REGIONAL STUDIES, REGIONAL SCIENCE
2024, VOL. 11, NO. 1, 256–270
https://doi.org/10.1080/21681376.2024.2329601

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Cittaslow through the lens of sustainable urban development: a comparative analysis of Italy and Türkiye cases

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ABSTRACT

Cittaslow emerged as a response to globalisation's devastating effects, particularly to small cities' local economies and the fast-paced and homogenised lifestyle in urban areas. Cittaslow has been promoting a local development approach based on a community's way of life. However, the present literature on Cittaslow mainly focuses on tourism and destination development. The concept of Cittaslow itself appears to have become a global brand for small cities. Considering this, the paper aims to extend current knowledge of Cittaslow. The main research goal of this paper is to examine the extent to which Cittaslow provides a sustainable urban development policy. For the investigation, qualitative research is structured using *the requirement of excellence.* Cittaslow policies are evaluated based on sustainable urban development. Two cities from different countries are selected to compare these policies in diverse planning contexts. Field studies and interviews were conducted in two small cities: Abbiategrasso, a neighbouring city of Milan and Seferihisar, located within the Izmir Metropolitan Region. The findings indicate that Cittaslow policies focus on sustainable development. However, there are various complex issues in the related official documents. In both cities, interviews indicate numerous initiatives to implement Cittaslow policies and improve their quality of life. Seferihisar encountered difficulties because of its recognition as a designated 'slow city' brand. Without a comprehensive planning strategy, Cittaslow cities may risk jeopardising their unique local way of life. The main focus is to provide recommendations for enhancing current Cittaslow policies.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 12 October 2022; Accepted 6 March 2024

KEYWORDS
Sustainability; sustainable urban development; Cittaslow; quality of life; Abbiategrasso; Seferihisar

JEL CLASSIFICATIONS
Q01; O21; R58; Y40

1. INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, products and ideas are rapidly spreading worldwide. The same planning strategies are implemented in different regions to compete globally among cities. Meanwhile, small towns face difficulties due to economic rationalisation and globalisation (Mayer & Knox, 2010). Mayer and Knox (2010) also noted that these factors have contributed to a decline in locally owned businesses, resulting in the loss of local distinctiveness and sense of

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place in such communities. In response to the negative impact of globalisation on small towns, the Cittaslow movement has emerged (Grzelak-Kostulska et al., 2011). In 1999, Cittaslow was created as a network of municipalities focused on improving quality of life through a different approach to development. The idea, first conceived in Italy, has become an international network of small and medium-sized municipalities worldwide, linking 33 countries and 287 cities, according to an updated list in June 2022 (Cittaslow, 2022). The Cittaslow philosophy opposes the trend of the global economy overtaking the local economy in small cities, instead emphasising each city's unique identity. Saturnini, the founder of Cittaslow, has stated that 'Slow cities were not born as a conservation movement, but, rather, as a movement that in the wake of modernisation and globalisation asks itself about how to transfer "cities" in a globalised world without making them lose their soul in that journey' (Paolo Saturnini cited in Miele, 2008, p. 136).

Many small cities face challenges due to the influence of metropolitan areas, particularly concerning population influx and economic activities (Zawadzka, 2017). Small towns are sometimes left abandoned, resulting in what is known as ghost towns. Metropolitan cities sometimes engulf them (Mayer & Knox, 2010). In contrast, Cittaslow creates a network for small towns to protect themselves from external pressures and progress towards local sustainable development (Brodziński & Kurowska, 2021). Brodziński and Kurowska (2021) also noted a gradual improvement in the socio-economic circumstances of the residents. Another researcher stated that Cittaslow can serve as an indicator of sustainable development, a stimulator of sustainable tourism and a tool for promoting awareness of the inherent capital of small towns (Zawadzka, 2017). Zagroba et al. (2021) also emphasise how the Cittaslow and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) overlap; similarly, the document available on the Cittaslow website claims that almost ninety per cent of Cittaslow policies correspond to SDGs (Cittaslow International, 2023). However, Mayer and Knox (2006) shed light on the differences between the Slow City and definitions of sustainability. They state that 'While sustainability agendas are mostly motivated by the issue of resource use and consumption, Slow Food, and Slow Cities utilise local products as mediators of local economic, social, and cultural distinctiveness and sustainability, with resources and environmental quality only part of the concern' (Mayer & Knox, 2006, p. 328).

Cittaslow is still a widely debated topic in light of all the information. Since Cittaslow offers a development programme for small towns, it is strongly linked to sustainable urban development. Yet, there are few studies on this subject (Ball, 2022; Brodziński & Kurowska, 2021; İlhan et al., 2020; Orhan, 2017; Stanowicka et al., 2023). This paper focuses on Cittaslow's policies regarding sustainable urban development and investigates its implications in different countries. The main aim is to expose the primary objective by analysing each criterion. This research assesses how Cittaslow can serve as a sustainable urban development policy. Simultaneously, two field studies investigated Cittaslow applications in diverse planning contexts. Drawing from both theoretical frameworks and practical observations, this analysis sheds light on the vulnerabilities and merits of Cittaslow. A comprehensive understanding of its strengths and weaknesses emerges by scrutinising its legal documents and examining its application in diverse regions.

2. CITTASLOW AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT: HOW ARE THEY LINKED?

The Slow philosophy[1] and the Slow Food movement[2] construct the ideological basis for the Cittaslow. At an initial point, all of them occurred as a grass-root organisation; however, while the slow movement stays at the individual level, Slow Food has shifted to an institutional level on an international scale. On the other hand, the Cittaslow is sculptured as an alternative development programme that connects small and medium-sized municipalities. It engages local governance bodies at an international level. A city can apply to join the Cittaslow network if its

population is less than 50,000. Becoming a Cittaslow can be considered a process that involves various tangible steps. A city needs to meet more than 50% of the 'Requirements for excellence' (Cittaslow, 2022). *Requirements for excellence* consist of seven essential policies: Energy and Environmental Policies; Infrastructure Policies; Quality of Urban Life Policies; Agricultural, Touristic and Artisan Policies; Policies for Hospitality, Awareness and Training; and Social Cohesion and Partnerships. There are 72 criteria in total listed under these policies (attachment C of the Cittaslow Charter, available in Appendix A of the online supplemental data).

Cittaslow has drawn the attention of many scholars since the beginning. Preliminary work in this field focused primarily on Cittaslow as a social movement (Pink, 2009) that counters the fast-paced lifestyle (Miele, 2008) and enables small cities to sustain their local identity (Radstrom, 2014). In the current literature, there are several approaches related to Cittaslow, such as socio-economic development (Senetra & Szarek-Iwaniuk, 2020), sustainable local development (Brodziński & Kurowska, 2021), spatial structure (Zagroba et al., 2021), social resilience (Gunduz et al., 2016), and social innovation of slow cities (Sept, 2021). However, the literature has been dominated by sustainable tourism and destination development (Nilsson et al., 2011; Park & Kim, 2016; Walker & Lee, 2022). According to a Scopus search (2024a), 168 documents use 'cittaslow' or 'slow city' in their title, abstracts, or keywords. Once the word 'sustainability' is added, the results indicate 51 documents. When combined with 'sustainable urban development' or 'sustainable city', the results decrease to 14. However, when the words 'tourism' or 'tourist' are added, the results increase to 59 (Scopus, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d). The findings of a recent study appear to support this situation. Presenza et al. (2015) revealed that among the Cittaslow member cities, the primary motivations for joining the movement are improving visibility, attractiveness and transformation into a visitor-friendly destination. Following these aspects, the focus shifts towards initiating and implementing 'slow' sustainable development (Presenza et al., 2015). This confirms the criticism concerning Cittaslow's vulnerability to global branding and place marketing approaches (Mayer & Knox, 2010). After the 2010s, researchers addressed these concerns by emphasising sustainable tourism (Ince et al., 2020; Park & Kim, 2016; Presenza et al., 2015; Walker & Lee, 2022; Zawadzka, 2017) which is defined as 'Tourism that takes complete account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities' (UNWTO, n.d.)

On the other hand, Cittaslow is a unique approach to sustaining small towns and positively impacts local development. Sustainable development, defined as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' in the Brundtland report (Brundtland, 1987), is embraced by cities as they consider not only environmental, economic and social systems but also their spatial systems. Regarding urban sustainability, Zagroba et al. (2021) indicate Cittaslow's positive effects on cities, such as 'preserving the city's unique character, restoring historical architecture, promoting local products and cuisine' (p. 3). Brodziński and Kurowska (2021) confirmed that Cittaslow policies positively affect local development and improve the residents' quality of life. However, many studies focused on Cittaslow have not comprehensively analysed its policies regarding sustainable urban development. Thus, there is a gap in the Cittaslow literature regarding evaluating its framework. This study evaluates each Cittaslow policy for sustainable urban development. While small-town sustainability comprises environmental, social and economic aspects, it focuses on small cities' distinctiveness, economy and urban fabric.

3. METHODOLOGY

The paper proposes a qualitative research method that investigates definition requirements for excellence and assessment cards (attachments C and E of the Cittaslow Charter) regarding

sustainable urban development. It also involves a one-day field trip to compare the different applications of Cittaslow and observe their implementation in each selected city. Furthermore, face-to-face interviews were conducted with government officials to support observations and ensure reliable comparison among Cittaslow applications. Cittaslow requirements are available online for data collection (Cittaslow, 2022; Cittaslow Deutschland, 2016; Cittaslow Turkiye, 2023); additionally, related literature is used to compare the two cases.

Two cities in Italy and Türkiye were selected. Italy hosts 40 per cent of Cittaslow towns in Europe, while Türkiye has 36 per cent of total Cittaslow towns in Asia. Both of them have the highest number of Cittaslow towns in their regions. Furthermore, the two selected cities are situated within a metropolitan area and retain their rural characteristics. Abbiategrasso is a town of over 30,000 residents located 22 km from Milan, Italy's second most populous city. The second one is Seferihisar, one of the small towns in the Aegean region. It is well connected with Izmir, Türkiye's third most populated metropolitan city. Seferihisar has over 50,000 residents and is 45 km from the Izmir city centre. Both towns have had long-standing membership since 2000 and 2009, respectively. Field trips, observations, and interviews with public authorities were conducted during the field study. For both cities, the assessment card for membership is not publicly available; thus, empirical research is supported by the local news, public authorities' interviews and similar case studies in the literature.

3.1. Context assessment of Cittaslow policies

Within the context of Cittaslow, a significant portion of the policies is mandatory, accounting for 43 per cent of the total. Most of the obligatory criteria are listed under the quality of urban life policy. In detail, each criterion considered urban sustainability has been spotted. The results indicate that 60 criteria directly focus on sustainable urban development regarding environmental, economic, social and urban aspects. Whereas only 22 per cent of the policies focus on economic aspects, 37 per cent are related to environmental aspects. The criteria that directly focus on the urban environment are 25 per cent. Additionally, nine criteria concentrate on sustaining the Cittaslow programme. Lastly, the complications in the requirements were revealed. If a criterion does not have a reference value, is repeated more than once, or opposes Cittaslow philosophy and sustainable urban development, it is stated as a complication. Table 1 shows the results of the context evaluation for the energy and environment policy as an example. The evaluation table with all criteria can be seen in Appendix A in the online supplemental data.

Table 2 demonstrates the context evaluation results with numbers and percentages for all the criteria. The results indicate that more than half of the requirements have complications, such as skipping a reference value, repetition, or conflicting with the philosophy of Cittaslow and sustainable urban development.

3.1.1. Eliminating complications of Cittaslow evaluation criteria

As a result of context evaluation, some problems are spotted in the criteria. As stated earlier in the study, complications occur if a criterion does not have a reference value, is repeated more than once or opposes Cittaslow's philosophy and sustainable urban development. Generic principles can be acceptable since the document addresses various countries; however, the association can provide a glossary to prevent misleading statements. For example, *3.1 Planning for urban resilience* is an extensive term in urban planning that is currently debated. The relationship between urban resilience and the Cittaslow network could be explained to form a more precise criterion. The situation is the same for another criterion: *3.4 Urban livableness (housework, nursery, company hours, etc.)*. This criterion could be more specific since the general aim is to support a more liveable city. The same problem can also be seen under the social cohesion policies. A glossary can help clarify all these terms. Since one of the strengths of Cittaslow is to be an

Table 1. Energy and environmental policy's context evaluation.

Requirements of excellence Energy and environmental policy	Sustainable urban development context					
	Environmental	**Economic**	**Social**	**Urban**	**Evaluation**	**Complication**
1.1 Air quality conservation*	x				Evaluation Based on Town Plans and/or Interventions Performed	Missing reference value
1.2 Water quality conservation*	x				Evaluation Based on Town Plans and/or Interventions Performed	Missing reference value
1.3 Drinking water consumption of residents	x	x			Under The National Average. Value = 5 Within The National Average. Value. = 3 Above The National Average = 0	
1.4 Urban solid separate waste collection*	x	x			Evaluation Based on The Percentage Actually Collected	Missing reference value
1.5 Industrial and domestic composting	x	x			Evaluation Based on Town Plans and/or Interventions Performed	
1.6 Purification of sewage disposal*	x				Evaluation Based on Actual Percentage	Missing reference value
1.7 Energy saving in buildings and public systems	x	x			Evaluation Based on The Actual Percentage Related To All-Time Consumption	
1.8 Public energy production from renewable sources	x	x			Evaluation Based on The Actual Percentage Compared to Total Consumption	
1.9 Reduction of visual pollution, traffic noise	x			X	Evaluation Based on Town Plans and/or Real Interventions Performed	Repeated in 1.10, 3.9
1.10 Reduction of public light pollution*	x			X	Evaluation Based on Real Interventions Performed	Repeated in 1.9
1.11 Electrical energy consumption of resident families	x	x			Below National Average. Value. = 5 Within The National Average. Value. = 3 Above The National Average. Value. = 0	
1.12 Conservation of biodiversity	x				Evaluation Based on Adoption of Active Policies Defending Biodiversity	

Source: Author.

Table 2. Results of context evaluation. Source: Author.

Requirements of excellence	Context evaluation				
Total number of criteria	Obligatory	Urban sustainability	Cittaslow theme	Evaluation	Complication
72 (100%)	31 (43%)	60 (83%)	9 (12%)	Town plans: 33 (45%) National average: 19 (26%)	37 (51%)

international network of small cities, a supplementary document with innovative projects from various countries can be a guide.

Some of the criteria can be seen repeating multiple times. For instance, there are three pollution reduction rules: *3.9 Monitoring and reduction of pollutants (noise, electrical systems, etc.)*, *1.9 Reduction of visual pollution, traffic noise* and *1.10 Reduction of public light pollution* (Cittaslow, 2022, p. 26). All of these criteria can be summarised in one or become more specific. More than that, additional criteria can be added, such as awareness of carbon footprint to collaborate with inhabitants, and green modes of transportation can be supported by prioritising pedestrians. Similarly, *3.3 Recovery/creation of social green areas with productive plants and/or fruit trees* and *3.14 Recovery/creation of productive green areas with productive plants and/ or fruit within the urban perimeter* are almost the same criterion.

Cittaslow does not have specific parameters for environmental sustainability, but some criteria offer standards. For example, the document aims to preserve air and water quality (Cittaslow, 2022, Criterion 1.1, 1.2). International standards, such as WHO global air and water quality guidelines, can be accepted as a solution. Another solution is *creating urban paths over 2.2 Length (in km) over the total number of km of urban roads* (Cittaslow, 2022, p. 26). The criterion states that if the ratio between cycle paths and roads reaches a min of 10%, the city will have the lowest score. If the ratio is more than 50%, it will have the highest score. Cycling is an efficient way of urban mobility for primarily short and medium distances (Szell et al., 2022). Nonetheless, calculating the efficiency of bicycle paths proves challenging when relying on the provided ratio. Instead, bicycle network planning and its foundational principles can be considered (Natera Orozco et al., 2020).

3.1.2. Sustainable urban development should be the primary objective

Regarding sustainable urban development, several criteria deal with the sustainable use of environmental resources, the promotion of renewable energy sources and efficient waste collection (Hoeschele, 2010). There are new non-obligatory criteria considering the preservation of biodiversity, improvement of agroecology, raising of private/public sustainable urban planning and restriction of the ratio between cement and green urban areas in present criteria (Cittaslow, 2022, Criterion 1.12, 3.1, 3.11, 3.13, 3.17, 4.1). All these new criteria are focused on environmental issues. However, some requirements are opposed to Cittaslow's philosophy. Specifically, two contradict biodiversity conservation and sustainable development: *4.10 New ideas for enforcing plans concerning land settlements previously used for agriculture* and *3.5 Requalification and reuse of marginal areas* can also be confusing. Both rules violate Cittaslow's environmental approach and encourage urban development in untouched areas.

There are also criteria related to social sustainability. Participation is considered within two criteria: *5.4 Adoption of active techniques suitable for launching bottom-up processes in the more critical administrative decisions* and *5.8 Active presences of associations operating with the administration on Cittaslow themes* (Cittaslow, 2022, p. 27). More than that, several criteria cover education,

awareness of the slow city, social cohesion and supporting cultural diversity (Cittaslow, 2022, Criterion 5.5, 5.6, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, etc.). According to İlhan et al. (2020), 'Protecting and developing cultural diversity is one of the most important goals in terms of the Cittaslow philosophy' (İlhan et al., 2021, p. 25). However, some criteria directly focus on visitors instead of inhabitants. One is *4.8 Additional hotel capacity (beds/residents per year)*. It is contradictory to obligate cities to increase hotel capacity as it does not necessarily improve residents' quality of life and mainly benefits visitors. Instead of this criterion, the policy could promote alternative accommodations emphasising collaboration with locals, such as Airbnb, bed and breakfasts or couch-surfing. Numerous studies have confirmed that cities become more popular after joining the Cittaslow network (Brodziński & Kurowska, 2021; İlhan et al., 2020). Instead of solely focusing on attracting visitors, the Cittaslow criteria should prioritise the balance between locals and visitors. In other words, the principles should be well-defined and prioritise the needs of locals to support sustainable development genuinely. Otherwise, due to uncertain policies and a lack of collaboration with local actors (Gunduz et al., 2016), the success of life quality improvement strongly depends on administrative bodies.

3.1.3. Awareness of the urban fabric, local distinctiveness and local economy should be raised

Urban sustainability is related to the *urban fabric* being handed down through generations. Toesca (1985) defined *urban fabric* as 'not just consist of the built structures, but also of the daily life within the built structures and in public spaces' (Toesca (1985) definition of 'Tessuto Urbano' cited in Hoeschele, 2010, p. 77). Specific attention to public spaces and town centres is vital for a sense of belonging. As Zagroba et al. (2021) mentioned, the town centre's limited size renders social integration an intrinsic element of its operation. Complementary criteria can be related to accessibility to city centres and social facilities and the promotion of mix-usage for the needs of inhabitants. Supporting mixed usages to create vibrant places for human interaction and safety is another essential aspect of urban sustainability (Jacobs, 1961). There are specific supportive criteria for the urban fabric (Cittaslow, 2022, Criterion 3.2, 3.16, etc.) and mixed usage (Cittaslow, 2022, Criterion 3.15, 3.16). Another aspect is local distinctiveness. Protecting built heritage, local cultural events and traditional crafts will maintain the local identity (Cittaslow, 2022, Criterion 4.3, 4.7). Radstrom (2014) also emphasised that the main aim of Cittaslow is protecting the cities' authenticity. Small towns gain a new characteristic when they become certified as Cittaslow (Cittaslow, 2022, Criterion 5.1, 5.3).

Economic sustainability is also considered in several criteria: *4.2 Protection of handmade and labelled artisan production*, *4.3 Increasing the value of working techniques and traditional crafts* and *4.5 Use of local products, if possible organic, in communal public restaurants*. Mayer and Knox (2006) explained that Cittaslow leverages local products to maintain the distinctiveness and sustainability of local economies, cultures and societies. This approach involves promoting and strengthening local entrepreneurship and creating new products that cater to local demand. By doing this, the character of products and services embedded in local traditions can be preserved (Brodziński & Kurowska, 2021). Stimulating local businesses is one of the essential aspects of Cittaslow, and it should also include supporting their digitalisation. With the help of digitalisation, local entrepreneurs can expand their market nationally and even internationally.

3.2. A comparison between two countries: Italy (Abbiategrasso) and Türkiye (Seferihisar)

Abbiategrasso is one of the small cities within the Milan Metropolitan Area. It connects with Milan and other cities through roads, railways and bike paths (see Figure 1). Its municipal boundary covers 47.05 km^2, with primarily agricultural land and parks; thus, the average density of Abbiategrasso is relatively low, with a value of 678 inhabitants per km^2. The history of

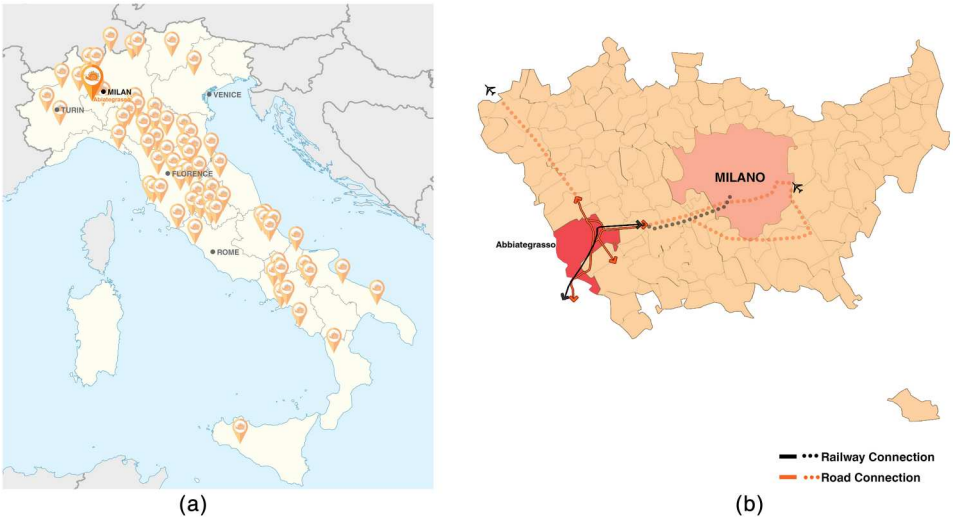


Figure 1. (a) Cittaslow network of Italy, (b) location of Abbiategrasso.
Source: Salieva 2016.

Abbiategrasso is known from Roman times. There are many examples of civil architecture belonging to different periods, thanks to the rich history of Abbiategrasso. The old town centre is well protected, with the Castello Visconteo, ancient houses and churches dating back to the Renaissance and Baroque periods. The city's industrial sector is based on agriculture, with a primary focus on cultivating cereal crops, particularly rice and corn. Local products are vital for the economy of Abbiategrasso. In the Ticino Valley's rural communities, farmhouses produce stone-ground flour, old brands of wheat, cured meats, and renowned cheeses like Quartirolo and Gorgonzola.

Abbiategrasso was certificated as a Cittaslow in 2000. The population has increased from 27,760 to 32,681 since 2000. Based on the population statistics of Abbiategrasso, the percentage of foreign residents (11%) is almost equal to the Milan average (13%). There are limited sources for Cittaslow's candidacy process. A field trip and an interview with a local official helped create an understanding of the current situation in Abbiategrasso. During the field trip, it was observed that there are several Cittaslow symbols around the city, both on administrative buildings and on the shops' windows on the main street (Cittaslow, 2022, Criterion 5.1, 5.3; see Figure 2). During the interview, the local official stated that Abbiategrasso was already a Cittaslow. During the candidacy period, particular projects are prepared to fulfil the requirements of Cittaslow certification. These projects include meeting with local shops and informing inhabitants, establishing a producer market for local agricultural products, creating a design code for streets and pedestrianising the main square, Piazza Guglielmo Marconi. These initiatives align with Cittaslow's criteria 2.4, 3.15, 4.2 and 4.3. The municipality also encourages local producers by supplying them with places to market their products (Cittaslow, 2022, Criterion 3.15) (Branduini & Carnelli, 2021). In 2016, the municipality conducted a project to increase bicycle use and create a sustainable slow mobility system: the Bicipark project (Cittaslow International Project Prize, 2016) (Cittaslow, 2022, Criterion 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4).

The local official stated that Abbiategrasso became a Cittaslow to maintain its slow-living philosophy despite being close to Milan's city centre, where job opportunities are limited. For Abbiategrasso, Cittaslow can prevent the city's transformation into a sleeping town. Cittaslow has the ability to draw people in various ways and transform their perception of a small



Figure 2. (a) Castello Visconteo, (b) a Cafetteria on the Corso Matteotti Giacomo.
Source: Salieva 2016.

town. The city has improved its residents' quality of life. On the other hand, there are some concerns as well. Nilsson et al. (2011) stated the local officials' concerns about gentrification and the increasing number of new residents who commute daily to work in Milan.

Seferihisar is a small town in the western part of Türkiye. It is linked with Izmir by motorways; there is no railway link between them (see Figure 3). The current population density is relatively low (98 people per km^2) due to its broad territorial area that covers almost 370 square kilometres. Seferihisar has a rich historical background that has pioneered the process of becoming a Cittaslow. The oldest settlement in the Seferihisar is Teos, which was established around 2000 BC. Besides its rich historical background, it has unique products. Seferihisar's tangerines are known on an international scale. Tangerine production is the primary source of income for inhabitants. Other imported agricultural products are olives and grapes. While agriculture is the leading sector, the second one is tourism. There are many summer houses close to the seaside.

Seferihisar was certificated as a Cittaslow in 2009, when it had 28,603 inhabitants in total. In 2021, the population reached a number of 52,507. Various projects were conducted in Seferihisar during candidacy to meet Cittaslow's requirements. Some are long-term projects like renewal energy projects (Cittaslow, 2022, Criterion 3.5), organic farming or sustainable fishing

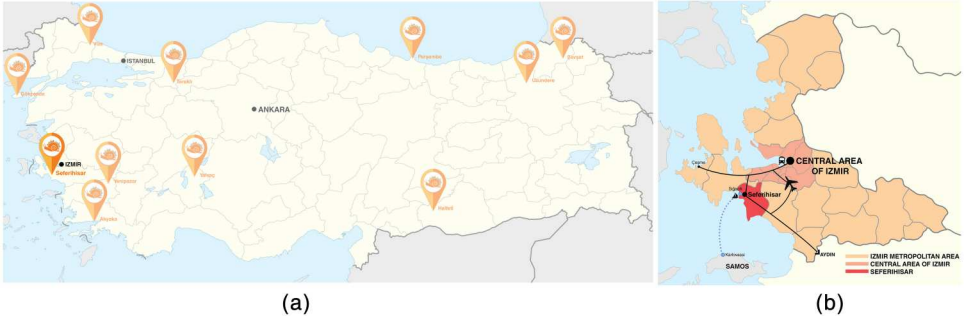


Figure 3. (a) Cittaslow network of Türkiye, (b) location of Seferihisar.
Source: Salieva 2016.



Figure 4. (a and b) Sığacık streets during the producers market.
Source: Salieva 2016.

(Cittaslow, 2022, Criterion 4.3, 4.9) (Seferihisar Belediyesi, 2016a, 2016b). Others are short-term projects, such as creating handbooks for historical sites or displaying the Cittaslow logo on signboards and bus stops (Cittaslow, 2022, Criterion 5.1, 5.3; see Figure 4). Several projects encourage women to participate in economic activity (Cittaslow, 2022, Criterion 4.2, 4.3). In addition to producers' bazaars, online stores have been established to sell local products nationally (Cittaslow, 2022, Criterion 3.6, 4.3) (Çoskun Hepcan et al., 2014). In a recent survey, the majority of residents claimed familiarity with Cittaslow, which has a positive impact on their daily lives (True & Kiliçaslan, 2015). Numerous meetings have been held since the start of the candidacy process to educate the residents about Cittaslow's policies and the process of becoming a Cittaslow. Seferihisar comprehends Cittaslow as an opportunity to create awareness, protect the city from becoming a second summerhouse district, adopt renewable energy and enhance local production.

On the other hand, there are various regeneration projects. The historical Sığacık neighbourhood has become a new attraction as a weekend destination (Gunduz et al., 2016). Numerous ancient buildings were transformed into hotels or cafes (Cittaslow, 2022, Criterion 3.5, 3.15). After becoming a Cittaslow, Seferihisar Municipality faced some disadvantages, according to an interview with a local official. The local official stated that 'the city has become more popular, and the population is increasing. Thus, real estate values are getting high-priced'. Similarly, in previous research, Gunduz et al. (2016) declared that 'Cittaslow enabled Seferihisar to put itself on the "market" with an "identity" distinct from all the nearby coastal towns' (p. 221).

Various projects have been initiated in both cities to meet Cittaslow's requirements. The projects aim to raise awareness by using Cittaslow symbols, supporting local agricultural products, creating a design code for streets, and planning new pedestrianised roads. While in Abbiategrasso, the focus was on the sustainable slow mobility system, Seferihisar emphasised

Table 3. Comparison of two cities. Source: Author.

Small town sustainability	Environmental	Social	Urban fabric	Local distinctiveness	Local economy
Literature review	Keskin, 2010; Küçükaltan & Pirnar, 2016; Cittaslow International Project Prize, 2016; Salieva, 2016; Ece, 2021	Keskin, 2010; Küçükaltan & Pirnar, 2016; Salieva, 2016; Ece, 2021	Çoskun Hepcan et al., 2014; Küçükaltan & Pirnar, 2016; Salieva, 2016; Ece, 2021	True & Kiliçaslan, 2015; Salieva, 2016; Ece, 2021	Öztürk, 2012; Çoskun Hepcan et al., 2014; Küçükaltan & Pirnar, 2016; Salieva, 2016; Seferihisar Belediyesi, 2016b; Branduini & Carnelli, 2021; Ece, 2021
Cittaslow	Criterion 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9, 1,10, 1.11, 1.12, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 3.3, 3.14, 3.7, 3.9, 3.11, 3.17, 4.1, 4.9	Criterion 4.2, 4.3, 4.7, 5.4, 5.6, 5.7, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.5, 6.4, 6.6, 6,7, 6.8, 6.9, 6.10, 6.11	Criterion 1.9, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.9, 3.2, 3.4, 4.4	Criterion 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.5, 4.7, 5.1, 5.3, 5.8	Criterion 3.5, 3.6, 3.10, 3.12, 3.15, 3.16, 4.2, 4.3, 4.5, 4.6, 4.8, 5.2
Abbiategrasso	Present, present, present, present, present, present, present, present, present, present, present, present, present, present, present, present, present, present, absent, absent, present, present	Present, absent, Present, present, present, present, absent, present, present, present, absent, present, present, present, present, present, present	Absent, absent, present, present, absent, present, present,	Present, present, present, present, present, present, present, present	Present, present, present, present, absent, present, absent, absent, present, absent, present
Seferihisar	Present, present, absent, present, present, present, present, absent, absent, present, absent, present, present, present, present, present, present, absent, absent, present, absent, absent, present	Present, present, present, present, present, absent, absent, absent, present, absent, present, present, present, present, absent, present	Present, present, absent, absent, absent, present, absent, absent	Absent, present, present, present, present, present, present, present	Present, present, present, present, present, present, present, present, present, present, present, present, absent

encouraging women's participation in economic activities. Table 3 compares these two cities regarding the suggested new framework for a sustainable small city. The results align with the context evaluation of Cittaslow, showing a specific focus on environmental and social aspects, while the local economy, urban fabric and local distinctiveness lag behind in practice.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Cittaslow's unique philosophical background is a response to the adverse impacts that globalisation has had on small towns. It offers an alternative way of sustaining local life in small towns while aiming to improve the quality of life. Because of local context and some complications of the policies, the application of it diverges in two different countries. According to interviews, in the Abbiategrasso case, Cittaslow has aided in improving the quality of life and adopted a slow-living philosophy for its inhabitants. For Seferihisar, Cittaslow has also helped improve the quality of life; however, it is becoming more popular since it has branded itself as a slow city and has difficulties maintaining its slow-living philosophy for its inhabitants.

One of the strengths of Cittaslow is that becoming a member is a long-term process that includes tangible steps and is strongly related to town plans. However, many complications in the criteria may challenge the application of Cittaslow. The policies are strongly related to sustainable urban development, making them robust principles. Both cities focus on environmental and social aspects, while the local economy, urban fabric and local distinctiveness lag behind in practice. In order to further improve policies, a particular focus can be placed on awareness of urban fabric, local distinctiveness and local economy; meanwhile, detected problems should be eliminated.

Lastly, earning a Cittaslow designation helps cities gain global recognition. Similarly, according to Mayer and Knox's (2006) study, Cittaslow has the potential to impact marketing efforts significantly. These towns are known for their authenticity and have become increasingly popular in a globalised world. However, this popularity could also adversely affect the local way of life in Cittaslow towns, as noted by Gunduz et al. (2016). These concerns are evident in both case studies. Therefore, placing residents at the centre of policies is crucial. Well-defined principles prioritising the local community are essential for sustainable development. Both case studies highlight the importance of prioritising the local community in sustainable development policies.

This study has certain limitations that can guide future research endeavours. The limited time available for field trips and interviews, being restricted to local officials, may result in overlooking the perspectives of local residents. Future studies may involve engaging with residents in various regions to understand better the impact of Cittaslow on their quality of life.

NOTES

[1] The Slow movement is an individual uprising against the 21st century's fast pace of life in different areas like; living, traveling and eating (Honoré, 2004).

[2] The Slow Food movement is against the massive standardisation of food in contemporary society. Its official website defines it as 'a global, grassroots organisation which aims to prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions, counteract the rise of fast life and combat people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from and how our food choices affect the world around us' (SlowFood, 2022).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was prepared based on Gülfiye Özcan Alp's (Gyulfie Rushenova Salieva) master's thesis titled 'Slow City: Fluctuation Between Improvement and Commodification of "Quality of Life" Two Case Studies: Abbiategrasso and Seferihisar', whose thesis advisor was Carolina Pacchi. The thesis is available online in the digital archive of Politecnico Di Milano. The author transformed the thesis study into an article thanks to the mentorship process with Danny Prabowo Soetanto, editor of the early career section, and peer reviewers. Thus, the author thanks both Danny Prabowo Soetanto and the reviewers for their valuable and constructive feedback.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study via email. The author affirms that human research participants provided informed consent for publishing the case studies.

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