

# Conceptualising Tourist Idleness and Creating Places of *Otium* in Nature-Based Tourism

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This paper conceptualises tourist idleness as a temporary engagement in slow, slothful and entirely unstructured holiday activities. We aim to extend the studies that prioritise the modalities of holidays in nature that encourage simplified, slower, immersive experiences, and which celebrate mindfulness, slowness and stillness as part of a tourist journey. In framing idleness as a relaxing, creative and recuperative holiday practice, we suggest that creating places of *otium* which encourage ‘doing nothing’ can in many ways enhance tourist wellbeing. To this end, we discuss the significance of spatial, temporal and existential elements of tourist idleness, whilst arguing that this ‘practice’ should be more celebrated in our modern, high-speed societies.

*Keywords:* wellbeing, idleness, leisure, *otium*, slowness, nature-based tourism



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## Introduction

We live in a busy world. It is characterised by digitalisation and acceleration in the pace of life, despite the expectation that technological advances would increase people’s free time and reduce working hours (Rosa, 2013). Over-dependence on digital devices and constant connectivity has resulted in people seldom finding time to switch off and disengage from work. Instead, they use their leisure time to maintain being busy and overscheduled. Our free time is overloaded with activities, planning and achievement, so that it does not feel like free time at all, but evolves into one more stress factor, thus exacerbating people’s impression of a lack of time and lack of relaxation (Fludernik, 2021). Packer (2021, p. 1) opines that ‘digital technologies do not only increase the pace and

intensity of work but also allow the boundaries of the working week to expand.’ Things have become even worse during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social distancing has yielded new concepts of working which have led to the blurring of the boundaries between home and work environments, leading to de facto ‘living at work’ (Waizenegger et al., 2020), which has resulted in digital distress and exacerbated various mental health issues (Xiao et al., 2021).

To escape their busy realities, people have long purchased holidays. Travel can ‘fix’ us after long periods of repetitive work and allow space for engaging in restorative, purposeful and meaningful activities (Kieran, 2012). And yet, even when they are on holiday, people bring along mindless speed, work, worries and everyday habits, which in turn makes tourism

largely replete with the mundane (Cohen & Taylor, 2003). Tourists create familiar spaces through carrying quotidian habits on their holidays whilst performing unreflexive, habitual and practical enactions (Edensor, 2007, p. 200). Coupled with the activity choice overload during holidays, which has been claimed to lead to demotivation, dissatisfaction and the diminishment of the tourist experience (Sthapit et al., 2019), there is a danger of a person's holiday becoming yet another busy day.

In recent years, to combat the negative effects of acceleration and digitalisation, ever more emphasis has been placed on the enhancement of people's health and wellbeing through tourism (Everingham & Chasagne, 2020; Prayag, 2020). Although the restorative effects of holidays have been long explored (Packer, 2021; Filep, 2014; Smith & Diekmann, 2017; Lehto & Lehto, 2019; Molz, 2009), people's wellbeing, safety and peace of mind have become priorities in more recent times, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. In nature-rich spaces, tourists can recreate, recuperate and rejuvenate after long periods of social isolation and tourism immobility, with blue spaces (Kelly, 2021) and green spaces being increasingly 'prescribed.' Facilitation of quality time, personal reflection and renewal of the self is seen as pivotal in the context of the tourism experience. To this end, staycations (Bafadhhal, 2021), hyperlocal experiences, microadventures or slow adventures have been prioritised in order to engage people in slower, more mindful and responsible practices (Mackenzie & Goodnow, 2020; Farkic et al., 2020).

In this conceptual paper, we suggest that idleness is a neglected concept in tourism studies. We argue that tourist connectivity, over-activity and hecticness should be un-mobilised in favour of mobilising idleness as part of a tourist journey. We therefore aim to extend the studies that prioritise the modalities of holidays in nature that encourage simplified, slower, immersive experiences, and which celebrate mindfulness, slowness and stillness. To this end, we add to these debates by suggesting tourist idleness as a holiday 'practice' that can bring multiple wellbeing benefits for tourists. The purpose is not to counter the busyness and eventfulness of tourism, but to pave new

avenues for understanding and thinking about idleness as an equally creative, rewarding, rejuvenating and fulfilling holiday pursuit, which can, in its own way, enhance people's wellbeing.

In joining the debates on the future of tourism, this study essentially explores what may encourage tourist idleness and how engaging in seeming 'non-events' can positively affect tourists emotionally, existentially and psychologically. We found inspiration in Löfgren's and Ehn's (2010) work which sought to redefine the act of doing nothing by explaining that structured and routinised practices, which restrict idleness, greatly diminish people's innate potential for improvisation, flexibility, spontaneity or creativity. Unlearning busyness and learning how to (temporarily) do nothing should therefore become the priority in achieving wellbeing, purpose and meaning in modern, high-speed societies.

Tourism has long been about doing something rather than nothing; doing, rather than being. This is reflected in tourism boards of countries worldwide normally promoting the eventfulness of a destination through offering programmed activities delivered by experts. To illustrate our ideas, we use the example of nature-rich areas, which can encourage being idle or 'doing nothing' as yet another way of holidaying. Through the concept of idleness as a theoretical lens, we aim to lay the foundations for the discussion on how else natural spaces can be utilised by tourists. We then move on to suggest the potential for the development of a new wellbeing experiential tourism product based on the benefits of being idle. In doing so, we focus on the importance of the spatial, temporal and existential dimensions of idleness, as a less recognised, yet increasingly important, aspect of holidaying in nature, aimed specifically at busy, stressed, time-poor urbanites.

We argue, however, for tourists' 'being;' we suggest that tourists should *do* nothing (in abundance, either programmed or physically demanding); instead they should minimise bodily movements as a way of recharging and re-energising the body, and more frequently practice *being* idle, an activity that is very much 'longed for and desired-and enjoyed for its own sake' (Rantala & Valtonen, 2014, p. 19).

### Slowness, Stillness and Sleep in Tourism

The notion of 'slowness' is crucial in our understanding of tourist idleness. It gained importance in the tourism context as it represented a shift towards a simpler, less alienated (and alienating), and more sustainable way of life. The slow movement was a manifestation of the necessity for slowing down the accelerated tempo of living and countering globalisation, consumerism, and standardisation of services, as well as fast and unhealthy food consumption (Honore, 2004). It began in Italy as the slow food and slow cities movement, and was later expanded to include travel, incorporating the same principles of localism, authenticity, connection, or interaction in tourism practices. Slow movements 'have found their niche within the material and cultural economy of western modernity' (Tomlinson, 2007, p. 147), as an increasingly desired, and more considered and mindful form of consumption of material pleasures.

Slow travel has greatly redefined the way we think about and 'do' holidays. Essentially, it aims to address the issue of time poverty and instantaneous experiences through extending the time for people to feel the benefits of a holiday by making meaningful connections with people, places and life in general (Heitmann et al., 2011). Slow travel does not only have the potential to enable meaningful immersion but also to encourage sustainable development of a destination by having multiple positive impacts on the local environment, society and economy of the region. Slow tourists are encouraged to linger in a destination for extended periods of time; they stay in local accommodation, family-run hotels, or B&Bs. Instead of racing to see the top sights before they return home, time is taken to explore the flavours, sounds and the lesser-known attractions in the area in more considered ways (Serdane et al., 2020; Walker et al., 2021; Fullagar et al., 2012). Minimising bodily movement in favour of maximising engagement with the traditions of the land, natural landscapes, local foods and people, are suggested as the main postulate of slow tourism, which we found helpful in our conceptualising tourist idleness.

In making stronger links between slowness, travel and idleness, Kieran (2012) proposed an idea of idle or deep travel as a particular philosophy of holiday-

ing which in many ways resonates with slow travel. In this context, idleness has nothing to do with fun, entertainment, or a temporary escape from our ills; it is more to do with a frame of mind and an attitude that a traveller is taking. The author suggests that 'we want to feel we have achieved something when we travel, but the structure we impose seems to make that impossible [...] as most of us herd ourselves through an itinerary that includes the predictable sights' (Kieran, 2012, p. 171). In many cases, people want to experience the exotic and the unknown through familiarity and order. However, through defying clichés and a sense of order tourists might be able to deepen the connection with a place. In this vein, being slow, idle, or not doing much on holiday may allow for different ways of experiencing and knowing. It may be a productive way for tourists to achieve something good for themselves, including their inner growth, spiritual transformation, or self-actualisation (Sheldon, 2020).

Similarly, adventure tourism scholars, such as Varley and Semple (2015), have built on the idea of slowness to conceptualise slow adventure, a way of slow bodily movement through and embeddedness in wild nature. Whilst contrasting slow to fast adventure, the authors highlight the wider experiential dimension of slow journeys, explaining that this blend of slowness and outdoor adventure may appear counter-intuitive, as adventure is generally associated with thrill, adrenaline, and excitement. However, experiencing spatial, temporal and natural rhythms through slow, immersive bodily engagement with a place is claimed to be both the luxury and necessity of the urbanised 21st-century inhabitants (Farkic & Taylor, 2019; Farkic et al., 2020).

Slow adventure has come a long way from the natural concept to consumer desire, as well as a marketable and consumable tourism product which has been implemented in several European countries thus far. Slow adventure may be a particularly useful marketing concept in lightly populated areas, such as the Arctic circle, where tourism development may be somewhat more difficult to realise (Varley et al., 2020). Despite this, it was recognised that in openness, vastness and remoteness lies the latent potential of these places, as 'their emptiness, the lack of development, where the

lives lived are imagined as simpler, closer to nature, less alienated [...] and slower' (p. 3) may represent a unique selling point of such destinations. The seeming 'nothingness' is therefore seen as a competitive advantage rather than a problem, in which the manic busyness of everyday life seems to be easily countered through engaging in (un)mediated slow adventures. Tourists may create their own, personal space, experience solitude or escapism, and easily become oblivious of the passage of chronological time and distractions imposed by omnipresent digital technologies. Varley et al. (2020) propose that slow adventure experiences encourage feelings of oneness and connection with nature in wild places, and this ontological connection with place could potentially restore the broken ties between people and nature – but only if they move through spaces not at slow, nor fast, but at the *right* speed.

Green spaces have been increasingly utilised for therapeutic purposes. In particular, the wellbeing benefits of arboreal environments have been highlighted (Konu, 2015), with a particular focus on slow immersion and mindful utilisation of forests through the Japanese practice of forest bathing – *shinrin-yoku*. A structured, mediated forest walk combines forest medicine and traditions of the land, and for most of programme requires bodily and mental presence and continual attention to the senses (Farkic, Isailovic, & Taylor, 2021). The aim of forest bathing is not to cover long distances while walking, but rather to engage in diverse activities in more mindful, deeper, and spiritual ways, which enables self-treatment with the help of the healing properties of the forest (Forest Therapy South-Eastern Europe, 2021).

This relatively new tourism product – forest wellness – is largely premised on forest therapy, suggesting the immense restorative powers and anti-stress effects of forests (Cvikl, 2016; Isailovic et al., 2014). In recognising that forests are ideal settings for therapeutic programmes, the spa concept of the Forest Spa was developed around the idea of authentic Turkish hammams. What is pivotal here is the slow movement of the sun across the *hararet* (the central place of hammam) in which activities take place. While the sun's rays filter through the treetops, they illuminate the

space in which programmes take place. The interplay of shadows and light then becomes the indicator of time, a category that easily becomes relative, bent, extended, fluid, and subjectively negotiated. The activities facilitate the power of presence through meditative practices and noticing what is in motion by walking at a snail's pace. They are usually followed by selfness workshops in which participants are free to unleash their creativity and innate need for play (Isailovic et al., 2014).

Tourism researchers have also moved beyond the slow-moving body, to explore the stilled body and the body that is asleep as a medium through which we can learn about the human condition. By way of example, Rantala and Valtonen (2014) opined that regular, normative rhythms of everyday life, cities and big tourist centres are disrupted on nature holidays, which allows tourists to get attuned to different modes of being *with* nature. To this end, they observed tourists as waking and sleeping beings, arguing that this very existential human condition assumes a temporary absence from waking life. In offering novel insights into being asleep and doing sleep in nature, Rantala and Valtonen (2014) illuminate the importance of lying down, a posture that is not particularly appreciated in industrialised, capitalist societies. Learning how to 'do' sleep requires skill and techniques that must be learned in accord with the surrounding space and natural rhythms. This, in turn, assumes unlearning to sleep indoors, in the bedroom, in bed, on a pillow and under a blanket. Learning is a process that requires time; people need to understand how things work in hitherto unusual environments and to become comfortable with different ways of doing things. Doing sleep, similar to doing slowness, therefore requires time and commitment to be understood, attuned to and meaningfully practised.

It is here where we can begin to understand the wellbeing potential of slowing down the passage of time and stilling the tourist body in developing the idea of tourist idleness. To date, limited studies have argued against stillness as a moment of emptiness or missed productivity, as something that needs to be filled with productive work (Bissel & Fuller, 2011). Rather, they observed it beyond the conditions of stasis and immobility, as a powerful 'activity' that can

meaningfully fulfil people's leisure time. However, the significance of slowness and bodily inaction (such as stillness or sleep) have been sufficiently explored (Yang et al., 2021; Valtonen & Veijola, 2011; Rantala & Valtonen, 2014; Bissell & Fuller, 2011; Löfgren & Ehn, 2010); however, there is little understanding of the implications of idleness for tourism. The abovementioned studies have been useful for our conceptualisation of tourist idleness as a way of rest, recuperation and slow immersion in natural rhythms, and as a practice that allows modern urbanites a space for much yearned-for switching off and doing nothing, albeit temporarily.

In aiming to add to the existing conversation on achieving wellbeing through tourism, we therefore draw attention to the idle body which can be enacted through activities in natural spaces, sitting around the meadow, romanticised gazing at the surrounding landscapes, engaging in creative workshops, or aimless wanderings over the pastures. These activities may be perceived as inefficient, un-ordered or irrational; however, they may be the non-verbal reaction to the regimented-ness of modern life and eventfulness of tourism. We propose that escaping the rules of everyday life and relocation to natural areas to 'do nothing' on purpose may provide a compensatory arena in which people can temporarily withdraw from hecticness and busyness, and enter that recuperative space described by Löfgren and Ehn (2010, p. 208) as 'a bohemian flipside of Western modernity'.

### Idleness and Otiose Leisure

Philosophers and writers have long celebrated and consistently configured the notion of idleness. For example, William Wordsworth (1995), having escaped from the vast city where he long pined, compared it to a feeling of liberty and ease. Kierkegaard (2004) advocated for idleness as a way of a truly divine life, as it 'brings liberty and a quiet enjoyment of rural scenes which are thus framed as the seeds of creative production' (Huber, 2020, p. 403). Similarly, Bertrand Russell (2004) explored the virtues of being idle in modern society, arguing that human happiness would increase with the increase in leisure time, further resulting in increased involvement in arts, sciences and hobbies. This should encourage modern humans to think of

the good life and accomplishment not only in terms of achieving tangible, measurable goals, but also in relation to unquantifiable, quality time that we spend doing things we enjoy, and which make us feel well, fulfilled, – and essentially human (Fendel et al., 2020).

There are various cultural manifestations of idleness. By way of example, the German concept of *Muße*, denoting leisure, signifies mental space for introspection and reflection (Gimmel & Keiling, 2016). It was originally translated as an 'opportunity,' not only to escape from work, but also to engage in meaningful leisure activities. In the state of *Muße*, the goal is not achievement and efficiency, but rather to be content with what is happening in the present moment. Similarly, the Dutch philosophy of *Niksen* advocates the pleasures of leisure time. It suggests the elysian pleasantness of performing idle activities, such as sitting in a chair and staring through the window, enjoying long mealtimes or aimless perambulations. To 'do niks' does not mean to work, perform emotional labour or be attentive and mindful (Mecking, 2021). The idea is to take time to relax completely and contemplate nothing serious or thought-provoking (Alpert, 2014). It is therefore suggested that entering the state of *Niksen* has wellbeing benefits for its power to encourage people to do good to themselves by not doing much (Tufvesson, 2020). Likewise, the Italian concept which strongly advocates for idleness is *Il dolce far niente* (literally translated as 'the sweetness of doing nothing'). It refers to the pleasure one gets from being idle, allowing for a celebration of time free of work, when the mind unwinds and the body rests (Carver, n.d.). The importance of letting the mind wander at will is acknowledged in this concept, as energy is thus replenished and priority is given to freedom, play and creativity.

To better understand idleness as a tourism practice on holiday, we explore it here through the dialectic of the Ciceronian Latin concepts of *otium/negotium*. The origins of these two terms can be traced back to the Roman state, in which Cicero's conceptualisation of *otium* was associated with the Roman political elite's retreat to their country houses, as documented in Cicero's works (Fludernik, 2021). In the Roman state, *otium* was not meant for everyone, rather it was

only aimed at the privileged. Authors such as Bragova (2016) explored the ambiguous concept of ‘cum dignitate otium,’ suggesting that it needs to be studied in relation to the context in which Cicero used this term. It can therefore be understood as both a political and social concept with multiple meanings, such as ‘peace with dignity’ or ‘tranquillity with honour’ (Radford, 2002). By *otium* Cicero assumed both ‘peaceful leisure full of studies’ and ‘peace in private affairs.’ In our study, however, we refer to *otium* as a social space, which encourages leisure, relaxation, creativity and freedom.

### **Otium/Negotium Dialectic**

The Latin term *negotium* (translated as business, employment, occupation, labour or difficulty) signifies chores; duties that need to be done within certain working hours or by a certain deadline. This is embodied in the concept of *Homo Faber* (Frisch, 1959), which encapsulates people’s dependence on technologies and their urge to produce something by way of their labour (Ihde & Malafouris, 2019). The capitalist ideology is largely premised on productivity and achievement of goals, and endorses motivation and initiative for work and production. It frames speed as positive and desirable whilst suppressing effortless activities like waiting, lying, or daydreaming. Waiting time is considered ‘dead time’ which prevents the regular flow and development of modern life. Being idle is a moment of inactivity, that unproductive moment in between movements, a period when people ‘do nothing’ but briefly recuperate and energise, in order to re-engage in work. In our workaholic society, an idle person is normally described as slothful, that is, wasting time by doing nothing of (economic) value, instead engaging in ‘empty labour’ (Paulsen, 2014). Unfortunately, modern humans have learned to deny stillness and dismiss idleness as trivial, uneventful, unproductive, unnoticed, and unimportant. Instead, the frenetic, dramatic, eventful, productive, laborious way of life is privileged. Despite the more recent concerns for people’s health and wellbeing, being idle continues to be seen as a negative and stillness has been regarded as something that punctuates the flow and disrupts the frenetic motion of things.

*Otium*, on the other hand, denotes the opposite – the non-working time, the time for leisure, inactivity, quietness, and recuperation from hard work. In the past, the time of *otium* was considered a leisure activity that excludes intensive physical activity and movement in favour of bodily stillness and an active mind. It was filled with simple habits, pleasures, pastimes, and hobbies, but it also allowed time for nature appreciation, research, intellectual activity, meditation, or contemplation (Vickers, 1990). More recently, the idealisation of the original meaning of *otium* (leisure) has been understood as a reaction to globalisation and digitalisation and its effects on the postmodern digital societies who may have fewer opportunities for leisure, thus developing nostalgic feelings about the ‘lost way of life.’

The experience of *otium* can also be explained as a state of mind. In contemporary societies, idleness has mostly been seen as a luxury rather than a virtue, as rare moments of idleness allow us to find harmony within ourselves, and to appreciate the significance of contemplation, compassion, gratitude, or deep reflection. To embrace idleness means to enable the mind to wander – it is a conscious act of living that restores a sense of freedom and inspires creativity and imagination (Russell, 2004). During a period of idleness, the mind wanders and resorts to its default mode, generating stimulus-independent thoughts that are typically internally oriented yet not specifically focused (Yang & Hsee, 2019). Even while being bodily still, one can have a busy, active mind, which daydreams. Löfgren and Ehn (2010, p. 2015) term this as ‘stationery mobility,’ the condition in which people are free to roam between different mental worlds or disappear into memories.

Being idle is not a complete absence of activity, however. It may often involve both mental and physical processes. For example, Fludernik (2021) uses the term ‘otiose leisure’ to explain the idea of *Muße*, suggesting that in these segments of leisure people can ‘meditate or listen to music; relax while hiking, dancing, or swimming; one can also engage in a burst of musical composition or in a workflow of concentrated reading or writing’ (p. 17). *Muße* may therefore assume anything from relaxation and doing little or nothing to

slightly more demanding activities, both physical and intellectual. What is crucial here is that otiose moments are largely determined by time and freedom to do something creative or to achieve a qualitatively different experience of that time. Fludernik (2021) explains that for one to enter the state of *otium*, they need to be liberated from imposed constraints (deadlines or schedules) and have the freedom to choose an activity they wish to undertake. For the consumers, the author states, the passage of time appears slower, as people then do not worry about the measurable, calculable goals they need to achieve; instead they engage in spending time at a slow, leisurely pace. This perception of deceleration becomes possible 'only when one withdraws into a bounded space or temporal slot without interruptions or outside interference' (Fludernik, 2021, p. 17). Such retreats allow one to shut out potential disturbances, obligations and distractions, to more meaningfully engage in the act of *being*.

The situations in which people express and enact idleness can in many ways be found liberating, purposeful and meaningful. People's freedom, wellbeing and development of the self could then be encouraged by places of *otium*, in which they are free to do nothing, waste time, wait, fantasise or daydream in unfettered, fulfilling ways. To Löfgren and Ehn (2010, p. 208), 'routines sink into the body and become reflexes, daydreams drift past unnoticed, and waiting becomes a state of mind.' Places of *otium* in nature surely have the power to encourage such states, and help people to take a different perspective on life, to unwind, relax and ultimately, to feel well.

Drawing on the extant literature that encapsulates the act of idleness as a way of living or being, we suggest that elements of these constructs could be implemented in the development of nature-based tourism. In framing idleness as the act of doing nothing which encourages bodily stillness, contemplation, freedom or creativity, we echo Varley's and Semple's (2015) view that immersion in places of *otium* may be viewed beyond the escape from the frenetic, grinding hypermodernity; it can also be understood as the metaphorical process of coming home. Although the choreography of doing nothing may resonate with emptiness and may sound like a set of oxymorons, such as active

Table 1 Dimensions of Places of *Otium*

Spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural environment</li> <li>• Hospitality establishments in quiet/remote areas</li> <li>• Locally grown food</li> <li>• Traditions of the land</li> </ul>
Temporal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertaking unstructured activities</li> <li>• Attuning to circadian rhythm of living</li> <li>• Independence of clocked, chronological time</li> </ul>
Existential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self actualisation through engaging in creative, playful and hedonic activities</li> <li>• Achieving freedom through introspection, daydreaming or inquiry</li> </ul>

passivity, productive laziness, or contoured freedom (Fludernik, 2021), it is undeniably rich, and may offer a quality experience through which humans come to self; reconnect with their inner beings, embark on inward journeys, relax, self-actualise, develop and grow.

We now turn to discuss how places of *otium* can be created and consumed in nature-based tourism through the triumvirate of spatial, temporal and existential dimensions, which we argue can contribute to the construction of the idle holiday experience (Table 1).

### Places of *Otium* in Nature

#### The Spatial Context

Places of *otium* in nature-based tourism are designed in such a way to encourage tourist idleness. For example, rural, mountainous, forested or coastal areas are ideal settings for activities to be undertaken in a uniquely localised way and which tourists may experience with a pair of completely new eyes (Mackenzie & Goodnow, 2020). Against the backdrop of natural landscapes, hospitality establishments (such as country houses, lakeside cabins, mountain huts, camping/glamping units, or commercial farmhouses) have a competitive advantage due to their location in natural and relatively remote areas with less noise and pollution than in urban environs. Such environments could be termed as 'moorings' (Hannam et al., 2006), that is, spaces to settle in, to just be still and 'do nothing.' What they have in common is their distinct spa-

tiality that draws clear boundaries between noise and silence, activity and calm, easy access and seclusion. These places offer an atmosphere different from that found in urban environs and foster a different kind of attention, one that does not need to be focused, won or retained; just what most modern urbanites need and search for (Figal, 2014). The slow, extended immersion in the landscapes and attentiveness to the dynamics different from busy, structured everydayness allows for the opportunities for creative absent-mindedness, learning, and deep appreciation of the traditions, the foods, the land, and people of that land.

We can learn from the example of slow tourism, which celebrates simple, organic, local, traditional, affective and emotional dimensions of the experiences gained through immersion in the destination and local way of life (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010). To this end, services in commercial hospitality establishments should be delivered in traditional, intimate, authentic ways, as is encouraged in any slow tourism context (Fullagar et al., 2012). The meals, prepared according to old recipes and from homegrown ingredients, may deepen the connection with the history, culture and identity of the regions. For example, on the mountain plateaus, where herdsmen spend their summers grazing sheep, tourists can enjoy the flavours of corn porridge, or soup made by roasting and browning flour. Shepherds, while serving homemade cheese, tell their visitors the story of its production. Similarly, farmsteads could offer opportunities for encounters with tradition through slow food cooked on the old wood-burning stove on the porch. Country houses nested in a rural ambience, and glamping in vineyards or wine cellars also offer ideal spots for escaping busy realities.

Some of the props to encourage idleness in these places are comfortable hammocks spread between pine trees, hay bales, benches by the waterfall, deckchairs at the riverbank or mats laid out on the meadows. Whilst reclining in sofas in front of the fireplace, in ergonomic deckchairs or swaying in hammocks, sipping mulled wine or munching on homemade cheese, tourists may let their minds wander and observe the dynamics of the natural world around them: the clouds forming in the sky, the ants crawling in the grass, the water flowing down the riverbed, the

sheep grazing in the pastures. Such seemingly 'slothful' activities represent the antidote to the prevalent workaholicism in high-speed societies. Engaging in so-called 'empty labour' (Paulsen, 2014) may encourage us to think about a different way of *being* in this world, however. The value of idleness moves beyond its role in constructing the deeper, richer and more meaningful tourism experience, to also be considered as a way of relaxing the tense tourist body, shaped by the mechanical repetition of everydayness.

#### Qualitative Time

Being idle on holiday also means having the alternative concept of time in mind. We argue here that it is the kairological time of an idle holiday that renders it pleasurable and meaningful. The Greek term *Chronos* expresses a measure, a quantity of duration, whilst its counterpart, *Kairos*, is more qualitative and has a special temporal position. As Weber (2014, p. 7) suggests, 'with Kairos we are always "on time," naked in the timeliness of opportunity, as it were.' In contrast to chronological time, qualitative time is what matters; there are no time constraints nor scheduled tourist itineraries. When we take out everyday life's repetition and predictable routines, our consciousness makes more space for new experiences; we are aware of new spaces, people and things, smells and flavours. Being in natural environments is recuperative per se; however, idling the body allows for different perspectives of observing and being in the world around us and within us, which can be additionally refreshing, rejuvenating and liberating.

In places of *otium*, tourists have the freedom to consume activities in whatever order they want, and for however long they want (Fludernik, 2021). Time is perceived differently, particularly owing to the temporary independence from clocked time. There are no errands to run, tasks to complete, deadlines to meet. Time becomes decompressed (Varley & Semple, 2015), and can be filled up in more kairological and meaningful ways (Farkic et al., 2020). Places of *otium* have agency of their own and might influence the way tourists consume a place and where chronological time materialises only in the rhythms of nature and the dynamics of the more-than-human world.



Tourists may observe the movement of the orb across the horizon to tell the part of the day; they may follow the circadian rhythms of light and dark to wake up and go to sleep (Rantala & Valtonen, 2014). Following the circadian clock means that the timing of biology is something that should be measured and managed, thus, aligning our inner clocks with the natural, cyclical shifts of dark and light may positively impact our wellbeing (Global Wellness Summit, n.d.). Tourists do not need to go anywhere; rather they are grounded in place, while, on their own or in the company of others, they engage in daydreaming, deep wonder, aesthetic delight, silent talks, or reveries (Sinclair & Watson, 2001; Schinkel, 2017).

#### Freedom, Liberty and Creativity

*Otium* is not only a physical space, but also an approach to *being*; it is a way of human existence, a condition that enables freedom of the individual. In our capitalist, consumerist society, we can observe freedom as ‘getting away from it all’ (Caruana & Crane, 2011); leisure time spent away from work and daily chores becomes freedom in itself. To Carr (2017, p. 139), leisure is ‘a journey of self-exploration and development with the aim of enlightenment,’ a process which is simultaneously an expression of and search for freedom. O’Connor (1966, p. 35, cited in Carr, 2017) suggested that ‘in our leisure we may meet ourselves’ and that ‘it is doubtful that you can live well in leisure if you have overlooked the development of self’ (p. 68). Therefore, delving deeper into the notion of freedom as central to leisure experiences can partially inform us what it may mean in the context of tourist idleness. Acquiring new existential experience through otiose leisure, favouring self-actualisation through meaningful and creative activities, are the priorities of an idle holiday. The periods of idleness are bounded and in this context our observation of freedom is reduced to the holiday’s timeframe. However, despite this ‘contoured freedom,’ tourists undertake activities at their own, slow pace (Fludernik, 2021). For some, a simple, undisturbed stroll in the hills or sitting by the waterfall may be perceived as freedom after having spent months of being chained to the workplace in one of the world’s metropolises; they can feel more

alive and closer to themselves, being focused on their own thoughts and the immediate environments which unleash their creative potential.

As Fludernik (2021) suggested, otiose leisure is embodied in active passivity. Bodily grounding in places of *otium* may be achieved through creative activities such as writing prose or poetry, finding contemplative siting spots, knitting, yoga or walking the *Muße* trails. Green spaces offer opportunities for escape from the city in order to temporarily co-exist with the more-than-human world, often in proximity to wildlife. An example of this could be wildlife watching in forests, in which tourists are required to sit in silence, while at the same time they can savour the luxury of being embedded in pristine nature, enjoy the healing sounds of nature, and attune themselves to the extended process of waiting (Kočevsko, n.d.). In engaging in simplified activities afforded by the land and the season, bodily movement is to be minimised in favour of creating comfortable personal and physical space, which allows for extended periods of ‘focused non-doing.’

To this end, relinquishing digital technologies can help us escape information overload which characterises the digital era in which we live. Big and small screens forever remind us of what else is there to be ‘done,’ or that life happens elsewhere, in another tourist resort, at home or the workplace. In recent times, however, digital-free tourism (Li et al., 2018) and the digital detox trend (Cai & McKenna, 2021; Cai et al., 2020) have gained importance due to the increasing number of individuals who choose to digitally disconnect on holiday. The abovementioned studies have shown that switching off digital devices has multiple benefits, one of them being a more frequent and immediate interaction among travel companions, which allows for bonding and building a sense of community, and, ultimately, overcoming social estrangement.

In encouraging the experience of *otium*, hospitality establishments in natural areas should discourage the usage of smartphones, tv, or frequent influx of the news through digital media by limiting access to Wi-Fi, or even offer opportunities for locking one’s phone away to completely unplug and recharge (Buzzoffski, n.d.; Unplugged, n.d.). Tourists should not look

at their phones, sleep watches or other wearables to track their sleep patterns. Also, learning how to detach from artificial light and flickering screens in the evenings (for example Netflix, online games or social media at bedtime) in favour of enjoying the moonlight or flickering light of the campfire at dusk while chatting away with sojourners, may be liberating in itself, unlearning to use digital devices and acknowledging the fact that a meaningful event *is* actually unfolding right there and then, with us being the protagonists of the idle holiday story.

Therefore, to embrace idleness means to enable the mind to do what it wants and attune to the simplicity of *being* – it is a conscious act of living that inspires creativity and imagination. Succour can be found in a simplified way of living, often afforded by natural and rural areas, away from the world of busy humans concerned with technologies, prestige, status or business attire. When we enter a place of *otium*, we can simply *be* – existentially, ontologically free. Through idle walking and meandering through the landscapes, taking on the role of an absent-minded flaneur can afford us enough time to indulge in our favourite pastimes, such as the process of thinking. Moments of idleness allow us to find harmony within ourselves, and to appreciate the significance of deep reflection in the context of our inner peace and subjective wellbeing. More importantly, by becoming idle we empower our freedom to do so without feeling a sense of pressure, nor within the constraints of the high-speed world.

## Conclusion

Throughout this paper, we aimed to extend the works of the tourism scholars concerned with slow(er) forms of nature-based tourism through discussing idleness as a particular modality of holidaying, which can in many ways contribute to people's wellbeing. We presented the act of idleness as a wrong, strange, or difficult-to-realise practice in contemporary, urbanised, digitalised societies, which are largely premised on speed, workaholism and productivity. To this end, we conceptualise tourist idleness as a temporary detachment from the structured and busy everyday life, and engagement in entirely unstructured holiday activities. Through 'doing nothing,' tourists should let go

of the guilt for not producing or measuring the success of the day by the achievement of economic goals. While on holiday, a new measuring system is to be considered: rather than counting the number of museums visited or photos taken and shared on social media, tourists should try to count the number of times they have seen a new species of bird, count the number of sheep in a herd, breaths they took while crossing the field, or smiled about nothing. Doing nothing is hard work, nevertheless. The first few days of their vacation, people normally find it difficult to decompress and let go of work, emails and a busy life. They have trouble breaking up with quotidian routines, such as checking emails or social media; however, this could gradually shift towards the enjoyment and pleasure of being entirely unproductive and, dare we say, productively bored and lazy.

Doing nothing, although it resonates with emptiness, is imbued with meaning. In defying servile activities and mindless speed, idleness widens the space of existence beyond utility, achievement and labour. It enables people to enter liberal activities in which they are internally free from the chains of the necessities of life (Pieper, 1950, p. 420). In places of *otium*, people may bracket themselves out from busyness, organised work and frameworks, and immerse in the world where things they see, do and feel do not yet have names; where mystery and magic are bound together; where the universe becomes more intimate and personal (Jenkins, 2000). It is argued here that people should recognise the reflective or restorative potential of being still in the outdoors and embrace inactivity as a process of ontogenic transformation (Bissell & Fuller, 2011). Tourists should therefore embrace idleness as a noble holiday activity and as a way of revival and renewal of the self.

In this paper, we used the example of natural environments to illustrate how idleness can be incorporated in the tourism offer, hoping, however, that tourism destinations worldwide can recognise the potential of idleness for improving people's wellbeing. National tourism boards normally promote events, recreational activities, or active tourism, alongside encouraging visitation of multiple destinations during tourists' stay. However, non-events, inactivity and idle

time have been less favoured categories, as they are considered less profitable, hospitable, productive or memorable (Fludernik, 2021). In expanding the approach to marketing destinations through offering idleness, local destination management organisations and national tourism boards can offer novel ways of being on holiday. The product could potentially create possibilities for hitherto unknown experiences for modern-day *Homo Faber* (whether urban dwellers, millennials or any other time-deprived market segment), premised on inactive journeys or active non-action.

We suggest that the existing activity portfolio of nature-based destinations could be expanded to also include idleness as an equally meaningful and restorative tourist activity. It is, however, distinct from other recreational, organised or expert-led outdoor activities, such as hiking, kayaking, rafting, cycling or mountain biking, in that it is entirely unstructured, unguided and requires minimal physical effort and independence from chronological time. Learning from the Nordic countries, 'selling nothing' to tourists should be seen as an opportunity for tourism development in nature-rich destinations as it is largely premised on sustainability. Such an approach works towards the achievement of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals through promoting responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism (UNWTO, n.d.).

The paper adds to the literature that disrupts the conceptualisations of holidays in nature as an assemblage of active participation in recreational activities or consumption of high-octane experiences (e.g. Rantala & Valtonen, 2014; Varley & Semple, 2015; Farkic et al, 2021). It does so by extending the studies which propose that minimal, slow-paced movement and idleness in natural settings may also account for tourism activities in their own right. More substantial research is needed into tourist idleness within the sustainability framework, and how it can contribute to people, the planet and prosperity of humankind. Our study opens the way for empirical explorations of the ways in which people perceive and experience idleness, and the plural effects doing nothing on holiday may have not only on our physical, mental and

emotional wellbeing, but also on determining our personal and social worlds. Happiness, creativity, meaningfulness and prosperity may therefore come from doing less, not more, on holidays. Idleness, by its nature, is both eudaimonic and hedonic, and should be savoured with delicacy.

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