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Study of relationship between Spanish **Airport** and **Destination Marketing**: An insight for Destination Management Organizations

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Abstract | This study examines airports as an essential tool in the strategic and marketing plans of Spanish destinations, but we are aware that every tool has a mathematical and social divergence. In the case of Spanish airports, these have been the Gates of Paradise of the Spanish tourist destination, but at the same time they have become the controller of the future of many Spanish tourist destinations, in which they condition the economy, urban planning and the labor and social scenario of the natives of that territory. The first objective is to analyze the hegemony of airports as a link to entry to the Spanish destinations, whereas, the airport and destination are communicating vessels that favor the tourist growth of Spain, but this has created a high dependence on destinations in their short and long-term plan. The second objective is to evaluate whether there are other alternatives for short and long-distance transport that reduce competition in the Spanish air sector. Finally, the third objective is to examine whether the record of tourist arrivals to Spain through airports is good for the strategic plans of Destination Management Organizations that stress quality. This correlation is not always feasible and acceptable in tourist destinations.

Keywords | Airports, LCCs, tourist destinations, tourism, transport, Destination Management Organizations (DMOs)

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1. Introduction

The proliferation of airports linked to tourist destinations on the Mediterranean coast during the last three decades of economic and social expansion has led to a notable increase in the capacity of tourism supply and demand, showing itself as a catalyst component of an unprecedented economic expansion. Bel and Fageda (2006) point out that the role of airports in economic growth can be considered from three points of view. First, airports are large generators of jobs in activities directly associated with the channeling of air traffic. Second, companies engaged in activities with high added value tend to be located in territories that have airports with an extensive and dense supply of air connections. For instance, in 2018 tourism activity was one of the industries with the greatest weight in Spanish GDP with 14.6%, supported in large part by the traffic provided by airports (INE, 2019). At this point it should be noted that the contribution of airports to economic growth focuses especially on the economy of the urban area or region of reference, much more so than on the national economy.

According to Florido-Benitez and del Alcazar (2020) 3/4 of tourists arrived in Spain through airports. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a catastrophic impact on the tourism and aviation industries worldwide (Florido-Benítez, 2021a; Dimitriou and Sartzetaki, 2022), the COVID-19 crisis, governments closed international borders and almost all airlines have drastically reduced their available seat capacity (Deveci et al., 2022). The pandemic crisis brought major shocks, with its long-term effect yet to be determined (To Ng et al., 2022). For this reason, the city needs to formulate clearer long-term strategies to improve its international air connectivity (Zhang et al., 2022).

Indeed, one of the qualities of an airport is to guarantee accessibility to companies and tourist attractions in the region in which the airfield is located. The airport infrastructure offers an improvement in the productivity of all the agents involved in the tourist offer of the destination, since this, facilitates and lowers access both to suppliers of the services and products offered and as well as tourists, that is, airports are simplifying time-space management in terms of efficiency for tourists who enjoy their trips. If tourism has had an exponential increase in developed countries in these last two decades, it is thanks to the democratization of air transport and the implementation of new information and communication technologies (ICTs). Airport and tourism are communicating vessels, where its main flow is tourists who travel the heart of the tourist destination that they previously booked in their country of origin. To stage the reality of this study and the importance of airports in Spain quantitatively, Spanish Airports and Air Navigation, known by its acronym AENA (2019) stood out that in 2018 they obtained the best traffic balance in their history, with a total of 263.7 million travelers who used some of their airfields, 5.8% more than in the previous year. AENA is a semi-public company, where the Government owned has the control of 51% of the shares and 'Enaire' has 49%, manages 46 airports and 2 heliports in Spain, in addition to operating and managing other airports in different locations around the world.

In the area of tourism there has always been the great debate between quantity and quality. Many experts and organizations in this area of knowledge defend the annual increase of tourists in the destinations, since they generate employment and wealth in the territory. But this correlation is not always feasible and acceptable in tourist destinations, since tourism is a seasonal, changing, capricious activity and especially in Spain, given its geographical location close to the European tourist issuing countries, the debate of annual increase presents a difference meaning. The current situation of world tourism is an apt example, whereas the Arab Spring and war conflicts are no longer latent problems in the countries of the East, therefore, European tourists are returning to Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, amongst many others.

Tourism experts who defend the quality of the offer and the tourist spending, before the number of visitors, Spain must attract tourists who spend more on the destination in a more efficient way so that it will generate a more sustainable and competitive tourism. As stated by Maestre (2019) the tourism sector has been warning for some time that some of these tourists have been borrowed from other destinations such as Turkey or the north of the African continent, in addition to Brexit, tourists from the United Kingdom, or the slowdown in Germany It could end up taking its toll on the Spanish tourism sector. That is, the records of arrivals of foreign tourists on most occasions have always focused on the same points so that Spanish tourism is volatile.

Tourists are willing to pay more for a quality as well as differential service relative to other destinations, Spain has to compete in quality along with the added value, mostly not in price, since this variable in the countries of the East is more competitive. To stage this reality, we will expose the data by Frontur (2019) competition from other vacation destinations cheaper than Spain was noted in July 2019. A total of 9.9 million foreigners visited the country that month, which is 1.3% less than the same period of the last year. It is the second consecutive month of July of descent. The key is in the fall of the two main markets, British and German. On the other hand, 'tourism spending maintains growth inertia i.e., tourists spent 11.980 million euros on their trips to Spain which is 2% more than in July last year, with an average daily expenditure per tourist of €160 which is 4.9% more' (Frontur, 2019). The number of tourists has been reduced, but the average daily expenditure has increased.

So, the question arises, ¬ how is it relating to the supply quality and quantity vis-à-vis airports? Quite simple, because most of the marketing agencies of destinations Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), manage their strategic and marketing plans according to the lines of action of their airports, openings of new routes to capture target tourists, brand image airport-destination, and finally, airports are the entry and exit doors of tourist. According to Lohmann, Fraga and Castro (2013) tourism is closely linked to transportation and this is one of the three fundamental components of tourism, the other two being the tourism product (supply) and the tourism market (demand, or the tourists themselves). Technological innovations in means of transport have been key to the evolution of tourism, with air transport being perhaps the main contributor to the development of tourism in the world. DMOs and the Spanish tourist business fabric, should be aware that we live in the digital era, where tourists are no longer satisfied with enjoying the hotel, they demand a crucible experiences in a short space of time. A living example of the transformation of the destination has been the Costa del Sol in Malaga/Spain. It has left its sun and beach comfort zone, it has energized its surroundings and its tourist offer, it is projecting and promoting Malaga as an polyvalent and attractive destination before its target group, where tourists can now enjoy a variety of products and services such as museums, sports, language tourism, sun and beach, adventure tourism 'El Caminito del Rey', cruise tourism, shopping tourism, luxury tourism especially in Malaga capital and Marbella.

Airports, in their role as getaways, are extremely important and influential in the tourist experience, including by attracting new tourists to destination. Responding to Martin Cejas (2006) and explained by Wattanacharoensil, Schuckert, Graham and Dean (2017) passengers mentally associated three aspects with Airport Experience (AE) and destination. First, the view of the passengers on the role of airports is associated with destination, which can be metaphorically compared with the role of an ambassador or representative of a place, which has been previously discussed in the tourism literature as one of the roles of an airport. Second, airports are the interpretation of a destination's tourism slogan and image, as passengers tend to understand the airport according to their mental perception of a destination's characteristics. Third, passengers mentally compare their actual experience at an airport with the destination's tourism message. These findings address three unexplored yet essential issues which become the research questions (RQs) of this study:

RQ1: Why does Spain's tourist destination have such high dependence on airports?

RQ2: Are there other transport alternatives that decrease the monopolization of air transport in the destination Spain?

RQ3: Is the record of tourist arrivals to Spain through the airports good for the strategic plans of the DMOs that are committed to quality?

These three RQs are addressed by adapting the literature on the current situation and the data offered by official organizations such as AENA, Frontur, and the National Statistics Institute (INE), among others. This study, defends the airports as an essential tool in the strategic and marketing plans of destinations, but is it noteworthy that every tool has a mathematical and social divergence. In the case of Spanish airports, they have been the Gates of Paradise for Spanish tourist destination, but at the same time they have become the controller of the future of many Spanish tourist destinations, in which they condition the economy, urban planning and the labor as well as social scenario of the natives of that territory.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Airports are the ambassadors of tourist destinations

Competition between tourist destinations is a growing reality, this impact has influenced airports in their development and management of these. Obviously, airports are the ambassadors of tourist destinations, therefore, their unitary spatial vision must be aligned with the tourist destination, so that the tourist perceives and knows the mark of the destination of the airport in all parts of the world. For instance, in 2011 the airport of Malaga in Spain, included in its name the Costa del Sol of reference, for reasons of regional and tourist interest, with the strategic objective of promoting the knowledge of the brand 'Malaga Costa del Sol airport' in the international tourist market. As stated by Florido-Benítez (2021b; 2021c) Málaga Costa del Sol airport promotes an increase of the establishment of companies in the city and how this plays an important role in the tourist, air cargo and logistics development and Málaga local economy. This is a great opportunity for companies and DMOs help add value to local products, bet on tourist quality and design customized products with high added value, as long as the pandemic lasts, and everyone is vaccinated.

Airports have accelerated the economic growth of many cities in the world, in quantitative and qualitative terms. Let us take Doha airport in Qatar as an example. According to Almalki (2019) Hamad International Airport (HIA) has become one of the best in the world in terms of efficiency, service and passenger comfort. The airport is now a major hub and served almost 35 million passengers in 2018 and over 155 million passengers since it opened in May 2014 to the end of 2018. This airport has become a cornerstone of the Qatari economy and has contributed significantly to the acceleration of economic growth through the creation of new jobs in sectors such as tourism, trade and industry.

Airport infrastructure is the first and last point of tourists' contact in their holiday destination, thus, it constitutes the mobility axe of tourists. These activities have to be 'processed' through airport in an efficient way to minimize travel time and to enjoy shopping and leisure time in the commercial area of the airport at the end of their holidays. It will be relevant to evaluate airport facilities quality as a factor of tourism service commodity (Martin-Cejas, 2006; Costa et al., 2011). Therefore, airport facilities give them the first impression they will have about the expected quality of their holiday time. Coban and Yildiz (2019) indicate that tourism is developing very fast, and this results in changes in tourism products and destinations. Following Cornejo-Ortega et al. (2021) claim that innovation and technological change have begun to form part of the discourse on tourism world where ICTs come to play a fundamental role in the development of a more digitized and smarter world. Moreover, tourism industry is especially suited to promote the integrated development for the country (Malta & Carneiro, 2005).

Consequently, there is growing interest in new and different destinations. Product diversity is also required to achieve success in tourism. In addition, Jarach (2001) describes airports as 'multipoint service-provider firms' in which diverse services and products are offered to a broad group of target customers, not only to passengers. Tourist services, for example, are important for the development of airport brand strategies, since they involve the concept of – airport as a tourist and leisure destination–. Next, we show in Table 1 the typologies of airports, according to the characteristics and operability that AENA (2012) has in Spain.

Within the particularity and management of each airport, we have to highlight that the main clients of these are passengers and airlines, then there are private companies and franchises that operate within the micro airport environment. Obviously, the messengers of the aerodromes and tourist destinations are the airlines, the operability and quality of their offer are decisive in the satisfaction and experience of the tourist when he/she arrives and leaves the destination. Another factor that determines the magnitude of an airport is the geographical scope of the routes that operate in it, whether direct or indirect flights, that is, intercontinental flights that operate on the five continents. Bel and Fageda (2006) assume that the differences in the quality of the route network offered in airports in large European urban areas are fundamentally related to the availability of intercontinental flights, both with respect to the number of destinations and the frequency of flights of each connection. In this sense, there are two business models that tend to be imposed in the airline sector: network airlines, which offer an extensive network of medium and long-distance connections through the exploitation of interconnection traffic based on a few hubs, and low-cost companies, which offer direct flights with high service frequencies on medium and short distance routes depending on the airport, often secondary, close to large urban areas or international tourist destinations.

At present, low-cost carrier (LCC), have entered the long-distance market very modestly, except for routes that generate a lot of point-to-point traffic, such as Norwegian Air that operates the Barcelona-San Francisco or Madrid-New York route. Therefore, it is the network airlines integrated into international alliances that concentrate much of this market. The distribution of passenger traffic by airline in 2018 in Spain, shows (see Figure 1 and Table 5) that LLCs consolidate the growth of their quota and represents 55.4% of the total, the remaining 44.6% corresponding to legacy carriers. However, the degree of concentration continues to remain at a moderate level (AENA, 2018).

Table 1 | Type of airports of AENA network

Type of airports	Localization	Number of airports	Arrival Passengers 2018
Hubs	Madrid-Barajas and Barcelona-El Prat.	2	108.063.797
Tourist	Palma de Mallorca, Málaga-Costa del Sol, Alicante-Elche, Gran Canaria, Tenerife Sur, Ibiza, Lanzarote, Valencia, Fuerteventura, Girona-Costa Brava, Menorca, Reus, La Palma and Almería.	14	124.933.153
Regional	Sevilla, Bilbao, Tenerife Norte, Santiago, Asturias, Santander, Jerez, A Coruña, Vigo, FGL Granada-Jaén, Zaragoza*, Melilla, San Sebastián, Pamplona, El Hierro, Burgos, La Gomera, Vitoria*, Logroño-Agoncillo, Murcia-San Javier, Valladolid, León, Badajoz, Salamanca y Albacete.	25	30.652.560
General aviation	Córdoba, Huesca-Pirineos, Madrid-Cuatro Vientos, Son Bonet and Sabadell.	5	20.587
Heliports	Ceuta and Algeciras.	2	83.309
Total Million Pax		46+2	263.753.406

* Airports specialized in air cargo.

Source: Own elaboration based on the data offered by AENA (2012).

Nevertheless, thousands of passengers to be affected every year during their vacations due to different strikes and stoppages called by pilots, ground assistance services and security personnel, groups that clearly claim their rights, but on the most important dates for the tourism in Spain, where the tourist becomes a currency to exert pressure on companies and thus get the demands of the workers. Year after year this continues to happen in Spanish airports and the railway sector, and the main victims are tourists. This wave of strikes nothing more than damage the image of Spain as a destination, loss of time and money to the tourist and especially a bad experience of the traveler who may not repeat in this destination and will not recommend his closest ones to visit Spain. According to EuropaPress (2018) more than 120.000 passengers were affected by the nine days of strike they suffered due to the strike of Ryanair workers during the summer of 2018 can mean a total compensation of 33 million euros, according to the online platform AirHelp that manages claims to airlines. Add to them the damages that have caused and will cause tourists during the year of 2019 and 2020, with the base closures in some destinations mentioned above and the strikes called during these periods, compensation to travelers because of the management of Airlines and airports can be millionaires.

Be careful, because this high dependence on the tourist destinations of LLCs, represents a risk and instability for the economic and social future of the destinations and this is recognized by Turespaña in its Strategic Marketing Plans (2018-2020), this weakness is accentuated much more in the Canary Islands and the Balearic Islands, since the main access is by air. In their report of July of Turespaña (2019) shows a decrease in passengers in LLCs in their interannual variation of July: Fuerteventura (-23.4%); Lanzarote (-9.6); Gran Canaria (-16.5%); Tenerife South (-2.3%); Palma de Mallorca (-0.6%); and increases in Ibiza (20%). These data are from the month of July 2019, high season, these negative indicators should put us on alert of what is really happening, add the withdrawals from the Ryanair bases in Tenerife South, Las Palmas, Lanzarote and Girona in January 2020, where according to Hosteltur (2019a) they can be affected by home markets: 535.000 seats in the British market; 253.000 seats in the Spanish market and 172.000 seats in the German market.

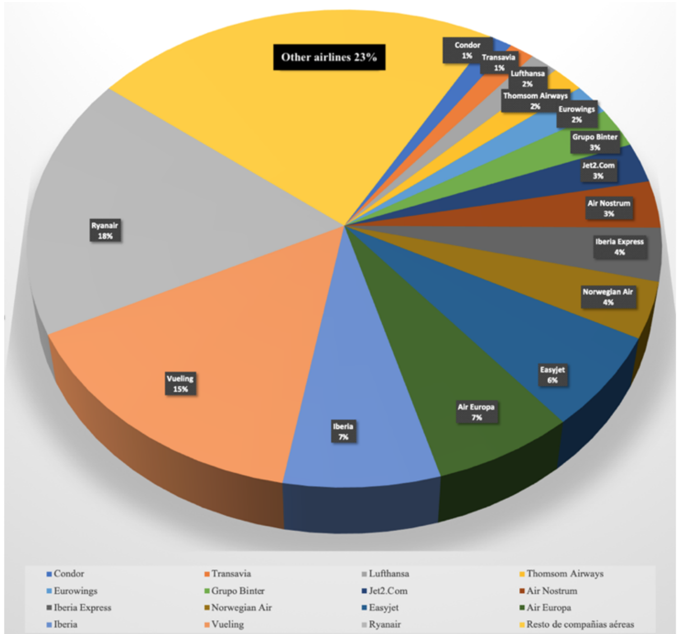


Figure 1 | Air traffic by airlines in Spain.
Source: Own elaboration based on data from AENA (2018).

In recent years, airlines have suffered a major blow in their income statements, neither external financing, nor the increase in passengers reflected in the seats of their fleets, have saved the bankruptcy of airlines such as: Air Berlin, Monarch, Air Madrid, Sterling Airways and finally the giant operator Thomas Cook. Obviously, many factors affect the closure of a short and long-haul or low-cost airline, management of the management team, short and long-term financing, hired staff, etc., but one of the main factors is the price war that they have imposed the low-cost model in the air market. Everyone wants to be the cheapest, but that model is not always viable. You have to pay fuel, aircraft maintenance, pay staff, etc., and the low-cost leaves very few benefits. All these indicators were alerting the air sector to the instability of the operation of many airlines and that with the COVID-19 pandemic it showed that most airlines and airports did not have liquidity and contingency plans for the continuity of air activity. According to Sun et al. (2022) suggest that the mobility of our society has significantly contributed to the increased risk of epidemic spreading, mainly driven by the efficiency and affordability of long-distance travel.

In this respect, Serrano and Kazda (2020) suggest that the uncertainty brought by COVID-19 on the aviation industry, the organizations need to reassess the different scenarios that can occur and ensure that sustainable and safe airport operations can be maintained. Airports will face unpleasant issues caused by the pandemic such as fewer passengers, costly health regulations and airlines and tenants that do not pay their bills on time. Domestic and international air passenger markets have seen an increase with the rapid growth of LCCs and aggressive route expansion; however, the coronavirus disease pandemic, which began in 2020, caused a steep decline in air travel and airlines face an uncertain future in regaining passengers (Kim & Sohn, 2022).

In an article of Hosteltur (2019b) suggested that the bankruptcy of Thomas Cook means that, when the company ceases its activity and its planes are confiscated, a total of eleven Spanish destinations will be left without approximately 400.000 air places from here until the end of year 2019. From January to August of the year 2020, the lost capacity is 830.000 seats. But this cessation of activity will mainly affect the Canary Islands and the Balearic Islands as we can see in Figure 2 and Figure 3. DMOs, airports and hotel operators have to polarize the flow of tourists, to reduce the dependence of their main suppliers of travelers. If we bet our market on a single letter, it is most likely that before unstable economic cycles we suffer a great loss of tourists or, for example, in the closure of an airline such as Thomas Cook, in which the DMOs are running its contingency plans and the corresponding actions to solve and deal with this serious problem.

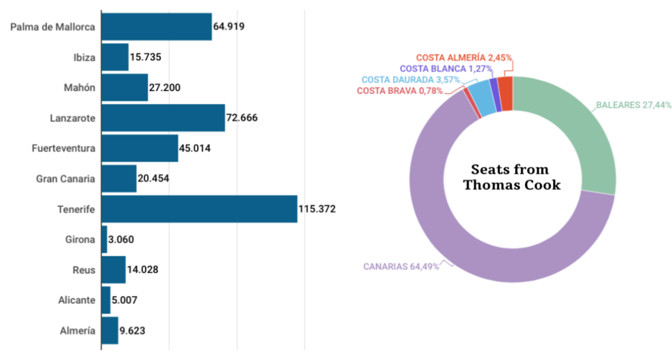


Figure 2 | Seats that Thomas Cook planned to offer from September to December 2019 to fly from the United Kingdom to airports in Spain
Source: Hosteltur (2019b)

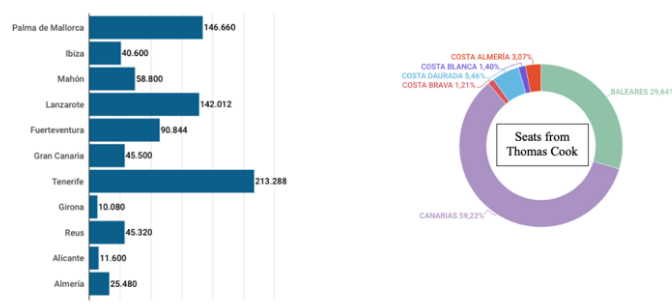


Figure 3 | Seats that Thomas Cook planned to offer from January to August 2020 to fly from the United Kingdom to airports in Spain
Source: Hosteltur (2019b)

2.2 The management DMOs in Spanish tourist destinations

Undoubtedly, DMOs plan their marketing strategies in order to innovates destination brand, image, identify and promote its natural and artificial resources for attracting visitors to the territory. Increasing competition between destinations necessitates better management not only for immediate success but also for sustainability. Destination management is important in competing against other destinations but success is possible through cooperation and coordination among stakeholders. To achieve this, a DMO is needed. According to the World Tourism Organization (2004), DMOs are the organizations responsible for the management and/or marketing of destinations. To emphasize the difficulty of coordination among different public and private organizations and among different enterprises.

Due to its complexity, tourism necessitates the development of strategies by both central and local governments. Wattanacharoensil et al. (2017) emphasizes the importance of how passengers can view airports and the tourism destinations as a single entity, thereby indicating that airports are an internal part of the tourism service system. In Figure 4, are shown the most relevant digital tools in the promotion and segmentation of markets in a tourist destination, in fact, qualified tourism staff, a master plan for short- and long-term marketing and interoperability in processes and the actions of the strategies to achieve the stated objectives will be the future of a successful project with iterative phases. According to a study carried out by Wu et al. (2022) revealed that the outbreak of COVID-19 is changing tourism and air transport market structure. Once the travel restrictions for vaccinated tourists to be relaxed, tour operators need charter flights due to the widespread of international flights cancelling or suspending, especially, on leisure routes.

Therefore, the collaboration between a DMO and an airport management should extend beyond general practices, which primarily involve setting up booths and exhibitions in airport terminals. Destination slogans should be well-conceived and delivered through good efficiency and service, which have strong influences for air travelers than objective representation, such as exhibitions and cultural activities. Because of the growing competition among airports for travelers and cargo, airport managers realize the need to invest in innovative and more focused marketing strategies. One of the differentiation strategies adopted by airports is branding (Figueiredo & Castro, 2019). Now in the 21st century we combine physical media with interactive media and the objective is to attract our target customers and satisfy their wants and needs. Tourism is a very important sector for local economy, and it is responsible for the creation of many workplaces (Costa et al., 2011).

Following Florido-Benítez (2021f) shows that informing users about their travel plans via an app has a positive effect on their sense of safety-control. Without a doubt, when customers have all the information they need on their mobile devices, they are given a sense of security and of having control over their thoughts and movements. This improves their ability to walk around the terminal with greater ease as well as being able to use their time more efficiently. The app helps the passenger know all the flight information: take off time, delays, boarding gates, etcetera. Thanks to the planning provided by the airport apps, the user-passenger has control over his or her leisure time he or she can have a coffee, buy a book or walk around the airport exploring the facilities available. In short, the app reduces a passenger's stress levels by providing him or her security, tranquillity, and a time-management tool.

Let us stage the studies and contents of the literature of this research with current Spanish tourism, as this will help us to better understand where the strategies and tools that is using Turespaña (2020) will participate in 44 international fairs in 2020, in the which will focus on attracting tourists with greater purchasing power and distant markets, this plan is part of the strategies focused on improving the profitability of international tourism, so it especially affects the acquisition of two specific consumer segments of high profitability. We commented in the introduction of this research, it is more efficient to bet on quality rather than quantity, with the search and polarization of tourists with greater purchasing power from European markets and distant Asian or American markets, since these contribute to increasing the profitability of the Spanish tourism sector (Hosteltur, 2019c).

Figure 4 | DMOs vs Digital marketing
Source: Own elaboration.
`https://view.genial.ly/5cf3e24178442e0f371f1a65/vertical-infographic-dmos-versusdigital-marketing`

In Spain, all airports operate under the AENA group, but competition for new routes, infrastructure expansion, improvement and implementation of new security technologies, etc., is latent between airports (Florido-Benítez, 2021e). Let us show you a live example between the airport of Seville and Malaga in Spain, these two cities are geographically limited in the territory of Andalusia, each has its airport and belong to the AENA group. There is the possibility that the Seville airport is the origin and destination of new intercontinental routes, and this has opened a territorial debate in Andalusia between Malaga and Seville (Sevilla-ABC, 2019). The concept of airport's hinterland is changing with a globalized economy, new needs between airports, stakeholders, and the tourist destination challenge new dimensions of operation in the territory. Identifying new factors and actors in the influence zone of the hinterland will allow us to stage the importance of airports in the regional economy and the positive effects derived from these (Florido-Benítez, 2021c).

Quantitatively and qualitatively, we must emphasize that the Malaga airport has two runways, while Seville has one. Malaga Costa del Sol airport is operational 24 hours a day all year round, and it is also the main airport in operations and passengers in Andalusia '141.313 operations in 2018 and received 19.021.704 million passengers' a figure much higher than the Seville airport that had '57,909 operations in 2018 and received 6.380.465 million passengers' (AENA, 2019), add to the Malaga airport its experience as an international airport, where 26 new routes have been opened in 2018, strengthening its seniority in flights international and being the main door to Andalusia since the 60s, when Torremolinos and Marbella was the favorite destination of the entire world elite, until today where the film industry and luxury tourism continue to enjoy this magnificent paradise. Furthermore, when airports are operated as a group, the result of competition can be controversial. In fact, for airports belonging to the same catchment area, this has led to a mitigation of competition (Pagliari & Graham, 2019).

Following Florido-Benítez (2020) the need to guarantee the sustainability, efficiency, and projection of the brand image of Seville, have made that the regional aerodrome and Sevillian public-private organizations reach an extraordinary achievement in the management and interoperability relationship of the Andalusian tourist destination such as Seville. This joint cooperation has managed to control rising costs, optimize processes, reallocate resources, and especially improve access by air, that it is within reach of very few European airports. Sevilla-San Pablo Airport (SVQ) was the airport that grew the most in Europe in terms of the number of passengers (+ 24.9%) within the framework of airports between 5 and 10 million passengers.

Utilizing the findings of this study, DMOs, airport managers and internal and external airport stakeholders can gain precious insight of multiple dimensions of the business, interconnectivity and promotion of brand image through digital marketing. The major reason airports and tourism companies are so successful at adapting digital marketing strategies is because they carefully analyze how people interact with surrounding environments while travelling. These insights help them recognize existing customer needs and give travelers what they want to create the 'wow' effect and ensure repeat sales. Airports can play a more active role in the promotion and delivery of tourism products and services in their host cities. Digital marketing enables companies to offer services instead of products. As an industry, aviation, travel, and tourism has a head starts, because of its position as a heavily service oriented ecosystem at the 'new economy' end of the spectrum. As stated by Florido-Benítez (2021d) marketing strategies through mobile marketing tool has opened a melting pot of opportunities for companies and consumers in this period of pandemic, the potential of this tool is being redefined, in order to identify, anticipate and satisfy customers requirement profitably and efficiently. According to Arman (2015) destination image in addition to pre-travel behavior of tourists such as the destination choice, influences both on-travel and post-travel behavior of tourists such as trip quality, trip value, tourist satisfaction, and revisit and recommend intentions.

2.3 The representation of the main means of transport in Spain

Following Hosteltur (2018) the plane is the most used public transport to travel between large cities in Spain with 36.62 million passengers in 2017; followed by the high-speed train (AVE) with 21.10 million and regular long-distance buses with 16.46 million. As Table 2 shows, we can see that the highest annual growth was registered in the plane with 8.1% and in ferries with 5.6%. Within the Spanish territory, the distribution of travelers by land and sea transport is acceptable, since within the peninsula travelers normally move by train or bus (Figure 5), unless they have to travel for business or residential to the Islands, where it is more frequent to use the boat.

Table 2 | Passenger transport within Spain in 2017

	Interurban maritime (Cabotage)	Rest long-distance railways	Regular long-distance bus	High speed Spanish AVE	Intercity aerial flights
Millions Pax	10.680.000	11.790.000	16.460.000	21.100.000	36.620.000
Annual variation	5.6%	2.9%	2.5%	3.7%	8.1%

Source: Own elaboration based on INE (2019) and Hosteltur (2018)

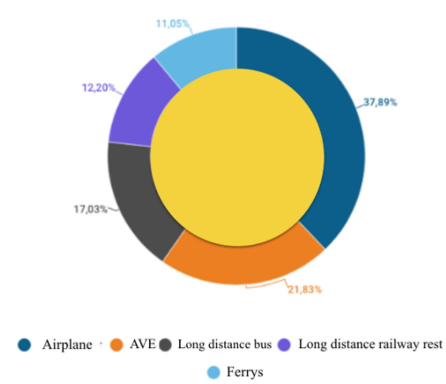


Figure 5 | Long distance intercity public transport in Spain 2017
Source: Own elaboration based on Hosteltur (2018)

To assess the importance of the aircraft as the main means of transport, the results shown in Table 3 are more than obvious, the distribution of the means of transport that tourists used to visit Spain from 2001 to 2018. Following Florido-Benitez (2021e) there are no 100 per cent safe spaces, the risks exist, and we must prevent them.

As you can see, of the tourists who arrived in Spain are by plane, the second means of transport has been the automobile by road with an average of 20%. Third, the ports with 2.5% of the average and the fourth railway with 0.5%, both occupy residual positions as a means of access to the tourist destination. In other words, airports are and will be for a long time the main gateway to most tourist destinations. The data shown in Table 3, lead the number of arrivals through the airport with 81.4% in 2018, and that both land and sea transport can barely compete with air transport. The results in Table 3 are represented in Figure 6.

Table 3 | Number of tourists arriving in Spain by the main measures (2001-18)

Year	Railway	%Railway	Port	%Port	Road	%Road	Airport	%Airport	Total
2001	239.401	0.5%	1.256.239	2.6%	11.738.611	24.2%	35.331.092	72.7%	48.565.344
2002	286.251	0.6%	1.225.427	2.4%	13.872.392	27,.6%	34.946.554	69.4%	50.330.623
2003	291.549	0.6%	1.521.376	3.0%	12.118.005	23.8%	36.922.885	72.6%	50.853.815
2004	297.785	0.6%	1.511.156	2.9%	12.097.005	23.1%	38.523.886	73.5%	52.429.832
2005	290.133	0.5%	1.772.354	3.2%	13.121.460	23.5%	40.729.830	72.8%	55.913.778
2006	280.619	0.5%	1.459.895	2.5%	13.818.656	23.8%	42.445.292	73.2%	58.004.462
2007	146.265	0.2%	1.456.254	2.5%	12.738.968	21.7%	44.324.017	75.6%	58.665.504
2008	143.015	0.3%	1.452.178	2.5%	11.199.926	19.6%	44.396.895	77.6%	57.192.014
2009	139.343	0.3%	1.398.278	2.7%	10.407.355	19.9%	40.232.663	77.1%	52.177.640
2010	171.861	0.3%	1.441.523	2.7%	10.504.672	19.9%	40.558.917	77.0%	52.676.973
2011	140.328	0.2%	1.416.311	2.5%	10.006.661	17.8%	44.613.583	79.4%	56.176.884
2012	127.896	0.2%	1.078.502	1.9%	10.098.671	17.6%	46.159.427	80.3%	57.464.496
2013	115.816	0.2%	907.604	1.5%	10.889.147	17.9%	48.762.922	80.4%	60.675.489
2014	304.210	0.5%	858.984	1.3%	11.953.093	18.4%	51.822.657	79.8%	64.938.945
2015	342.863	0.5%	1.066.123	1.6%	12.466.246	18.3%	54.278.441	79.6%	68.153.673
2016	362.849	0.5%	1.635.428	2.2%	12.973.078	17.2%	60.343.653	80.1%	75.315.008
2017	373.662	0.5%	1.965.673	2.4%	12.889.671	15.7%	66.639.515	81.4%	81.868.522
2018	338.418	0.4%	1.970.083	2.4%	12.933.364	15.6%	67.531.290	81.6%	82.773.156

* The number of tourists is shown in millions and percentages.

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Turespaña (2019) and INE (2019)

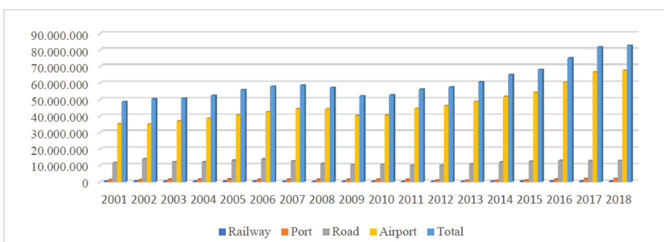


Figure 6 | Arrivals of tourists to Spain by the main access means (2001-2018)
Source: Own elaboration based on data from Turespaña (2019) and INE (2019)

The first and last perception of quality in a tourist destination takes place at the airport. This essential service has to be provided at a reasonable standard; otherwise, its poor quality will detract from overall experience. Average waiting time and crowding level for airport facilities are two relevant aspects in quality perception of tourists when arriving at their destination (Martin-Cejas, 2006). These results have many policy and managerial implications. From the point of view of the airlines serving the tourist destination, these offer great opportunities for new air routes, and thus be able to reach new market segments. The DMOs are aware of this reality, therefore, some airports along with the DMOs offer to install operational bases of some airlines in their airports, in order to open new air routes and bring a greater number of tourists to the tourist destination. With the arrival of LLCs there are now increased consumption choices, in which individuals can access flights to many hundreds of destinations that depart from their local airport on dates that suit their needs, and often at a reasonable cost (Casey, 2011). Following Hotle and Mumbower (2021) revealed that darkest served by airports in multi-airport cities decreased more than airports in single-airport cities (38.5% versus 15.8%) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Methodology

The aims of the research method adopted here is to review the specific paradigm of research which discusses, investigates, and evaluates the airport as the best means of transport in the specific context of DMOs. The research will conceptually classify focuses of research and will analyze papers discussing these subjects. The literature relational to airport, airlines, DMOs and destinations is very extensive, and this paper is focused on these authors (Standing et al., 2014; Serrano & Kazda, 2020; Dogra & Kale, 2020; Hotle & Mumbower, 2021; Wu et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022; Florido-Benítez, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; To Ng et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2022, amongst many others).The outcomes will provide longitudinal perspective around research themes and trends, and areas of greater and lesser research. This collective intelligence will cover the papers identified (but not limited) in Tourist Studies, Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Annals of Tourism Research, Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research, Journal of Travel Research, Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, Journal of Airline and Airport Management, Journal of Air Transport Management, Tourism Management Perspectives, Current Issues in Tourism, etc. Data was collected from journals using University of Malaga databases and verified with reference to Google Scholar searches (Buhalis & Law, 2008), an approach also adopted by Leung, Law, van Hoof, and Buhalis (2013) and Standing, Tang-Taye and Boyer (2014).

Upon completion of this initial data collection, each selected article was further reviewed through a process of content analysis in order to ensure the focus of its research is placed upon the brand image of an airport as own identity and banner of the tourist destinations. The final analysis of the documents is, therefore, based upon a conceptual content analysis, based upon a grounded approach which allowed the key themes to emerge from the literature. This mitigates any issues of trying to make this analysis 'fit' and existing set of categories or classifications. Moreover, this research also uses empirical data from Turespaña, National Institute of Statistics of Spain (INE), UNTWO, etc. This data represents quantitatively the basic core of why airports are the gateway to tourist destinations and their importance in DMOs master plans. Therefore, the scope of study of this research project has been national, collecting data and patterns of success that support the objectives of this research.

4. Results of research

4.1 Why does Spain's tourist destination have that high dependence on airports?

If we put Spain in the tourist context today, we must recognize that it not only has an excellent raw material such as: good beaches, gastronomy, national parks, monuments listed as World Heritage, museums, etc., one of the keys of this destination is its location close to the main emitting countries of European tourists and its entry enclave for tourists from the American continent, where the Spain brand acts as a host to these travelers to access the European continent. The excellent infrastructures of land, sea, rail and air transport make this country a territory with high connectivity to move easily, being Spain the most competitive country in the world in tourism according to the World Economic Forum report WEF (2019), is the country that best combines its cultural and heritage offer, standing out for its quality of its natural and cultural resources. Next, we show the distribution of traffic by countries of the AENA (2018) network (see Table 4), the total airport traffic is mainly concentrated in Spain (30.6%) and in the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy and France, countries that represent altogether a 38.8% share in 2018. These countries, as we mentioned earlier, the decrease in the number of passengers with origin/destination in the United Kingdom (-3.0%) affected by the recovery of alternative tourist destinations to Spain, as well as the impact of Brexit and its reflection on the evolution of exchange rates. As we mentioned in the introduction, AENA obtained the best traffic balance in its history, with a total of 263.7 million travelers who used some of its aerodromes, 5.8% more than in the previous year.

Table 4 | Air traffic distribution by country in Spain (2018-2017)

	Passengers		Interannual variation		Share%	
Countries	2018	2017	%	Passengers	2018	2017
Spain	80.773.105	73.441.642	10.%	7.331.463	30.6%	29.5%
United Kingdom	44.114.652	45.460.047	-3.0%	-1.345.395	16.7%	18.2%
Germany	29.735.131	28.676.583	3.7%	1.058.548	11.3%	11.4%
Italy	15.322.572	14.024.888	9.3%	1.297.684	5.8%	5.6%
France	13.229.644	12.354.027	7.1%	875.617	5.0%	5.0%
Holland	8.771.402	8.603.723	1.9%	167.679	3.3%	3.5%
Switzerland	6.411.587	6.391.259	0.3%	20.328	2.5%	2.6%
Belgium	6.088.932	5.990.013	1.7%	98.919	2.3%	2.4%
Portugal	4.877.201	4.295.889	13.5%	581.312	1.8%	1.7%
Ireland	4.332.257	4.162.682	4.1%	169.575	1.6%	1.7%
United States	4.408.673	3.719.791	18.5%	688.882	1.7%	1.5%
Sweden	3.873.457	4.048.144	-4.3%	-174.687	1.5%	1.6%
Denmark	3.455.567	3.442.023	0.4%	13.544	1,3%	1.4%
Norway	3.118.163	3.190.928	-2.3%	-72.765	1.2%	1.3%
Poland	2.660.779	2.472.060	7.6%	188.719	1.0%	1.0%
Total Top 15	231.173.122	220.273.699	4.9%	10.899.423	87.6%	88.4%
Rest of countries	32.580.284	28.944.617	12.6%	3.635.667	12.4%	11.6%
Total Passengers	263.753.406	249.218.316	5.8%	14.535.090	100%	100%

* Passenger numbers expressed in millions and thousands.
* Annual variation rate shown in percentages.

Source: Own elaboration based on the AENA database (2018)

Regarding to the distribution of passenger traffic by airline, Aena's main clients remain the IAG Group and Ryanair. The first, which includes Iberia, Iberia Express, Vueling, British Airways, British Airways City Flyer, Aer Lingus and the Level brand, has increased its share of total passenger traffic, from 26.2% in 2017 to 27.8% in 2018. Among the other airlines, it is important to mention the increase in Eurowings activity, the sustained growth of Jet2.com 'passengers coming mainly from the United Kingdom to tourist destinations in Spain', the growth of the Binter Group that operates mainly the traffic between airports of the Canary Group, as well as that of Air Europa, mainly at the Madrid-Barajas Airport and EasyJet Airport (AENA, 2018).

Furthermore, LLCs obtain 55.4% of Spanish air traffic in 2018 (see Table 5), including Ryanair with a share of 17.8% of the total passengers and which at the same time has been the airline that has transported the most passengers with 46.834.426 million passengers; Vueling with (14.9%); Easyjet with (6.6%) among others. This panorama of the LCCs condition Spain's destiny for good and for bad, mainly in tourist airports, where you do not have bilateral agreements with LLCs and a guaranteed frequency of routes with domestic destinations, medium-radius and long-haul routes, this can negatively affect the economic and social stability of the tourist destination, especially in this pandemic moment. We have already seen how they can affect the withdrawal of LLC bases and routes to tourist destinations, putting companies, families and the future of a territory at risk. Therefore, we have to look for other transport alternatives, whether in the Canary Islands and Balearic Islands or on the peninsula, efficient and profitable means of transport such as the ship, train or bus, to reduce the high dependence on airports. In the case of the islands, maritime operators can create regular or combined routes of a week or 10 days, with car rental or organized trips with tour bus operators to visit the islands.

Table 5 | Air traffic distribution by airlines in Spain (2018-17)

	Passengers		Interannual variation		Share%	
Airline	2018	2017	%	Passengers	2018	2017
Ryanair [1]	46.834.426	44.026.566	6.4%	2.807.860	17.8%	17.7%
Vueling	39.388.231	34.802.550	13.2%	4.585.681	14.9%	14.0%
Iberia	19.280.728	17.465.094	10.4%	1.815.634	7.3%	7.0%
Air Europa	17.362.329	15.655.282	10.9%	1.707.047	6.6%	6.4%
Easyjet [2]	16.753.696	15.433.064	8.6%	1.320.632	6.4%	6.2%
Norwegian Air [3]	9.996.446	9.771.993	2.3%	224.453	3.8%	3.9%
Iberia Express	9.532.184	8.577.197	11.1%	954.987	3.6%	3.4%
Air Nostrum	8.414.781	7.748.597	8.6%	666.184	3.2%	3.1%
Jet2.Com	7.241.470	6.058.120	19.5%	1.183.350	2.7%	2.4%
Grupo Binter [4]	7.051.906	6.148.173	14.7%	903.733	2.7%	2.5%
Eurowings	5.612.244	3.803.852	47.5%	1.808.392	2.1%	1.5%
Thomsom Airways	4.813.506	5.108.094	-5.8%	-294.588	1.8%	2.0%
Lufthansa	4.246.828	3.703.650	14.7%	543.178	1.6%	1.5%
Transavia	3.689.599	3.741.371	-1.4%	-51.772	1.4%	1,50%
Condor	3.394.319	3.035.958	11.8%	358.361	1.3%	1.2%
Total, Top 15	203.612.693	185.079.561	10.0%	18.533.132	77.2%	74.3%
Rest of airlines	60.140.713	64.138.755	-6.2%	-3.998.042	22.8%	25.7%
Totales Pax	263.753.406	249.218.316	5.8%	14.535.090	100%	100%
Totales Pax CBC [5]	146.228.689	135.345.861	8.0%	10.882.828	55.4%	54.3%

(1) Includes Ryanair Ltd. and Ryanair Sun, S.
(2) Includes Easyjet Switzerland, S.A. and Easyjet Airline Co. LTD.
(3) Includes Norwegian Air International and Norwegian Air Shuttle A.S.
(4) Includes Binter Canarias, Naysa and Canarias Airlines.
(5) Includes traffic from low-cost carriers on regular flights and (Pax: passengers).

Source: Own elaboration based on the AENA database (2018)

The installation of LCC bases at airports cannot be currency exchanges for DMOs or airport managers, because in the end these companies are only interested in obtaining a high profit, local subsidies and cheaper fuel as is the case of the Canary Islands. These are short-term strategies, without guarantees of future and closing of bases and routes at the time that the LCC wants. In the case of Gran Canaria, in its 2017-2020 marketing plan, a specific item is destined for 'joint agreements with airlines and cruise ships that incorporate new routes with the destination, carrying out direct marketing campaigns to support them'. Following Barreno (2019) union sources indicate that 75% of the cost of operating in the Islands is financed by the government in the form of a marketing and promotion agreement, subsidies prohibited by the European Union. How much money are we talking about? It is one of the best kept secrets of the Canarias administration. In March 2018 Ryanair signed one of these promotion agreements valued at 3.1 million euros to deploy four routes to the Basque Country. Regarding the closure of the Ryanair base in Girona, the newspaper Expansion published that the Association for the Promotion and Development of the Girona Region (AGI) contributes 3.5 million euros to the airline to maintain the base and its routes. The sources consulted indicate that in the case of the Canary Islands we would be talking about a figure higher than those known in these Spanish regions.

Additionally, it is relevant to note that the consolidation trend of airlines, which entails the progressive resorption of passengers by other airlines, has been reflected in 2018 in the cases of Air Berlin, Niki or Monarch, companies that operated in relevant markets (Air Berlin and Niki in the German and Monarch in the British), which ceased operations (AENA, 2018). The key is to look for new air routes that are profitable in occupancy of seats for the airlines and transport to the destination Spain tourists of high purchasing power where their spending capacity is higher than the average of current daily spending, always accompanied by an attractive tourist offer, personalized and quality. Actually, we are talking about intermodally strategies as a transport system integrated by different 'road-rail-air-maritime' modes, constituting an origin destination chain, in which each of them operates in its economic area being more efficient and profitable.

This demonstrates the airports can play a more active role in the promotion and delivery of tourism products and services in their host cities. Why? First, an airport is an ambassador of a destination. Second, an airport exhibits the positive characteristics of a destination. Third, passengers evaluate the experience within the airport with the promotion of the destination they received in their country of origin and fourth, airports are the Gates of Paradise where tourists enjoy and satisfy their dreams in the desired tourist destination. Emphasizes the importance of how passengers can view airports and the tourism destinations as a single entity, thereby indicating that airports are an internal part of the tourism service system (Florido-Benítez & del Alcázar, 2020).

4.2 Are there other transport alternatives that decrease the monopolization of air transport in the destination Spain?

The data shown in this research show that the hegemony of air transport in Spain and developed countries is latent. This close relationship between airports and tourist destinations provides a good system of support for mobility to the territory and improvement of the economy, but sometimes it can be a double-edged sword, especially when carried out in the context of investments of large companies in that tourist destination and have a period of planned obsolescence, since after this they relocate their infrastructure in other destinations that provide higher profit margins, subsidies and cheaper labor. These strategies have very hard economic and social effects on the territory and the population, since they create uncertainty and increase the number of unemployed. We do not attempt to overlook that airports are within the tourism supply chain. From the point of view of local tourism authorities, it would be convenient for DMOs to help interested parties develop crisis or contingency management plans, with an explicit knowledge of the effects, barriers and facilitating factors in relation to Implementation of these plans.

Growing demand for travel brings a great opportunity, while challenging ecosystem stakeholders to rapidly adapt their strategies to capture growth. Since the 1980s, the amount of air traffic has doubled every 15 years, and is expected to continue to do so (see Figure 5). Appetite for travel is increasing due to demographic developments: the growing influence of millennials, who are more likely to travel; and the expected doubling of the middle class in high-growth global regions, and the corresponding rise in their disposable income. Furthermore, travel itself has become more affordable (World Economic Forum, 2017).

From 2015 to 2019, an upward path began in the increase of passengers who used public transport within Spain with 4.905.7 million passengers (INE, 2019). Undoubtedly, the means of land and sea transport exercise greater competition for air transport, within the Spanish territory as we observe in the following figures, but they cannot compete with the number of foreign tourists arriving in Spain (see Table 3) since. of the tourists who arrived in Spain are through the plane. After a few years of struggle with the long-distance train, including the AVE, air transport stands out clearly and, with a growth of 10% in 2018 compared to the previous year, while passengers who chose AVE trains rose 3.8%, according to INE data (see Figure 7). The economic recovery of recent years has boosted the use of the plane, and has again increased the competition gap to the AVE.

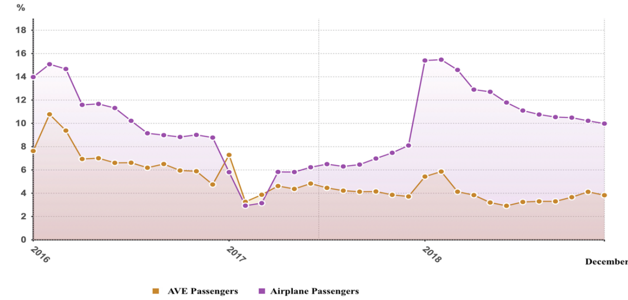


Figure 7 | Annual variation of the number of accumulated travelers by airplane and AVE in Spain
Source: INE (2019)

The number of travelers (year-on-year variation) that chose to travel by plane to travel through the interior of Spain varied by 7.85% in July 2019, compared to the same month of the previous year, while those who chose AVE trains varied by 4.87% (see Figure 8).

Figure 9 shows that around 4.27 million users used air transport in July 2019, while about 3.26 million passengers chose the long-distance train for their journeys. Within this segment, the travelers who used the AVE were 2.02 million users. On the other hand, bus transport was used by 61.11 million travelers in July 2019, a figure that represents 2.1% year-on-year variation. Travelers transported by suburban buses were 40.95 million passengers, 0.34% in year-on-year variation, while those from medium distance varied 6.23% and those from long distance did 2.21% (see Figure 10).

According to the data published by the INE (2019), the aircraft transported 16.13 million passengers within the Peninsula in 2018; 4% more than the bus, which a year earlier had surpassed the air by more than one million travelers (16.1 million of the bus in 2017 compared to 15.1 million aircraft). It is long distance when the average travel of a passenger is greater than 300 kilometers. Within urban transport, 1,246 million passengers, 4.6% more, took the subway at some time of the year in those Spanish cities that have it: Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Seville, Bilbao, Malaga, Granada and Palma. Madrid and Barcelona accumulate 85.5% of travelers, with 657 and 407 million travelers, respectively. The urban bus, on the other hand, registered a much more modest growth of 1.5%; to reach 1.767.6 million users. For its part, bus transport was used by almost 695 million travelers in 2018; 2.6% higher than in 2017, while sea transport rose 3.1%, to reach 11 million users (INE, 2019).

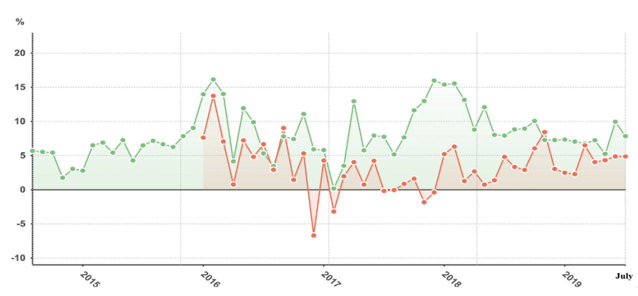
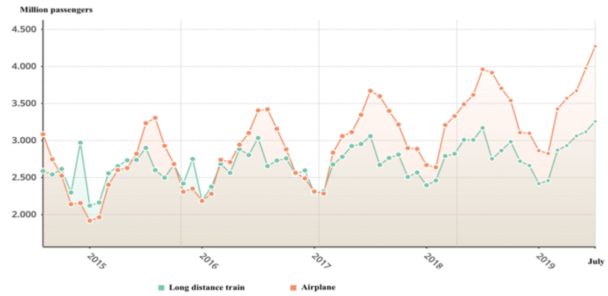
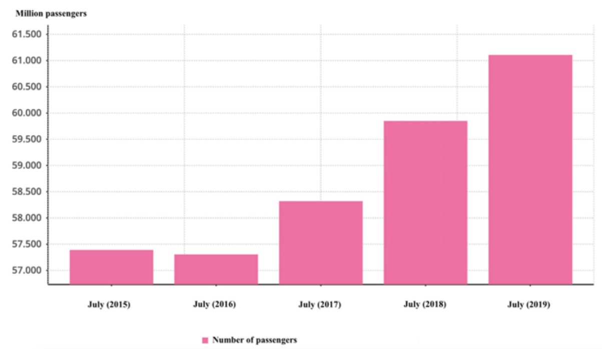


Figure 8 | Variation of the number of users of the Airplane vs AVE in Spain
Source: INE (2019)



* Number of users in millions.
* Interurban air transport (inside) and long-distance train transport.

Figure 9 | Number of travelers who used the plane vs train in Spain
Source: INE (2019)



* Number of users in millions.

Figure 10 | Travelers who used the bus in their displacements in Spain in the months of July 2015-2019
Source: INE and Epdata.es (2019)

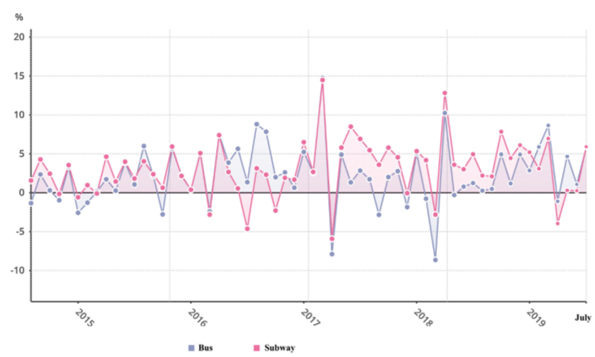


Figure 11 | Interannual variation of urban transport by metro vs bus in Spain
Source: INE (2019)

The airport and railway management have a particularity in Spain, and that is that both operate under a monopoly regime and annuls any possibility of competition. It would be interesting for new operators to enter these sectors, as this could provide a greater supply of trips and compete on prices, and the demand of travelers would be more inelastic and less seasonal during the year. In short, consumers could buy their cheapest train tickets, given that there is more competition and with less price fluctuations between the high and low season.

The relevance of transport is such that it is a sector that is heavily regulated and controlled by the public administration. Transport contributes to the improvement of a country's competitiveness and is of strategic importance for industry, commerce and people's mobility. The planning and strategies carried out by different national and European public organizations are very numerous for its improvement, its modernization, intramodality, accessibility, pollutant reduction, cost optimization, etc. Numerous studies have shown that transport is an indicator of very procyclical activity, in which the economic cycle can be intuited and anticipated, that is, in periods of economic recession it falls more strongly than GDP and in periods of economic growth it presents growth rates above GDP. According to the Spanish Confederation of Business Organizations (CEOE), passenger transport in Spain must undergo a series of improvements aimed at increasing competitiveness, efficiency, sustainability and strengthening connectivity between different means of passenger transport (Rodríguez, 2019). The entry of new operators and a more liberalizing and flexible commercial law will reduce the competition and dependence of tourist destinations on air and rail transport, as well as increase the number of passengers thanks to a greater supply of cheaper and substitute trips.

5. Conclusion

If the tourism sector can boast of anything, it is the speed and integration of digitalization in the companies that make up this activity, from airports, tour operators to hotels. The ubiquity of information and new technologies have empowered tourists, adapting to the demand of an increasingly informed and demanding consumer, with great capacity for influence and living at the click of a button, has caused that not only has occurred a transformation in the processes or in the products offered, but it demands accessible and satisfactory experiences in the whole process of your trip. Undoubtedly, the air sector is the main means of transport as we have seen in the results of this research, and this makes this destination have a high dependence on this airport infrastructure, channeling air traffic and distributing the majority of tourist flows in Spain.

In this investigation we can affirm that airports are the ones that guarantee travelers accessibility to Spain. The economic growth of Spanish tourist destinations is sustained in most cases by the air traffic provided by airports. Spain has a high dependence on the hegemony of airports as a transport link and this is confirmed by Turespaña in its Strategic Marketing Plans (2018-2020), this weakness is accentuated much more in the Canary Islands and the Balearic Islands, since the main access It is the air. The airport is the heart of the human body, with two cavities, one in and one out, where each heartbeat and blood flow distributes to all parts of the body the oxygen that the human needs to live, in short, airport and destination are communicating vessels that make the economy flourish in destinations.

Another line of research to analyze in this study, is the increase in tourist arrivals in Spain, where airports have an important role, since most of the tourists that access the destination Spain do so by air. It is not about breaking records in numbers of tourist arrivals every year, we do not doubt that it is operational and viable for airports, it is about managing the number of tourists based on the strategic plans of tourist destinations, whether by their power purchasing and spending capacity, for a quality and personalized offer, for the distribution of the flow of tourists throughout the year to reduce seasonality and very important to efficiently channel the tourists we want, in order to obtain a sustainable and competitive tourism before our main competitors. In this study we defend that a tourist destination that supports a quality and personalized offer, better supports the fluctuations of tourist arrivals and mitigates that high dependence on airports. It is not about crowding the destination, the key is to balance supply and demand, where the tourist has an excellent experience and links them with the natural and cultural resources they visit.

The managers of the DMOs and airports have to be aware that the massive arrival of tourists to Spain in the summer season only collapses the infrastructures and public services, not to say, that in these periods the demand exceeds the supply, causing a decrease in the quality of the services and products offered, since personalized attention deteriorates due to the large volume of customers. It has been previously analyzed and discussed in the tourist literature and in this study, that airports serve as ambassadors for tourist destinations, and that in studies carried out, it has been shown that passengers mentally associate the airport with the destination. Therefore, the role of Spanish airports is decisive in terms of tourist experience and brand image of Spain.

Regarding other transport alternatives that reduce the hegemony of air transport in Spain. The results of this research have shown that foreign tourists access Spain mainly by plane, it is reasonable, the plane is the only means of transport that makes long-distance space-time profitable to access a destination. It is very difficult to compete with the air sector, when most travelers have a month of vacation and distribute these during the year. The tourist prefers to book their flights and visit 2 or 3 different destinations per year. On the contrary, at a short distance, to do domestic tourism or to travel from one city to another within Spain, road and rail transport compete with the air sector.

Mainly, the car is the main means of transport for tourism in the interior. As for the power struggle between the plane and the long-distance train, including the AVE in Spain, the competition gap has increased in favor of air transport with a growth of 10% in 2018 compared to the previous year, while that those who chose the AVE trains rose 3.8%, according to INE (2019) data. We have already commented that the railway sector, specifically Renfe operates in monopoly in Spain, this has caused that there is no competition either in prices or in choosing other alternatives to travel with other operators, tickets in AVE have been and are quite expensive. With the opening of the railway market to new companies in 2020, consumers will win, since they will be able to opt for cheaper tickets and new railway operators. This the study recommends that 'the transportation managers regulate reasonable spacing between passengers and continue to sensitize, monitor and enforce the hygiene level and protection of travelers, especially in public transportation, to make shared mobility more appealing to the generality of the people postcovid' (Faiyetole, 2022). There is a need for tourist destinations to have a tourism agenda, in which it must be identified through the cooperation and collaboration between public sector, aviation and tourism industries, and scientific community (Silva, 2004), especially in this period of pandemic.

As regards passenger transport by subway and bus at short and long distance, they annually have a growth path, but they are means of transport that are complementary to the air sector, since when you want to travel to the airport, you usually travel by subway or urban bus, do not exercise competition to the short distance air sector. Long-distance if they compete with bus transport with the plane, but in peninsular Spain more passengers moved by plane with 4% than by bus in 2018. The increase in routes and frequencies between the different cities of our country, where there is almost an airport every 200 kilometers, and the decrease in ticket prices has caused the demand for internal flights (not counting the islands) to increase every year until it surpasses the bus as a means of long-distance transport, which traditionally it has been the most accessible in price and destinations. In general, before pandemic crisis there was continued growth in all terms related to aviation and tourism industries, but the effect's pandemic and its impacts in these sectors could lead to a rethinking of them in order to reposition it.

Finally, the results of this study represent an important advance in the knowledge of airports and how it is affecting Spanish tourist destinations, especially as Spain has a high dependence on airports, so the DMOs will have to articulate Alternative accessibility strategies within the Spanish territory, to reduce the hegemony of the air sector. We have seen that airports enjoy a high market power due to their location, speed offered by airlines in travel, attract tourist flows and open new markets. Nevertheless, airports also have their weaknesses and threats, and that is that airlines and especially those of LLC have great bargaining power with airports and DMOs and this allows them to have the capacity to change to other airports and destinations when they please, affecting seriously to the economic and social future of tourist destination. This study contributes to improve the tourism literature, sustainable development, and management of airports and tourist destinations (Silva et al., 2021), with the aim of facing new challenges during and post pandemic crisis (Casales-Garcia et al., 2021).

6. Limitations and future research

Like all research, this work has certain limitations, focused mainly on the opinion of the managers of the DMOs and airports on the dependence of the destinations with the LLC and the financing to them under marketing and promotion agreements. In addition, we were pleased to know what levels of satisfaction passengers have had with airlines within the airport and how they have influenced their perception of the trip in Spain. On the other hand, in future research it would be interesting to analyze the economic impact that are causing the closure of the bases of the airlines in some tourist destinations, such as in the Canary Islands and the Balearic Islands.

7. Declaration of conflicting interests

Authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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