

## SUPSI

# Riviera aviation technological pole

*Axis 4 – New business models for sustainable development of the territory*

Interview with Andrea Huber, lecturer-researcher at the inno3 Competence Centre, project director



**Tell us briefly about the “Riviera aviation technological pole” project, starting with the problem tackled.**

The idea behind the creation of an aviation pole arose as early as in 2006, when the Swiss Air Force decided to give up the military airport in Lodrino, and with the resulting Confederation decision to dispose of the infrastructure. The plan was to create a pole consisting of companies complementary to one another, that would develop competences covering the entire life cycle of aeronautic systems and provide high-quality services and products, while also creating new jobs and training opportunities, thanks to the establishment of new businesses, in a field at the technological cutting edge. The idea was developed and refined over the course of a few years, with a focus on reaching a broad consensus, also in political terms, regarding the potential creation of an aviation technological pole in Riviera. This is why in June 2014 the Department of finances and the economy

(Dipartimento delle finanze e dell'economia - DFE), in collaboration with the Municipality of Lodrino and the Regional Institution for the Development of the Bellinzona and Valleys area (Ente Regionale per lo Sviluppo Bellinzonese e Valli), granted the DEASS inno3 Competence Centre with a mandate to evaluate the advisability, feasibility and sustainability of an aviation technological pole in Riviera, an integral part of a potential cantonal cluster in the aerospace sector.

**What initial results have been obtained?**

According to the results obtained from the quantitative and qualitative studies conducted, we can say that it is possible to hypothesise the creation of an aviation technological pole in our Canton. There is indeed a certain amount of interest, not only from businesses directly operating in this sector, but also from companies that are complementary to it

and that are part of the industry. In addition to this, the pole could act as a significant driver and incentive for other businesses, not currently operating in the aviation field, to enter the sector. Among the various aeronautic infrastructures currently in Ticino, the Lodrino aerodrome is the one that appears most suited to accommodating a technological pole, not just for its unique structural and infrastructural features, but also because of its strategic position in the local territory, due to its central location and productive specialisation.

**What are the strong points of the project? And the problems?**

One of the project's strong points lies in its methodological apparatus. In order to gain a strategic and operational understanding of the Ticino companies in the aviation sector, and also in order to reconstruct and map out the relationships



between those operating in the sector, an initial survey was conducted in February 2015 and involved more than 50 companies in the Ticino aviation, aeronautic and avionics sector. A second survey was conducted subsequently, in May 2016, involving not only the companies operating directly in the sector, but also those economic sectors that could potentially be classified under the industry in question, such as, for example, companies supplying components and/or materials, brokers, industrial and product design companies, consultancies, to mention only a few. 220 companies participated in this study. The “discrete choice models” methodology made it possible to explore company behaviour in terms of location choice. In fact, the respondents had to indicate their choice from various hypothetical future scenarios related to a potential aviation technological pole. Each analysis scenario included attributes and levels, and the alternative choices were described in terms of different levels in the attributes. By observing the variations in the description of the alternatives it was possible to derive the impact of the attributes on the choice. In this specific research study, one of the aspects verified by this methodology was the significance, or lack of significance, of some attributes related to a potential aviation technological pole, represented by some localisation factors (presence in the pole of businesses from the aviation industry and of entrepreneurial infrastructures, the presence of training and research centres, public support, etc.). The critical element lies in delineating a design that finds the correct balance between the number of attributes to consider, the degree of profundity of the levels, and last but not least, the number of responses required in order to obtain something representative.

**Do you remember anything interesting, amusing or unusual that occurred during the project?**

In order to process the data, particularly for the part related to the “discrete choice models”, a specific computer programme was used, consisting of codes and languages that, until then, had been incomprehensible to me. So I initially had to familiarise myself with this new tool. Also, it could take some hours for the programme to produce results in terms of significance of the attributes deriving from the various combinations and iterations of the scenarios. Sometimes the computer stayed on all night: myriad and constantly-changing alphanumeric characters on the screen. I felt more like a “hacker” than a business economist. Waiting for the results was rather exciting. In fact, I couldn’t wait for the machine to stop doing its job and show me the final results.

**Could other projects develop from this one?**

The project is currently still in its strategic phase. The initial proposals emerging from the study and regarding the direction of the future technological pole must therefore be discussed and examined in detail with the clients, and its potential organisational and functional structure must also be specified. Should the pole really be created, it could generate numerous opportunities for SUPSI as a whole, both in terms of research and service activities – simply consider the various technologies involved in the aviation world (mechanics, electronics, intelligent systems, design, rapid prototyping, additive manufacturing, etc.) – and in terms of education. The aviation technological pole could therefore become a significant strategic partner for SUPSI.



**Apart from you, who else was on the project team?**

The project involved Siegfried Alberton, director of the inno3 Competence Centre, and, for the part relating to the “discrete choice models” methodology, Stefano Scagnolari, lecturer at the Department of Business Economics, Health and Social Care. In addition to this, in view of the complexity of the project, an associated group was formed, consisting of the main stakeholders (institutional, economic, etc.).

**Project type:** research financed by institutions

**Financing institutions:** Regional Institution for the Development of the Bellinzona and Valleys area (Ente Regionale per lo Sviluppo Bellinzonese e Valli), Municipality of Lodrino

**Project partners:** Department of finances and the economy (Dipartimento delle finanze e dell’economia del Canton Ticino), AGIRE Foundation