

Politicizing science vs. technicalizing politics: A comparative study of Kastelli Heraklion International Airport, Greece and Chinchero Cusco International Airport, Peru

Politizar a ciência vs. tecnicizar a política: Os casos do Aeroporto Internacional de Kastelli Heraklion, Grécia e do Aeroporto Internacional de Chinchero Cusco, Peru

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Abstract

This paper aims to add to the debate on the negative externalities of tourism-related megaprojects. It examines the policy adoption and implementation of two contentious airport projects in two tourist-heavy regions, Heraklion (Kastelli), Greece, and Cusco (Chinchero), Peru. In the context of destination competitiveness and commitment to neoliberal economic growth, national and regional governments in both countries became attracted by the idea of regional economic development and further increasing the number of international tourists and tourism investments. Deciding whether building a new airport serves the public interest or not is a complex policy problem with technical uncertainties and conflicting interests, which entails both a technical and political process of expressing and pairing policy actors' goals and means. The aim of the paper is to identify similarities and differences between the tactics adopted and arguments used for and against the two airport development projects by the respective advocacy coalitions.

Keywords: tourism; politics; megaprojects; Greece; Peru.

Resumo

Este artigo contribui para o debate sobre as externalidades negativas dos megaprojetos relacionados com o turismo. O trabalho examina a adoção de políticas e a implementação de dois projetos aeroportuários controversos em duas regiões de grande intensidade turística, Heraklion (Kastelli), na Grécia, e Cusco (Chinchero), no Peru. No contexto da competitividade dos destinos e



do empenho no crescimento económico neoliberal, os governos nacionais e regionais de ambos os países foram atraídos pela ideia de desenvolvimento económico regional, de aumento do número de turistas internacionais e de investimentos no turismo. Decidir se a construção de um novo aeroporto serve ou não o interesse público é um problema político complexo, com incertezas técnicas e interesses contraditórios, que implica um processo técnico e político de expressão e emparelhamento dos objetivos e meios dos atores políticos. O objetivo do artigo é identificar semelhanças e diferenças entre as táticas adotadas e os argumentos utilizados a favor e contra os dois projetos de desenvolvimento aeroportuário.

Palavras-chave: turismo; política; megaprojetos; Grécia; Peru.

1. Introduction

Travel and tourism was one of the sectors that experienced the most disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic with grounded airplanes, closed hotels and travel restrictions applied in almost all countries around the world, which resulted in a loss of 2.6 billion international arrivals in 2020, 2021 and 2022 combined (UNWTO, 2023). International tourism regained 88% of pre-pandemic levels with 1286 million international tourists (overnight visitors) in 2023, an increase of 34% over 2022 (UNWTO, 2024) while it is expected to fully reach pre-pandemic levels in 2024 and exceed the 2019 peak as travel demand has been showing notable resilience and continuous recovery, amid economic and geopolitical challenges, due to increased air connectivity and the release of remaining repressed demand (UNWTO, 2024). Surprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic, a black swan event, that is, unpredictable with a massive impact (Taleb, 2007), when policy choices of decision-makers were causally decisive for the selection of one path of institutional development over other possible paths, was not seen by governments as a ‘turning point’ or a ‘critical conjuncture’ to reconsider the implementation of large-scale infrastructure projects in the air transport and tourism industries. Instead, path dependence¹ seems to have influenced the decision of policymakers to persist in the construction of megaprojects, such as airports, either because the latter were designated as a “national priority”, which would address the recession caused by the pandemic by generating jobs (Hofmann, 2020), or because of the unfettered, undisputed dominance of mandatory neoliberal growth ideology, or because of both.

As air traffic numbers worldwide continue to soar and move closer to pre-pandemic levels, it seems that the governments’ choice of not halting the construction of new airports during the pandemic has been vindicated. Therefore, governments and the aviation industry are well-prepared to fulfil this air travel growth through extensive plans for airport expansion and capacity enhancements (ACI, 2023; Oliver Wyman Forum, 2023; FAA, 2024). The air transportation industry regained profitability in 2023, “only three years after the historic loss of nearly US\$ 140 billion in 2020” but the same rate of growth and financial improvement is unlikely to be equal in 2024 and beyond (IATA, 2023: 1).

¹ “Path dependency” in the context of new institutionalism is defined as “a situation where the present policy choice is constrained or shaped by the institutional paths that result from choices made in the past.” (Torfing, 2019: 71).

Air transport has played a pivotal role in the growth of international tourism since the 1960s. The relationship between air transport and tourism is symbiotic, with each industry influencing and supporting the other. Tourism-related, large-scale projects such as airports have important economic, social and environmental impacts. Although many studies have examined the effects airports have on the economy and regional development (Dimitriou & Sartzetaki, 2022), there is a lack of research on how political decisions to get such projects endorsed are made as tourism has been almost completely ignored by political science (Richter, 1983). This research gap limits our understanding of how politicians and policymakers allocate tourism resources and produce tourism policy when they make such decisions. Therefore, this article, inspired by Hall (1994), who considered the role of the political dimension in tourism, aims to explore this gap.

The paper is structured as follows. In the literature review and analytical framework, the current knowledge of megaprojects, the relationship between aviation, tourism and climate change, the negative environmental impacts of airports and the analytical framework on the relationship between politics and science is summarized. Then the research context and methodology are presented before formulating the research question. Following this, the findings are discussed in reference to those described in the literature review. The conclusion section then outlines the paper's key findings with suggestions for future research.

2. Literature review and analytical framework

Megaprojects are defined as “large-scale, complex ventures that typically cost US\$1 billion or more, take many years to develop and build, involve multiple public and private stakeholders, are transformational, and impact millions of people.” (Flyvbjerg, 2014: 6). Megaprojects are strongly disputed by political parties and stakeholders and marked by uncertainty and conflict (Esposito & Terlizzi, 2023). Transport, telecommunications and energy megaprojects demonstrate a perpetual attempt to shrink space and achieve a frictionless society (Flyvbjerg *et al.*, 2003). With reference to critical development projects such as airports, the goal is to promote the increase in existing infrastructures and to ameliorate the financial and social welfare of local communities on both the regional and national levels, by adopting “a socially inclusive and participatory approach” (Dimitriou *et al.*, 2024: 129). Σφακιανάκη (2017) argues that major projects are generally promoted with a misleading narrative, emphasizing some aspects and obscuring others, in order to achieve social consensus and that this narrative is always based on a prefabricated image that has been methodically built up on the issue of growth.

Although aviation has substantial economic and social benefits, by facilitating tourism and trade, generating jobs and improving living standards, there is an environmental cost attached to it (ATAG, 2020). Aviation is the single most pertinent sub-sector of tourism with regard to its contribution to climate change (Gössling, 2009). Climate change affects tourism policy, planning, investment and destinations (e.g., more extreme weather events, water shortages) and makes tourism vulnerable (Gössling & Scott, 2018; Scott *et al.*, 2019; Scott, 2021; UNWTO & ITF, 2019). Nevertheless, tourism also contributes significantly to climate change (Scott *et al.*, 2019).

On the one hand, although climate change and biodiversity loss are the most significant challenges for tourism, governments all over the world seem to disdain this reality as tourism is off-track to reach its sectoral interim goal of decreasing emissions by 45% by 2030 as called for in

the Paris Agreement (Cooper & Hall, 2024). On the other hand, the aviation industry responds to climate change through policies of carbon neutrality and offsetting, net zero carbon and improved fuel efficiency. Nevertheless, these efforts are made to appear insignificant due to the ever-increasing number of flights and greater distances flown, leading to increased use of fossil fuels and emissions (Gössling & Scott, 2018; Quiggin, 2023). This means that the reduction of aviation emissions needs to be viewed as supply- and demand-led. Yet, Gössling and Scott (2018) caution that acting on climate change sometimes seems to be a dead end as it occasionally encounters political resistance from leaders whose understanding of the issue of aviation and tourism decarbonization is bounded by their belief systems and the fact that these leaders have not allowed scientific knowledge ('truth') to be transferred into policymaking ('power') (Böcher, 2016).

There is a social and environmental cost linked with constructing and operating airports (Culberson, 2011). The key environmental impacts of airports are noise, emissions, energy management, water pollution and use, waste management and biodiversity (Graham, 2023). Airport projects involve new land acquisition, environmental degradation, destruction of ecosystems, displacement and resettlement of people who risk losses to their dwellings, livelihoods, food security and socio-cultural support (Price & Tagliarino, 2020), which can sometimes lead to socio-environmental conflicts. Conflict is not just the outcome of a project. It is the incompatibility between the features of the project and the features of the territory, its history, the value attributed to it, which causes conflict (Subra, 2016), and raises environmental justice concerns.

Airports, due to their negative impacts, increased scale, duration, complexity, uncertainty, contingency and multiple competing stakeholders with different interests, values and rationality are sources of intense conflicts, pressures, and risks (Sergeeva & Ninan, 2023). This means that throughout the project lifecycle, the advocacy coalitions will seek to advance their personal policy preferences through narratives with either evidence (science) or ideas (politics). Politicians are regarded as experts on the art of politics but with restricted knowledge of the complicated and technical issues they have to address (Grødem & Hippe, 2019). Thus, politicians and their experts, inside the bureaucracy or outside of it, are confronted with the legitimization dilemma, seeking to reconcile expert advice (objective knowledge) and subjective values (political decisions) (Weingart, 1999). Although effective policymaking processes should be based on science to acquire a more profound understanding of policy problems and justify specific policies and instruments, the relationship between science and policy is not linear but controversial (Schmid-Petri *et al.*, 2022).

During periods of crisis and high uncertainty (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic), governments in democracies appeal to evidence-based policymaking, that is, scientific and technical advice to legitimize their choices in the light of political considerations and preserve their authority and power (Weible *et al.*, 2020; Μοίρα, κ.ά., 2024). However, policymakers find it difficult in practice to combine the paradox of knowledge and politics, science and democratic values (Stone, 2002; Smith & Larimer, 2018). In this context, they may sometimes turn to the politicization of science when they want to emphasize "the inherent uncertainty of scientific evidence to cast doubt on the existence of a consensus, generating uncertainty and anxiety about whether science can be

trusted when invoked in a politicized debate” (Bolsen *et al.*, 2019: 150). However, in autocracies scientific accountability is understood as subordinate to state accountability. For example, Zhang (2015: 925) notes that in China there is “an over-politicization of science that alienated the public (and the scientists) and paralyzed effective communication.”. China’s tactics of tight control of (scientific) information became apparent with the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in December 2019 when Li Wenliang, an ophthalmologist at a Wuhan hospital, was rebuked by the government for cautioning colleagues about the virus from which he later died (Qin & Hernández, 2021).

Thus, advocacy coalitions will try to expand or restrain the policy debate by disparately highlighting the allocation of costs and benefits related to a specific policy option (McBeth *et al.*, 2007). On the one hand, promoters of a megaproject are more likely to glorify themselves, that is, present themselves as ‘heroes’, politicize scientific and technical information by mobilizing political identities, and tend to disperse benefits to the many and condense costs on the few to contain the conflict (Shanahan *et al.*, 2013; Stone, 2002). On the other hand, protesters of a megaproject are more likely to demonize their opponents by presenting them as ‘villains’ and by identifying inanimate (e.g., the environment) and animate (e.g., the local communities) characters as ‘victims’ (Jones & McBeth, 2010). In addition, protesters attribute blame, technicalize politics (Palonen, 2003; O’Byrne *et al.*, 2014) and tend to scatter costs to the many while they concentrate benefits on the few to expand the scope of conflict. Advocacy coalitions are sometimes assisted by policy entrepreneurs, a class of individuals, in or out of government, who appear suddenly, take specific actions to drive dynamic political and policy changes, “disrupt status quo policy arrangements” and then disappear (Petridou & Mintrom, 2021: 945).

Finally, apart from using proofs to support their arguments (logos), trustworthy members of advocacy coalitions (ethos) use metaphors² in their narratives to trigger emotional reactions (pathos) and thus make their rhetoric more persuasive.³ The main purpose of metaphors is to frame how the public perceives policy issues and negatively depict out-groups (i.e. opponents) as well as situations that are construed as problematic (Charteris-Black, 2011).

3. Research context and methodology

We chose to conduct a qualitative comparative case study with two geographically distinct cases (projects), emphasizing comparison within and across contexts (Goodrick, 2014). A deductive approach to reasoning was adopted, which “seeks to see if the theory applies to specific instances” or cases (Hyde, 2000: 83). The first project is the construction of the new Heraklion International Airport at Kastelli on the island of Crete, in Greece while the second project is the construction of the new Cusco airport at Chinchero, Peru, near a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The selected municipalities share similar features as cultural centres in the past, while their current socioeconomic situation depends largely on tourism. Both projects are underway and take place in rural areas, in countries with different political systems and cultural contexts. The

² “Metaphor” is defined as “a word or phrase that differs from another more common or more basic sense than this word or phrase has”. (Charteris-Black, 2011: 31).

³ Aristotelian rhetoric depends on the interaction of the three elements of ethos, pathos, and logos (Stucki & Sager, 2018).

common government narrative is that as public benefit flagship development projects they are expected to boost tourism and create jobs.

The case study, defined as the “[d]evelopment of detailed, intensive knowledge about a single ‘case’, or of a small number of related cases” (Robson & McCartan, 2016: 80) is a widely used flexible design research strategy. Comparative or multiple case studies are an adequate tool to explore the impacts of policy and practice in social research as they can synthesize the information across time and space. A description of each case is made, referred to as ‘within case analysis’, followed by an analysis across the cases (‘cross-case synthesis’), looking for common themes that transcend the cases (Yin, 2018). Documentary analysis is used as a research method as it is particularly relevant to qualitative case studies, which produce thick descriptions of events (Bowen, 2009). Public consumption documents, such as news articles, speeches and reports, disseminated in the public domain by the promoters and the protesters of both projects, originally written in English, Greek and Spanish, were used. The cases for our study were selected based on the researchers’ sufficient access to the potential data to review documents for the two candidate cases which will most likely illuminate our research question (Yin, 2018). The fact that Greece is the researchers’ home country, combined with the researchers’ very good knowledge of Spanish, facilitated the approach to the specific case studies.

Our research question is to identify similarities and differences between the tactics adopted and arguments used for and against the two airport development projects by the respective advocacy coalitions. How do promoters of both projects seek to influence the policymaking process to get the projects approved and constructed? How do opponents of both projects try to shape the policy process to stall their implementation?

4. The Kastelli Heraklion International Airport, Crete, Greece

4.1 Profile of the project area

Crete is the fifth largest island in the Mediterranean Sea and is the largest island in Greece. 56% of its total area is covered by mountainous areas. Olive trees, extremely drought-tolerant, and vineyards are the prevailing cultivations at the eastern part of the island, favored by fine soil texture and drier climate conditions (Morianou *et al.*, 2021). Crete produces excellent quality (extra) virgin olive oil, owing to its production methods and the ideal climate, and holds an estimated 5% of the market share of world production of olive oil (Migdalas *et al.*, 2004). Pottery, a traditional craft of Crete, flourished initially in the Early Minoan period (3000-2100 BC). It is still preserved at Thrapsano (Voyatzoglou, 1974), a village near the proposed Kastelli international airport, where handcrafted ceramic pots, jars and planters are molded on pottery wheels with clay and water. The Bronze Age in Crete is termed “Minoan” after the legendary King of Knossos, Minos, son of Zeus and Europa. The British archeologist Sir Arthur Evans used myth to give a name to the Bronze Age civilization that he unveiled at Knossos (Moorey, 2019).

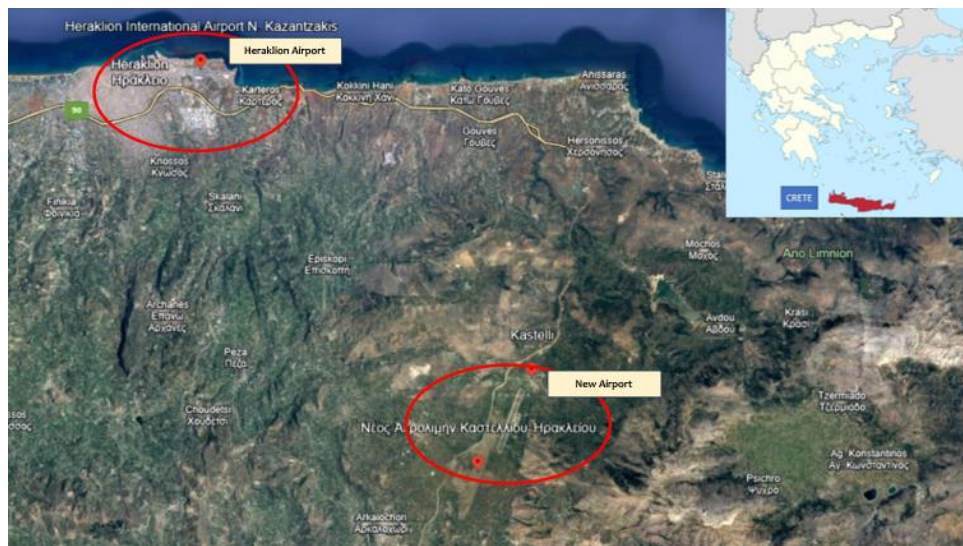
In the last 60 years mass tourism has become a significant part of the economy of Crete. At the same time rural depopulation took place, terraced agriculture was abandoned, cereals disappeared and olive cultivations and greenhouses with vegetable crops multiplied (Vogiatzakis & Rackham, 2008: 248). Crete has three airports: Heraklion and Chania international airports and

one airport for domestic flights, Sitia. The existing “Nikos Kazantzakis” Heraklion International Airport recorded in 2023 3.56 million international arrivals, which accounted for 13.6% of the total of international flight arrivals to Greece (HCAA, 2024).

4.2 Background context of the project

The government’s official announcement for the relocation of the existing Heraklion airport to Kastelli (Figure 1) was made suddenly in November 2003 although a different policy solution had been previously selected (Μπογδανίδης, 2003). The first call for tender took place in 2009 (Reuters, 2009) but no contract was awarded until 2017. In April 2017, the only bid submitted was priced at EUR 480 million, well below the expected EUR 850 million, by Ariadne joint venture made up of India’s GMR Airports Limited and Greece’s GEK Terna (Spiegel, 2017; Σαββίδης, 2017). The European Investment Bank (EIB, 2020) agreed to provide a EUR 180 million loan for 28 years to support construction of the new airport. In February 2019, a Public-Private-Partnership concession contract was signed for thirty-five years (Reuters, 2019). The consortium holds 54.1% of the shares. The foundation laying ceremony of the project was held in February 2020. The new airport is scheduled to be operational in 2027.

Figure 1. Map showing the sites of Heraklion and Kastelli International Airports



Source: Google Maps <https://www.google.com/maps/> (edited by the authors)

4.3 Technicalizing politics vs. politicizing science

The advocacy coalition⁴ against the construction of the new airport consists of two minority parties represented in the Hellenic Parliament at the time, the Golden Dawn and the Communist Party of Greece (K.K.E.), a local grassroots movement called the “Citizens’ Initiative for the Rescue, Promotion and Sustainable Development of the Pediada plains” (CIRPSDP), which

⁴ Advocacy coalitions are defined as groups of actors who share core policy beliefs and coordinate their political activities in a non-trivial manner to influence the policy process (Sabatier, 1998).

launched an online petition in 2016 with more than 3,200 signatories as of April 2024, and a national civil non-profit partnership “Citizens’ Inspectorate for Sustainable Development” (CISD). In April 2023 the Regional Government of Crete launched an Open Consultation on the revised 2022 Environmental Impact Assessment on the Kastelli international airport. The then President of CIRPSDP, Yiorgos Mavrantonas, an experienced aeronautical engineer, replied to the consultation, highlighting the inconsistencies and purposeful oversights contained in it (Μαυραντωνάκης, 2023). For example, the EU’s air quality directive 2008/50/EC sets NO₂ thresholds at 200 µg/m³ hourly or 40 µg/m³ in a calendar year. The EIA (ENVECO, 2022) underestimates the initial NO_x emissions in turbine engine exhaust at 200 µg/m³ hourly whereas the actual concentration is 1,200 µg/m³. Further, although the normal angle of descent for jet-powered transport aircraft is three degrees (Filippone, 2007), the EIA (ENVECO, 2022, chapter 9, p. 107) sets a thirty-degree glideslope as the most suitable and safest alternative solution due to the uneven topography, which is extremely dangerous (Μαυραντωνάκης, 2023). In basins when over-emissions of primary pollutants react in the atmosphere with solar radiation, secondary pollutants such as ozone (O₃) are formed and toxic and cancerogenic photochemical smog is inevitably generated (ibid.), which impacts mainly on human health (Javed *et al.*, 2021). Nowhere in the EIA is there a mention of photochemical smog and its effects.

Φιλίππου (2023), a physicist, argues that despite the negative opinion of the Water Directorate of Decentralized Administration of Crete, the 2019 and 2022 EIAs foresee the recharge of the groundwater system with the treated waste from the airport’s biological treatment plant, which poses a serious risk of irreversible damage to the aquifer of Roussochoria and Kastelli. The latter provides drinking water to both the villages of the Municipality of Pediadas and Heraklion. In addition, Μαυραντωνάκης (2023) highlights that the relocation of the airport from Heraklion to Kastelli might negatively affect tourism as the landing and take-off procedure from the Libyan Sea will add an extra fifteen minutes to flight time, with a total cost of €45 million per year (9,000 additional flight hours X €5,000 average flight cost per hour) to the air carriers.

The MP and Special Speaker of the Communist Party of Greece Stelios Syntychakis during his speech in the Standing Committee on Production and Trade in the Hellenic Parliament noted that the privatization of air transport is an unacceptable policy and that the project aims at securing profits for business conglomerates and promoting the military plans being devised by NATO and the EU. He also argued that there was never any meaningful dialogue or consultation, particularly with local residents, or even when there was, governments “were holding a gun to their head”, posing them the familiar false dilemma “Do you want growth or poverty?” (Βουλή των Ελλήνων, 2019). Here the MP frames political opponents as the enemy by using an image-based, cognitively accessible, metaphor from the source domain of crime to make his point more noticeable.

This lack of citizens’ deliberation seems to violate one of the terms for the disbursement of the loan of the Greek State from the EIB as the Environmental and Social Data of the EIB (2022: 17) requires that the promoter “undertake a meaningful consultation process that provides opportunities to stakeholders to express their views on the project on an ongoing basis”. Furthermore, during the hearing of experts in a special sitting of the Standing Committee on

Production and Trade in the Hellenic Parliament on May 7, 2019, the President of CISD stressed that the airport would have a devastating impact on the agri-food sector of Crete, and that “there should have been a real and serious consultation for such a big project, which never happened.” (Βουλή των Ελλήνων, 2019). In addition, during the expert legislative testimonies the President of the Steering Committee of the local branch of the Technical Chamber of Greece (TCG), a legal entity of public law supervised by the Greek Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation, underlined the fact that since 2003 when the project was decided, the basic policy parameters regarding the tourism and agricultural sector had changed. She questioned the choice of the site of the planned airport and stressed that, considering the available data, the TCG could not form an ex-post opinion on the project, therefore, was not able to fulfil its institutional role as an advisor to the State (Βουλή των Ελλήνων, 2019).

The advocacy coalition in favor of the construction of the Kastelli international airport comprises five parties represented in the Hellenic Parliament at the time (SYRIZA, Independent Greeks, New Democracy, PASOK, The River) as well as their allies, that is, the Regional Government of Crete, the Municipality of Minoia Pediadas and the local tourism industry. The promoters of the project have been the successive Greek governments from 2003 to 2019 and the majority of the political parties represented in the Parliament. The statements of the MPs in the hearings of the Standing Committee on Production and Trade of the Parliament in April and May 2019 on the bill ratifying the concession contract of the new Heraklion airport at Kastelli (Βουλή των Ελλήνων, 2019) need fact-checking as they may include claims without providing evidence. One of the MPs of SYRIZA, Sokratis Vardakis, in his speech on 22 April 2019 in the sitting of the Standing Committee on Production and Trade in the Parliament said that all proposals and views about the site of the new airport had been taken into account and that the majority of the local community, and the people of Crete were in favor of the airport. Nevertheless, there was no official stakeholder engagement in the policy adoption stage, although considering the points of view of the local community with respect to the plans for the growth and the policy instruments by which they are to be achieved is essential. Further, the MP in his speech provided no evidence for the alleged five thousand jobs that would be created during the construction phase and the alleged 2,500-3,000 new jobs during the operation of the new airport. In another instance, the then incumbent Infrastructure and Transport Minister Christos Spirtzis in his speech in one of the sittings of the Standing Committee on Production and Trade demonized the New Democracy part (villain), because it put a public tender for the new Heraklion international airport in 2014, when it was in government, with unfavorable conditions for the Greek state (victim), and which was subsequently canceled. The speaker glorified his party SYRIZA (hero) who was at the time in the Opposition and objected to this public tender and added that when SYRIZA came to power it sought to renegotiate the terms to the benefit of the Greek people.

In August 2017 the residents and landowners of the village of Evangelismos, who were initially in favor of the project, sent a factual and emotional resolution to the Infrastructure and Transportation Minister, the Regional Governor of Crete, the Mayor of Minoia and the local MPs, expressing their indignation and bitterness for the confiscation of their land (about 200,000 olive trees were uprooted) and the very low prices provided as compensation. They claim that many residents ended up landless and unemployed, while for the majority of the remaining local

population, the size of the remaining land makes farming unsustainable. Furthermore, the olive oil cooperative of the village, which has existed for 70 years, will lose 61% of its turnover, leading to bankruptcy. They note that the adverse environmental effects of the construction and operation of the airport, such as air pollutants and noise pollution (costs), will directly affect the area around the airport, while the proven benefits from the operation of the project will be spread throughout Crete. They admit that they knew all this from the very first moment they studied the Master Plan of the project, but they did not react through protest and resistance, trusting that the State would have taken into account all the social and economic factors as it should. However, they stress that they were proved woefully wrong, and that their attitude was not appreciated but was considered a weakness, as if the State was their enemy (Πατρίς, 2017).

All in all, Greek policymakers did not respond to the scientific or technical evidence provided by public and private experts and scientists that refuted the technical expertise of the project promoters.

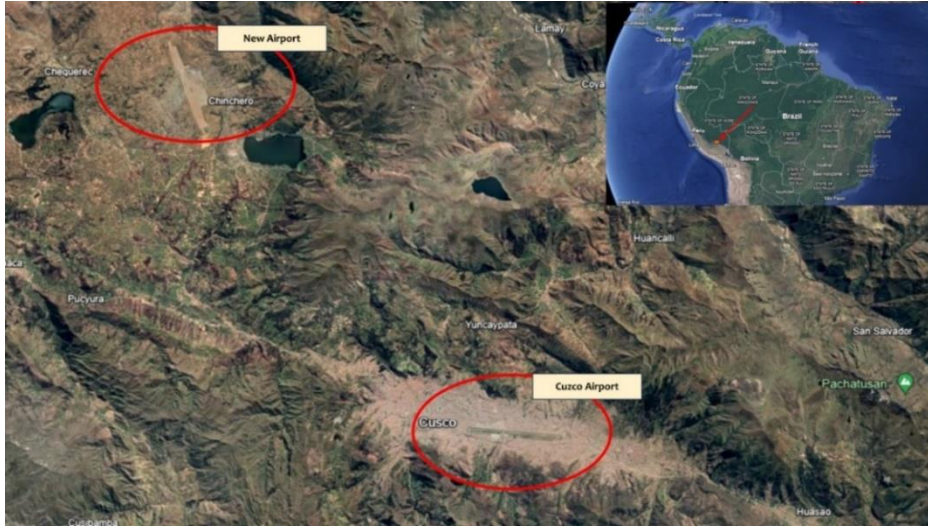
5. The Cusco Chinchero International Airport, Peru

5.1 The profile of the project area

Cusco is the fourth largest department in Peru. The Spanish colonial city of Cusco, which is characterized by an intense sociocultural and linguistic Hispano-Quechua identity, is built on the foundations of the Inca empire's ancient capital. The city of Cusco is 80 km from Macchu Picchu, 4-5 hours travel time each way. Chinchero is in the Peruvian Andes above the Sacred or Urubamba Valley with Incan terraces and fields of quinoa, potato, olluco and cañihua crops. Agriculture has been practised in the Andes for eight thousand years in a hostile ecosystem which shows its resilient nature (Garcia, 2021). Chinchero is an indigenous poor town of four thousand inhabitants, famous for its pre-Hispanic textile tradition, its medicinal plants and traditional medicine (Franquemont *et al.*, 1990). In Chinchero private houses have been partially reconverted into workshops, where “local women dressed in traditional outfits weave for the tourists [and] sell their products” (Garcia, 2018). Chinchero is 60 km from the historic sanctuary of Machu Picchu or ‘Lost City of the Incas’, a mixed UNESCO World Heritage Property since 1983, a 15th-century Inca citadel. Between 2007 and 2017 the number of tourists increased by 176% as almost all visitors to Machu Picchu arrive passing through the city of Cusco (Branca & Haller, 2021). Chinchero consists of three historical *ayllus* (family groups), Yanacona, Cúper and Ayllopongo. In 2013 Yanakona was coerced by state and regional propaganda into selling its land to the Regional Government of Cusco under unfavorable negotiation conditions because the community was deprived of its right to be acknowledged as “indigenous” (Garcia, 2020).

The new airport (Figure 2) will reduce by 30 minutes the driving time to Machu Picchu, but this will not substantially influence the total travel time. Although travellers who wish to make a short trip to Machu Picchu from abroad will skip Lima and the congestion around Cusco, Rafo León thinks that the new airport will endanger the sustainability of hotels, restaurants and other businesses on which the city lives (Planas, 2019). In 2023 Cusco airport recorded 1.47 million domestic arrivals, which accounted for 10.7% of the total of domestic flight arrivals to Peru (MTC, 2024).

Figure 2. Map showing the sites of Cusco and Chinchero International airports



Source: Google Maps <https://www.google.com/maps/> (edited by the authors)

5.2 Background context of the project

A concession contract, signed in 2014 by the government of President Umalta, was cancelled in 2017 due to financing concerns (Reuters, 2017). President Vizcarra adopted the project in 2018 as a way of political canvassing, affirming that it will boost tourism and create jobs (Andina, 2019). The airport is being built on a government-to-government basis at an estimated cost of US\$ 665 million, it will cover an area of 464 hectares at 3,754 metres above sea level (WPS, 2024), and will replace the current Alejandro Velasco Astete international airport in Cusco.

The new airport will receive 6 million tourists a year, which would mean about 16,000 visitors a day, or more than three times the upper limit of 4,500 visitors a day, set by the Ministry of Culture of Peru since January 1, 2024 (MINCUL, 2023), which could undermine the natural and cultural world heritage that tourists are coming so far to see. The airport was supposed to be completed in 2025, but the work is currently only about 12% advanced so it will not be operational before 2027 (Cuadros, 2024).

5.3 Technicalizing politics vs. politicizing science

In January 2019 the Peruvian government announced the start of earthmoving work to advance the construction of an international airport in Chinchero. Nearly 200 Peruvian and international experts signed a letter to Peruvian President Vizcarra, asking him to postpone construction and consider relocating the project (Collyns, 2019). More than 111,000 people have signed the accompanying online petition as of April 2024. Majluf (2021) argues that the airport dream was sold with false arguments because it has no substantive advantages over the current Cusco airport: it is located at a higher altitude, in a more complex orography and at a greater distance from the city. In her petition, Majluf (2019a) praised President Vizcarra's commitment to fight against corruption and invoked his engineering knowledge and his democratic credentials. However, when she realized that the government was determined to go on with the project, she

accused Peru of being a weak State submitted to corruption, which lacks the criteria to set the path for truly sustainable development (Majluf, 2019b). Petition signatories often use metaphors to appeal to the public's emotion and reinforce their arguments. One of them writes: "An airport among the ruins is a crime." while another one writes: "Some of y' all really are trying to kill our planet." (Majluf, 2019a). Here the citizens frame promoters of the Chinchero airport as an enemy by using metaphors from the source domain of crime to make their views more dramatic.

Chinchero airport does not have a Certificate of Non-existence of Archaeological Remains (CIRA), a requirement for major works involving the removal of surface land and mandatory component to guarantee the protection of cultural vestiges, which is issued by the Ministry of Culture (Majluf, 2019c). The EIA for Chinchero airport (Kuntur Wasi, 2015), approved in 52 days, has been questioned as the plateau located on the Chinchero-Maras Road has a tendency to dissolve materials and form subway caverns, while there is no geophysical study with the aid of Georadar (Majluf, 2021).

Soria (2020) highlights that the deficiencies and misrepresentations included in the EIA, and the environmental management strategy of the EIA with regard to surface and ground water, including wetlands, violate the Political Constitution of Peru, the General Environmental Law, the Law of Water Resources, the Law of the National Environmental Impact Assessment System (SEIA), the Law of the National Environmental Assessment and Enforcement System (SINEFA), with administrative and in some cases even criminal consequences.

In February 2021 the World Monuments Fund Peru requested from President Sagasti to delay airport construction because Peru had not conducted a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) on Machu Picchu, Cusco and an Inca Road network as requested by UNESCO (Kenney, 2021). Two retired aviators of the Peruvian Air Force Major General Bruno Papi and Colonel Alberto Carpio (also signatories of the 2019 petition) highlighted the aeronautical deficiencies of the project (Torres, 2018). Chinchero airport will have only one take-off route, due to two immediate obstacles: the snow-capped Pumahuanca mountain, which rises above the city of Urubamba to a height of 5,350 meters, and the Chicón mountain range to the right. The EIA negligently lacks noise evaluations on arrival (final approach) and departure (initial climb) (Filippone, 2014). Due to the knowledge of noise estimates from other airports, the noise estimates for the town of Urubamba and Ollantaytambo Archaeological Park will be considerably higher than those permissible for human health according to World Health Organization criteria.

The advocacy coalition in favor of the construction of the Cusco airport includes all parties represented in the Peruvian Congress as well as their allies, that is, the Regional Government of Cusco, the Provincial Municipality of Cusco and the local tourism industry. When asked about a possible impact on historic sites and Inca ruins in the imperial city, the Ministry of Culture of Peru denied that such heritage could be affected as a result of the landing and take-off flights as monuments "are not located or included within the area of influence of the noise footprints" foreseen (Villar, 2019). President Vizcarra, during a visit to Urubamba in May 2019 said: "There are evaluations and studies that have been done for fifteen years. This is not an improvisation." While Peru's Finance Minister, Carlos Oliva, confirmed this: "This airport will be built as soon as possible because it's very necessary for the city of Cusco. There's a series of technical studies which support this construction" (Planas, 2019). Guillermo Cortés, vice-minister of Culture,

specified that Chinchero Airport, besides being a project of national interest for which all the studies have been carried out, will contribute to an important growth in Cusco's tourist activity. He described the Guardian's publication as 'exaggerated': "I understand the media's concern, but the article is speculative. It does not have the necessary elements to affirm the alleged dangers of the airport," he said (*Ibid.*).

In an interview with local media in June 2019, Culture Minister Ulla Holmquistl claimed that the CIRA would be issued later because the Archaeological Evaluation Project (PEA) showed that there were only traces of carriageways in the area and added that there is no monumental evidence (Cárdenas, 2019). The Ministry of Culture stated that the HIA, requested by UNESCO to analyze possible effects and consequences of development on the Outstanding Universal Value of Machu Picchu, would not be binding on the decision to start work (Chacón, 2021). Former Transport Minister said that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was valid until 2023 and that the Archaeological Monitoring Plan (PMA) and PEA had been approved in March 2021 and January 2021, respectively (Valdivia, 2021). The Regional Government of Cusco (2021) argues that the new airport will allow the tourism Gross Domestic Product to double in five years and improve citizens' quality of life through better access to health and education services.

Finally, the Ministry of Transport and Communications (MTC, 2021) stressed that the project is legitimate as it is supported by the professional associations, institutions and civil society of Cusco who are considered government's allies, and that it complies with all the necessary aeronautical and environmental authorizations.

Some key economic and political facts as well as air transport statistics about Greece and Peru are presented In Appendix A in order to facilitate the comparative study of the two cases.

6. Discussion

In this section, the similarities and differences between the two case studies will be presented. The first common finding is the remarkable systematic, long-term perseverance of the successive governments in Greece and Peru to remain loyal to the original policy design and decision-making, given the time frames that apply to major project development and implementation. Thus, elected officials willingly inherited the ownership of the airport projects from their predecessors and produced systematically (over)optimistic forecasts of project feasibility to get projects promoted because they know that they will not be in office when actual feasibility can be estimated (Flyvbjerg *et al.*, 2003). Moreover, governments in both countries self-servingly instrumentalized these legacy national projects to gain legitimation and get reelected. Further, both national governments seemed to occasionally misinform the media and the public by underestimating costs, overestimating revenues, undervaluing environmental impacts and overvaluing economic development effects about the projects under study.

In addition, the comparison of the two case studies shows that the decision-making styles and the imbroglio between science and politics is not related to the political system. Even though Greece is a liberal democracy while Peru is an electoral democracy in terms of political rights and civil liberties (see Appendix A), it is concluded that the politicization of science, "the (communicative) act by which science acquires a political meaning" and pursues specific political goals, occurs in both democratic and less democratic settings (Schmid-Petri *et al.*, 2022: 49).

Science can show how, for instance, building development projects such as airports can contribute to economic and tourism growth and which hazards and advantages to the population they provide. Nevertheless, it is a political question whether the economic and social benefits of transport infrastructure projects override individual or collective concerns about climate change and commodification of cultures. Surprisingly, the different political systems of the two countries did not seem to influence the politicization of science by the respective governments although semi-presidentialism⁵ often produces dual-legitimacy problems,⁶ thereby decreasing confidence in both government and parliament (Ecevit & Karakoç, 2017).

Further, both case studies call attention to the overdependence of the economies of Greece and Peru on tourism under the neoliberal imperative of continued economic growth (Mosedale, 2016), which prioritizes trade and megaprojects over local residents' livelihoods and well-being, growth over environment and climate change. In addition, both case studies demonstrate the salience of the Cretan and Andean indigenous identity and culture respectively, which contributes to enhanced political regional autonomy. This is because both airport projects emerged on the initiative of the respective local and regional governments which introduced them to the systemic and institutional agenda coercively without the respective central governments' initial consent, to draw the political attention of their respective rival capital cities (Athens and Lima) because they saw themselves as 'deserving'.

Subsequently, both national governments decided to take ownership and exploit them as major development projects that would help them achieve their policy goals. In 2018 Greece exited its eight-year bailout programs, pointing to its return to growth, supported by tourism, while Peru was invited in 2022 to begin the process of joining the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in an effort to reduce poverty in the country. Politicians in both countries sought to gain credits and lasting prestige from these legacy projects to serve their own agendas, which consists in getting re-elected or pursuing a political career in the context of electoral clientelism, an example of particularistic politics, which refers to the redistribution of resources and benefits by patrons to their clients in exchange for political support (Trantidis, 2023; Muñoz, 2014). For instance, the Greek PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis referred to the Kastelli international airport and other infrastructure projects taking place in Crete in his campaign speech in Heraklion just before the 2023 general elections (Skai, 2023) while in southern Peru, protests began to brew over the unfulfilled election promise of President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (PPK), who in the fervor of the 2016 general elections campaign promised to unblock the Chinchero airport project (Otra Mirada, 2016).

Another similarity between the two cases is that despite the absence of a fair compensation and resettlement plan, - people affected by the project were not restored to income and

⁵ A semi-presidential regime is defined as "the situation where a popularly elected fixed-term president exists alongside a prime minister and cabinet who are responsible to parliament" (Elgie, 1999: 13). The President of Peru is both head of state and head of government. Executive power is exercised by the President and the Government (power sharing). The President and the legislature (unicameral Congress) are directly elected by the people for a five-year term.

⁶ Linz (1994) refers to the problem of "dual democratic legitimacy", the fact that both president and legislature can claim democratic legitimation.

livelihoods to levels equivalent or better than those that prevailed at the time of sale or expropriation - the communities of Kastelli and Chinchero did not directly oppose the construction of the new airports probably because of their high expectations of economic growth and modernity respectively, which megaprojects generate in local populations.

Further, it seems that in both cases officials chose to ignore or omit procedures because likely mistakes and political calculations could emerge that might jeopardize the feasibility of the projects and the decision to build the airport. In addition, they did not contest the evidence that the mega-projects violated accepted standards, which seems to indicate that they had already decided the outcome and viewed those processes as obstacles to the perceived public interest. No Economic Impact Assessment or Cost-Benefit Analysis was conducted for either of the two projects under consideration, because if the true costs and benefits had been known beforehand, perhaps these projects would never have been undertaken. The opponents of both projects blamed the promoters for not complying with the correct procedures and technical advice and for a lack of stakeholders' deliberation and dialog. However, their arguments appear only to be narrowly focused on local social, economic and environmental impacts, such as noise and pollution, but not on global impacts such as climate change. This may reveal a short-term, competitive attitude towards tourism, rather than a collective attempt to prevent catastrophic long-term climate change.

One striking difference between the two case studies is that the Chinchero airport project showed over the years a tremendous resilience against a turbulent institutional setting amid accusations of corruption for Peruvian political and economic elites who seek to appropriate accountability institutions (Aquino, 2020) in the context of overlapping ethnic, class, and geographical cleavages (McClintock, 2021). Peru is a third-wave democracy with a weakly institutionalized and eroded political and party system (Carter, 2020) where traditional parties are replaced "by regional movements or leaders that monopolize all the power and the partisan image." (Jaramillo, 2023: 649). Presidential election is not followed by majority in the Congress,⁷ and thus, the leaders of the executive are deterred from acting, which leads to unstable, short-lived governments with practically no opposition leader who could articulate a voice of protest. Greece, on the contrary, a European Union member state, has a coherent party system with a stable parliamentary practice, like those of the Western European democracies (Gerapetritis, 2020).

Another difference is that in the case of Kastelli, despite its rhetoric of scientific discourse and expert knowledge in the (social) media as well as in the Parliament during the public hearing, the local advocacy group failed to mobilize international media and environmental justice organizations to reframe air travel as a problem of climate change and unsustainable tourism development. Further, it failed to produce convincing narratives that could cause divisions and splits in the promoters' advocacy coalition. This is probably because this group's inability to supply broad societal support did not allow it to gain access to political-administrative venues

⁷ Peru uses a two-round system. If no candidate gets over 50% of the vote in an election in the first round, a second round is held between the two candidates for President who received the most votes. The winner of the runoff then wins the election.

where it could shape public policies and politicize the policy domain of sustainable aviation and sustainable tourism development in terms of political contestation, public salience, and interest mobilization (Willems, 2020). In the case of Chinchero, although the local advocacy groups and the Peruvian and international scholars managed to expand the scope of conflict and mobilize international organizations such as UNESCO and the World Monument Fund as well as international media against the new airport, they were unsuccessful in delivering persuasive narratives to the public and the Peruvian politicians who have no base and whose “goals are exclusively short-term and self-serving” (Freeman, 2023).

The narratives of the opponents of the airport projects in both Kastelli and Chinchero did not succeed in mentally transporting the public into the world generated by the narratives and influencing their opinions and beliefs about the connection of mega infrastructure projects, such as airports, and climate change. This failure could be attributed to the fact that the advocacy coalitions against the airport developments in Kastelli and Chinchero were organizationally unable to forge coherent, broad, diverse and unexpected alliances and progressive social movements across their respective countries or they never thought that they would win and thus, they were not prepared to win (Frey, 2019).

One may wonder whether the specific tactics adopted by the opponents of both projects were irrelevant as the power system was always on the side of development or whether other (organizational or narrative) tactics might have resulted in different outcomes. Let us take the example of the successful campaign against the Grand Ouest Airport project in the commune of Notre-Dame-des-Landes near Nantes, France, where green lobbies and environmental NGOs managed to change public opinion and shape the policy outcome (Cheikbossian & Hafidi, 2022), by participating in radical, even violent campaigns and by associating anti-airport protests to opposition to air travel and to climate change. However, it was the unanimous mobilization and stiff opposition of the anti-airport movement, combined with the catalytic intervention of the Minister for the Ecological and Inclusive Transition, Nicolas Hulot, who supported the activists’ fight (Jaunet, 2018) and exploited the window of opportunity⁸ acting as a policy entrepreneur, which contributed to the project being abandoned in January 2018. But what worked well in France was highly uncertain that it would also work in Greece and Peru, countries with different institutional settings, actor constellations, levels of activism and degrees of development of Civil Society Organizations (see the World Giving Index in Appendix A).

In the light of the above, it can be concluded that the tactics endorsed by the opponents of the airport projects in Kastelli and Chinchero were not irrelevant and that even if different tactics had been used, the outcomes would probably have been the same because there were no policy entrepreneurs inside or outside government with knowledge and power involved in the policy process to influence the policy process and stop the implementation of the projects.

This paper might be limited by country-specific economic, political, and cultural contexts of the cases compared, which influences the extendibility and generalizability of the findings.

⁸ The French president Emmanuel Macron during his first term (May 2017-May 2022) prioritized the international fight against climate change having organized the “One Planet Summit” in December 2017, which generated hope among climate activists that change might truly be possible.

7. Conclusions

By studying the narratives of the advocacy coalitions in favor or against two contested infrastructure megaprojects through a comparative case study, this paper showed the similarities and differences with regard to the strategies and arguments used by the promoters and the opponents of the projects.

The case studies of two international airport projects that promote sun, sea, and sand tourism in Greece and ecotourism and cultural tourism in Peru illustrate the diverse nature of neoliberal projects due to path-dependence in a space-time context. These projects also have implications at a national and subnational level and show the role that tourism development may play in transforming urban and rural landscapes and the associated livelihoods.

According to our findings, promoters of both megaprojects sought to justify them as contributing to public purposes and a greater public good, as a form of increasing inbound tourism and thus creating jobs and boosting economic growth while they ignored the protesters' opinions and technical arguments by politicizing scientific evidence to pursue their political ends. They also strategically crafted policy narratives addressed to the media and the public to diffuse advantages to the many and concentrate costs on the few to restrain the scope of conflict. Surprisingly, although a major argument against increasing air capacity is that it increases supply-led civil aviation and climate change, reducing global climate change risks for tourism did not seem to be a considerable argument among project promoters in either destination as growth seems to be more important for them than mitigation.

Opponents of both megaprojects sought to delegitimize the proponents' arguments in the eyes of the public opinion and used different forms of mobilization (e.g., involvement of national and international NGOs, official complaint letters and petitions) to hamper the megaproject implementation. Further, they technicalized politics by revealing the technical (aeronautical and environmental) miscalculations and inaccuracies of the proponents' undocumented or poorly documented scientific evidence and by criticizing the governments' undemocratic top-down approach which institutionally excluded the affected communities from the decision-making process. In addition, protester groups unsuccessfully constructed policy narratives to expand the scope of conflict and stop the projects, by diffusing costs to the many (local communities, the environment and local agricultural production and cultural heritage were presented as victims), and by concentrating benefits on the few 'villains' (e.g., business, and political elites). Further, opponents used metaphors in their arguments against the projects to appeal to the public's emotions and make their narratives more compelling.

This paper demonstrates the asymmetry of power and resources distribution in society as far as tourism-related infrastructure projects are concerned, whereby policymaking is not the unambiguous outcome of scientific knowledge, but the result of evidence combined with value-based criteria and political objectives. The paper also shows that the presence or absence of policy entrepreneurs, combined with the rhetoric of advocacy coalitions, may have a decisive impact on the outcome of the policy process. This study could be useful to tourism and aviation experts, planners, geographers, policy makers, bureaucrats, policy analysts, policy experts and policy advisors in government, environmental justice organizations and anyone who wants to

influence public policy. Future comparative case study research could be conducted on infrastructure megaprojects in countries with similar institutional, cultural, and economic settings, which would allow generalizability and reproducibility of the findings.

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Appendix A

State facts, figures and air transport statistics on Greece and Peru

State Facts and Figures	GREECE	PERU
Area	131,957 km ²	1,285,216 km ²
Population	10.48 million (2021 census)	31.23 million (2017 census)
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (World Bank, 2022)	US\$ 217.5 billion US\$ 20,867 per capita	US\$ 242.6 billion US\$ 7,125 per capita
Tourism's total contribution to GDP for 2019 (WTTC, 2023)	20.7% of total economy	8.1% of total economy
Agricultural land	47.3%	18.5%
Perceived tenure security (Prindex, 2020)	81%	68%
Corruption Perceptions Index 2023 (100%: very clean, 0%: highly corrupt) (Transparency International, 2024)	49/100	33/100
Political system	Unitary parliamentary republic	Unitary semi- presidential republic
Freedom rating (70%-100%: Free, 35%-69%: Partly Free, 0%-34%: Not Free) (Freedom House, 2024)	85/100: Free	66/100: Partly Free
World Giving Index (CAF, 2023) 0: lowest possible score 100: highest possible score	18 Rank: 138/142	32 Rank: 114/142
Air Transport Statistics (ICAO, 2019)	GREECE	PERU
International Airports	15	11
Domestic Airports	25	12
International Passenger Traffic	45.4 million passengers	11 million passengers
International Cargo Traffic	81,249 metric tons	281,521 metric tons
National Airlines with International Services	10	9
Foreign Airlines	96	63

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