



SLOW TOURISM IN ALSACE? THEORY VERSUS REALITY

ABSTRACT

Master Thesis about Slow Tourism in
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the phenomenon of Slow Tourism in the Alsace region of northeastern France, critically examining the intersection between theory and practice. Amid a global tourism industry increasingly scrutinized for its environmental, social, and cultural impacts, Slow Tourism emerges as a sustainable, reflective alternative to mass tourism. It promotes immersive, mindful travel that emphasizes local engagement, cultural authenticity, sustainability, and personal well-being. Through a constructivist, qualitative approach, this research evaluates how the principles of Slow Tourism are understood, implemented, and experienced by tourists, locals, and institutional actors in Alsace.

Alsace offers a compelling case study due to its well-preserved villages, extensive cycling and walking infrastructure, strong culinary and wine traditions, and regional efforts to promote responsible tourism. However, the study reveals a significant gap between the theoretical ideals of Slow Tourism and the on-the-ground realities of tourist behaviour and regional policy execution. Data collection included semi-structured interviews with tourists and stakeholders, field observations, and the analysis of strategic and marketing reports from VisitAlsace and other regional institutions. These sources were coded and thematically analysed to extract patterns related to tourists' motivations, travel behaviours, experiences, and perceptions.

Findings indicate that while many tourists unknowingly engage in Slow Tourism practices—such as walking, cycling, enjoying local cuisine, and engaging with local communities—the majority are unfamiliar with the formal concept. Most visitors still exhibit behaviours associated with conventional tourism, including short stays, limited cultural immersion, and constrained interaction with locals. Institutional strategies in Alsace, while aligning in part with Slow Tourism values, rarely use the term explicitly and face challenges in translating these ideals into widespread practices. Barriers include rigid dining hours, expensive and sometimes inflexible public transport, and the dominance of heavily marketed attractions that concentrate visitors in a few locations, creating localized overtourism.

The study introduces the concept of "deceleration" as central to understanding Slow Tourism, comprising embodied, technological, and episodic forms that shape tourists' perception of time and engagement. Alsace provides natural and built environments conducive to such deceleration, yet effective engagement depends significantly on tourists' willingness and ability to embrace these slower rhythms. The constructivist approach reveals that the construction of a slow travel experience is co-created between visitor intention and regional offerings.

Ultimately, the research underscores that infrastructure and institutional support, while crucial, are insufficient without an accompanying cultural shift among tourists and a targeted strategy to encourage behavioural change. Recommendations include enhancing visitor education around slow travel, diversifying cultural programming beyond peak seasons, and improving accessibility and affordability of sustainable transport options. Alsace is well-positioned to become a model of Slow Tourism, but a deeper alignment between theoretical values, regional strategies, and actual tourist behaviour is necessary to fully realize this potential. This thesis contributes to the growing academic discourse on sustainable tourism by providing empirical insights into the complexities of implementing Slow Tourism within a specific regional context.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays tourism stands at a crossroads. On one hand, the industry continues to grow, boosted by globalisation, improved and greater transportation, digital connectivity, and rising living standards in many parts of the world. On the other hand, however, this growth has raised increasing concerns about overtourism, environmental degradation, the loss of cultural authenticity and the negative social impacts on host communities. These challenges have ignited a growing interest in alternative models of tourism that aim to reduce the adverse consequences of mass tourism and offer more sustainable, responsible and meaningful ways to travel.

One question that naturally rises is, why simply don't we stop tourism altogether if it has such negative effects? The answer is simple; many destinations rely on tourism as their economic activity. In Alsace, tourism counts for more than 1.6 billion € (using the English term) (Alsace Destination Tourisme; Collectivité Européenne d'Alsace, 2023).

Therefore, the necessity to keep tourism as an economic resource is fundamental, but so it is for it to be sustainable: Consequently, slow tourism can be the solution, or one of them.

Slow Tourism appears in this context as a compelling alternative. Rather than promoting speed, efficiency, and high consumption, Slow Tourism encourages a more deliberate, meaningful and immersive experience. It invites tourists to slow down—physically, mentally, and emotionally—and to engage deeply with their surroundings, local cultures, communities, and natural environments. Rooted in the broader philosophy of the Slow Movement, which began in Italy in the 1980s as a protest against the industrialisation and commodification of food (the "Slow Food" movement), Slow Tourism represents a shift in the values underpinning travel. It prioritises quality over quantity, connection over consumption, and sustainability over exploitation.

This thesis explores the concept of Slow Tourism through the lens of the Alsace region in north-eastern France. Alsace offers a unique and fertile ground for studying this form of tourism. With its well-preserved villages, rich cultural history, diverse landscapes, accessible transport infrastructure, and emphasis on local products and traditions, the region inherently lends itself to slow travel. While Alsace has long been a tourist destination—famous for its wine route, Christmas markets, and Franco-German heritage—it is only in recent years that the principles of Slow Tourism have started to gain attention in both strategic tourism planning and the practices of visitors themselves.

The core aim of this research is to assess how Slow Tourism is perceived, enacted, and facilitated in Alsace. The study seeks to understand whether, and to what extent, the region meets the criteria to be considered a Slow Tourism destination. It explores how tourists interact with the region, what motivates their travel choices, how local stakeholders understand and promote tourism, and how institutional actors envision the region's tourism future. By combining theoretical exploration with empirical investigation, the research aims to provide a comprehensive picture of Slow Tourism in Alsace.

The study is structured into several parts. The literature review introduces and critically examines key concepts such as Slow Tourism, the Slow Movement, Cittaslow (slow cities), deceleration, and tourist motivation. These theoretical frameworks provide the foundation for the analysis. The case study of Alsace examines the specific characteristics of the region and how they align with the values of Slow Tourism. The methodology section outlines the qualitative research approach adopted, grounded in a constructivist paradigm, which recognises the socially constructed nature of reality and emphasises the role of individual and collective experiences in shaping knowledge. Through semi-structured interviews, personal observations, and secondary data analysis, the research gathers insights from tourists, locals, and institutional representatives.

Finally, the analysis and discussion chapters synthesize the findings and relate them back to the theoretical framework. They assess how the values of Slow Tourism are being realised in practice in Alsace, identify areas of strength and weakness, and explore opportunities for future development. The thesis concludes by reflecting on the implications of these findings, not only for Alsace but for other regions interested in pursuing Slow Tourism as a sustainable and enriching model for tourism development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SLOW TOURISM & SLOW CITIES

Slow Tourism, as its name implies, it is tourism that happens slowly. It appears as a reaction to mass tourism, so that, traveling doesn't mean the continuation of our rush, stressful lifestyle but instead, slow tourism becomes an escape, a way for slowing down physically and mentally, for visitors to take their time, to appreciate the details, discover new things and reflect about our society and its problem (Manthiou, Klaus, & Luong, 2022). Slow tourism prioritizes quality over quantity (Interreg Europe, 2024).

Slow Tourism is one of the fastest-growing markets in sustainable tourism (Manthiou, Klaus, & Luong, 2022), it is attracting the attention of both tourism scholars and practitioners (tourists). What makes it unique is the philosophy of deceleration, allowing the tourists to take their time to visit, to interact with locals, discovering heritage (beyond the mainstream attractions), consuming local products, traveling slowly, etc. all this ensures a higher quality experience and a reduce carbon footprint (Manthiou, Klaus, & Luong, 2022)It encourages to spend more time in fewer places (Interreg Europe, 2024)

It all started with the "Slow Food Movement" in the 1980s in Italy against the "McDonaldization" of life (ever faster, bigger, more stressful, etc.) in the context of food and soon it expended to other fields (Zielińska-Szczepkowska, 2020), Italy (Walker, J. Lee, & Li, 2021)& (Manthiou, Klaus, & Luong, 2022).

The movement was not only again fast food but also the overall pace of 'fast live' in our current society, and soon this movement blended to the tourism industry to produce slow tourism and the concept of 'Cittaslow' (Balaban & Keller, 2024).

Slow cities (Cittaslow) is a concept used to signalise a city that fulfils some requirements and slow tourism, and a high quality of life is possible (Balaban & Keller, 2024). Slow cities pay close attention to the concept of "sense of place", inviting slow travellers to pursue quality over quantity by highlighting the advantages of staying longer and invite them to participate in activities which enable the tourists to establish a sense of place, sense of identity and even emotional attachment (Fusté-Forné, Ginés-Ariza, & Noque-Junca, 2022). It must be said that even though the concept of "Citta Slow", in its most strict sense, could only be applied to cities under 50.000 inhabitants, I will be applying it to bigger cities.

Additionally, many of the activities that helps tourists achieve such estates don't necessarily take place inside the city but outside, in nature, for example: hiking, riding a bike, camping, etc. (Fusté-Forné, Ginés-Ariza, & Noque-Junca, 2022)

Now Cittaslow has evolve to become a territorial certification aiming to protect the cultural and environmental values of small towns through a slower lifestyle, while improving the quality of life of its inhabitants (Balaban & Keller, 2024).

To do so, the movement uses certain values as pillars (Anciaes, 2025):

- Urban spaces should prioritise pedestrians, cyclists, children, older people and individuals with restriction, rather than motorized vehicles.
- Urban streets should be considered places for relaxation and interaction.
- Local production should be supported and encouraged.
- The environment is seen as a component of the towns' sense of place, therefore it should be preserved and protected

Since in this paper we are covering the whole region of Alsace, we'll see how many of these values and aspects can be applied to the region and even to big cities such as Strasbourg or Mulhouse.

SLOW TOURISM

Although the concept of Slow tourism is still recent, and there is yet no consensus, it could be said that its theoretical foundations are:

- Sustainability: slow tourism opposes mass tourism and promotes sustainable practices and minimises environmental impact by choosing low impact transportation (train, bus, bike), supporting local economies, responsible behaviours towards natural and cultural resources, etc. (Sousa, Santos, & Lubowiecki-vikuk, 2021).
However, slow tourism isn't free of critics since many tourists arrived at their destination by plane and then travel "slow", but it is the flight that holds the biggest environmental impact. Therefore, it could be argued that slow tourism should also involves the journey to and from the destination, not just the way of traveling once at the destination. Nonetheless, in this paper, I will be using the widest accepted definition of slow tourism, the one that doesn't include the mode of transport to and from the destination. Furthermore, in order to achieve a truly sustainable tourism (economically, environmentally and with a responsible use of the resources) it must exist a long-term commitment of different actors and stakeholders (Walker, J. Lee, & Li, 2021) which isn't always the case.
- Cultural Authenticity: slow tourism emphasises authentic experiences so that visitors can engage with local customs, traditions, and ways of life. It is about searching for meaningful interactions in the destination, its culture, locals, history, etc. (Sousa, Santos, & Lubowiecki-vikuk, 2021)
- Temporal and spatial immersion: travellers are encouraged to visit less places in more time, thus; trying to remove the "checklist" from their minds, avoiding rushing and simply enjoying (Dickinson, Lumsdon, & Robbins, 2011). The "right" pace. Slow tourism doesn't mean doing everything slow, but rather at the right pace, taking time to properly accomplish goals (Manthiou, Klaus, & Luong, 2022). It is about quality not quantity, longer stays, less distance
- Connection to local communities is promoted in Slow tourism by trying to gain a cross-cultural understanding between visitors and locals. This connection supports local economies since visitors are more willing to spend money on local products and services (Wearing, Wearing, & McDonald, 2012). Slow tourists want to immerse themselves in the local culture, they want to "live" in a destination, rather than just "visit" a destination (Klarin, Park, Xiao, & Kim, 2023).

- Involvement. Slow tourists involve themselves in their experiences by engaging in different and several activities, rituals, traditions and by creating sensorial experiences and memories (visual, tactile, olfactory, gustative) (Manthiou, Klaus, & Luong, 2022).
- Economic benefits. Since tourists tend to stay longer, travel slower, engage with locals, etc. this type of tourism is most economically sustainable and more profitable for local communities than traditional mass tourism (Manthiou, Klaus, & Luong, 2022) & (Walker, J. Lee, & Li, 2021).

As said before, slow tourism has emerged as a counterpoint to mass tourism, emphasising engagement with local communities, encompassing the exploration and sharing of their customs, traditions, culinary practices, and more. This approach advocates for a leisurely pace, thereby minimising the environmental impact of tourism, and fostering a sense of relaxation, as articulated by Manthiou, Klaus, and Luong (2022).

The notion of "slow" in tourism refers to the establishment of authentic and significant connections with individuals, locations, culture, cuisine, heritage, and the environment (Manthiou, Klaus, & Luong, 2022). Practices associated with slow tourism include the exploration of local distinctiveness and the consumption of locally sourced products, such as dining at local restaurants, purchasing goods from local markets or directly from producers, and sampling regional beverages, beer, and wine (Fusté-Forné, Ginés-Ariza, & Noque-Junca, 2022). It is incumbent upon both public and private stakeholders within destinations to protect and promote food heritage and traditions (Fusté-Forné, Ginés-Ariza, & Noque-Junca, 2022).

The practice of slow tourism facilitates opportunities for tourists to unwind, evade their quotidian routines and stresses, explore other locales and themselves, engage in introspection, and partake in social interactions, among other benefits.

DECELERATION

Alongside Slow tourism, "deceleration" (as simply slowing down) is a recurrent concept and idea that we often see mentioned. Since the concept of "Slow Tourism" and "deceleration" are quite recent, they still don't have a clear definition and, in some areas, they overlap with "mass tourism" (Manthiou, Klaus, & Luong, 2022).

One question that naturally appears is, why do tourists feel the need to slow down? (Rosa, Dörre, & Lessenich, 2017) argues that we all live in a socially accelerated society. Social acceleration is "the setting-in-motion of the material, the social, and the cultural world at an ever-increasing speed" (Rosa, Dörre, & Lessenich, 2017) they also identify oases of deceleration, which exist within the societal state of acceleration as protected spaces where the speed and rhythm of life is temporarily slowed down. According to (Rosa, Dörre, & Lessenich, 2017) there are several different types of accelerations that people in modern societies are suffering; Acceleration of pace of life, acceleration of social change and technological acceleration; they can be defined as the "increase in episodes of action, experience and/or change per unit of time" (Rosa, Dörre, & Lessenich, 2017). And these episodes are occurring more and more often, thus the desire to escape and to slow down.

Deceleration refers to the search of opportunities by the tourists to escape the high paced daily life and engage in "slow consumption" (Manthiou, Klaus, & Luong, 2022). It can also be engaging in experience, during which participants feel present and conscious about the activity and their environment (Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019)

In fact, acceleration and deceleration are both part of how consumers (tourists in case of tourism) perceive time (Woermann & Rokka, 2015). They introduce the concept of time flow to better understand it, and how different elements influence this sensation.

When it comes to slow tourism, it is fundamental to understand all these concepts and the elements that help achieve deceleration, so that tourists enjoy a better experience and tourism actors can provide the right activities, experiences, offers, etc. to the tourists.

Following (Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019) in their study of "The Saint James Way" (El Camino de Santiago), I will base my study in theirs, to understand how Alsace is currently offering (and potentially could) opportunities to decelerate and take part in Slow Tourism.

Aspect that helps decelerate according to (Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019)

- not having a schedule (visitors said that in cities they experience time because they have to catch buses or do things, but when they are in nature or doing an activity, since they don't have to pay attention to time. As in daily life or in a tight scheduled trip, we have appointments, things to do, places to be, instead, in slow tourism there is only the experience at hand, the moment.
- Not to align with other people's times, for example with doctors, school, work, etc.
- Doing things slowly, calmly and without rush also helps in this aspect.

(Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019) also identified 3 different kinds of deceleration that can be applied to slow tourism. It is crucial that these 3 forms must be present in order for the consumers (tourists) to be able to decelerate.

1. Embodied Deceleration: it is the decrease of travelled distance per unit of time, it occurs as a result of engaging in slow modes of transportation (bike, walking, train). Going slowly allows travellers to pay attention to their bodies (when walking or cycling) and to the surroundings.
2. Technological Deceleration: it is the decrease in use of technology per unit of time, which helps disconnecting from the accelerated world and to enhance face-to-face communication. It is not abandoning technology but rather limiting it.
3. Episodic deceleration is the decrease in number of episodes of action per unit of time. By analysing the study of (Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019) we see that repetition and simplicity are fundamental in this aspect. Travelers need and engage in simple and repetitive routines in order to further engage in their slow experiences. Whatever the kind of slow trip that visitors are taking part in, it is key to develop some kind of easy routine.

(Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019) also mentioned 'oasis of deceleration', these are spaces where the 3 forms of deceleration occur, even if briefly, and where consumers (people) can decelerate. Slow cities aim at creating these safe spaces for their inhabitants and visitors.

TOURISTS' MOTIVATION

We have seen why tourists feel the need to slow down, to decelerate, now we are going to see the other motivations behind their travels.

Tourist motivation has been defined as the reasons that motivate individuals to travel (Yang, Ruan, Li, & Zhang, 2023), and it is the underlying force that arouses and directs travel behaviour (Prayag & Lee, 2019). These factors can vary and encompass a multitude of elements, including the desire to explore, personal growth, acquiring new knowledge, escaping one's usual environment, and the prestige associated with a particular destination, among others. A plethora of theoretical frameworks have been proposed to elucidate the underlying mechanisms that precipitate this motivation. These include: Maslow's hierarchical theory of needs, the push-pull framework and MEC (Means-end chain) theory (Yang, Ruan, Li, & Zhang, 2023).

Maslow's model posits that both fundamental and sophisticated psychological needs underpin the motivation to travel, and it asserts that tourists are influenced by factors associated with the destination environment (Tikkanen, 2007).

The push-pull framework is predicated on the premise that tourists' internal psychological dynamics constitute push factors (novelty, relaxation, social interaction, etc.), whilst the destination's attributes are classified as pull factors (climate, architecture, services, etc.). (Lin & Zhang, 2021).

According to the MEC theory, attributes, consequences and values represent different motivation levels, and their relationship and hierarchy is explained by MECs (Yang, Ruan, Li, & Zhang, 2023).

Some of the motivations behind both kinds of tourism that have already appeared include learning something new, social interaction, self-development, the prestige of doing an academic exchange, academic goals, and experience a new lifestyle (to live like a local), etc. Another approach to cultural immersion is to discover and understand the culture of the host community (Gomez, Imhoff, Martin-Consuegra, Molina & Leticia Santos-Vijande, 2018).

It is imperative to acknowledge the distinction between these motivations and those of a "regular traveller". The latter's motivations encompass a range of factors, including the desire to escape routine and daily life, the pursuit of relaxation, and the exploration of new places. The two types of tourists under discussion in this paper have more time at their disposal, allowing them to adopt a more leisurely pace and to immerse themselves in the local culture, traditions and habits.

These characteristics influence the overall experience and perception of a destination, for example not only by engaging in conventional activities but also by living through the daily issues of a destination as a local. This approach is said to engender a more "authentic" experience. A more detailed analysis of these motivations is warranted.

- The pursuit of a more authentic experience is driven by a desire to slow down. The contemporary age is characterised by an information-saturated environment, characterised by rapid changes in all spheres of life, including work and social interactions. This has resulted in a societal trend of individuals experiencing a perpetual sense of time constraints, and a consequent loss of control (Zielińska-Szczepkowska, 2020). Consequently, individuals seek to evade this reality, to decelerate, to relinquish their preoccupation with timepieces, schedules, and stress, and to re-establish a sense of agency and a capacity to savour life's nuances (Zielińska-Szczepkowska, 2020).
- This inclination towards reconnection, nurturance, discovery, exploration, and introspection is further emphasised by Zielińska-Szczepkowska (2020) and Oh, Assaf, & Baloglu (2016). These reasons also appeared in the field of academic tourism, since this kind of travelling isn't only about growing academically, but also personally and improving oneself.
- Furthermore, the pursuit of academic tourism can be understood as a means of escaping one's immediate environment, whether physically or mentally, and of finding respite from the demands of

daily life and stress (Zielińska-Szczepkowska, 2020; Oh, Assaf, & Baloglu, 2016). Achieving this escape can be facilitated through academic pursuits, particularly by engaging with novel concepts and confronting unfamiliar challenges in a different country and environment.

- The pursuit of knowledge, the exhilaration of the unknown, novel insights and stimulation, amongst other factors, have been identified as key drivers of academic tourism (Zielińska-Szczepkowska, 2020; Oh, Assaf & Baloglu, 2016). In the context of academic tourism, participants not only acquire new knowledge in their studies but also gain insight into the operational processes of other institutions and countries. Moreover, they are exposed to a plethora of new experiences, which serve as a rich source of input and stimulation.
- Furthermore, academic tourists are encouraged to engage with their new environment, including local customs, traditions, habits, and lifestyles (Zielińska-Szczepkowska, 2020) and (Oh, Assaf, & Baloglu, 2016). Furthermore, academic tourists actively engage with and participate in the local community. This engagement can be facilitated through various avenues, including academic studies, supplementary educational programmes, access to resources, networking opportunities, and participation in academic clubs. Furthermore, they have the opportunity to engage in part-time employment, join associations, forge new friendships, and assimilate into the local way of life.
- It has been demonstrated that studying abroad can enhance one's prospects of securing a desired position, thereby acquiring international recognition, academic experience, and knowledge (Harazneh, Al-Tall, Al-Zyoud, & Abubakar, 2018). Furthermore, some academic tourists utilise this opportunity to escape challenging circumstances in their home country and/or remain in their new host country or gain entry to a different one (Harazneh, Al-Tall, Al-Zyoud, & Abubakar, 2018).
- It is imperative to acknowledge the multifaceted motivations and factors that influence the decision to travel, the manner in which travel is undertaken, and the destination selected by these individuals. These include perceived risks, safety concerns, visa procedures, the cost of education and living, language barriers, geographical and cultural proximity, reputation, and policy (Harazneh, Al-Tall, Al-Zyoud, & Abubakar, 2018). The influence of these factors can be both positive and negative on the individual, with more adventurous participants, for instance, potentially preferring to travel and study in a more "exotic" culture.

CASE STUDY

Alsace is a slow tourism region, or better said, Alsace is a region where slow tourism takes place. All the indicators of slow tourism are present; slow transport modes, local products, contact with locals, sustainability, etc.

Slow transport

Alsace is a region where slow transport is encouraged, for both locals and tourists and not only in the bigger cities like Strasbourg, Mulhouse or Colmar, but also in the small villages and towns and across the region.

Bike:

the bike is an essential element in Alsace (there are more than 2500Km of bike lanes in the Region (VisitAlsace, 2025), mostly in Strasbourg where bike lanes coverage is very extensive with more than

600Km of bike lanes (Strasbourg Eurometropole, 2025). Other cities, towns and villages also have extensive infrastructure for bikes and the use of it is promoted and encouraged. Not only locals, but also tourists, there are many companies offering bike tours in the big cities as well as through the whole region, visiting the most iconic places, following the Alsacian Wine Route (VisitAlsace, 2025), or simply to enjoy nature, the big outdoors and the scenery (Visit Alsace, 2025). A great advantage of the region of Alsace is its geography. The parts closer to the Rhin are flatter and with gentle hills, whereas the mountain chain of The Vosges rises to the west of the Region, with a maximum altitude of 1400m. There is also the possibility of taking one of the European biking trails, since there are three of the Eurovelo routes (5,6 and 15) that cross Alsace (European Cyclists' Federation , 2024)

Walking:

Alsace is a Region rich in history and where many of its cities, towns and villages date from medieval times or even before (Visit Alsace, 2025), which means that most of them have an old design and old centre not ideal for cars, therefore, they are pedestrian friendly. In addition to this, there is a great effort done throughout the entire region encouraging locals and visitors to leave their car/bus outside the city/town/village centre and instead use the public transport or simply walk around (CTS Strasbourg, 2025), (Colmar & sa Region, 2025) (Mulhouse Alsace Agglomeration, 2025). A great example of this is the numerous park-and-drive stations or parkings outside the centre, mostly in Strasbourg.

The city of Strasbourg takes this to its limit, since during the Christmas market, the whole city centre is fenced, and no vehicles are allowed inside.

Moreover, many localities offer 'historic walks', explaining interesting facts about their history, emblematic buildings, etc.

There are even the traditional walking tours all around the region.

Hiking, refuges, club Vosgien.

Public Transport (Visit Alsace, 2025)

Alsace is one the regions in France with the best public transport. This network is very extensive and covers the whole territory.

Mostly there are trains and buses.

There is a main train route connecting the bigger cities: Strasbourg, Selestat, Colmar, Mulhouse and Saint Louis until Basel (Switzerland). However, there are also a great number of regional trains connecting many other localities within the region and connecting the region to the rest of the country and even with its neighbouring countries.

Bigger cities count with a great tramway system, Strasbourg being the city in France with the longest tramway network and it keeps expanding.

Smaller places have buses and some of the localities offer them for free to locals, like Obernai. There is also a great offer of bus lines connecting localities with each other.

Once the weather starts to improve, there is always an increase of the number of public transport possibilities, the most notorious one is "La route des cretes". It is an extra bus service connecting the bigger cities with the mountains.

Tourists can enjoy different passes in order to use the public transport system when they visit Alsace.

Local consumption/local products

In Alsace, as in every other region in France, inhabitants tend to consume local and seasonal products. This is especially remarkable when going to the market, and even in restaurants since the menu changes to accommodate the changing seasons.

Alsace is a fertile region and thus, it produces a lot, from wheat, to corn, to cheese, and meat derivatives. It is not unusual to be able to buy/eat just Alsacian food. Moreover, every single locality counts with a farmers'

market, where customers can purchase goods directly from the farmer themselves. And, in some cases, there are even farms where clients can pick-up their own goods.

When it comes to restaurants/bars/etc. it is easy to find those which propose daily menus with local products that follow the seasons and the disponibility of ingredients.

Even more, throughout the whole region one can find many “Ferme-auberge”, mostly closer to or on the mountains though. These are hosting farms. They are farms, where visitors can buy/consume the products from the farm directly in-situ to the farmers, since they function as shops and restaurants. Some of them even offer the possibility of accommodation, ideal for hikers and tourists.

Wine is a national pride in France and in every producing region, so Alsace is no different. Wine is also a crucial part of Alsatian culture and of the Region identity. It produces all kinds of wine, although mostly white wine. Alsatian wine can be purchased in every supermarket, market or directly in one of the hundreds of vineyards that are scattered across its territory. Furthermore, there is a speciality that is even internationally known, ‘Le Crémant d’Alsace’, Crémant is a type of wine, similar to Champagne, but only produced in Alsace.

To further emphasize the importance of wine in Alsace, the region counts with:

- a Wine-Marathon (a real 42Km marathon through some of the vineyards, during which the participants drink locally produced wine),
- a wine route (it is a marked path that crosses the whole region, doable on foot, by bike or on horse, or by car, that takes the travellers to the most iconic villages and wine producers),
- ‘Alsace Rock, La tournée de Terroirs’ (it is an itinerant event that takes places in several town and villages during the summer months, May-August. Visitors can enjoy locally produced food and wines and activities and workshops such as wine degustation or how to take care of the vines).
- ‘la fête du Munster’ it is a cheese festival where visitors can enjoy Munster cheese, the most famous cheese of Alsace.
- ‘la fête de la choucroute’ it is a festival to enjoy locally produced drinks, food, and mostly choucroute (fermented cabbage).
- “Slow-up Alsace”
- there are many more events celebration local traditions/food/drinks/etc. (Visit Alsace, 2025)

There are many other locally produced goods in Alsace (Envies d'Alsace, 2025) like pottery.

Nature

The natural environment is a key element in Slow Tourism, it becomes not only a space to be enjoyed and/or exploited, but most importantly, it is a part of the local identity, and it must be protected.

Alsace is known for its diverse environment, ecosystems, fauna and flora.

As any other place in the world, Alsace is also suffering the consequences of the climate crisis, which emphasises the importance of this topic even more.

We have already talked a bit about nature in Alsace. It is a unique Region. To the east the terrain is almost flat, crossed by woods and farmlands, streams and the Rhine marking its border with Germany. To the west rises the mountain chain ‘Le Vosges’, completely covered in dense forests and with some roads, train lines and hiking paths cutting through them. And in between lie “Le vignoble d’Alsace” (the Alsatian Vineyards). The region is home to some emblematic animals like the Stork (one the most recognizable elements of the Alsatian identity), le chamois (a mountain goat), deer, forest cat, kestrels, beavers, hedgehog, etc. All these animals make Alsace rich in biodiversity and, also, they are very attractive to Slow tourists, who want to enjoy the pace of nature.

Towns and Villages

One of the pillars of slow tourism is being able to slow down, and even though it can happen in cities (if the right conditions are present, as it is the case in the cities in Alsace), it is easier to do so in small towns and villages. Alsace is rich in small localities and settlements. From villages of a few dozen inhabitants to towns of around 10.000, visitors can choose from a wide range. All of them possess a lot of history and a unique mix between French and German culture unique to the Region.

When it comes to accommodation, tourists can choose among several options: regular hotels, B&Bs, gîtes (house/room rentals), ferme-auberge (hosting farms), campings, huts and mountain refuges, etc. depending how and where they want to experience the region. There are even some unusual accommodation options such as old monasteries and castles.

Sustainability

When talking about sustainability in slow tourism, it is the combination of all of its factors that highlight this aspect. VisitAlsace, the biggest and most important DMO of the region (Visit Alsace, 2025), is also aware of the importance of sustainability. Therefore, in their page, they propose many possibilities, experiences and activities in order for the visitors to reduce their CO2 impact on the region. Some of the activities proposed (aligning with what has previously been mentioned) are: slow modes of transport, buying local and bio, responsible accommodation, etc. (Visit Alsace, 2025)

All of this doesn't mean that slow tourism is the only option in Alsace, far from that. Since it is a very touristic region, it is also possible to find mass tourism in Alsace, especially during summer and Christmas, when most visitors come to Alsace. It is common to see groups of tourists arriving in the region by bus or cruise ships (along the Rhine), they belong to mass tourism. They have tight schedules, visit the most iconic attractions and are herded by guides, who controls them, telling them what to do, see and where to go, and at night, they are brought back to their accommodation. As we have seen in the literature, these tourists are the most harmful for a destination, consuming many of its resources, crowding spaces and not interacting with locals or trying to understand the destination.

METHODOLOGY

In this section I will explain the methodology followed during the study.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The present paper employed a qualitative methodology. According to Stanford University (2023), qualitative research can be defined as "the naturalistic study of social meanings and processes". Qualitative researchers utilise in-depth studies of the social world to analyse how and why groups think and act in particular ways".

In contrast to quantitative research, which focuses on individuals, qualitative research delves deeper into individuals to gain a more comprehensive understanding of them (Baker & Edwards, 2012). Consequently, the utilisation of qualitative research as the optimal approach is imperative in addressing the research

question at hand. Furthermore, in order to understand human behaviour, it is necessary to consider the meanings that people ascribe to their activities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Therefore, by employing this approach, I can gain a deeper understanding of how Slow Tourism in Alsace is perceived and experienced by all the different actors (tourists, DMOs, locals, etc.). I decided to use this type of research in order to better understand the Region. The utilisation of qualitative research methodologies is instrumental in elucidating the prevailing state of Slow Tourism in Alsace. This approach enables the researcher to concentrate on how various stakeholders (tourists, locals, DMOs, political actors) perceive the concept of slow tourism.

CONSTRUCTIVISM PARADIGM

The present study will utilise the constructivism paradigm. A paradigm can be defined as a set of fundamental principles that underpin the study's theoretical framework (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It is a conceptual framework that shapes the worldview of the individual, defining the nature of the 'world'. These beliefs are accepted without the need for proof of their ultimate truthfulness.

According to Guba & Lincoln (1994), paradigms address three fundamental questions, with each paradigm utilising a distinct approach to do so. The three questions are as follows:

- The ontological question: what is reality made of and what is its nature? And, consequently, what can be known about it?
- The epistemological question: how is the relationship between reality and the researcher?
- The methodological question: how can the researcher make their way to knowledge? How can the researcher learn what is believed to be knowable?

This paradigm provides answers to the three aforementioned questions as follows (Guba & Lincoln, 1994):

- Ontology: reality is relative; it is unique for each individual or group (mentally constructed) and it is socially and experientially based: There is no objective truth; rather, there are different constructions of reality.
- Epistemology: the researcher is linked to the object of the investigation; therefore, the findings are created as the investigation proceeds.
- Methodology: the individual constructions and meanings can only be elicited and refined through the interaction between the researcher and the respondents.

Constructivism can be understood as the argument that all knowledge is constructed rather than received (Riegler, 2012). According to Riegler (2012), each person constructs their understanding by relating new information to what they already know.

The underlying rationale for adopting a constructivist approach pertains to the objective of comprehending the current and future potential of slow tourism in the Alsace region. Alsace is home to a plethora of factors, infrastructure, characteristics, and other elements that are conducive to the development of slow tourism. The objective of this paper is to examine how various actors (local inhabitants, tourists, DMOs, political actors, etc.) interpret slow tourism in the region. Constructivism posits that knowledge does not exist independently; rather, it is constructed by the combination of individuals' realities. Through the analysis of these realities, it is expected that a general view and understanding of Slow Tourism in Alsace will be

provided. The knowledge I hope to gain and present in this paper is constructed; it will be constructed during the interviews and then, once again, in the analysis.

So, why constructivism of all paradigms? Because having all the elements of Slow Tourism and the infrastructure for it doesn't translate directly into being a Slow Tourism destination. It certainly helps, but it is not until the visitors see and experience Alsace as a Slow Destination that the region becomes one. The tourists are constructing their own reality and way of travel based on what they are experiencing.

DATA COLLECTION

Data collection is defined as the process of gathering information for the purpose of subsequent analysis. Data collection is critical to research (Wilcox, Gallagher, Boden-Albala, & Bakken, 2012). There are a variety of qualitative data collection methods, including secondary data, questionnaires, interviews and observations (Kuada, 2012).

Firstly, data is gathered through interviews. Qualitative interviews and research will be utilised during the course of the project, as they are designed to facilitate an in-depth examination of the subject matter (Berner-Rodoreda et al., 2018).

It is important to note that semi-structured qualitative interviews will be utilised in this study. The data collected from semi-structured interviews constitutes the empirical foundation of a substantial body of research in the social sciences (Campbell, Quincy, Osseman, & Pedersen, 2013).

Within this interview paradigm, the decision was taken to utilise "doxastic interviews," a technique that places emphasis on the comprehension of interviewees' experiences and behaviours (Berner-Rodoreda, et al., 2018).

The semi-structured interviews incorporate both open-ended and more theoretically driven questions, electing data guided by existing constructs in the particular discipline within which one is conducting research (Galletta, 2013). It is imperative that each interview question is clearly connected to the purpose of the research (Galletta, 2013), and that all questions create an opening from which the researcher can learn about the participants' experiences (Galletta, 2013). This method uses open-ended questions that allow respondents to openly express their feelings and experiences, enabling the researcher to explore a topic in breadth and depth to obtain as much information as possible about the discourse (Maxwell, 2005). Interview questions are structured in such a manner as to ensure their relevance to the research topic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

SECONDARY DATA

Secondary data is the final form of data collection. Secondary data is defined as information that has previously been collected, organised, and published by other parties. In this instance, the data was sourced from a comprehensive research study conducted on various websites promoting the Alsace region and its attractions. To gain deeper insights into these websites, additional interviews were conducted with the individuals responsible for their management.

This is the case study above.

QUESTIONS

The questions could be grouped into several topics: previous knowledge of Slow Tourism, choosing Alsace, trip planning, mobility during the trip, accommodation, activities, cultural exchange and interaction with locals, flexibility and impressions.

Some of the questions:

- (If you are not from or living in Alsace) Why did you choose Alsace? Is it your first time here?
- (Even if you live in Alsace) How did you plan your trip(s), from where did you get your information? How did you decide where to go and what to do? (read blogs, watched videos, VisitAlsace webpage, friends, etc.)
- (In case you don't live in Alsace) Where do you come from and how did you arrive (which mode of transport)?
- How are you moving around the Region? (car, train, bike)
- How long are you staying?
- Where are you staying (hotels, AirBnb, Gîtes, camping)?
- What are you planning to do (activities, museums, hiking, cycling, etc.)? Why did you choose to do those things?
- Did you know about: The Alsace Wine Route, the mountains Vosges, all the Wine and Foodtraditional from Alsace? How did you learn about them?
- Did you know anything about Alsace before coming?
- Do you speak French?
- Have you interacted with locals (people living in the Region)? In what context? What do you think of them?
- Have you learnt anything about the Region's culture? What?
- Are you planning anything so that you get to know the Region and the culture better? (It could be a museum visit, a cooking workshop, just speaking to people in the bars/cafes/etc.)
- How would you describe your trip?
- Do/Did you have a tight schedule or is/was your trip more relaxed/flexible?
- What are your impressions? What has surprised you the most?
- What did you enjoy the most? And the least?
- Do you think you will come back?

It must be noted that although there were many questions I didn't use them all in every interview. Instead, they were there as a guide to help me through the process of interviewing and to give me an idea of what could be asked: Equally important were the topics mentioned above.

ANALYSIS

In this part I will analyse the gathered information from different sources, an online questionnaire with more 45 responses, personal interviews with 11 tourists I met in different places (the city of Strasbourg, the trains and even in the mountains) and an interview with Carole Heiligenstein, who is in charge of Sustainable Tourism at VisitAlsace: Additionally, 2 documents will also be included in the analysis: the report of touristic strategy and the marking strategy of VisitAlsace.

First, we will take a look into the findings, mostly how interviewees and respondents answers to the different questions.

CODING & TOPICS

I used coding in order to analyse the data from the interviews. Coding is the work of analysing the interviews and secondary data that have been collected (Deterding & Waters, 2018). It isn't just making themes, rather it connects themes to data and data back to the themes (Parameswaran, Ozawa-kirk, & Latendresse, 2019). In fact, coding is a fundamental process of analysing text and visual data, often used in

interviews (Parameswaran, Ozawa-kirk, & Latendresse, 2019). It involves generating themes [and subthemes] to make sense of the data (Parameswaran, Ozawa-kirk, & Latendresse, 2019).

Previous knowledge of Slow Tourism

- Only a few of the respondents knew about Slow Tourism, less than 10%. They have, however, heard about CittaSlow and Slow food. Only one knew exactly what Slow Tourism was. The others didn't know at all what it was about but, after the interviews, they were surprised to learn about all the similitudes of Slow Tourism and how they have travelled and even with the region of Alsace.

Choosing Alsace

- The majority of the interviewees had already visited Alsace before. Here it is important to remember that the biggest markets for tourism in Alsace are Germany, Switzerland and France itself, followed by Luxemburg, Belgium and the Netherlands (all countries sharing a border with Alsace or very close by).
- Most of them come to Alsace because they already know the region and like it; the small villages, the mountains, the culture, the food and drinks, and because it is very convenient to travel to.
"We live in Baden-Wuttenberg, so coming to Alsace is kind of a tradition. Although it is very similar to our region, it is still another country and another way of living. Also, the wine here tastes better."
- Among those who were visiting for the first time, many of them have already visited France before and were discovering Alsace as a new region. The smallest percentage of visitors came for the first time.
- Some of the reasons listed as why to choose Alsace as a destination to visit were: due to its proximity to, because of the mountains, because of the beauty of the region, because of the food and drink (it is crucial to mention the Alsatian Wine Route as well as all of the different festivals related to food and wine). Much of the participants cited the influence of social media in discovering Alsace; what to do and visit.

Trip planning

- When talking about how to plan the trips, activities, visits, etc. many different kinds of sources were cited.
- Although nowadays most of them used electronic sources: internet searches (like what to do in Alsace, places to visit in Alsace), blogs, videos, social media and hashtags, official websites (such as VisitAlsace). The minority of the respondents used other methods, some important to highlight are asking friends and family who have previously visited Alsace, books and travel guides and even hiring a travel agent.
- One of the interviewees mentioned that his main interest to visit Alsace came from history. He has learnt about Alsace and its history, changing from Germany to France several times and even its medieval times.

Mobility during the trip.

- As mentioned before by some of the interviewees, and by the information obtained from VisitAlsace, the biggest majority of the visitors come from nearby countries, so they tend to arrive by car or train.
- Alsace counts with two airports, Strasbourg and the European Airport of Mulhouse-Basel. The latest one being the biggest one, where most of those arriving by plane land.
- It is also worth mentioning that other airports like Baden-Baden and Frankfurt receive certain numbers of visitors who then end up in Alsace.
- Once in the region, the transport method used depends on the characteristics of the trip. Those simply staying in Strasbourg (and/or visiting Colmar or another big city) tend to move around by train.
- However, the greatest percentage of tourists using the train are French tourists or those long-term tourists like international students.
- On the other hand, those staying longer and planning to visit more places tend to move around by car (either rented or own), alongside those coming from nearby areas who also preferred the car for its convenience.
- The tourists whose main motivation was an active holiday (hiking, cycling, etc.) were a mix of all the transports mentioned above, mainly depending on whether they come from Germany for example, or are simply spending a weekend exploring the wine route, etc.
- There is also a curious case when it comes to Slow Tourism and sustainable tourism, and it's the one of those who arrive by plane in order to have an active holiday. Many tourists, mostly non-Europeans (overseas tourists) decide to book a pre-planned trip by bike or hike to explore the region. Therefore, they arrive by plane but then move around in a sustainable way. This can of trip can be deceiving, even more so if these tourists land outside France, for example Frankfurt, because in that case it could be considered that they arrive in France by bus/train and move around by bike. So technically, it is sustainable from the point of view of the French DMOs, but it actually isn't.
- Lastly, we have the big groups, usually from Asian origin, who arrive by plane and move around in a rented private bus/coach. Their trips tend to be short, only visiting the most iconic places and not staying for than one or two nights in each destination.

Accommodation

- The average stay obtained by the interviewees is 3 nights. This is a bit higher than the average for the whole region according to the latest report, which indicates 2'45 nights. However, those coming from nearby areas stay shorter, mostly only one night, and sometimes even just for the day.
- A key aspect is that the average length of stay continues to grow from previous years and that the goal of the region (political and professional actors) is to attract even longer stays.
- The shortest stay in the region is from those coming from neighbouring countries, doing a "weekend trip/escape".

- Most of the visitors stay in hotels. This is not surprising since the biggest percentage of beds are in hotels. Campings, gîtes, and other kind of accommodation are just a small part of the total accommodation potential.
- The case of Strasbourg, and some part of Alsace, is particular, since there are also many tourists that visit the city but not necessarily sleep there (and not even in the region). Many opt to sleep in the neighbouring city of Kehl (reachable by tram, walking, or bike), in the surrounding area or arrive by river cruise-ships. These two aren't considered in the reports, so the data could be different.

Activities

- What the tourists decide to do depends on whether they are first time visitors or recurring visitors, whether they are moving around by car, train, bus or bike, and how long they are staying.
- Generally speaking, tourists tend to do a lot of sightseeing, perhaps 1 to 2 museums, going to Strasbourg and to some of the villages along the wine route, and visiting a few castles here in Alsace (the most visited one being "Château du Haut-Koenigsbourg").
- Spending time in nature and outdoors activities are less frequent, and almost all of the time done by recurring visitors, the only exception being those, as mentioned above, who have booked a pre-planned trip (for example: the Alsatian wine route by bike).
- The reason for choosing those activities comes from different sources such as social media, travel blogs, recommendations, etc.

Cultural exchange and interaction with locals

- All of the interviewees knew something about Alsace before coming, whether it was about its wine, its mountains or Strasbourg as one of the capitals of Europe, Alsace was already present in visitors' imagination.
- Some visitors knew really a lot of the region, but they were the minority. Most of them have heard about it and knew about Alsace changing from Germany to France.
- All of the participants stated to be able to speak at least the minimum French in order to order in a restaurant, ask for directions or check-in in a hotel. They argued that French people usually don't speak English well, so they try their best to know, at least, the most basic things in French to navigate their trip.

Interaction with locals

- This question was one of the most difficult to answer, since all of the tourists interact, at one point or another, with locals. The issue arrives when defining a 'real' interaction (talking to someone in a bar or in a local market) and a 'must-do' interaction (such as ordering in a restaurant).
- For the purpose of this paper and in the topic of Slow Tourism, I will be using the concept of 'real interaction'.
- When taking this definition, only half of the respondents had interacted with locals, while the other half limited themselves to 'must-do' interactions (bars, restaurants, museums, hotels, etc.).

- Those who interacted with locals agreed on Alsacians being very friendly and welcoming towards foreigners and tourists, more than in other regions of France. They specifically indicate that they tend to be less judgemental and more open to different cultures.
- Also, the main places where interactions take place are bars, local markets, small towns and in nature. Basically, the places where tourists are not in a rush, but rather on a relaxed estate.

Cultural learning

- Travelling is learning, in one way or another, whether it is something about us, about the people we travel with, about the destination or all of them at the same time.
- When asked what they have learnt about the region, every participant confirmed to have learnt something, even if it was just one thing, for example, the symbol of Alsace is a stork, that "Alsatian" is a dialect that mixes German and French, the history about the region and how it belonged to several countries through history, or simply the most iconic wines such as "Cremant d'Alsace":
- Some of the tourists decided to take part in specific activities to learn more about the destination in some areas. Some of the activities mentioned were a pottery class, wine and cheese tasting, reading books and, one of them even took a language class in Alsatian.

Flexibility

- Here the answers differ a bit. Although almost all of the respondents made long trips, some of them were less flexible:
 - "Our schedule was halfway to flexible. Sometimes someone would recommend us a village outside our itinerary or a specific place or thing to do, and then we will perhaps change our plans. However, we had already bought train and museums ticket, so we were a bit restrained."
 - "We are completely free, within the limits of traveling hahaha. We only had our plane tickets, and we knew that we wanted to make a wine tasting, the rest was improvising, talking with locals and getting recommendations. Even in the hotels we booked we had the possibility of cancelling until the night before"

What are your impressions? What has surprised you the most? What did you enjoy the most?

- Many tourists, even those who have already visited the region, are always surprised by how Alsace is a mix between France and Germany, never fully one of them, always in between. From the names of villages and cities, the cuisine and even the local language "Alsatian".
- Many enjoy the slow pace of life:
 "Life here goes at its own rhythm. People here never rush; they do what they must but never allowing stress to come into their life"
 Eating times also surprise visitors, most of the restaurants, except for the most touristic ones, only open from 12 to 14 and from 18 to 21 (the local eating time) so visitors are always confused and sometimes frustrated.
- The beauty of the region and the walkability of villages and cities were remarked by all respondents.

What didn't you like? What was unpleasant?

- “Definitely the restaurants’ opening times. Like, come on! This is a touristic region, they should adapt to tourists a bit more”
- More than half of respondents were unhappy or very unhappy regarding the opening times of restaurants. In their opinion, restaurants should be more flexible and adapt better to the tourists’ demands.
- “Public transport is very expensive. Yeah, perhaps the day pass for Strasbourg is okay, but to travel around the whole region just using trains and buses is quite expensive, one needs a very big budget. It is cheaper to rent a car”.
Despite of how well connected the region is, everyone emphasises that the prices are too expensive, that they should be lower if they (governments, DMOs, etc.) want tourists to use them more frequently.
Moreover, those who wanted to experience the mountains and nature said that although the coverage was good, it could be better. Many gave the example of Switzerland or Austria to illustrate how well-connected mountains are there and could be in Alsace.
- “Food is pretty good, fresh and delicious but it gets repetitive. After 3 days we were tired of the same meat, cheese and ‘tarte flambée’. Maybe we as tourists don’t know how to look for it, but I feel that the offer is not so big. I understand that many restaurants want to offer traditional Alsatian food to tourists, but a bit of change would be great”
Around half of the interviewees agreed that many restaurants only offer the same things over and over again, and that it gets a bit boring. However, many of them also mentioned that if one looks for different types of cuisine, there are plenty to choose from. Therefore, the problem arises with traditional restaurants which only serve “the same 4 dishes”, quoting a visitor.
- “There are not enough museums. I mean, sure, there are many museums about different things like traditional life, history, World War II or even cars, like the one in Mulhouse. However, I feel that they are not that interesting. Maybe it is due to the centralisation of France and that all interesting museums are in Paris”.
A small minority of visitors said that the region, especially Strasbourg as the capital, lacks museums. They were aware of the big number of museums which exists through the whole region but were surprised to find that they were all very similar and showing similar exhibitions. This lack of museums was more accentuated in Strasbourg, where according to some of them, there should be more museums of more variety.
- “It is nice but boring. I don’t mean that I didn’t have fun or enjoy it, it is just that well, it feels as if nothing happens here”. Some of the respondents, mostly the younger ones (under 30) stated that there is “nothing going on”, even in Strasbourg.
As it is also highlighted in the marketing strategy of (Alsace Destination Tourisme; Collectivité Européenne d’Alsace; 2023), Alsace is perceived as a traditional, old destination, beautiful but calm.
- The prices. All of the respondents agreed that Alsace is an expensive destination; “compared to other places in France like the Marseille in the south, it is expensive. I’d say that only Paris is this expensive”.

Do you think you will come back?

- Every single one of the interviewees said that they would be happy to return, and some of them have already done so. At the same time, many said that, even though they would happily return,

they have other places in mind that they also wish to visit. This is a crucial point for Alsace, and any other destination, when it comes to increase tourists' loyalty.

REPORTS ANALYSIS

Although in none of the two reports the term "Slow Tourism" is used (Collectivité Européenne d'Alsace, 2024) & (Alsace Destination Tourisme; Collectivité Européenne d'Alsace, 2023), many of the data and goals to be achieved correspond exactly to the definition of Slow Tourism, therefore they can be used for this analysis. It is possible to match the characteristics of Slow Tourism and Slow Cities to what VisitAlsace wishes to achieve in the region.

We have previously seen how the region already has a lot of potential to be a Slow Tourism Destination, and how in a percentage, it already is. Through the analysis of the reports, we will see how the most prominent actors expect to come closer to the goal.

Let's start with the Tourism Strategy Report.

- Common strategy and local participation. In order to create the new strategy, VisitAlsace decided to work together with more than 150 partners including, local communities and agglomerations, local tourist offices, representative of groups, clubs and companies.
We see here how the goal is not economic benefit and growing in the market, but rather trying to involve as many actors as possible so that everyone, including locals, benefit from tourism
- "To make Alsace an authentic sustainable Destination by prolonging tourists' stays and discovering the region in a 'soft' way" (Collectivité Européenne d'Alsace, 2024). This statement clearly shows the willingness of becoming a Slow Tourism Destination, even when this term is not used. There are 4 main points to be developed according to the strategy.
 1. To make the tourism more competitive and responsible. Some of the actions to be taken are, to facilitate the visit of the whole region (including not so touristic places, hidden gems and each one at its own pace); to prolong the tourist offer throughout the year to avoid big seasonality; help companies in their daily challenges and reinforce and encourage innovation and diversification of services, offers, activities, etc.
 2. Alsace as an exchange region: "to be Alsatian for some days, to always be Alsatian..." (Collectivité Européenne d'Alsace, 2024). The goal here is to establish local inhabitants at the centre of the tourism strategy, in way that they do not suffer from tourism, but instead benefit and be proud of it.
The path to follow is to create and develop a more inclusive tourism, to grow the local economies by promoting the local "know-how" and products, and to facilitate new touristic experiences based on the exchange and sharing between tourists and locals.
 3. Sustainability. "To adapt to the mobility and environmental challenges, by building a resilient destination which allows to limit the impact on natural sites, preserve biodiversity, landscapes and way of living" (Collectivité Européenne d'Alsace, 2024).
Alsace is already impacted by climate change: lack of snow in the mountains, dry spells, heat waves in summer, etc. therefore, the region must adapt in order to, not only survive, but also thrive. Some of the ways chosen to do so is by establishing, developing, improving and

promoting sustainable touristic offers, to help tourism actors to become more sustainable, to prioritise kilometre 0 products and goods.

4. Reinforce cooperation. (Collectivité Européenne d'Alsace, 2024) will work with as many tourism actors as possible, in order to facilitate the cooperation among them. It will do so by establishing and developing communication networks, a better-connected network of partners translates to a better adapted, more resilient, more attractive and more creative destination.

This strategy is supported by great investment of money in different sector such as local projects, sport events, restoration of patrimony, funding for natural areas, etc. Additionally, the Collectivité Européenne d'Alsace will organise regular meetings (2 times per year) with the actors involved in order to evaluate how the strategy is going and to publish regular reports to show the strategy's success.

Marketing Strategy Report (Alsace Destination Tourisme; Collectivité Européenne d'Alsace;, 2023) analyses and states the situation of tourism in Alsace and how, ideally, it will develop. The ultimate goal is to promote the region as: A unique Alsace that offers a great variety of quality experiences in all seasons "Une Alsace singulière qui offre une densité d'expériences de qualité en toutes saisons."

- As mentioned before, here we find interesting data; the duration of the stays is growing (which aligns with the goals of the region), the number of tourists is also increasing (mostly from neighbouring countries).
- Many of the main interest points of the region are its many castles, the numerous beautiful villages (many of them classified as UNESCO, French favourite villages or even places of great interest), more than 18000km of marked paths, more than 2500km of cycling lanes, more than 420km of navigable waterways, etc.
Additionally, there are 36 Michelin star restaurants, more than 100 wine-making communities, more than 50 hiking paths through the vineyards and more than 100.000 beds for tourists (including hotels, campings, hostels, and rental homes).
- We find an analysis of strength and weaknesses, that very much correspond to what we have already seen from the interviews:

Strengths

- Alsace is very well connected to other countries and to France thanks to its 2 airports, the many train lines, the buses and even through several highways.
- There are great attractions such as cultural (castles, history, villages), gastronomy (food, wine), natural (the mountains, the Rhin, hiking, cycling), and many events (Christmas markets, Wine fair, Slow-Up Alsace, etc.)

Weaknesses:

- Opening times from business and restaurants.
- Outside hotels, and the city of Strasbourg, many inhabitants don't speak foreign languages very well.
- Seasonality (mostly Christmas and Summer)
- Expensive
- Although there are many beds, it is difficult to accommodate big groups.
- Alsace is perceived as "old", "traditional" and a very "calm" destination.

Goals for the next years:

- To increase tourists' loyalty and prolong the stay so that tourists return to Alsace and they also stay longer.
- Improve the image of Alsace as a unique destination, offering great value to the tourists.
- To transit to a more sustainable tourism destination (by promoting public transport, local products, energy management, improving and developing the social links between tourism and locals, etc.)

How to achieve them:

- Promoting what already exists like UNESCO sites, "most beautiful French villages", history, wine tourism, well-being tourism, etc.
- Promoting unknown places such as Massif des Vosges, the north of Alsace, meeting with locals, discovering local traditions, make more use of the Rhin, business tourism.

DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

Theory vs Reality.

On paper, Alsace has everything to be a Slow Destination, from the infrastructure to the initiatives and institutional and private support, to the cultural activities and local products, festivities, etc. Nonetheless, it isn't there yet. Tourists don't stay long enough, and they don't engage enough with locals, initiatives, culture, activities, etc.

Individuals vs Groups.

Although Alsace isn't as well-known as Venice, Florence, Paris or London, it is a growing destination. The biggest majority of tourists still come on their own (individuals, couples, families or very small groups) however, there are more and more bigger groups coming in organised trips (Alsace Destination Tourisme; Collectivité Européenne d'Alsace, 2023). This growing trend could halt the efforts done by tourism actors to make Alsace a Slow Destination.

Redistribution of Tourists.

As we will see further down, tourists tend to visit the same places (the most famous ones, the most shared on social media, the ones belonging to the "standard visit of Alsace"). Over the year a standardized itinerary for Alsace has been taking form and track, inviting tourists to go and visit those cities and town on the wine route (Strasbourg, Colmar, Riquewihr and Eguisheim). A better distribution of tourists throughout the region it is not only needed but also it will be extremely beneficial.

Tourists will be tourists.

Tourists are still tourists, even those who were already in Alsace or come from nearby places. They expect to be able to communicate in at least in English, to have many attractions and things to do, to be able to eat whenever they are hungry. Yes, many enjoy the slow pace of Alsace as a region but they also become unhappy when restaurants have limited opening times or when on Sundays the main thing to do is to simply go for a walk, relax and enjoy the day. The mentality of "I'm on a trip, I want to do and see everything" is still dominant.

Slow Tourism yes, but full of activities

Continuing with the previous point, according to the answers and the respondents, Slow Tourism have a great potential and a good trajectory for the future. At the same time, there are many challenges to face. One of them being that tourists still want things to do.

Taking things slow and relaxing resonate with many visitors, but they still crave for days with activities and options to fill the day. It doesn't mean that their days have to be filled up, but rather they want the possibility of doing a lot.

"Going slow is one thing, not doing anything is another" – said one interviewee.

The question is, how can destinations, in this case Alsace, offer multiple activities that are within the limits of Slow Tourism?

DISCUSSION

This study is set out to investigate the concept and practical implications of Slow Tourism in the Alsace region, considering both theoretical perspectives and empirical data. As outlined throughout the paper, the research draws from several interconnected frameworks—Slow Tourism, Cittaslow, deceleration, and tourists' motivations—and seeks to understand how these ideas are manifested in Alsace through infrastructure, tourism practices, and the perceptions of different actors involved. This discussion will focus on how all previous parts of the thesis are interrelated and together contribute to a cohesive understanding of Slow Tourism in Alsace.

Theoretical Foundations and Their Relevance to Alsace

The literature review provided a conceptual basis for understanding Slow Tourism. It emphasized that Slow Tourism is more than just traveling at a slower pace; it involves deeper engagement with the destination, local communities, and cultural and environmental values. These elements—sustainability, authenticity, immersion, local connection, and personal involvement—are the foundational values of Slow Tourism and were used as reference points throughout the case study and analysis.

Alsace, as demonstrated in the case study, naturally aligns with many of these foundational values. The region offers extensive bike infrastructure, walkable towns and cities, well-preserved natural areas, and a strong emphasis on local products, culture, and traditions. These are not isolated characteristics but form a network of slow practices that together create the potential for a deeply immersive and sustainable travel experience. Therefore, the theoretical framework helped to interpret how these elements come together to shape tourist behaviour and regional identity.

Infrastructure doesn't mean Slow Tourism

True, Alsace has everything, when it comes to infrastructure and even events and cultural proposal by the tourism actors, in order to be a Slow Destination: However, despite the efforts done by the DMOs and the political actors to become a Slow Destination, it is a lengthy process. Yes, many tourists enjoy the slow pace, but the being a Slow Destination is still far away. As we have seen by the data, the average stay is between 2'45 and 3 nights, not enough to be a destination.

Additionally, as we will see further down, the great majority of tourists visit the same places in the region, creating not only inequalities, but also crowding spaces and over-tourism (at a smaller scale though).

Deceleration as a Mechanism of Experience

The concept of deceleration, explored in the literature through the works of Rosa (2017), Husemann & Eckhardt (2019), and others, adds an important psychological and experiential dimension to Slow Tourism. Deceleration is not only about slowing physical movement but also about slowing perception, interaction, and cognition. The three identified forms of deceleration—embodied, technological, and episodic—help to explain how and why tourists in Alsace might find opportunities to disconnect from their fast-paced lives and engage more meaningfully with their surroundings.

In Alsace, these three types of decelerations are facilitated by both the physical environment and regional infrastructure. Embodied deceleration is supported by walking and cycling routes through both cities and natural landscapes. Technological deceleration is more subtle but is often experienced in natural settings or

traditional towns where distractions from digital devices are reduced. Episodic deceleration emerges through repetitive, simple routines—like daily visits to markets or slow meals at farm restaurants (*ferme auberge*)—that allow tourists to engage more fully with the moment. These modes of deceleration reinforce the sense of presence and authenticity emphasized in Slow Tourism and were repeatedly echoed in tourists' responses during interviews.

For deceleration to happen tourists must engage.

As it happens with the infrastructure, deceleration can only take place if the tourists engage in it. Yes, many tourists enjoy the slow pace of life, the nature, the culture, local products, etc. However, despite their liking for it, not many engage in slow tourism practices. Or at least, not enough. The average stay is too short to be considered as slow tourism and many tourists, mainly those coming from far away places and first time visitors, tend to do the same route visiting the same destinations, so their trips aren't very flexible nor as relaxing as they could be.

Tourists' Motivations and Behaviour

The analysis of tourists' motivations revealed a diverse yet coherent set of driving forces behind travel to Alsace. Although most tourists interviewed were unfamiliar with the formal term "Slow Tourism," many displayed behaviours and preferences that closely align with it. Motivations such as escaping routine, connecting with culture, exploring nature, tasting local food and wine, and engaging in authentic experiences were prevalent. The study highlighted that motivation and behaviour often reflect the values of Slow Tourism even in the absence of explicit awareness of the concept.

This finding supports the constructivist idea that meaning is created through experience and interaction. Tourists construct their own versions of "slow" based on what they seek and how they experience the region. Some deliberately sought flexibility and spontaneity in their travel; others found it imposed upon them by local rhythms, such as strict restaurant opening hours or limited public transport options in remote areas. In both cases, the tourists' perception of time, space, and experience was transformed, often aligning with the theoretical goals of Slow Tourism.

The Role of Place: Alsace as an Enabler of Slow Tourism

Alsace functions as both a setting and an agent in the process of slow tourism. The region is not just a passive space where tourism happens, but an active participant that shapes and reinforces tourist behaviour. From the infrastructure (bike lanes, hiking paths, wine route) to the cultural calendar (festivals, local markets, traditional food events), Alsace curates a slow experience. The landscape itself—from the flat Rhine plains to the Vosges mountains—allows for different types of slow encounters with nature and heritage.

This geographical and cultural diversity supports the idea of "oases of deceleration," where visitors can momentarily step out of accelerated modern life. Whether hiking in the Vosges, wandering through a small village, or sipping wine at a vineyard, tourists in Alsace are offered settings that encourage the suspension of urgency. These are the moments where the philosophy of Slow Tourism becomes practice.

Re-education of tourists.

Mentality and intentions must change. As mentioned before, tourists must engage for deceleration and slow tourism to happen. It is no longer enough for destinations, DMOs, actors, etc. to facilitate Slow Tourism, tourists must engage for it to happen, but how to motivate them to do so? The answer is clear, there must be a re-education of tourists.

How to do so and who should provide it are questions to which there aren't straight answer yet. Should the tourists themselves search for answers, does the responsibility fall on DMOs and destinations, private actors, business, etc?

Many destinations, like Alsace, promote some kind of sustainable travel/ecotourism/etc. on their websites. In VisitAlsace, it is under the section of “voyage ecoresponsable” (Visit Alsace, 2025). However, it is still unclear how this influences tourists’ choices.

Institutional Alignment and Strategic Intentions

The strategic and marketing reports from VisitAlsace (2023) and the Collectivité Européenne d’Alsace (2024) show an institutional awareness of the value of sustainable and experience-based tourism. Even though the term “Slow Tourism” is not explicitly used, the objectives and strategies align closely with its principles. Goals such as extending the length of stays, spreading tourism beyond seasonal peaks, encouraging cultural exchange, and promoting sustainable mobility reflect the same ideas found in the academic literature.

This strategic alignment is crucial because it indicates that the region’s future tourism development is not purely market-driven but includes social, environmental, and cultural considerations. The fact that institutions are working with multiple stakeholders—from locals to tourism offices—suggests a willingness to build a collaborative tourism model that benefits both visitors and residents. In this way, the regional strategy acts as a bridge between theoretical ideals and practical implementation.

Reflections on Methodology and Constructivism

The use of a constructivist paradigm in this study allowed for a deep understanding of how different actors perceive and experience Slow Tourism. The interviews, observations, and reports were not just data points but constructed realities—individual and collective understandings that reveal the diversity of interpretations around the same place and practices. This methodology also highlights the importance of qualitative depth over quantitative generalization in studying phenomena that are rooted in meaning, emotion, and personal experience.

By interviewing tourists, stakeholders, and analysing institutional documents, the study was able to triangulate perspectives, offering a well-rounded picture of how Alsace functions as a Slow Tourism destination. These layered perspectives are necessary to fully grasp a phenomenon that is inherently subjective, and experience based.

Contradictions and Areas for Improvement

Despite the strong alignment between theory, practice, and strategic intent, the research also uncovered contradictions and limitations. For instance, while many aspects of tourism in Alsace encourage slowness and immersion, mass tourism is still very present, particularly in peak seasons. Furthermore, some aspects of the tourist experience—such as limited restaurant hours, perceived repetitiveness in local cuisine, and high transport costs—act as barriers to a fully positive slow experience.

These contradictions illustrate that while Alsace has high potential for becoming a leading slow destination, there is still work to be done in balancing visitor expectations with regional practices and limitations. The institutional goal of increasing tourist loyalty and extending length of stay depends on addressing these main points while continuing to promote the core values of Slow Tourism.

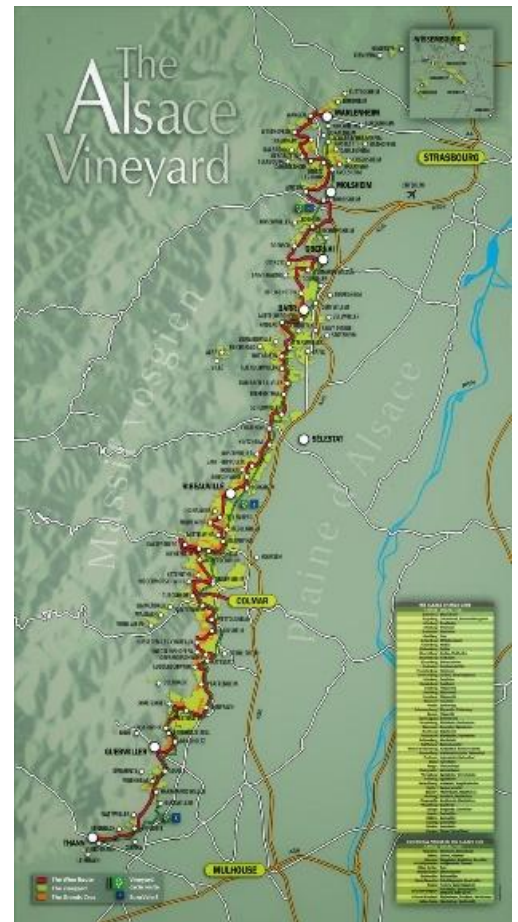
Additionally, we can see that the most visited places and attractions in Alsace are those which are nearby the main highway and the main train line. This reinforces the idea of how difficult it is to escape the “tourist itinerary” of Alsace.

It also helps a reminder of the areas of improvement, facilitating easier and cheaper transport between cities and villages, promoting hidden gems and unknown places, offering possibilities and incentives to get off the beaten track, etc.

There are many possibilities to redistribute the tourists through the region in a better way alongside what has already been mentioned; for example, promoting tourism in the plain of Alsace or a better use of the Rhin than just cruise ships.

Most Visited Places in Alsace:

1. Strasbourg
2. Colmar
3. Alsace Wine Route
4. Kayserberg
5. Eguisheim
6. Castle of "haut-koenigsbourg"



SHORTCOMINGS OF THE STUDY

This study on Slow Tourism in Alsace falls short in several key areas that future research could address for a more comprehensive understanding:

- **Limited Quantitative Data:** The study relies primarily on qualitative methods (interviews and surveys), which provide depth but limit generalizability. A mixed-method approach—including quantitative analysis of tourism flows, spending patterns, or environmental impact—would strengthen the empirical foundation.
- **Lack of Comparative Analysis:** The study focuses solely on Alsace without comparing it to other regions practicing Slow Tourism. This makes it difficult to assess whether Alsace is unique or simply representative. Comparative studies could clarify which factors are context-specific and which are generalizable.
- **Narrow Stakeholder Scope:** While the study engages with tourists and some local actors, it pays less attention to the perspectives of broader policy makers, large-scale tourism operators, and

underrepresented local groups. Their views are crucial in understanding systemic barriers and institutional inertia.

- **Absence of Longitudinal Insight:** The research provides a snapshot in time but does not track changes over seasons or years. Longitudinal studies could reveal how slow tourism evolves in response to policy shifts, global trends (e.g., post-COVID travel behavior), or local development.
- **Superficial Treatment of Economic Trade-offs:** Although the thesis acknowledges tensions between slow and mass tourism, it does not deeply explore the economic implications for businesses, particularly those reliant on high-volume tourism. Balancing sustainability with financial viability remains an unresolved issue.
- **Limited Exploration of Digital Influence:** The role of technology—both as a tool for promoting slow tourism and as a potential disruptor—is not fully considered. This is a growing area of relevance given the increasing digital mediation of travel experiences.
- Addressing these gaps would yield a more robust and actionable framework for implementing and assessing Slow Tourism in both Alsace and similar regions. Would you like help revising part of the thesis to reflect these critiques?

POTENTIAL FUTURE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the findings and scope of the thesis on Slow Tourism in Alsace—and grounded in certified sources cited within the study—several new research questions could be explored to deepen and expand the understanding of slow tourism practices, challenges, and impacts:

- To what extent does tourists' awareness of the concept of Slow Tourism influence their travel behaviour and decision-making? This would assess whether knowledge of the concept alters choices related to transportation, accommodation, activities, and interaction with locals.
- How do seasonal variations affect the sustainability and authenticity of Slow Tourism experiences in Alsace? Given the presence of mass tourism during peak seasons, this question would evaluate how seasonality impacts the quality of slow experiences.
- What are the socio-economic impacts of Slow Tourism on local communities in less-visited areas of Alsace? This could explore whether slow tourists contribute more sustainably and evenly to local economies compared to traditional tourists.
- What barriers exist for international (non-European) tourists in engaging with Slow Tourism in Alsace, and how can these be mitigated? This is especially relevant in light of issues such as language, transport accessibility, and cultural differences mentioned in the study.
- How does digital technology (e.g., travel apps, social media) enhance or hinder the principles of Slow Tourism? This would investigate whether tech tools help foster deceleration and authenticity, or whether they inadvertently reinforce fast, checklist-based travel.
- What role does public policy play in scaling Slow Tourism without compromising its core values? This would explore the tension between growth-oriented tourism strategies and the preservation of local identity and ecological balance.

- How can Alsace's Cittaslow-related strategies be adapted for mid-sized cities like Strasbourg or Colmar, without diluting their effectiveness? Given the original small-town focus of Cittaslow, this question would assess scalability and adaptation.

CONCLUSION

This thesis is set out to explore the phenomenon of Slow Tourism through the specific example of the Alsace region in France, aiming to bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and real-world application. As the analysis has shown, Alsace is a region particularly well-suited to embodying the principles of Slow Tourism, both due to its inherent characteristics and the deliberate efforts of regional institutions, tourism actors, and local communities. However, the study also highlights the complexities and contradictions involved in implementing slow practices in a world still largely structured around speed, efficiency, and consumerism.

Through a detailed literature review, the research identified the key dimensions of Slow Tourism—sustainability, cultural authenticity, connection with local communities, temporal and spatial immersion, and deceleration. These values were used as a framework for analysing tourism practices in Alsace. The study also incorporated the concept of Cittaslow, originally intended for small towns but here applied more broadly, as well as the psychological and experiential dimension of deceleration in tourism. These theoretical tools allowed for a nuanced analysis of what it means to travel “slowly” and what conditions are necessary to facilitate this kind of experience.

The qualitative methodology, supported by a constructivist paradigm, enabled an in-depth exploration of how tourists and other stakeholders in Alsace perceive and practice Slow Tourism. Interviews and surveys revealed that, even when tourists are unaware of the term “Slow Tourism,” many of their behaviours align with its principles. Visitors often seek flexible, immersive, and authentic experiences; they value local food, historical places, and natural environments; and they engage with the region at a pace that allows for reflection, learning, and emotional connection.

At the same time, the research uncovered certain tensions and barriers. For example, the influence of mass tourism—particularly during high seasons—can undermine the goals of sustainable and meaningful travel. Complaints about the cost and accessibility of public transport, rigid restaurant hours, repetitive food options, and the need for better cultural infrastructure (such as more diverse museums) suggest that the region still faces challenges in meeting the expectations of slow travellers. These findings point to areas where improvements can be made to align more closely with Slow Tourism ideals.

A key contribution of this study is its analysis of the institutional discourse surrounding tourism in Alsace. Although the term “Slow Tourism” is not explicitly used in strategic and marketing documents, the goals outlined by VisitAlsace (2023) and the Collectivité Européenne d’Alsace (2024)—such as lengthening stays, spreading tourism across the year, fostering cultural exchange, and promoting sustainability—strongly reflect the spirit of slow travel. This indicates a promising alignment between theory and practice and suggests that Alsace is moving in a direction that supports the broader transformation of tourism toward more responsible and locally rooted forms.

In conclusion, Alsace is not only a region where Slow Tourism is possible; it is a region where many aspects of Slow Tourism are already being practiced and promoted, sometimes consciously and sometimes organically. The interaction between tourists' motivations, local culture, natural resources, and institutional

strategies creates a dynamic space where Slow Tourism can thrive. However, continued effort is needed—both to preserve what already works and to address the structural and perceptual challenges that limit the full realization of slow principles.

This study contributes to the broader discussion on sustainable and alternative tourism by offering a concrete, place-based analysis of how Slow Tourism is interpreted and lived. It also highlights the importance of local context, multi-stakeholder cooperation, and adaptive policymaking in shaping tourism that is not only economically viable but also culturally enriching and environmentally responsible. Future research might build on this work by examining visitor behaviour in different slow destinations, comparing regions, or exploring the long-term impacts of slow tourism strategies on local communities. For Alsace, the road ahead is clear: to deepen its commitment to slow values and to continue evolving as a region where time, tradition, and thoughtful travel come together.

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APPENDIX

USE OF AI

For this thesis I used AI. The used of this tool was limited to generating ideas and guidelines about could I improve the content of the thesis, how could I continue writing, and helping me identify gaps and flaws in my research that I could tackle, revise and improve.

It was also used to improve the writing and make it more formal and academic