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# Tourist and business models in the mobility of customers using car rental services

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**Abstract:** The article aims to present mobility models and patterns in relation to clients using services rendered by car rentals. The paper seeks to illustrate the subject matter, but also offers an element of innovation consisting in a sketch of mobility models for the clients of an agency. The proposed patterns and models were compiled based on a series of in-depth free-form interviews performed in June and July 2020. In total, the author conducted four interviews with the employees of a car rental in the city of Rzeszów. The starting point for the interviews was identifying the main categories of car rental clients and establishing their characteristic features from the standpoint of a selected offer. Based on the information provided by the employees of the agency, the author compiled two mobility models pertaining to the clients that use car rental services, i.e. business and tourist model. Each model demonstrates different characteristics and preferences of clients that use the agency's services. Furthermore, travelling patterns assigned to each model indicate differences in terms of the route, direction and duration of a travel. The theoretical part of this paper is predicated on the analysis of relevant literature and Internet sources.

**Keywords:** car rental industry, business model, tourist model, tourism, individual transport

## 1. Introduction

Car rental is a significant part of the transport industry, which correlates with various factors, such as: increase in the number of air travellers for leisure, insurance replacement, and business (Fee et al., 2016). While much has been written about the role of other means of transport in servicing tourist and business traffic, the role of cars – especially rented ones – is often disregarded and underestimated (Korstanje, 2011). It is overlooked that the car, unlike most other means of transport, offers flexibility, comfort and convenience, allowing travellers to reach virtually any destination. It is also an element of the tourist experience.

Today, the car rental industry provides mobility and solutions for business and leisure travellers. It meets the needs of those who do not have their own car or, for various reasons, cannot use it in a given place. Depending on the fleet of vehicles and the number of locations, car rental companies are established in various

areas (Raport z kontroli działalności..., 2012). And thus, there are companies operating on international and domestic markets, covering the entire territory of a country and featuring car rental facilities in the largest cities; there are also car rental companies operating on the local market (<https://ec.europa.eu/transport/sites/transport/files/facts-fundings/evaluations/doc/2016-ex-post-evaluation-of-directive-2006-1-ec-final-report.pdf>).

A car rental service or a car rental agency is a company which rents cars for a short period of time (several hours, days or weeks) for a fee. It is generally accepted that the car rental business provides cars for a period of 12 months or less. "Rental" of cars for a longer period is commonly referred to as lease. Such companies often have numerous local branches (which allow the user to return the vehicle to a location of their choice), located near airports or busy city areas. The provision of a car rental

service to a natural person is carried out on the basis of a civil contract<sup>1</sup> concluded between the company and the consumer. The requirements imposed by car rental agencies include, among others, the need to possess a valid driving licence, which is not respected everywhere in the world to the same extent as in the home country. There is also a financial aspect which is important with regard to the number of people travelling by car and the nature of the tourist destination.

The World Travel and Tourism Council announced that in 2018 the global tourist industry grew by 3.9% and created over 319 million jobs worldwide. This tremendous growth in the industry translated into an increase in the number of car rental companies. The car rental industry is projected to grow by 7.9 percent between 2019 and 2024 (<http://blogs.cornell.edu/armapp/2013/03/27/rental-car-industry/>). This is due to the fact that tourists nowadays prefer to rent cars to visit new places, as it gives them the flexibility to plan their own route without the need to worry about the public transport system. Car rental services allow customers to travel to a destination of their choice without any time constraints. Moreover, growing income and wealth of the society consolidated the tendency for more frequent and shorter trips. Therefore, one may note a growing popularity of car rental services at airports, where tourists rent a car immediately after landing, use it and return it to a convenient location (<http://blogs.cornell.edu/armapp/2013/03/27/rental-car-industry/>). Unfortunately, tourist mobility in the context of rented vehicles is rarely brought up in research (Martín et al., 2019), thus, the available literature on the

activity of rental companies is limited, and there is little to no information on how this market works (Korstanje, 2011). First of all, there is a lack of data on the number of trips that are purely tourist by nature. Difficulties in identifying specific journeys and broadly understood seasonality in the tourism industry deepen the existing gap in this respect. Moreover, there is a noticeable lack of information pertaining to the circumstances of the choice and frequency of using car rental offers for tourist purposes.

Additionally, car rental companies continue to rely on the traditional ethos of customer service and employee loyalty to increase the business value of the company, ignoring the customer-centric technological transformation commonly applied in other industries. This is particularly important, especially in today's world of hyper-competition and ever-shrinking product lifecycles, where innovation is an essential key to the growth and survival of a business. This is especially true for the tourism and transport industry, which is considered slow on innovation (Sinha et al., 2015).

The main purpose of the publication is to present the mobility patterns of customers using the services of a car rental agency under the two proposed models: tourist and business. It is assumed that the characteristics of models and mobility patterns take into account the requirements and preferences of car rental customers, as well as the actions and decisions of the agency to satisfy them. The interpretation adopted in the publication is also intended to broaden the scope of knowledge about the mutual connections between tourism and business, and the car rental industry.

## 2. Methods

The study is predicated on a series of in-depth free-form interviews conducted in June and July 2020. The above-mentioned interview form offers flexibility in terms of the structure of ques-

tions and their ordering. Moreover, during the interview one can include additional questions to further explore selected topics, which proved useful due to the preliminary (pilot) nature of

<sup>1</sup> Agreements used by such companies constitute either rental or lease contracts. By signing such a contract, in most cases, the consumer accepts the terms and regulations imposed by the car rental company (<https://ec.europa.eu/transport/sites/transport/files/facts-fundings/evaluations/doc/2016-ex-post-evaluation-of-directive-2006-1-ec-final-report.pdf>).

the study. The author conducted a total of four interviews with the employees of selected car rental agencies in Rzeszów. The point of departure for each interview was identification of the main categories of the company’s clients and establishing their characteristics through the prism of a selected offer.

The information obtained from the agency’s employees allowed for the formulation of two

mobility models with regard to the clients using car rental services, namely business and tourist model. Each of the models demonstrates different characteristics and preferences of car rental clients (Table 1). Furthermore, individual travel patterns related to each model indicate discrepancies in terms of the route, its direction and duration.

**Table 1.** Criteria differentiating the business and tourist model of car rental customers.

Criteria	Tourism model	Business model
Types of rentals (cars)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family cars;</li> <li>• Small compact cars;</li> <li>• Larger vehicles equipped with additional carriers for camping or skiing equipment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Luxury cars;</li> <li>• Cars with GPS;</li> <li>• Vans.</li> </ul>
Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking into account the comfort of traveling children;</li> <li>• Introduction of a gamification element to the car rental service;</li> <li>• Baby car seats;</li> <li>• Car booking via a mobile device;</li> <li>• Multiple pick-up and drop-off locations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fast service, changing the traditional rental process of manually entering lessee’s data to a more automated format. The rental agents use a scanner that takes the information directly from the magnetic strip on the driver’s license to complete the electronic rental agreement. The customer uses the electronic signature to send the contract by e-mail;</li> <li>• Value-added services including roadside assistance, GPS options, prepaid toll options, prepaid fuel, electronics chargers, wireless in-car features;</li> <li>• Cars with access to the network, the Internet of Things (IoT).</li> </ul>
Ease of use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of a location search engine on the agency’s home page with a map, so that customers know exactly where to pick up their rental car.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applications thanks to which business clients have greater access to information on agency websites;</li> <li>• Ease of navigation on the agency’s websites;</li> <li>• Multilingual website format.</li> </ul>
Price	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The price is important;</li> <li>• What is included in the price, possible discounts for children;</li> <li>• Discounts for students, prepayments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The price is less relevant;</li> <li>• What is included in the price (car type, rental length, day of the week, location, prepayments, membership, insurance discounts).</li> </ul>
Location/ Availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hotels;</li> <li>• Tourist attractions, communication points,</li> <li>• Islands.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Airports and railway stations;</li> <li>• Hotels;</li> <li>• Business centres.</li> </ul>
Loyalty programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loyalty points;</li> <li>• Bundling the service with other travel services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperation with hotels.</li> </ul>
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Longer car rental time;</li> <li>• Holiday, weekends.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short trips during the week.</li> </ul>

Source: own compilation based on the interviews and literature studies

The publication is illustrative with an element of innovation in the form of a sketch of mobility models for car rental customers. The travel patterns within each model are presented

graphically. The theoretical part relating to the history of the development of the car rental industry is based on the analysis of relevant literature and Internet sources.

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1. History of the car rental industry development

The history of car rental goes back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, although similar services had been rendered as early as in antiquity, with chariots being the subject of lease. Car rental activity began in 1918. At that time, it was a simple business where local operators provided standard cars for a fixed daily charge plus a charge per kilometre (Carroll and Grimes, 1995).

The first rented car was a Ford T, which marks the beginning of the car rental history in the world. The pioneer was an American called Joe Saunders from Nebraska, considered by many to be the forerunner of the industry. He was involved in selling real estate in the United States on a daily basis. His car broke down on one of his trips, so he rented a car from his employee at a price of 6 cents per mile. In 1916 Saunders bought a used Ford T, which he began renting for 10 cents per mile. Thanks to local wealthy entrepreneurs, the business quickly flourished (Busse and Swinkels, 2012). The very system for keeping track of the distance covered by the clients was also interesting. He used a device consisting of a stick with a scale placed in the fuel tank, because cars at that time were not equipped with a meter. The idea proved to be successful. Saunders' company is a prime example of a business that emerged from an effort to resolve a wide-spread problem. A decade later, Saunders provided services in 21 states with a fleet of several hundred vehicles (<https://wypozyczalniauszczecin.pl/krotka-historia-wypozyczalni-samochodow-na-poczatku-byl-ford/>).

The financial success did not go unnoticed, and competition quickly emerged on the market. Saunders' first competitor was Walter Jacobs' company, founded in Chicago in 1918, which he sold to John Hertz several years later. In the 1930s Hertz created the concept of rent-it-here and leave-it-there (Carroll and Grimes, 1995). In 1932 he established the first car rental company at the airport. Today, Hertz is the largest car rental company in the world, distinguished by two important criteria related to customer perception. Firstly, clients who rent cars for tourist purposes are very price sensi-

tive. Secondly, when incentivised with loyalty programs, clients are inclined to use the services provided by a particular brand even if the car rental cost is higher (Fee et al., 2016). Moreover, one should note that as far as tourist travels are concerned, the character of a trip and its direction is of importance, and that prospective clients tend to choose car rentals offering conveniently located pick-up and drop-off points (Lohmann and Zahra, 2010).

Unfortunately, the Great Depression led to the collapse of Saunders' company and the period of World War II severely damaged the newly established industry. However, just after the end of the war, another opportunity to expand the car rental business appeared. Warren Avis came up with the idea of establishing rental offices near airports and railway stations. In 1946, W. Avis opened his first rental office at Detroit airport (Fee et al., 2016). Soldiers returning home eagerly used this form of travel. Over time, airline passengers grew accustomed to having the option of switching to their 'own' cars immediately upon the arrival. In the 1950s, car rental offices started to emerge in the vicinity of hotels and attractive tourist destinations. After 70 years of existence and expansion, now Avis has over 5 000 locations in 165 countries around the world (<http://www.ekspert-flotowy.pl/artykuly/548/branza-rent-a-car-w-polsce-i-na-swiecie-coraz-wiecej-szybciej-i-taniej.html>).

In the 1970s, due to an increase in the quality of provided vehicles and their availability, car rentals began to offer temporary insurance policies to the lessees. In the 1990s, price and performance management systems started to be implemented, and computerized reservation systems were fully used, regulating the place of return and collection of the car and the length of the vehicle rental period (Carroll and Grimes, 1995). The increase in the popularity of the means of transport in question entailed an evolutionary change pertaining to product management in the car rental industry. Companies started to put greater emphasis on the quality of service, understanding that exerts an undeniable impact on general tourist experi-

ence and the economic sphere alike (Erdogan et al., 2010). The concept of quality was touched upon, among others, Ekiz et al. (2009), who developed the RENTQUAL scale, which consists of 18 elements and allows for the assessment of the quality of services rendered by car rentals.

The car rental industry in Europe developed parallelly and its beginnings can be traced back to 1912, when an entrepreneur named Martin Sixt founded Sixt Autofahrten und Selbstfahrer. At that time, he owned seven cars, including four Mercedes and three Luxus-Deutz-Landaulets. However, his business profile was slightly different. He specialized in car rental for one-day trips and special occasions. His customers were almost exclusively British aristocrats and wealthy Americans. Unfortunately, in 1914 the vehicles and drivers were subjected to the orders of the army and the property was confiscated. In 1919, Martin Sixt chose a new location at Seitz Strasse 11 in Munich. To this day, this is one of the most visited Sixt city locations. However, after the outbreak of World War II, the German army again confiscated all the cars. Only a seven-seater Mercedes 230 Landaulet, hidden in a barn, made it through the war. After the war, in 1946 Sixt relaunched his business. The saved Mercedes 230 Landaulet was still offered as an exclusive chauffeur-driven limousine, and in 1951 the car rental company Auto Sixt was founded (<http://ir.sixt.de/websites/sixt/English/1500/corporate-history.html>).

Europcar is yet another significant company on the market, whose beginnings date back to 1949 in Paris. Europcar started cooperation with the Renault brand, which made it possible

to expand its activities to other European countries. In 1973, the first offices outside France were opened. Rental agencies very quickly established cooperation with railway lines and, in later years, with airlines, following the business model from the USA. The model proved to be very profitable and has been working very well to this day. Currently, Europcar has over 213 000 cars available for rent in 143 countries worldwide.

It is worth adding that 'rent a car' slogan covers not only popular passenger cars, but also luxury and sports cars, delivery vans and buses. Cars are rented by individual customers for holidays, by business customers for business trips, but also for exceptional, special occasions. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (2000), the car rental industry is polarized between major international companies providing services to both business and leisure customers, and small local companies serving mainly the entertainment market (Fink and Reiners, 2006). The most common segments in the group of all car rental customers are:

- business travellers who rent cars based on contracts negotiated between their employers and individual car rental companies;
- people traveling for private or business purposes with no affiliation with any organization;
- private travellers who book and receive discounts through tourism, professional or other organizations.

This division led to the emergence of two models of customer mobility, namely tourist and business model.

### 3.2. Car rental companies and the tourist model

In tourism, car rental companies gain popularity and attractiveness every year. The main reason for choosing this form of travel and, at the same time, the unquestionable advantage of rented cars is the autonomy they provide, granting access to various geographical locations, including islands and fairly remote regions.

The research conducted by Hammond (1993), which analysed the decisions on the choice of a rental car, emphasized the importance of convenience, independence, flexibility and purely pragmatic issues, such as the need

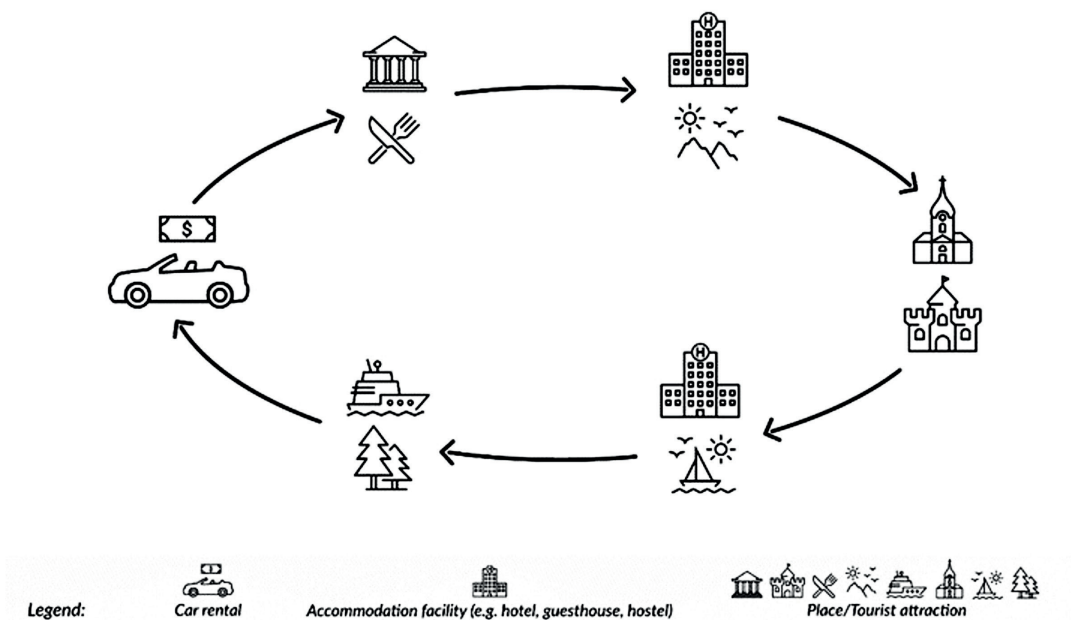
to transport equipment and travelling with children. Other important aspects include speed – i.e. ability to arrive at a destination on time – and costs, fixed distance, problems with public transport or a complete lack of alternative means to access a selected place or attraction (Böhler et al., 2006; Dickinson and Robbins, 2008). On the other hand, the work of Dickinson and Dickinson (2006) draws attention to the importance of the behavioural aspect underlying the choice of transport, and the cost of public transport in relation to

the cost of travel by car. Finally, the choice of this mode of transport is influenced by one's attachment to a car. Simply put, a considerable number of people find the convenience of a car so important that other means of transport are not given any consideration (Nilsson and Küller, 2000).

Another interesting practice employed increasingly often in recent years is gamification, which aims at building loyalty in clients and encouraging them to use services rendered by a given company (Sinha et al., 2015). Using an application, car lessees check in at different places frequented by other users and have access to data, such as the time of arrival. Thanks to the ranking panel, rental owners can compare the results of users, rewarding the winners with medals. Gamification makes sense especially to millennials who like challenges, want to be involved and experience emotions.

In addition to tourists' motivations guiding the choice to rent a car, there are several other important issues that affect the policy and

activity of car rental agencies. First of all, car rental companies more and more often cooperate with hotel chains, establishing car pick-up points at their premises. Customers using the services of both companies are eligible for discounts and may participate in relevant loyalty programs (Sinha et al., 2015). Tourist trips are usually longer and seasonal in nature, as they focus on holiday periods, as they focus on holiday periods. There are also shorter excursions, weekend trips and those related to the holiday season. Thirdly, travellers are attracted to specific regions, places and points of interest for tourists, which necessitates a logistically sound location of pick-up and drop-off points. Moreover, as far as this model is concerned, the customers choosing car rental companies include families with children, groups of friends and the elderly. They are also the ones to choose the direction of travel and pay for the journey. Taking the above data into account, three types of travel were distinguished within the tourist model based on the car rental service.



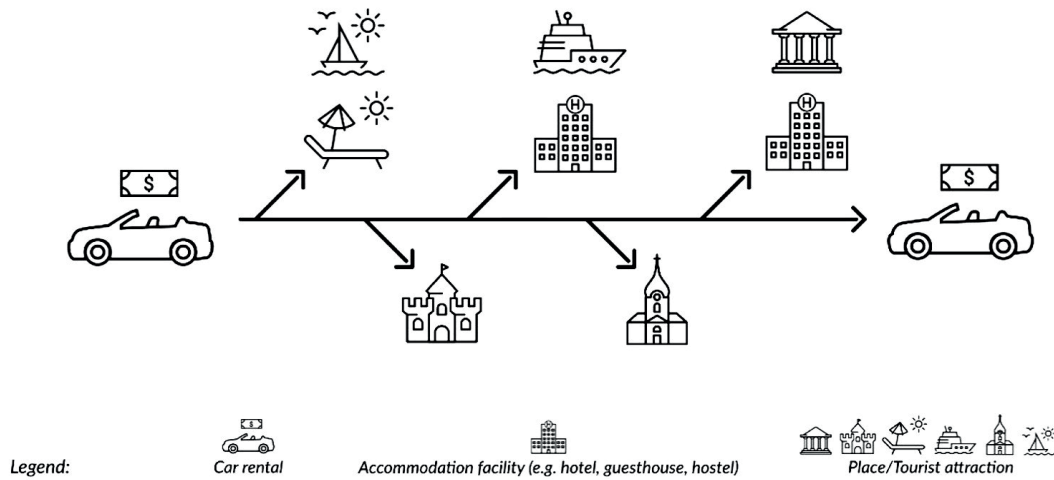
**Figure 1.** The pattern of spatial mobility of a tourist using a car rental service (CRS) during a multi-day trip (Source: own study)

This model (Fig. 1) is employed on islands or in regions with a dispersed system of attractions/tourist sites. Tourists usually rent a car upon arrival at the airport for a spell of several days

and return the vehicle to the same place after the tour. This model seems to prevail in places where there is either a complete lack of other types and means of transport, or the existing transport

infrastructure is poorly developed, thus rendering some places inaccessible without a car. This

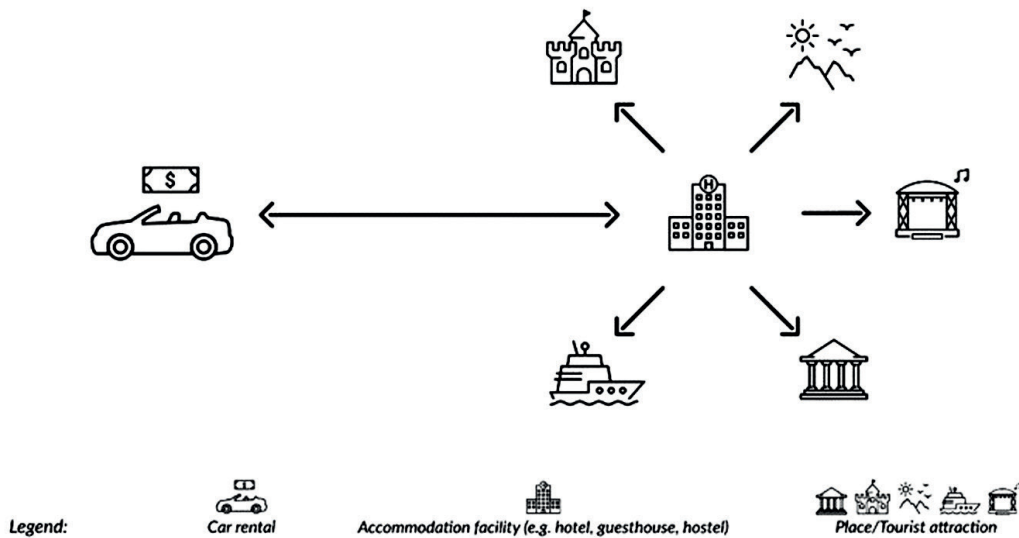
travel pattern is popular among married couples, singles and active tourists.



**Figure 2.** The pattern of spatial mobility of a tourist using a car rental service (CRS): the main route with secondary attractions and a CRS point at the end of the travel (Source: own study)

The second model (Fig. 2) involves one main route from point A to point B. During the journey there are breaks for sightseeing or overnight stays, and the car is returned to the

rental company at the final destination. This is popular among tourists who set out on a longer journey, in which case car rental is merely one of many stages of the tourist experience.



**Figure 3.** The pattern of spatial mobility of a tourist using a car rental service (CRS): one destination with optional trips (Source: own study)

The last pattern (Fig. 3) is often adopted by families with children, the elderly and tourists visiting islands. In this case, car lessees typically spend the entirety of their stay at a single

housing facility, which becomes a starting point for subsequent sightseeing tours. The car is collected and returned at the same location, usually at the airport.

The models of tourist mobility described above do not exhaust all possible travel alternatives that may include car rental. They are pri-

marily the characteristics of the most common examples occurring in a specific geographical space.

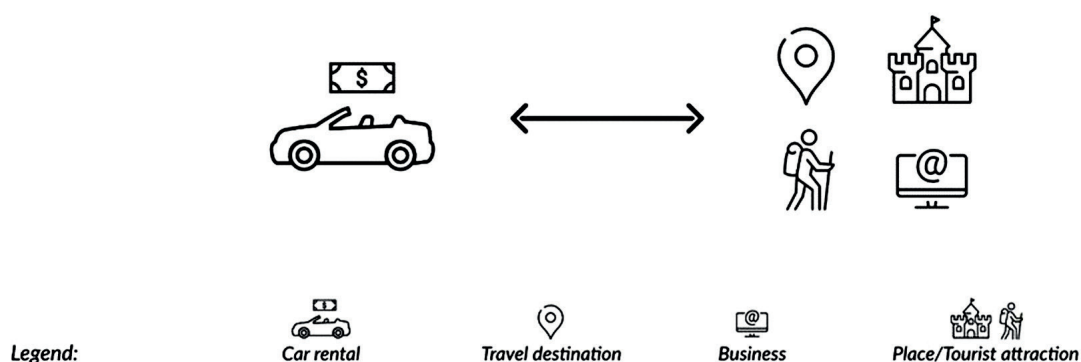
### 3.3. Car rental companies and the business model

The first customers to rent cars were business-people. One may argue that they successfully popularized this way of travelling and, for a long time, shaped the nature of the industry. It was only later that the car rental services began to be used for tourist purposes.

The location of car rental offices is important for the business. The most popular are those found at airports, or near (business) hotels and business centres. Usually, the employer pays for the car rental service (Davidson and Cope, 2003) and the choice of the direction and route is determined by the agenda of business meetings. Business travellers rent cars for shorter periods, but they usually do it more frequently. Travels tend to take place outside of holiday seasons, typically on workdays. The business model puts greater emphasis on the ability to book a vehicle online (Waspodo et al., 2011), as well as favours quick and simple rental procedures, especially at the airport (car rental and return). Worldwide, the Internet is the preferred method of booking cars for rent. This is

mainly due to the convenience offered by the online systems in combination with transparent prices and 24-hour booking.

In order to meet the modern expectations of business customers, the car rental industry started cooperating with airlines. For example, many airlines incorporated an offer of affiliated car rentals on their websites, thus allowing the passengers to easily procure a plane ticket and book a car at the same time. Increasingly more often business travellers can earn loyalty points, even when using services of several different car rental companies. It is noteworthy that today's market is also witnessing a rapid growth in demand for the segment of luxury cars due to sustainable economic development and their increased corporate use in business travel. Therefore, each brand is carefully calibrated to target different consumers. In the business model, we can identify two main types of business trips. They differ in terms of the place of collection and return of the vehicle to the rental company.

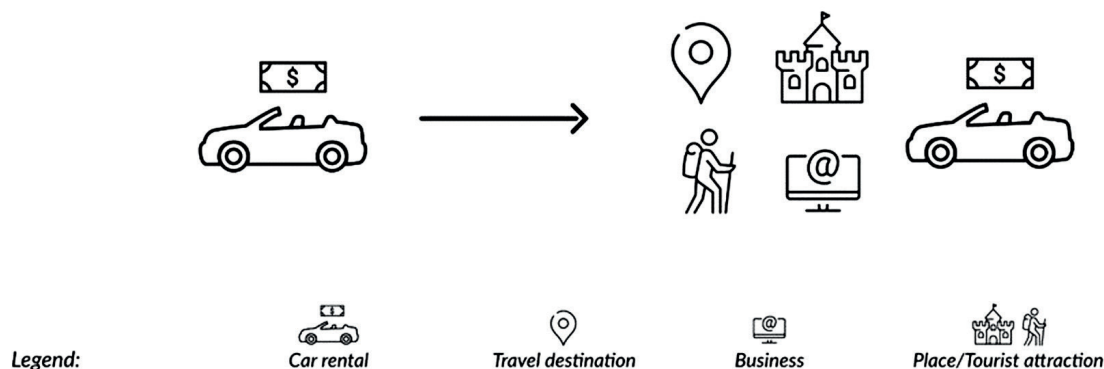


**Figure 4.** The pattern of spatial mobility of a tourist using a car rental service (CRS) in the following relationship: CRS – place/business (Source: own study)

This model is the most popular among businesspeople and is limited to visiting selected places or doing business in a short time. These

are usually one- or two-day trips. Car rental and return takes place at the same location, usually near the airport or in its proximity.





**Figure 5.** The pattern of spatial mobility of a tourist using a car rental service (CRS) in the following relationship: CRS – place/business – CRS (Source: own study)

The second model refers to driving a car from the rental company in one direction only. The car is rented in one place (usually the airport, railway station, hotel) and returned at

a different location. This is a convenient option for people who need to move from point A to point B in the shortest possible time, and at the same time cannot use other means of transport.

#### 4. Summary and conclusions

Although car rental companies are part of the tourist services industry, very little is said about their interconnection. It appears that the role of car rental companies is greatly underestimated in servicing tourist traffic. After all, improved mobility of tourists around their places of destination, also in cooperation with car rental agencies, is of key importance to the economic development of these enterprises, as well as effective tourist policy (Lohmann and Pearce, 2010).

Car rental has been a dynamically growing industry generating billions of dollars in revenue in recent years. The primary drivers of the car rental industry are the increasing tourist traffic, global economic development, growth in business activities, and expanse of airline services (Fee et al., 2016). An increased interest in car rental services is influenced by their location, which takes into account the industry's ties to air and rail transport. It is well known that, for example, after arrival, passengers still have to reach their final destination from the airport. Renting a car is therefore an easy and convenient solution.

The growing strength of the industry is a result of marketing activities employed by car rentals paired with their flexibility and continuous efforts to meet the expectations of both business and tourist travellers. The customers often have needs that go far beyond renting a vehicle, for instance, booking a recommended hotel at an airport rental company. In order to live up to the requirements of customers, today's car rental companies take into account issues related to the seasonality and peak traffic volumes during the year. In practice, this means that they need to have more cars available during the high season than during the low season. There are also noticeable changes pertaining to passenger safety and service quality. Environmental considerations are manifested, among others, in the efforts of car rental companies to convince customers to use low-emission vehicles.

Car rental companies must therefore identify and listen to their customers and respond to their needs, and use the information obtained to improve services. Given the intense competition in the industry, a relatively high quality

of both customer service and the offer is taken for granted. Market leadership depends on how quickly a business can identify and respond to changing demand in an increasingly competitive environment.

Individual patterns assigned to each of the proposed models (business and tourist) show a wide range of differences (Table 1), including those related to the route, its direction and duration. Being aware of the existing discrepancies is very important for car rental owners in the context of the logistics planning process, fleet modernization and replacement, and the location of the company's offices. It is also nec-

essary in the case of specialization – more and more common in this industry – because it allows the company to focus all its strength on a selected group of customers, their needs, preferences in terms of car type, booking method, place of rental and return of the vehicle.

To take advantage of the latest innovations, rental companies must spend time and resources creating their vision, solution and a plan that will ensure its successful implementation. They should also work with appropriate partners – ones who understands the full range of emerging technologies and their implications for the car rental industry.

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