



Analysis

Beach ‘lovers’ and ‘greens’: A worldwide empirical analysis of coastal tourism

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines worldwide tourist coastal destination choice using a comprehensive global dataset at the country level, for both domestic and international tourists. This data includes a systematic profile of the countries’ coastline with respect to economic and natural environments, such as marine biodiversity related indicators. Tourist demand is modelled using a system of simultaneous structural equations estimated by a 3SLS routine. We identify two tourist demand segments, denoting different preferences for the worldwide coastal destinations. International tourists choose their coastal destination because they have a strong preference for the cultural and natural environments. This, in turn, depends on the destination of country’s coastal habitat abundance and marine biodiversity. We label this segment of coastal tourism, as “greens”. Alternatively, domestic tourists have a preference for beach characteristics, in particular beach length. This in turn depends on anthropogenic pressure, the built environment and climatic variables. For this reason we interpret this tourism segment as “beach lovers”. This information is, in turn, of high significance for stimulating coastal tourism demand as well as for identifying market based policy instruments with the objective to finance the conservation of environmental and cultural capital hosted at the coastal communities.

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1. Introduction

Although the travel diaries of the *Grand tour* participants at the end of the sixteenth century reported bath and water games for groups of children along the Italian coasts, coastal tourism as a major industry is a recent phenomenon. The development of coastal tourism in Europe, and worldwide, starts only at the end of the nineteenth century (see Battilani, 2007a, 2007b for comprehensive review). When coastal tourism spread throughout the continent, in spite of cultural and climatic differences, there emerged two true European models of coastal tourism that gradually expanded and conformed in different countries. The northern “cold beaches”, from Travemünde to Wyk, from Brighton to Dieppe to Ostend, adopted the same functional elements: the “bathing machines¹”, a monumental establishment of the baths on the skyline and a busy promenade of

men and women fashionably dressed and strictly protected from the sun by the various types of umbrellas. The heart of social life throughout the nineteenth century was the resorts and grand luxury hotels and leisure facilities, theatres, concert halls and walkways. In the southern “warm beaches”, from Monte Carlo to Nice, from Sanremo to Rimini, the most important centre of spas and resorts was the *Hotel des Bains*, full of “common social areas” and gaming halls, including pool table and cards. In the second half of the nineteenth century, three elements determined the prestige of a resort: (1) the establishment of the baths; (2) the Casino; (3) the Grand Hotel, which became the barometer of the success of a coastal location. This trend towards uniformity of tourist destinations across countries was inspired by the aristocracy, who shared programs and lifestyles and thus tended to promote similar forms of sociality. In this phase, characterized by the predominance of an elite tourism, beaches tried to imitate one another, as revealed by the advertising campaigns of the time and reference models proposed by contemporary literature (see Battilani, 2007a, 2007b). Equally clear is the process of mutual imitation by the various localities in the construction of the grand hotels and luxury beach resorts, where soon the French standards became dominant. In the next stage, the coastal touristic landscape began to be less homogeneous with the changing pattern of socialization and the use of leisure time that will later be called “mass tourism”. Examples include Blackpool, and the beaches of the eastern

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¹ The bathing machine was a device very popular in the 19th century that allowed people to change out of their clothes into swimwear customs. Bathing machines were roofed and walled wooden carts rolled into the sea. Some had solid wooden walls; others had canvas walls over a wooden frame.

United States, in particular Coney Island (see Battilani, 2007a, 2007b). Two localities mark the central role in the creation of tourism products around large amusement parks, which also absorbed the largest share of investments: Pleasure Beach was opened in 1908 in the English town, while in the American Steeplechase Park dates to 1897 and Dreamland in 1904. However, the development paths of the two tourists' towns soon began to differ: Blackpool became the favourite holiday of all social classes, including the workers, so that each colonized their own district, while Coney Island was transformed from a tourist destination to a residential working class area.

In warm seas, namely the Italian and Spanish coasts, the opening to tourism to all social classes and consequently the development of new forms of hospitality, started later. In some Mediterranean countries the process of “democratization” of the coastal tourism only began after World War II. In Spain, for example, tourism in the 1920s and 1930s maintained features similar to those of the previous century, as is clear from the history of the main Spanish seaside resorts such as Malaga, the Canaries and the Balearics. The investments made in that period were aimed at building luxury hotels and tried to make these places attractive to the high end of society. In general, on the Mediterranean coast, mass tourism did not expand rapidly also, for the well-known political and economic events of the 1920s and 1930s and because of the profoundly different path of tourism democratization. The economic instability of the early 1920s made life in Europe more complex for the middle-class and this is reflected in the development of tourism at that time.

The coastal tourism picture changed radically in the second half of the twentieth century, when southern Europe became the very symbol of mass tourism and its coasts offered a product that remained long without rivals². In the second half of the twentieth century, in the first phase of this long passage from the tourist elite to mass, the resorts and beaches diverged from each other, driven by the search of products to offer to customers with less money to spend. In this period, mass tourism reached its maturity and competition between different localities stimulated a new process of imitation. Finally, at the end of the twentieth century, a new form of coastal tourism developed. A new elite of wealthy tourists worldwide started to seek exclusive destinations, mostly located in Caribbean, African and Asian developing countries, characterized by conditions that are generally associated with high quality environmental amenities, namely warm weather, sunshine, pristine nature, white sanded beaches clean air and water.

This short history of coastal tourism development introduces the objectives and motivation of this paper. We aim at understanding tourists' choice of coastal destinations and to identify the variables affecting that choice. As we have seen, in the beginning of coastal tourism development, the aristocratic practice of “sea and sun baths” was mostly motivated by socialization among elites, and, after World War II, the stays at the beach were conceived as invigorating and relaxing breaks from factories and offices for the masses and working classes. In this context, we are interested in understanding the elements affecting today's choices, and therefore, the current demand for coastal tourism worldwide. The research aims at exploring the following questions: Why do (national and international) tourists choose coastal destinations? Which attributes and characteristics affect the tourists' destination choice? In particular, is marine environmental quality a factor affecting the destination choice? In broader terms, does the preference of particular consumers (tourists) for a coastal destination (also) depend on environmental and biodiversity factors? How can we empirically model and measure that effect? In this context, we explore a rich worldwide dataset, including information on coastal tourism arrivals. The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides background and surveys the relevant literature. Section 3 describes the data sources used for this analysis and explains the choice of the

selected biodiversity indicators. The model specification and the empirical strategy are discussed in Section 4, while Section 5 presents and discusses estimation results. Section 6 highlights the significance of the empirical estimation results for policy discussions. Finally, Section 7 concludes.

2. Background and Literature Survey

Even though the study of touristic industries requires a heuristic, multidisciplinary approach, from a strict economics perspective, two main streams of research have emerged: (1) research aiming at understanding the relationship between economic growth and tourism specialization in selected countries; and, (2) research aiming at understanding the determinants that explain tourists' destination choice and demand. In the first stream of literature, the relationship between tourism specialization and economic growth has become a principal area of research. Since the seminal works of Copeland (1991), Hazari and Sgrò (1995) and Lanza and Pigliaru (1995), the role played by tourism in the process of national development has captured increasing attention among both academics and policy makers. In the last few years, many papers have attempted, mainly theoretically, to understand the underlying mechanisms at which determine tourism related economic development. Notable empirical papers include the works of Brau, Lanza and Pigliaru (2004, 2007), and Lanza, Markandya and Pigliaru (2005).

In the second stream of literature a number of studies aim to elucidate the variables affecting tourists' destination choice and the elasticity of touristic demand to price or income changes – for a comprehensive survey see Candela and Figini (2004) and Witt and Witt (1995). In particular, Eugenio-Martín et al. (2004) use standard economic variables such as tourists' income, tourism prices, cost of transportation and exchange rates as explanatory variables to describe tourists' arrivals in Latin America. In particular, the gross domestic product (GDP) of the country of destination is interpreted as a driver of tourism flows, based on the idea that the growth of international tourism tends to concentrate in regions with the highest level of economic development³.

All in all, most of the studies are characterized by the analysis of the touristic demand at national/regional/local level or by the analysis of a particular touristic type/specialization at a selected destinations, for example, art and local culture, wine and gastronomic production (see Brunori and Rossi, 2000; Correia et al., 2004; Medina, 2003; Nunes and Loureiro, 2012; Poria et al., 2003; Telfer, 2001). Cultural and natural heritage are deemed to be significant determinants of the tourist's destination choice. Heritage and environmental tourism are often analysed as a specific tourism type, influenced by the tourist's personal characteristics, awareness and perception as well as by the site's attributes (see Loureiro et al., 2012; Poria et al., 2003; Ryan, 2002). A number of studies have focused either on ecotourism or, in specific activities, related to tourism markets, like safaris, scuba diving and bird watching (see, for example, Wunder, 2000; Naidoo and Adamovicz, 2005; Baral et al., 2008). For the relationships between environment attributes and tourism, a number of empirical studies have focused on the econometric analysis of the relationship between climate and tourism demand worldwide. Temperature is typically considered as the most relevant climatic variable, since most climate parameters, such as humidity, cloudiness and weather extremes are ultimately linked to temperature. Of interest here is that climate change might shift international tourist towards higher altitudes and latitudes in the future (Bigano et al., 2007; Cai et al., 2011; Hamilton et al., 2005a, 2005b; Lise and Tol, 2002).

The present study relates to the second branch of research and aims to understand the determinants affecting the choice of coastal

² Since the Second World War, the growth of international tourism has been exponential. According to the World Tourism Organization, annual tourist arrivals worldwide increased from 25 million in 1950 to 940 million in 2010.

³ Hamilton (2004) adds population density.

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