

# Transport for tourism or tourism for transport? A choice experiment to evaluate the tourists' preferences and willingness to pay

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**Keywords** | Tourism, Transport, Choice modelling, Environment, Willingness to pay.

**Objectives** | A tourist destination is a geographical area endowed with the necessary components to attract tourists and satisfy their needs. It comprises of different components known as the four 'A's. One of these is 'accessibility', in terms of development and maintenance of transport. Indeed, transport and tourism are normally considered interdependent. Their interaction is considered mutually beneficial, in consideration of the resulting feedback relationship between the two: transportation enables tourism development and the latter, in turn, drives the demand for additional transportation services. Recently, in many countries, specific political attention has been devoted to the relationship between air transportation and tourism. The implicit assumption, rarely verified, is that the two are positively related, although achievement of a viable, strong and effective 'partnership' between air transportation and tourism remains elusive in many destinations. In consideration of the numerous local projects for air transportation development, the objective of this work is to contribute to the understanding of the relationship existing between air transportation and tourism development. More specifically, this work seeks to (i) understand the feedback relationship existing between air transportation and tourism; and (ii) identify factors which may stimulate or restrain tourism in consideration of transportation development alternatives. Additionally, it aims at debating whether transport are really conceived to develop tourism or tourism is just an 'excuse' to justify projects that have other purposes.

**Methodology** | In order to achieve these goals, the research uses a choice experiment method, based on a survey, to analyse a case study, i.e. the enlargement of a local airport close to Siena, a cultural and tourist small Italian city. In particular, by means of direct interviews, the research aims at verifying the tourists' preferences and opinions with respect to alternatives transportation projects and the prospective impact that they may have on tourism and tourists' satisfaction. To this aim, a Conditional Logit and Mixed Logit model are developed to verify the study's hypothesis.

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**Main results and contributions** | The paper aims at contributing at the debate on the relationship between tourism and transport, with particular attention to air transport. It tries to demonstrate that the relationship between air transportation and tourism development is not univocally determined and that, in consideration of the new environmental paradigm, environmental impact of the transports or projects has to be carefully taken into due consideration. Unlike others studies, the main contribution of the paper is to demonstrate the impact of factors other than time, cost and distance on the tourists' choice and willingness to pay. As a by-product, it aims at debating whether transport are really conceived to develop tourism or tourism is just an 'excuse' to justify projects that have other purposes.

**Limitations** | We think that the research has the merit to analyze an aspect still little debated in the literature. However, in order to confirm its hypothesis a more in depth analysis would be required. In particular, considered the way the sample was selected, it would be very helpful to enlarge the number of people interviewed. Although very difficult, it would help selecting a more representative sample of tourists.

**Conclusions** | The results of the research confirm that the relationship between transport and tourism is not univocally determined and that variables other than time, distance and travel costs influence the tourists' choices and willingness to pay. In particular, considering the growing importance that the environmental quality has in determining the tourists' choices, a particular attention to their environmental impact has to be paid when developing new transport infrastructures. This is particularly true in those destinations characterized by valuable natural and landscape aspects.