed our morning coffee, we walked with traditional tiled ground underfoot, the lightly clouded sunlit sky above, surrounded by photographs of the typical architecture of the town with the mountains in the distance. The window frames of the buildings surrounding us in images of the harbour were painted blue, green, and red, which, as we had learned earlier from José, were the colours that local fishing boats had traditionally been painted—the window frames then being coated with the remaining paint. Now local residents were still required to use only these colours, bringing a historical synchrony to the experience of the town that would be known only by those who had lived the local or sought to know about how it was lived. The door behind led us out—back to the outdoor world we had just visited virtually and through our imaginations. Going outside, looking out to the west we could see the route we had taken. When looking to the east the coastline was beautifully lit by the sun. But it was here that Nekane told us that they were running safety workshops partly because a man had sailed out to sea and not returned. Our simulated excursion did not fill all the gaps between knowing the sea as others did and being a researcher visiting the town. Yet this intense embodied and affective engagement with the mediated sea offered an embodied and sensory route to imagine and seek to comprehend the forms of experiential uniqueness that town leaders referred to when citing those historical and environmental qualities that make their towns Cittaslow.

In Begur a similar narrative unfolded as Joan Català, the Mayor of Begur and President of Cittaslow Spain, spoke of how this town, also by the sea, is at an 'end point' geographically. It is not a place people pass through. This, he told us, makes the character of the people 'special': while in one sense the isolation has made people more 'closed', it has also enabled

them to maintain some of their ancestors' ways of life. For instance, older people still speak a dialect like Mallorcan, referred to as *parla sala* due to its pronunciation (the primary language of this region is Catalan). Joan emphasised the variety of ways in which residents have a very 'direct' relationship with nature: local people pick wild mushrooms and asparagus when they are in season, maintaining "the cultural heritage of our ancestors" and therefore continuing to practise their skilled sensory ways of knowing. These very local ways of being and living were identified directly with Cittaslow since, Joan told us, "one of the points of Cittaslow is maintaining these formulas, of living in ways that respect the heritage of our ancestors."

These narratives of isolation and of the uniqueness of particular locations build a notion of authenticity for each place that is very reliant on sensory experience. These notions of authenticity endure and can be carried into the present through the Cittaslow framework precisely because it recognises and celebrates both local uniqueness and its intersection with global forces. The towns we studied have protected the way they may be lived in and experienced while simultaneously maintaining beneficial contacts with global flows. For instance, Llekeitio was historically a significant port, and its impressive gothic Santa Maria Church houses Spain's third-biggest gothic-flamenco altarpiece. Moreover in Pals, Rosa (the Secretary for Cittaslow Spain) told us the "almost science fiction" story of how a rather different landscape was partially responsible for the town being Cittaslow. In the 1950s, she explained, the North American government had bought a small piece of land on Pals beach, on which they installed the transmitters of Radio Liberty, which broadcast Russian language programmes made in Germany to the then-Communist countries during the Cold War. The landscape remained imprinted with Radio Liberty's enormous antenna until they were taken down in a controlled explosion only four years ago. The rest of this intriguing tale, Rosa suggested, we could find on the Internet (indeed, digital technologies are not only part of the everyday in Cittaslow towns, but participate in how Cittaslow history is made). This highly visual, physical, and practical presence of Radio Liberty was significant for the area in a number of ways, not least in supporting the local economy through employment. But it also ensured that a prime stretch of Pals frontline beach land remained undeveloped during the late-20th-century tourism boom. This, coupled with Pals having always had strict building regulations in its historical centre, protected the town during the years when mass tourism became part of the everyday experience of other towns in the Costa Brava. Thus the experiential possibilities of the local were being made through a narrative of the Cold War, historically one of the most important global issues of the 20th century. Yet, as we show below, the local of Pals is also embedded in everyday and festive practices that are differentiated through their sensory qualities.

Slow tastes, textures, and sounds

The sensory specificity of locally produced foods and the skilled practices associated with their production and preparation were important to the meaning that being Cittaslow held for participants in a number of towns, and contributes further to their self-identification as slow, authentic places. Above we noted how the historically rooted practices of picking wild mushrooms and asparagus were part of being Cittaslow in Begur. Likewise, in Pals, Rosa explained that rice cultivation has been part of the town's history since the 15th century. Approximately twenty local families still live "either directly or indirectly from rice cultivation", and there are two main rice mills in the town that produce and sell their own rice. She described how in June, a week before our interview, some of the town's older residents had performed 'Slow' rice harvesting in an embodied reenactment of the 1920s practice when "people still did it manually, they put their feet in, the fields were covered in water, they did it by hand." The rice is now harvested by tractor, but there is, nevertheless, a way of distinguishing Pals rice production as 'Slow'. Rosa told us she had heard that,

in contrast with other areas in Spain where more rice is produced, authentic Pals rice is not distributed through big supermarket chains, but in smaller shops, delis, and restaurants (something that is coherent with the nature of the built environment, as discussed in the previous section). Connecting local knowledge, temperature, and environment with culinary experience, Rosa explained how, because of Pals's "slightly colder climate", "it's a rice that has more contact with the earth and has more texture". She told us how, in contrast to the more famous rice dish *paella*, which is associated with Valencia further south, in Pals the traditional rice dish is *arroz a la cazuela*, stressing how "it has a special flavour, and rice from Pals has a texture that does not soften so much perhaps as other types of rice, and it's an exquisite dish."

In the opening section of this paper we noted how the taste of freshly caught, and not frozen, fish is part of being Slow in Lekeitio. Just as Pals's climate lends texture to its rice, in Lekeitio there is also something special about the tomatoes grown in the allotments by the sea. José told us:

"you don't need to put any insecticide on them because the seawater, which is there like a kind of cloud, keeps them good",

and there is a high demand for these local tomatoes. Fish and tomatoes, both spoken of in relation to the sea, were likewise part of the configuration of what makes Lekeitio Cittaslow. Indeed, José's narrative brought together the tastes and experiences of the local with the global, as he interwove food experiences with the town's Cittaslow identity, history, and technology. As we discussed earlier, technology enables the preservation of the authentic in the case of food. Rather than enabling the destruction of local and authentic foodways—as technology surely has done—slow towns perceive technology as a tool to be harnessed for the strengthening of the authentic. As José described it:

"The advantage of being Cittaslow is that you can go and buy your fish, go home, and then if you know how to, you go ahead, and if you don't, go on the Internet, find a recipe, go to the kitchen, put the gas on (which is centralised—everyone can use it) and cook this fish, which has been caught today, using a recipe that you've downloaded ... using the centralised gas, and it will turn out the same if it was cooked over a wood fire as if your grandmother had cooked it. This is the objective: to do it as your grandmother did, but using the recipe that you found on the Internet, with centralised gas, without noticing the difference. This is what we want to integrate—new technologies and advances."

He continued, saying:

"Lots of people confuse Cittaslow with dead cities. But this not a call to go backwards—we want public transport that can take us anywhere in a short time, that is low cost, to have all the ICTs at hand, but we want to integrate this with what we like to *be*, things like, buying Fulano's tomatoes, making meals with our friends, normal things."

These spoken narratives bring to the fore not only the localness of produce that comes from the local soil, sea, and air, but also the uniqueness of the experience of consuming it (because of its texture or taste). In Rubielos de Mora similar themes emerged through a walking narrative. The mayor walked us through the town to a local bakery known for its traditional breads and pastries. Joana, the proprietor, exuded pride as she told us how she had resurrected recipes dating back hundreds of years. She spoke with us as she waited on the customers who came and went from her tiny storefront, all carrying traditional cloth bread bags imprinted with the logo of the shop. Before we left, Joana gave each of us one of these bags, filled with crunchy *botones de canela* and *pan integral*. As we walked slowly back to the fountain in the town square, we snacked on our cookies and lifted our faces to the sun. Townspeople doing their morning errands smiled or engaged the mayor in a quick conversation. He spoke of an upcoming meeting to one man, inquired after the health of another's mother.

Combined with the focus on historicity and environment in narratives about how towns are *already* Cittaslow outlined above, these spoken and experiential narratives begin to indicate: (1) how town leaders are able to embed the feeling of being Cittaslow in the material and sensory experience of locality; and (2) how technology can strengthen and ground these traditional ‘authentic’ practices and ways of being.

Globalising authenticity from the bottom up?

Above we have shown how, for the Spanish Cittaslow town leaders we interviewed, the notion that *we were already Cittaslow* is bound up in the experiential dimensions of their towns: the ‘character’ of local people; the foods grown in their soils or fished from their seas; the ways these have been shaped historically by their ‘natural’, technological, and architectural landscapes. We also noted the impossibility of representing many of these elements of local identity, authenticity, and ways of being directly, and the need for recourse to metaphors, stories, and historical accounts to express these. We likewise discussed how our own embodied and mediated experiences of the town, which were framed by our participants and by digital technologies already designed to communicate about locality, enabled us to understand the relevance of experiencing the unspeakable.

Being Cittaslow is therefore deeply rooted in locality, whether this is described through an allegory, roared in an imitation of the sea, tasted in a forkful of fresh fish, or digitally mediated in a darkened room. Yet, as we noted at the beginning of this paper, the local is not always exclusively local. Nor is it necessarily visible. On the one hand, global flows are part of the way in which local authenticity is historically produced and is marked out. As the example of Radio Liberty in Pals brings to the fore, the Cold War, one of the most significant global events of the 20th century, participated in the way in which Pals was able to *already be Cittaslow*. The Radio Liberty antennae were historically a very visible element of the Pals landscape, but they remain a part of its invisible landscape—revealed to us in our interview and later as we searched the Internet to find out about their destruction. As is emphasised by Cittaslow International, as well as in our interviews, being Cittaslow involves combining new technologies with traditional ways of being. Elements of the local are inextricable from flows from and beyond the local. For example, if a local towns person looks up traditional recipes on the Internet and cooks with a central gas supply to achieve a gustatory experience equivalent to when their grandmother had cooked the same fish over a wooden fire, then they are engaging the invisible flows associated with digital media, and fossil-fuel energy as a way of experiencing local authenticity.

In addition, the fact that Cittaslow towns are employing the products of globalisation to produce locality, and doing this in the context of belonging to and learning in an international movement, provides evidence for the argument that the terms ‘local’ and ‘global’ are not themselves fixed but, rather, are malleable and multiple. As Gibson-Graham argue, “Globalization need not be resisted only through recourse to the local (its other within) but may be redefined discursively, in a process that makes room for a host of alternative scriptings, capable of inscribing a proliferation of economic differences” (1996, pages 146–147). In the Cittaslow movement the international—global—network enables this discursive process and supports the diverse ways in which the tenets that hold across all Cittaslow towns land differently in each place. The towns we studied understand Cittaslow as a way to help them navigate the complex set of opportunities and challenges global forces have brought. Mayor Joan Catala, from Begur, spoke of Cittaslow as a way to help that city “maintain the specialness, in relation to the global”.

Understanding places thus, not simply as localities, but as constituted through an interweaving of diverse processes both from beyond and from within the local (Massey, 2005; see also Pink, 2012) helps us to understand the entanglements through which being Cittaslow

and feeling that one's town is Cittaslow are generated. These towns *are 'already' Cittaslow* because they interweave new technologies with their histories and the products of their soil and sea. Yet they only become Cittaslow when their leaders conceptualise these qualities of locality in relation to the movement. The verbal, sensory/embodied, and mediated forms through which being Cittaslow was expressed show how the growth of the movement cannot be understood simply as a form of deceleration within the narrative of modernity, or as a model for sustainable development. Rather, it becomes a way of acknowledging authenticity in the unique configurations of local and global flows that constitute each town as it is experienced. If we return to the paradox of the 'good city', as presented by Amin, we can see that Cittaslow accounts for the imaginary of the 'good life' in a way in which, rather than being a transferrable universal model, the 'good life' *as already lived* and experienced in towns is invested 'upwards' into the Cittaslow model. In this sense, we might see it as a version of the 'good city' that is built precisely on "the fine grain of the circumstance of place" (Amin, 2006, page 1010).

Conclusion

In this paper we have suggested that analytical routes to understanding the Cittaslow movement as part of a deceleration trend, or as a transferable model for urban development, offer only limited ways of understanding how and why Cittaslow is gaining in popularity across national and cultural contexts.

As our research demonstrated, the Cittaslow framework does not provide a development model that is *applied to* towns as a regeneration process but, rather, one that town leaders in Spain [and also in the UK (see Pink, 2009a; 2012)] saw their towns already mirrored in. It offers them a route through which to project and formally validate the experiential uniqueness and authenticity of their towns through a model that offers them a sense of global relatedness. The Cittaslow model is clearly not appropriate for direct 'transfer' to towns in which the ways of life it proposes are not *already there*. Towns can join only if they already meet the movement's criteria. Indeed, it has not been our intention here to assess its potential for transferability but, rather, to better understand through a sensory analysis the principles through which we can understand its success. From this analysis we have certainly learnt something about Cittaslow and how town leaders engage with it. However, the broader implications of this are wider ranging in suggesting that, in order to understand more generally how and why certain models for sustainable urban development 'fit' or appeal to local leaders, we need to look beyond approaches that account for the cultural, material, and economic. We also need to seek the unspoken, experiential, and (at least initially) invisible strands of locality and treat these as routes to knowledge about how frameworks for development might be made coherent with local ways of being.

Our example of the Cittaslow movement has thus shown that in understanding the making of sustainable towns we need to attend both to representations, models, and frameworks and to those elements of towns, the ways that the flows of everyday experience, history memory, and imagination are lived and felt, that cannot be put into words. The Cittaslow example offers us a way of considering how what Ingold (2008) would refer to as an 'entanglement'—conceived as unbounded and produced through movement—might be constituted through this tension between what can be represented and what is not. As researchers, we need to be able to engage likewise with this tension, to be able to participate in the environments that it creates, and yet seek to unpick the unspoken detail of the processes of place through which it is constituted.

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