Tourism Under Climate Change: Will Slow Travel Supersede Short Breaks?

Climate change is affecting the tourism industry through many different mechanisms (Weaver 2011; Gössling, 2002, 2007; Berrittella et al. 2005; Hall and Higham 2005; Peeters 2005; Dubois and Ceron 2006; Becken and Hay 2007; Buckley 2008; UNWTO-UNEP-WMO 2008; Gössling et al. 2009). These include: environmental changes and human responses at tourist destinations and countries of origin (Koenig and Abegg 1997; Harrison et al. 1999; Maddison 2001; Elsasser and Buerki 2002; Lise and Tol 2002; Scott et al. 2006, 2008; Buckley 2008; Wolfsegger et al. 2008; Moore 2010; Eugenio-Martin and Campos-Soria 2010); mitigation and offset measures (Gössling et al. 2007; Tol 2007; Brouwer et al. 2008; Hall 2008; Broderick 2009; Ceron and Dubois 2009; Gössling 2009, 2010; Haites 2009; Peeters et al. 2009; Scott et al. 2010); and changes in travel patterns due to increased financial and social costs of travel (Oum et al. 1992, 1993; Sykes and Thomas 2006; Amelung et al. 2007; Mayor and Tol 2007; Hares et al. 2010; Nawijn and Peeters 2010). This contribution reports on direct interview approaches used to examine a question previously addressed only through economic modelling: namely, how tourists will respond to expected increases in the costs of longhaul travel associated with measures to mitigate climate change. It concludes that a change from short-break to slow-travel patterns in human mobility is at least a realistic possibility.

Air travel currently contributes 14% of effective greenhouse gas emissions (Scott et al. 2008). There is limited scope to reduce fuel consumption through more efficient routing, design or fuel substitution (Scott et al. 2010): fuel is the major recurrent cost for airlines, which already pursue opportunities for savings. Carbon offsets are currently ineffective, firstly since very few passengers buy them (Gössling et al. 2007; Eijgelaar et al. 2010); and secondly since at present, they merely reflect marginal adjustments between land uses which are strongly influenced by historical subsidies in the farming, forestry and energy sectors. Social considerations of climate change do not currently affect holidaymakers' travel plans (Hares et al. 2010), even for people visiting attractions at high risk from climate change (Eijgelaar et al. 2010; Dawson et al. 2010); and even though most air travellers acknowledge that flying contributes to climate change (Becken 2007; Hares et al. 2010; McKercher et al. 2010). Under current social systems, therefore, the only effective option to reduce greenhouse gas

emissions from air travel is to increase the cost of travel through carbon taxes or emission trading systems.

Demand for holiday travel, however, is inelastic to price (Nawijn and Peeters 2010). Price elasticities of demand are around -0.8 within individual nations and -0.6 internationally (Oum et al. 1992, 1993; Brons et al. 2002; Pearce 2008; Fageda and Fernández-Villadangos 2009). Elasticities are lower for business travel. Income elasticities of demand are around +1.5 in developed and +2.0 in developing nations (Njegovan 2006; Pearce 2008). Air travel costs constitute about a quarter of total price for shorthaul package holidays within Europe (Pearce 2008) but significantly higher proportions for travel to most southern and developing nations. Estimates of the impacts of carbon taxes differ widely. Michaelis (1997) suggested that a tax of \$125 per tonne CO₂ equivalent would reduce demand for air travel by 4.4–13.3%. Olsthoorn (2001) concluded that a tax of \$1500 per tonne would double airfares and reduce air travel dramatically; but Tol (2007) concluded that a tax of \$1000 per tonne would only reduce international travel by 0.8%.

Econometric approaches examine only the population-scale responses to marginal changes in prices and income, including substitution between existing behaviours. They do not consider potential new patterns of behaviour. One possible effect of higher air travel costs, however, is that people may restructure their entire leisure activities. In recent decades, the combination of cheap air travel and heavy work commitments has given rise to short-break vacations, where people take multiple brief holidays spread throughout the year (Pike and Ryan 2004). More expensive air travel coupled with improved global communications, in contrast, may generate the opposite effect: people may travel less often but for longer periods, continuing to work at least part-time whilst travelling. To examine the potential for new behavioural patterns under substantially altered and unfamiliar circumstances, qualitative interview approaches may be more reliable, or at least complementary, to quantitative economic modelling. This is therefore the approach adopted here.

There does not appear to be any pre-existing term which means 'travelling to fewer destinations but staying longer at each'. I therefore refer to it here as slow travel, by analogy with the "slow" movement more generally (Honoré 2004). This is the meaning ascribed to

"slow travel" in popular travel literature such as newspaper articles. In academic publication, the term slow travel has been used with a literal meaning within the fields of engineering and biology. In the field of human mobility, there are several related but clearly distinct concepts. Slow leisure means taking one's time during local activities (Woehler 2004). Slow transport or soft mobility means using energy-efficient local transport (Hoyer 2000; Hall and Higham 2005; Verbeek and Bargeman 2008; Straadas 2009). Slow tourism means taking fewer holidays overall (Matos 2004; Dubois and Ceron 2008). The term slow travel has been mentioned either in an undefined sense (Gössling et al. 2008; Scott and Becken 2010); or as synonymous with slow transport (Molz 2009), which is not the popular meaning as above. Given the shortage of appropriate terms, and the lack of any formal prior definition, it is appropriate to coopt the term for the concept considered here.

To assess whether slow travel in this sense is a likely scenario, I interviewed travellers in two main categories: cash-rich time-poor, and time-rich cash-poor. The former were clients of upmarket commercial wildlife and adventure tours in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Oceania (Buckley 2006, 2010a, b). Most of this group were wealthy professionals from Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, East and Central Asia, Australia and New Zealand. The latter were largely university students, studying in Australia but originating worldwide. Mean age, as well as mean wealth, was lower for students than for professionals. All of the professionals, and a similar number of students, were consulted through one or more semi-structured interviews following several days of more general intermittent conversations to establish rapport. The interviews were conducted both face-to-face, and via the social networking site Facebook®.

Interviews were carried out during 2008, 2009 and 2010, periods when actual airfares fluctuated quite substantially. They examined interviewees' likely responses to a doubling of current airfares, corresponding to the highest carbon tax yet considered (Olsthoorn 2001). The interviews aimed first to establish two comparative baseline scenarios in the minds of the respondents, namely: (a) their current travel patterns; and (b) a substantial reduction in overall travel, either in time or distance. They then lead the interviewees to consider other options, notably that of slow travel as defined here - i.e., the same maximum distance and total time, but fewer destinations and longer at each. Responses were subsequently coded as Same, Less

or Slow, respectively. This is a very broad, simplified and hence robust coding from a rich and detailed set of interview responses. This robust coding, and also the time taken to establish prior rapport with interviewees and the widely varying interview circumstances and pathways, are standard techniques to improve the reliability of semi-structured interviews. The results are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Stated future travel patterns

Group	Stated Travel Expectations Under Doubled Airfares			
	Same	Less	Slow	Total
Professionals Students	12 4	14 13	29 28	55 45
Total	16	27	57	100

More of the professionals (22%) than the students (9%) expected to continue travelling as currently, but the overall differences between the two groups are not statistically significant. The key result is that over half of the interviewees identified a slow travel pattern as a likely response to doubled airfare costs. This indicates that modified patterns of mobility corresponding to the slow travel suggestion are at least worthy of more detailed consideration in forward planning by tourism destinations, tour operators, transport and accommodation providers, and policy makers attempting to address concerns over climate change. This is a different conclusion than that reached by Hares et al. (2010).

If slow travel becomes commonplace, it would also affect tourist accommodation, restaurant and activity sub-sectors. If tourists want to spend a month or two in one place instead of a day or two each in many places, they are less likely to look for a hotel, and more likely to look for furnished accommodation or homestays, up or downmarket according to their

economic circumstances. They are also more likely to explore a wider range of local activities and restaurants.

At the same time, few people who are wealthy enough to travel at all can now afford, or want, to be without access to electronic communications for more than a few days: and many jobs can now be conducted as well from anywhere with internet access as from a fixed office in a single town. It is already commonplace that people conduct business by phone or email at home, in hotels, trains, restaurants or on beaches or other leisure environments. As a New Yorker cartoon puts it (Mankoff 2008), (mis)quoting Masefield (1902): "Look, if you must go down to the seas again, to the lonely seas and the sky, then go! But take your Blackberry."

We can thus envision that slow travel, if it does indeed become a major trend, will produce a class of travelling professionals who move from place to place every few months, perhaps with regular seasonal patterns, and continue to work as they do so; and a class of people who specialise in providing them with accommodation, food, communications and living amenities for periods which are neither as brief as a hotel stay, nor as long as a typical residential lease. If so, slow travel could well become a significant social phenomenon, linked to patterns of human mobility more generally.

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