

DEVELOPING BUSINESS TOURISM BEYOND MAJOR URBAN CENTRES: THE PERSPECTIVES OF LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to identify development strategies for Business Tourism in territories where this segment is not always given due consideration, especially at the level of local and regional development policies.

Design – The paper discusses the concepts of Business Tourism and analyses the characteristics of a delimited territory in the Central Region of Portugal that encompasses the cities of Coimbra, Aveiro and Viseu, located between the main Portuguese cities, Lisbon and Oporto.

Methodology – A Delphi study was conducted to explore the prospects of destination stakeholders, with the aim of identifying proposals and product development measures in this territory.

Findings – Despite the lower urban density and lower load capacity, when compared with the main urban centres of Lisbon and Oporto, this territory presents a qualified and diverse tourism offer that combined with the existence of differentiated venues and quality accommodation can contribute to provide a valued tourism experience associated with the Meetings Industry.

Originality – The study presented here allows us to reflect on the potential of Business Tourism in territories with lower urban density and lower supply of facilities and services, when compared to the major cities that usually take the leading positions in international rankings. This is especially true, if we consider that smaller urban centres that are relatively near each other (as is the case of Coimbra, Aveiro and Viseu) may find interesting strategic advantages in joint action, taking into account that these three geographic areas complement each other in the integrated supply of tourism products, experiences, services and facilities.

Keywords Business Tourism, urban centres, territory, Delphi method

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays Business Tourism has an important economic weight in local and regional economies and corresponds to a tourism sector with great potential for development. The low seasonality, the controlled environmental impact, the higher revenue for accommodation and meeting venues, the high demand for food and beverage (lunches, gala dinners, coffee breaks, etc.), the boost in leisure activities and the relative resilience to the current economic crisis, are some of the main factors that make Business Tourism so attractive to destinations. This reflects the potential of Business Tourism for local and regional development and the importance of providing an excellent service to visitors to ensure high levels of satisfaction during the stay at their destination which exceed their expectations. In this context, the Destination

Management Organizations (DMO), and more specifically the Conventions & Visitors Bureaus (CVB), play a key role in the supply structure associated with the territory and in the management, planning and development of tourism destinations, especially those which want to assert themselves as successful Business Tourism destination.

However, it's important to demystify the idea that seems to be commonplace that Business Tourism only refers to major urban centres with very large venues, accommodation and infrastructure. The study "A Modern History of International Association Meetings", presented by the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA, 2013), analyses the evolution of associative meetings over half a century (1963-2012). The data shows that of the 54.844 meetings registered by ICCA between 2008 and 2012, about 34.8% hosted between 50 and 149 participants, about 21.5% hosted between 150 and 249 participants and about 23.5% hosted between 250 and 499 participants. This means that the vast majority of the registered meetings (79.8%) hosted fewer than 500 participants. The study also shows that the average number of meetings held annually has increased about 10% per year, which means that the number of meetings doubles every 10 years. It is also noted that the percentage of increase in the number of meetings (50%) is significantly higher than the percentage of reduction in the number of participants (20%). We are thus witnessing a clear trend in reducing the number of participants in associative meetings over the past few decades and, at the same time, a continued increase in the number of meetings held.

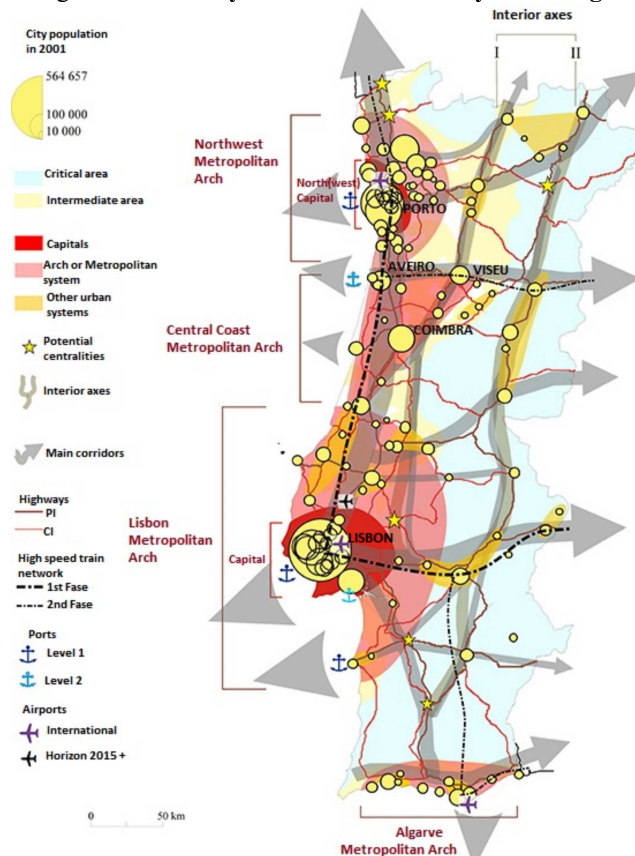
In this context, and taking into account the guidelines of the current tourism policy in Portugal (Turismo 2020), we consider the investigation of this theme relevant to the management of the territory and its resources in a delimited geographical area in the Central Region of Portugal, which covers the urban triangle of Coimbra, Aveiro and Viseu (identified in Figure 1), situated between the main centres of Business Tourism in Portugal, Lisbon and Oporto. As stated in the Tourism 2020 Action Plan, preserving territory is to enhance the tourism asset, because increasingly the demand requires sustainability and quality in tourism destinations. Therefore, we must take into account territorial elements such as the weather, geographic location, the inhabitants, the diversity of landscapes, the architectural, historical, cultural and natural monuments, the culture, the traditions, the gastronomy and the biodiversity. It is precisely this approach that is proposed in this paper.

Indeed, this territory is characterized by a great potential of natural features (rivers, sea, lakes and ponds, hot springs, mountains, forests), environmental factors (no dangerous outbreaks of industrial pollution, temperate climate) and cultural resources (heritage of all Ages/historical Eras, numerous archaeological sites, popular and religious traditions and one of the oldest universities of the world, the University of Coimbra), being seen as a region of great affections, hospitality, origin of many emigrations and social relations with several countries in the world. From a tourism perspective, these are important aspects to take into account. We are talking about a region of articulation North-South (Oporto and Lisbon) and west-east (coast and Portuguese/Spanish border), characterized by a cross-thematic and small-scale tourism supply, where nature and environment, cultural heritage and landscape, good and diverse cuisine (including the wines) and the development of adventure activities play an important role. Sustained mainly by its natural, historic and built heritage around a network of medium-sized

cities which can be complementary, here, we can identify the key spaces and identities: Aveiro, water (Haff-Delta of Aveiro) and technology; Coimbra, health care (Medicine) and heritage; Viseu, hydrotherapy (thermal spas) and rural tourism (PROT C-2011). All these elements provide the region with conditions for tourist, economic and social development and contribute to local and regional economies, providing jobs and investment, including the recent construction and rehabilitation of venues, accommodation and infrastructure, that benefit not only local people but also visitors. Business Tourism, seen as a strategic tourism segment, is positioned as an important leverage factor that can contribute to local development by attracting events, contributing to the extension of stay at destination, influencing the return of visitors and the promotion and strengthening of the region's tourism image (Marques, 2013; Marques and Santos, 2012).

The study here presented explores the prospects of destination stakeholders, with the aim of identifying proposals and product development measures in territories where this segment is not always seen with due attention, especially at the level of local and regional development policies.

Figure 1: Urban system and accessibility in Portugal



Source: Adapted from the National Program of Regional Planning Policy (PNPOT, 2006)

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scientific knowledge around Business Tourism is characterized by a heterogeneity of concepts and a lack of standardized terminology, a result of the multiplicity and heterogeneity of business events verified through various acronyms used over the years to define the set of events or activities associated with Business Tourism. We refer to MECE (Meetings, Events, Conventions, Exhibitions), MCE (Meetings, Conventions, Exhibitions), CEMI (Conventions, Exhibitions, Meetings, Incentives), MC & IT (Meetings, Conventions & Incentive Travel), MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, Exhibitions) or MI (Meetings Industry). This last concept was introduced in 2006 in accordance with a decision carried out by the International Congress & Convention Association (ICCA), the Meeting Professionals International (MPI), the Reeds Travel Exhibitions and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in an attempt to standardize concepts and create a stronger image of the sector (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2001; Weber and Chon, 2002; Davidson and Cope, 2003; UNWTO, 2006; Rogers, 2008).

Over the years there have been some authors who have explored the definition of tourism and its contextualization with business travel. Krapf and Hunziker's tourism definition presents one of the first approaches to the type of activity performed during travel and stay at destination, making a clear reference to business and professional reasons (Krapf and Hunziker, 1942 in Cunha, 2003). In 1991, the UNWTO identified one important step towards the recognition of travel motivated by businesses and professions in the sphere of tourism, by defining tourism as the set of activities developed by individuals (visitors) during their trips and stays in places outside their usual environment for a consecutive period not exceeding one year, for leisure, business and other purposes, not related to the exercise of an activity paid in the visited place (UNWTO, 1991). The category of "business and professional" is established to classify tourism trips according to purpose of travel; nevertheless, clarifying that the main reason of the visit should exclude the exercise of a remunerated activity in the place visited¹.

Some authors, such as Lage and Milone (2000) and Boniface and Cooper (2005), consider that Business Tourism, even implying remuneration, reflect the use of the same services and facilities and, as such, it should be enclosed in the overall concept of tourism, given that Business Tourism is often transformed exclusively into Leisure Tourism, particularly when there is an extension of stay at the destination beyond professional obligations. In this context, Beni (2001) refers to Business Tourism as traveling executives and businessmen flowing to big business and cosmopolitan centres to close deals or to develop professional, commercial and industrial activities,

¹ The classification presented by UNWTO included: 1) Leisure, recreation and holidays, 2) Visiting friends and relatives, 3) Business and professional, 4) Health treatment, 5) Religion/ pilgrimages and 6) Other reasons. More recently the UNWTO (2010) presented a document entitled "2008 International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics" with a more recent classification: 1) Personal [Holidays, leisure and recreation; Visiting friends and relatives; Education and training; Health and medical care; Religion/pilgrimages; Shopping; Transit; Other]; and 2) Business and professional. Nine categories are now proposed, with the inclusion of Education and training, Shopping and Transit. This new classification gives a stronger focus to Business and professional purposes.

employing their free time in local recreation activities and entertainment, which also includes attendance at local restaurants. The urban tourism destinations are the main attractors of Business Tourism, not only because of the venues they have to offer, but also because it is in these destinations that we can find the biggest multi-attraction offer (Hunt and Crompton, 2008), capable of more easily meeting a wide range of motivations that can be found among the Business Tourism visitors.

It should be noted, however, that despite the higher positioning of major urban and industry centres as the main destinations for Business Tourism, other areas with lower population density and lower supply of services and facilities have positioned themselves in this segment in order to attract a larger number of visitors and boost tourism, especially at the level of accommodation facilities situated in non-urban areas that have been able to adapt to the demands of this segment and contribute to meetings conducted in quieter places, away from large urban centres, such as in rural hotels, resorts or even thermal areas.

Throughout this process, the action of specialized organizational structures such as the CVBs, proves to be of great strategic importance.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research work is based on the results of a Delphi study conducted over three rounds of questionnaires between 2010 and 2011, as part of a PhD thesis on Business Tourism in the Central Region of Portugal and the creation of a CVB in the territory, presented at the University of Coimbra in 2014. Although some time has elapsed since then it should be noted that this theme is still current.

The Delphi technique consists of analysing qualitative data and is based on achieving the critical opinion of specialists or experts in a particular area. These experts are strategically chosen according to the high knowledge they possess in relation to the subject and/or area of research and constitute what is called the "Delphi panel". To this panel, questionnaires are presented to be anonymously answered in successive rounds as independently as possible in order to obtain a final consensus on the issue under study (Linstone and Turoff, 1975; Landeta, 2005; Garrod and Fyall, 2005).

In recent years this technique has been increasingly used in Portugal in research applied to the tourism field, as shown by the work conducted by Gonçalves (2007), on the cultural product development in Algarve, Ramos (2005), on the development of the Portuguese spas as tourism destinations, Almeida (2010), on the image of Portugal as Business Tourism destination and Fernandes (2014), on the management of tourism in mountain areas, among others.

As the main criteria for selection of experts for this study we took into account the following: 1) professional or academic experience in the tourism sector and/or in the specific segment of Business Tourism; 2) developing their professional and/or academic activity in the geographical area under study; 3) knowledge of the territory under study. Based on these criteria, we tried to work out a balanced panel, structured

with elements from different areas (academics, professionals, institutional) in order to collect the different perspectives and readings on the territory and the subject under study.

Table 1: **Initial structure of the Delphi panel**

Academia 8 experts	Public entities and institutional 5 experts	Industrial, business and trade associations 3 experts
Accommodation and travel agents 10 experts	Venues 3 experts	Cultural, leisure and recreation suppliers 8 experts

Source: Authors

The initial panel was composed of 37 experts from different sectors of activity (Table 1). Besides meeting the criteria initially established, we believe that the experts had the proper motivation to participate in the study otherwise they probably would have declined the invitation. However, between the first and last round we registered a few dropouts, which is a phenomenon often mentioned in other Delphi studies. In the second round, 29 experts completed the questionnaires (eight dropouts) and in the third round 28 experts responded (one dropout). Between the first and last round there was a dropout rate of about 24% ($n = 9$). The three rounds of questionnaires were conducted between May 24, 2010 (first round submission date) and July 29, 2011 (last round submission date), which emphasizes the need for a significant period of time for the application of this technique.

The questionnaires were drawn from a set of open questions plus closed questions, in order to collect a comprehensive reading of the territory, allowing it to respond to the research question: *Which strategies can be identified for the development of Business Tourism in lower density urban centres?*

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Main arguments in favour of Business Tourism

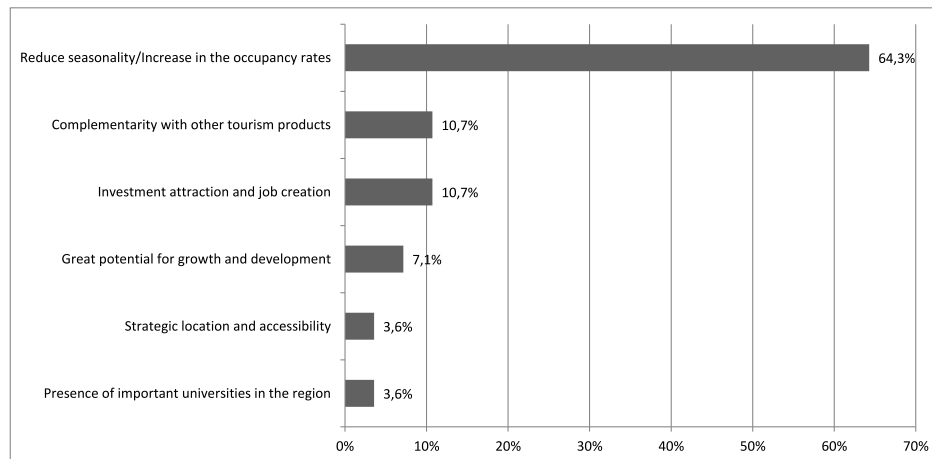
In the first round we asked the experts if they considered Business Tourism an important sector for the economic development of the territory under study, in order to understand the actual importance given by stakeholders specifically to this tourism segment. All of the respondents answered affirmatively, which significantly strengthens the idea of strategic importance to the economic development of the territory. Still in the first round, following the previous question, we asked the experts to point out the main reasons why they considered Business Tourism important to the economic development of the region. As all experts agreed with the first question, the arguments were also based on perspectives that highlight the strategic advantages of Business Tourism and the potential for tourism development in the territory under study.

We can identify two clear trends in the responses. On the one hand, the main benefits of this product are identified, namely: 1) decrease of seasonality through higher hotel occupancy rates, resulting in an extension of the tourism activity throughout the year and better use of venues, facilities and services that depend much on tourism [i.e. congress centres, accommodation, catering, entertainment activities]; 2) investment attraction and job creation through the development of facilities and services related to tourism and, particularly, Business Tourism; 3) higher visitor spending average, which leads to the increase of revenue to the destination, to the extent that many business visitors travel on behalf of their companies, organizations or other entities, which generally assume the costs associated with transport, accommodation and meals, have a greater willingness to spend money on other complementary services and activities associated with Leisure Tourism; 3) complementarity with other tourism products, thus enhancing the tourism experience and the image of the area as a destination for Business Tourism; 4) lower environmental impact, to the extent that we are talking about a tourism segment that makes frequent use of public transportation due to group trips to venues and hotels; 5) enhancing Leisure Tourism through the complementary activities undertaken by business tourists which often lead to the extension of the stay or return for reasons relating to leisure; 6) product with great potential for growth and development, driven by an increasingly globalized world, where factors such as the internationalization of companies, emigration, the need to increase exportation, the growing demand of knowledge through academic exchange programs (or other) or the information sharing and scientific debate, have actively contributed to the revitalization and development of the Meetings Industry and consequently of Business Tourism.

On the other hand, specific features are identified in the territory that may enhance the development of this product, namely: 1) the existence of important industrial areas, which attract a significant number of meetings and business trips; 2) the existence of important universities, which are facilitating agents of scientific events with an international focus; 3) the geographical location and network access, which enhance the interconnection and complementarity between the major urban centres (Coimbra, Aveiro and Viseu) and surrounding regions; 4) the tourism richness and diversity of the region, which may enhance the creation and/or development of different products and overall tourism attraction; 5) the existence of proper infrastructure, facilities and venues, which allow travelling to (and staying in) this territory and the realization of an important and diverse range of business events.

In order to try to understand what would be the outlook of experts concerning the main argument in favour of the development of Business Tourism in the region, in the second round we presented to the panel all the main arguments obtained in the previous round and requested they state their opinion on the arguments and their hierarchy. The results of this second round show that 90% (n = 26) of experts agree with the proposed ranking (Kendall's W of 0.935). Thus, we reached a final set of arguments that we presented to experts in the third round, in which we asked them to identify the most important ones. The majority of responses focused on the decrease of seasonality through higher hotel occupancy rates (64% of respondents, n = 18) (Graphic 1).

Graphic 1: **Main argument in favour of the development of Business Tourism**



Source: Delphi study

In fact, Leisure Tourism is mainly seasonal (Leisure Tourism here understood as other than Business Tourism) with the tourism demand reaching its highest levels at very specific times of the year - especially in the summer time. This leads to an intensive use of infrastructures, facilities and services for very limited periods of time contrary to the tendency at other times of the year, causing the distinction between what is commonly known in the tourism industry as high season (larger tourism demand) and low season (lower tourism demand). Since Business Tourism is a segment that runs counter to the seasonal tendency of Leisure Tourism, it is seen, therefore, as a very important activity to attenuate this seasonality. Its importance is reflected especially in terms of hotel supply, which in periods of low season depends largely on Business Tourism.

Having identified the great importance that the development of Business Tourism could play in the area under study, it is important to analyse the possible measures to be implemented to encourage this development.

3.2. Strategic proposals for the development of Business Tourism in the region

We specifically requested the experts to identify the measures they consider relevant for the development of Business Tourism in the territory under study. The most frequently referenced measure was the 1) need of requalification and creation of new venues for conferences and other events, particularly the construction of a large congress centre in the region with an auditorium with a capacity of more than 1,000 people. It should be noted that in the city of Coimbra that investment was recently accomplished and it seems to be enough to offset the lack of auditoriums with capacity for over 1,000 people (The Convention and Cultural Centre of the San Francisco Convent, with a main auditorium with capacity for 1,125 people, opened in April 2016). As far as the requalification and optimization of existing venues is concerned, we consider that it should be seen as a highly relevant measure as it can improve the

quality of the existing supply in terms of services and facilities and contribute to the recovery and enhancement of built heritage thus avoiding its degradation.

The second measure most often referenced by the panel refers to the 2) upgrading and development of the hotel industry and catering, which include the need to improve the hotel supply (which can also include catering, since most hotels are equipped with restaurants) mainly in terms of higher quality of accommodation (4 and 5 stars) that is closely connected to Business Tourism. According to the National Tourism Registration (RNT), in the year 2013 there were 110 hotels in the region, with a total capacity of 5.661 rooms and 11.100 beds, mostly in 3-star units (42.7% of the supply), followed by 2-star (25.5%) and 4-star units (23.6%). The less represented are 1-star (5,5%) and 5-star units (2,7%).

Other measures suggested by the panel were: 3) wider dissemination and promotion of the product associated with the territory at national and international level, and where the Portuguese diaspora in the world can play an important role not only in the destination promotion but also in the attraction of international events; 4) creation of partnerships/synergies between different public and private agents, where the articulation of the local industry with the local universities is of particular importance, especially through the transfer of knowledge and the consequent need for scientific events (here we are also talking about Business Tourism)²; 5) stimulation of the tourism supply through the enhancement of resources and tourism attractions and where the valuation of the themes related to the Sea and the Discoveries can be assumed as differentiating elements, due to the coastal strip that characterizes the territory; 5) emphasis on training of specialized human resources in order to provide a tourism service of great quality and professionalism, especially in terms of organization and business events management, thus also contributing to the increase of visitor satisfaction levels.

The measures relating to the dissemination and promotion, the creation of partnerships/synergies, the dynamics of the tourism supply and even the training of specialized human resources (notably in the technical approach related to support the realization of business events and support/monitoring of visitors during the events) lead us to the role of the Convention & Visitors Bureaus (CVBs), because in addition to organize and promote the offer of destinations and work on attracting events and business visitors, these organizational structures bring together different public and private agents (stakeholders) around a common overall objective, which is the development of tourism in the destination, especially regarding Business Tourism, and hence the economic and social development of the territory.

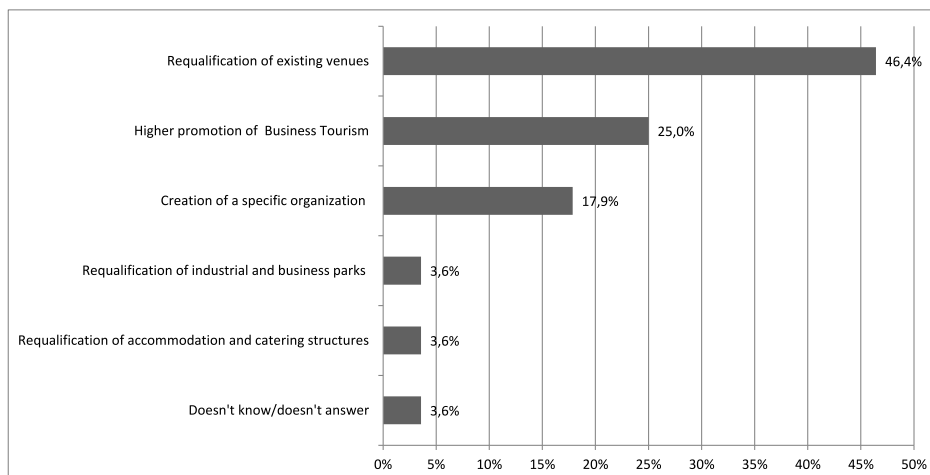
All the measures that we have just discussed were presented in the second round to the panel for consideration, having gathered the agreement of 83% of experts (n = 24). Another specific measure was also suggested by the panel, namely the creation of an organizational structure for the management and promotion of the tourism product (included in the last round), which helps support the view of the need to create a CVB

² The concept of the Triple Helix of university-industry-government relationships initiated in the 1990s by Etzkowitz (1993) and Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (1995) fits this problem perfectly.

in this territory. Although the requalification/creation of venues for conferences and other events continues to be seen by most experts in this second round as the main measure, we thought it would be important to clarify the prospects regarding the possible need to build new facilities and whether it would make more sense to speak about requalification and reuse of the existing ones.

In this context, in the third and final round we reformulated the proposal of requalification/creating venues for conferences and other events, to requalification and reuse of existing venues for conferences and other events. Effectively, this last proposal was indicated at the end by most experts as the one they thought to be the most important (referred by 46.4% of experts; $n = 13$), followed by the need for greater dissemination and promotion of the tourism product associated with the territory (25%; $n = 7$) and the need to create a specific organization to manage, communicate and promote Business Tourism, such as the CVB (17.9%; $n = 5$) (Graphic 2).

Graphic 2: **Main proposals for developing Business Tourism**



Source: Delphi study

We can thus conclude that the main measures to be implemented for the development of Business Tourism in the territory refer, on the one hand, to the enhancement of the main support structures associated with this segment (venues, hotels and restaurants), not so much regarding the dimensional scale or load capacity but more on improvement of existing services and facilities, and on the other, better management in terms of tourism resources and potential of the territory (dissemination and promotion of Business Tourism; involvement of different agents through partnerships/synergies; promotion of complementary offer, qualification of human resources), that it is important to value and where the existence of a CVB, as we have seen, would be very important.

Furthermore, the panel was also asked to identify the main difficulties for the development of Business Tourism in the territory, so that we could compare it with the main measures for development, previously explored.

3.3. Main difficulties for the development of Business Tourism

In the first round we identified a group of main difficulties presented by the experts: 1) the lack of infrastructure and adequate facilities, regarding mainly to the lack of innovative venues, the need for larger conference centres and the need for greater hotel capacity, mainly in the 5-star category; 2) accessibility, related essentially to the fact that there is no airport in the Central Region of Portugal (between Lisbon and Oporto) or high-speed rail network between the main cities of this territory and the cities of Lisbon and Oporto and the rest of Europe. However, we must take into account the dimension of the territory and have to note that the main urban centres of the region under study are distant about one hour by car from Sá Carneiro International Airport (Oporto Airport). Undoubtedly, a good network of road and rail access could help to offset the lack of an airport in the Central Region; 3) lack of mobilization capacity, referring more specifically, according to the experts' opinions, to poor development of this segment by the stakeholders, the lack of joint efforts, the lack of development policies and political will and the weak partnerships among public and private sectors; 4) lack of qualified human resources, mainly due to insufficient technical knowledge that exists in this sector; 5) scarcity of the Business Tourism promotion and the poor destination positioning among this segment, regarding the insufficient event attraction and lack of promotion of the destination, the non-consolidated destination image and the lack of investment in the accreditation of the Business Tourism product; 6) Finally, the panel also identified as a difficulty the strong competition from other regions of Portugal, especially Lisbon and Oporto where the tourism potential, mainly at the load capacity level, is very much higher and where there is a higher tourism structure and promotion. However, although on a smaller scale and operating in a Business Tourism market that is well defined and adjusted to this scale, we believe that this territory can develop this tourism segment in a more valued and sustained manner. Still on the issue of competition with other regions, it should be noted that internal competition (intra-regional) that may possibly exist, i.e. between stakeholders in the same defined area, should also be considered as a difficulty that may be present. Therefore, the creation of an organizational structure (CVB) that takes into account the common interests of stakeholders can be seen as an opportunity to mitigate competitive actions where they should not exist.

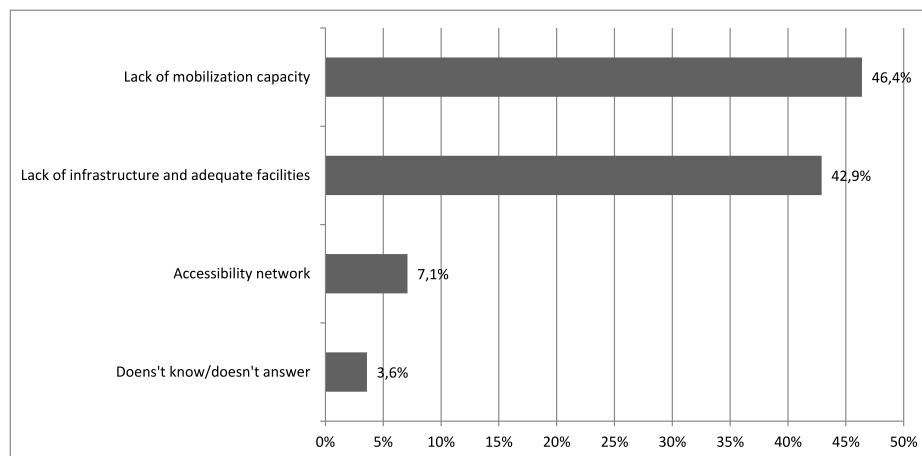
Globally, the main difficulties identified in the first round, as expected, meet the main measures to be developed to boost Business Tourism, as discussed above, as they identify the main problems at the level of the specific supply (lack of infrastructure/adequate facilities) and the level of product management associated with the territory (accessibility, mobilization capacity, skilled human resources, promotion, positioning and competition with other destinations).

In the next round we asked the experts' opinion again and found that 59% agreed with the perspectives presented. The application of Kendall's W test resulted in a relatively low concordance coefficient (0.422), indicating a lack of consensus on the rankings

assigned by each expert to each of the proposals. In this second round it was possible to identify some perspectives presented by the panel to reinforce the idea of the need to create an organizational structure (CVB) that can act not only on product development in an integrated and coordinated way, but also in its effective promotion and its competitive development, in order to improve its positioning in the market. This means that the non-existence of an organizational structure of this type is seen as a problem for tourism development in the territory.

In the last round we asked the panel to identify the main difficulty associated with the development of Business Tourism in the territory under study. Despite the clear division in the responses, lack of capacity for mobilization became the main difficulty pointed out (46.4% of respondents, $n = 13$), followed by lack of infrastructure/adequate facilities (42.9%; $n = 12$) (Graphic 3).

Graphic 3: Main problem against the development of Business Tourism



Source: Delphi Study

We can now say that it is extremely important to have a combination of the stakeholder's efforts in structuring the Business Tourism product and in the management of the territory as a tourism destination. There is thus the need to structure Business Tourism in a more serious and comprehensive way, including the many aspects associated with it (venues, accommodation, catering, transport, tourism attractions, complementary activities, etc.) and the joint action of public and private agents in its valorisation and integration in this particular geographical area. So, as that is its primary role, we emphasized once again, the importance and the need to create a CVB.

CONCLUSION

The study presented here allows us to reflect on the potential of Business Tourism in territories with lower urban density and lower supply of facilities and services, when compared to the major cities that usually take the leading positions in international rankings especially if we consider that smaller urban centres that are relatively near each other (as is the case of Coimbra, Aveiro and Viseu) may find interesting strategic advantages in joint action, taking into account that these three geographic areas complement each other in the integrated supply of tourism products, experiences, services and facilities.

Thus, Business Tourism proves to be of great strategic interest to the tourism development of the regions, especially those with differentiating tourism attractions. These attractions, together with the existing venues, regardless of their size, and the performance of a body responsible for the management of the supply associated with the Meetings Industry, may be of great importance for the development and strategic positioning of the territories along this particular segment.

In conducting our study, we can conclude that the main measures for the development of Business Tourism in the territory are: 1) better structuration and requalification of the Business Tourism facilities (venues, hotels and restaurants), mainly regarding the improvement of service quality; 2) better management of the tourism activity and resources through the presence of a CVB (communication and promotion of the Business Tourism product; involvement of different agents; enhancing the complementary tourism offer, qualification of human resources).

On the other hand, the main difficulties identified bring us mainly to the lack of mobilization capacity, in particular regarding the lack of joint efforts, the lack of political will/adequate policies and weak partnerships between the public and private sectors. We can find a similarity between the main measures to be developed to enhance Business Tourism in the region and the main difficulties pointed out. For all these factors that we have just discussed, the promotion of combined efforts of stakeholders in the structuring of Business Tourism and management of the territory as a tourism destination with potential in this particular segment would be of high importance. Therefore, the presence of a CVB is required to promote cooperation between stakeholders and to pressure local, regional and national authorities in order to develop concerted policies and adequate branding and marketing strategies in this particular geographical area.

The realization of a Delphi study was very important to reach our goals and proved to be very useful, allowing us to explore issues of some complexity, mainly due to the limited literature and scarcity or disaggregated statistical data that characterize the arguments associated with Business Tourism, that this article also seeks to attenuate. However, it is important to continue on this path through future investigations that allow building a more solid and structured scientific knowledge around Business Tourism, especially regarding statistical data. The great heterogeneity associated with events in the Meetings Industry makes this a difficult task, albeit necessary.

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