

## ASSESSING TOURISM BENEFITS OF URBAN FORESTRY: THE CYPRESS IN THE LANDSCAPE OF LAKE GARDA (NORTHERN ITALY)

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### Abstract

We estimated the landscape value of an ornamental tree - *Cupressus sempervirens* – in the area of Lake Garda (Northern Italy) using the contingent valuation method. The cypress is intimately associated with the image of this region, both as urban forestry and urban greening. Beyond the important historical and cultural significance of this tree, it actively contributes to the harmony of a unique landscape which represents a combination of natural and human capital that underpins a flourishing tourist industry.

This landscape is threatened by the so-called “Cypress canker” (*Seiridium cardinale*). In order to combat this disease effectively, trees need to be monitored, treated and possibly replaced by resistant varieties. Such interventions are quite costly for the cash strapped policy-makers and can only be justified economically if the disappearance of the cypress trees will reduce the landscape value of the area.

We interviewed face-to-face 411 randomly drawn tourists (response rate 75%). We elicited willingness to pay (wtp) using a payment card format and used the Cameron and Huppert model to analyse data. In the valuation scenario we used different pictures representing the landscape with and without cypresses and asked wtp for financing research expenditure and treatments to avoid losing the cypresses.

Once we had eliminated protest bids (15%) and outliers (9%), we estimated per person willingness to pay of € 1,2 and an annual value reaching nearly € 3 million. The present value exceeds 200 million Euros and indicates the economic efficiency of the public expenditure in caring for the cypress.

There is also evidence to support construct validity of results as wtp is significantly associated with variables that economic theory or previous results predict will determine demand.

We suggest the use of such studies on benefits evaluation of tourism resources for the formation and implementation of better informed policies on tourism.

### Key Words

Informed policies on tourism, cypress, landscape value, tourism benefits, contingent valuation.

### Key References

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