

## Assessing Tourist Willingness to Pay Slightly More for Environmentally More Benign Excursion Services

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### DESCRIPTION

Overall, the global post-pandemic recovery of domestic and international tourism has generally been rather strong, even if tourism services in some regions and countries continue to face considerable economic challenges [1]. With tourism contributing more significantly to economic growth again, pertinent local, regional, and global sustainability concerns are also receiving increased public attention again. Sustainability concerns include local “over-tourism”, social and environmental aspects, resource depletion, local pollution, and growing travel and tourism related greenhouse gas emissions, potentially accelerating climate change.

Tourism industry service providers are typically quite aware that tourists are increasingly seeking clean, “green”, and sustainable offers and solutions, whilst at the same time, due to inflation and other factors, the majority of excursion and holiday travelers are increasingly cost-conscious in the disbursement of their available budgets. Wherever tourism service providers operate with narrow margins, investments in new technologies may only be seen as feasible if there is a sufficient tourist Willingness to Pay (WTP) slightly more for environmentally benign services.

There are a growing number of studies attempting to assess the WTP in the tourism sector in order to help address these challenges. These include recent analysis by global tourism operators [1] and market analysts, as well as work on specific tourism businesses, such as hotels and accommodation [2-5], or for individual destinations, including national parks or conservation areas [6]. Assessing WTPs remains a methodologically challenging task, as interviewees tend to (over)state the value of sustainability, whereas actual consumption patterns suggest that priority continues to be given to competitive and low prices.

In the scope of a recent study undertaken in Berlin, Germany, the authors have assessed the tourist WTP for excursions on environmentally benign tourist boats [7-9]. The authors have conducted surveys among passengers on solar-battery-electric boats cruising the Spree River in downtown Berlin in the summers of 2019 and 2021, using an open questionnaire. The

data analysis included tests with hierarchical agglomerative cluster processes, applying the ward variance method using Square Euclidian Distance (SED). The study was able to distinguish with regard to their motivations, interests and preferences four different subgroups of tourist customers. These were named “ecologically sensitized hedonists”, “sightseeing-oriented tourists”, “style- and luxury-oriented relaxers”, and “time- and sightseeing-oriented optimizers”.

The study in Berlin found that a limited yet distinct WTP more for excursions on environmentally benign tourist boats exists in all customer groups, even if their other preferences, motivations, consumption patterns, and touristic interests differed. A comparison of data collected in the two years indicates that the observed WTP more for environmentally benign services may have gradually increased over time between 2019 and 2021, at least among the interviewed tourists in the sample. These findings may suggest a slowly growing consumer attention to environmental concerns, including recognition of the need to mitigate local air pollution and climate change through own purchase decisions.

Findings of empirical studies based on personal interviews always need to be interpreted with some caution. However, the authors recommend additional in order to gather and make available more information that can help public and private investors to plan and to successfully launch environmentally benign tourism services. Suggested future studies may not be limited to waterborne excursions on (solar) battery-electric boats in other locations, but could also discuss battery-electric (hop-on hop-off) city tour buses, tourist shuttle bus services, safaris, or other recreational vehicles.

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