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## Sustainable consumer behaviour in aviation

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# Sustainable consumer behaviour in aviation

*The Airneth seminar entitled “Sustainable consumer behaviour in aviation”, held on February 7<sup>th</sup> 2024 in The Hague, included presentations by: Dr. Marleen Onwezen, Dr. Andreas Wittmer and Dr. Stefan Baumeister.*

## Introduction

Aviation enables connectivity. Connectivity benefits the economy. Aviation also enables travel for non-economic reasons, such as visiting family and friends abroad or traveling for vacation. The negative effects of aviation, and transportation in general, on the environment and climate have been high on the agenda in scientific and public debate for several decades. In the academic literature, various alternatives to steer sustainable consumer behaviour in the context of aviation have been examined, such as:

- Voluntary or involuntary offsetting of emissions;
- Voluntary or involuntary use of eco-labels;
- Other measures, such as taxes.

During this seminar, dr. Marleen Onwezen, dr. Andreas Wittmer and dr. Stefan Baumeister discussed their academic research related to the question of which methods are effective in steering consumer behaviour towards greater sustainability, under what circumstances, and for which types of travellers this yields the greatest effect and what this effect is.

## Key takeaways

- ❖ Information is crucial.
  - What information consumers get
  - How this information is presented to them
  - The timing of sending and receiving the informationThese all have a great effect on the choices people make.
- ❖ There is an intention-behaviour gap with consumers when making ‘green choices’. There are multiple ways to reduce this gap, discussed ways are activating values, nudging and categorization.
- ❖ Defining and identifying different consumer groups can help to understand consumers’ behaviour, including social norms and emotions, and target these groups specifically (e.g. frequent or occasional fliers) or use such a specific group as an example for other groups.
- ❖ Studies show that sustainability is a rather low concern for leisure travellers to other concerns (such as budget restriction, geo-political state of affairs, bad weather).
- ❖ A Swiss study shows that the willingness to pay for SAF exists amongst Swiss corporates and varies with distance. For short haul flights price and share of SAF are shown to be key determinants for aviation related choices by Swiss corporates, for long haul flights the price clearly dominates.
- ❖ Compensation is not the optimal strategy to fight climate impacts of aviation – cause pollutants are still emitted – but it may generate the financial means to invest in decarbonization of the sector.
- ❖ The environmental impact of a flight is heterogeneous over route/flight characteristics such as time of day, direct vs. indirect, type of aircraft and load factor. Eco-labels can help travellers distinguish between the environmentally less harmful flights and the remaining ones, it might also incentivize suppliers to steer for cleaner flying (aircraft, routes etc.).
- ❖ Research has shown that eco-labels do affect booking decisions. In particular, the willingness to pay for less polluting flight alternatives increases when consumers are faced with an eco-label. Eco-labels are more effective towards the more environmentally minded consumers and when consumers are provided by a clear understanding of the label.