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## Multi-Airport System as a Way of Sustainability for Airport Development: Evidence from an Italian Case Study

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### Abstract

Airports need to find a way to overcome economic, financial and infrastructural problems in a coherent attempt of definition of a conceptual framework of the airport business as a whole. In this context, an increasing relevance has the model of Multi-Airport System (MAS).

The research uses case study analysis approach. More in details, business and technical data accounted from “Puglia’s airports” have been considered.

Main findings seems to demonstrate that the basic hypothesis, according to which a well-structured multi-airport system can contribute significantly to infrastructure management and development, is valid only if it is supported by a coordinated managerial approach.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, many studies (Percoco, 2010; Siciliano and Zucchetti, 2006; Senn and Zucchetti, 2001) have defined airport business activities as not limited to merely infrastructure characteristics or economic activities but rather able to play a crucial role in increasing territorial competitiveness. Therefore, airports can generate economic and social value on two different sides: as a business activity, as infrastructure for the development of the regional economy.

Furthermore, other studies (Baccelli and Zucchetti, 2001) have shown how a specific linkage exists between territorial competitiveness and determinate airport system models.

Certainly, on the aggregate demand side, greater competition between airport services offered in adjacent geographical areas can exert a multiplier effect on a territory through secondary and tertiary multiplier effects (Graham, 2003). At the same time, regions that are experiencing increasing economic growth in sectors such as tourism are those in which more competitive airport services are localized.

Basically, then, in the airport system management one must balance two key objectives. The first, from a business point of view, is related to the corporate features of the various companies that operate in the airport, and refers to the consequent economic results which will ensure their financial sustainability over the long term. The second refers, from a planning point of view, to airport development in terms of infrastructure – both airside and landside - investments and maintenance in order to shape travel demand and air companies policy.

## 2. Background

On the basis of these previous considerations it is possible to better understand the impact of the transportation industry in its relative territorial development. During the last few years – taking into consideration sectorial regulatory changes (Oum, 1998) – which generated a transition from positioning airports solely as public utilities towards private enterprises that offer airside and additional ancillary services (Gillen, 2011) – some Scholars (Forsyth, Niemeier and Wolf, 2011), have focused their attention on the topic of airport company management.

In this context, the configuration of a multi-airport system (MAS) seems to represent a potential key element for local competitiveness. In effect, the MAS could be a model for this particularly interesting industry because it offers the possibility of achieving a fine balance between social and economical goals. In this way, the analysis of a MAS can be conducted, at least, under two different strategic points of view: financial-economic and infrastructural-planning issues.

According to de Neufville (1995), MAS is “the set of airports that serve the traffic of a metropolitan area”. For example, the MAS in London is formed, in addition to Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports, which are under the ownership and management of the British Airport Authority (BAA), also by the independent Luton Airport.

A MAS, consistent with the definition cited above, is also defined as “the set of two or more major airports that serve commercial traffic within a metropolitan region” (Bonnefoy, 2010). According to these definitions, the crucial element in defining a multi-airport system is that of the territory it represents. Instead, in this paper a managerial approach is developed in order to highlight the importance that companies’ ownership and management can play in the identification of a multi-airport system.

The definitions provided by literature, focusing only on the territorial aspect and considering generally all airports located in a more or less large geographical area, is not adequate in describing the real configuration of a MAS. These definitions cannot be accepted without the correct consideration of all aspects relating to the management of the system.

In this sense, Gillen (2011), by examining the management structures of different airports, emphasize the differences existing between multi-airport companies and strategic airport alliances. They argue that the creation

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