

Jorge Marques / Norberto Santos

Tourism development strategies for business tourism destinations: Case study in the central region of Portugal

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present the results of a Delphi study about the strategic importance of business tourism in the Central Region of Portugal (territory encompassing the cities of Coimbra, Aveiro and Viseu), where the presence of a qualified and diverse tourism offer combined with the existence of varied venues and quality accommodation can contribute to provide a valued tourism experience associated with the meetings Industry. This study allows a reflection on the potential of business tourism in territories where this sector is not always given due attention by local, regional and national tourism bodies. These smaller urban centres (compared with the main urban centres of Lisbon and Oporto), relatively close to each other, may find strategic advantages in joint action, considering that these three geographic areas complement each other in the integrated supply of tourism products, experiences, support services and facilities. Primary data was collected through a Delphi study with the aim of identifying regional tourism stakeholders' perceptions of the importance and potential of business tourism development and strategies that should be put in place to this end. The results show that stakeholders identify business tourism as a strategic product that should be developed, and indicate some development strategies to be considered in this territory.

Key words: business tourism; destination; destination management organizations; Delphi technique; Portugal

Introduction

In 2015, international tourist arrivals reached a total of 1186 million, an increase of 52 million over the previous year, representing approximately 5% growth. This is the sixth consecutive year of above average growth following the 2009 global economic crisis, with international arrivals increasing by 4% or more annually ever since 2010 (UNWTO, 2016). Considering the purpose of visit, business tourism takes 14% of global international tourist arrivals, with travel for holidays, recreation and other forms of leisure accounting for just over half of all international tourist arrivals (53%) and travelling for other reasons such as visiting friends and relatives (VFR), religious reasons and health treatment representing 27%.

Considered one of the main tourism segments and expected to grow approximately 3.1% per year until 2030 (UNWTO, 2011), business tourism has an important economic impact on local and regional economies and represents a tourism sector with a high development potential. 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, and coffee breaks), the boost in leisure activities and its relative resilience in the face of the current economic crisis, are some of the main factors that make business tourism so attractive for destinations.

In addition to the immediate economic benefits, business tourism can give a boost to destination promotion and foster destination loyalty. Business tourists often extend their stay beyond the business

Jorge Marques, Portucalense University (UPT), Porto, Portugal; E-mail: jorgem@upt.pt

Norberto Santos, CEGOT - Centre of Studies on Geography and Spatial Planning, University of Coimbra, Portugal; E-mail: norgeo@ci.uc.pt

event to explore region and its attraction, return as individual tourists or recommend destination to their circle of influence (friends, family, professional network). To reap these benefits, it is important to provide an excellent service to business visitors, exceeding their expectations.

In this context, organizations in charge of destination management, especially if they are specifically created to foster business tourism (i.e. Convention and Visitors Bureau) have a key role in ensuring smooth functioning of business tourism by integrating activities of all actors in the process of planning, management, promotion and development of successful business tourism destinations (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001; Davidson & Cope, 2003, Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007). Business tourism usually takes place in major urban centres with large venues, accommodation, and supporting infrastructure. However, smaller urban centres are also attractive for business tourism, where tourism attractiveness together with the existence of adequate venues and support services play an important role in destination selection process (Oppermann, 1996; Oppermann & Chon, 1997).

In terms of size, according to the market demand study conducted by the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA, 2013), which analyses the development of associative meetings over half a century (1963-2012), business tourism is growing. The study also shows that the average number of meetings held annually has increased by about 10% per year, which means that the number of meetings doubles every 10 years. It is also worth noting 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%). From about 55 thousand meetings registered by the ICCA between 2008 and 2012, 35% hosted between 50 and 149 participants, 22% between 150 and 249 and 24% between 250 and 499 participants. This means that most of the registered meetings (79.8%) hosted fewer than 500 participants. Thus there is a clear trend where the number of participants in business meetings has been reducing over the past few decades and, at the same time, the number of meetings held has been increasing.

Portugal ranks 12th in the worldwide meetings industry with 278 international meetings conducted in 2015 (ICCA, 2016). This is an excellent position, given the relatively small size of Portugal in comparison to other business tourism leaders, such as U.S.A, Germany or United Kingdom. Although mostly due to the contribution of Lisbon (145) and Porto (60), there are other smaller cities in Portugal that have contributed to this global performance. This is the case of Aveiro (7) and Coimbra (5) in the Central region of Portugal, among others. These smaller urban centres, as noted before, may find interesting strategic advantages in joint action, considering that these geographic areas can complement each other in the integrated supply of tourism products, experiences, services and facilities. Such an integrated approach to tourism management is advocated by the current national tourism policy (Turismo 2020) in order to enhance destination value and avoid destination degradation through uncontrolled growth and poor management. Therefore destination characteristics such as weather, geographic location, inhabitants, diversity of landscapes, architectural, historical, cultural and natural monuments, culture, traditions, gastronomy, and biodiversity must be respected (Oppermann, 1996; Oppermann & Chon, 1997), as these factors influence destination choice. This is also the case with business event organisers, where two group of factors influence their choice of destination. The first group consists of accommodation availability and quality, meeting venues, accessibility, local DMC and DMO support. The second group of factors relates to the attractiveness of destination in terms of recreational and leisure activities (Crouch & Weber, 2002; Crouch & Louviere, 2004).

The study reported here examines the process of a destination cooperation for creation of an integrated business tourism product. It was conducted in Coimbra, Aveiro and Viseu, nested between the main cities of Lisbon and Port, creating an urban triangle in the Central Region of Portugal. With the

geographical proximity but different geographic characteristics these three cities possess all necessary conditions for creating a joint and complementary business tourism products.

Business tourism: definition and segmentation

Over the years there was a confusion about business and tourism. One of the early definition of tourism excludes business tourism, so that Krapf and Hunziker, in 1942, state clearly that tourism excludes all movements and permanence at destinations that are used for the exercise of a main profitable activity, permanent or temporary (Krapf & Hunziker, 1942 in Cunha, 2003). In 1991, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) contributed to clarify this issue associated with the recognition of travel for business and professional reasons by defining tourism as the set of activities developed by individuals (visitors) during their trips and stays for and 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 (WTO, 1991). The concept of "usual environment" was adopted instead of "place of residence" and the category of "business and professional" was established to classify tourism trips by purpose of travel; nevertheless, clarifying that the main reason of the visit should exclude the exercise of a remunerated activity in the place visited.

However, not all authors agree with the inclusion of business trips in the tourism concept. Barretto (2008) argues that tourist movements must be associated with pleasure and leisure activities, so when there is obligation or profit included in the purpose of travel, this cannot be considered as tourism. From this perspective, in addition to business tourism, other segments should be excluded from the sphere of tourism, such as health-related tourism (medical care, convalescence, etc.), which may not necessarily be associated with pleasure or leisure activities. However, it should not be forgotten that business travel demands the same venues and services as leisure travel, whether related or not to obligation and profit.

Some authors, such as Lage and Milone (2000) and Boniface and Cooper (2005), reinforce this idea considering that business tourism, even implying remuneration, involves the use of the same services and facilities and should be included in the overall concept of tourism, especially 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 major business and cosmopolitan centres to close deals or to develop professional, commercial and industrial activities, employing their free time in local recreational activities and entertainment, which also includes visiting local restaurants. It should be noted, once again, 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 a lower supply of services and facilities have positioned themselves in this segment to attract a larger number of visitors and boost their tourism activity, especially in the case of accommodation facilities situated in sparsely-populated areas which have adapted to the demands of this segment and are promoting the organization of meetings in quieter places, away from large urban centres, such as rural hotels, nature resorts or even spas. Throughout this process, the action of specialized organizations such as the CVBs, proves to be of great strategic importance.

Business tourism is a broad concept that covers the activities and support services inherent to tourism in general, and the range of events or meetings held in the destination. The heterogeneity of concepts and lack of standardized terminology, because of the multiplicity and heterogeneity of business events, can be seen through several acronyms used in recent times to define the set of events or activities related

to business tourism. Thus reference is made 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 Meetings Industry (MI). This last concept was introduced in 2006 following a decision by the International Congress & Convention Association (ICCA), Meeting Professionals International (MPI), Reeds Travel Exhibitions and the UNWTO, as an attempt to standardize concepts and create a stronger image for the sector (Weber & Chon, 2002; Davidson & Cope, 2003; Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001; Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007; UNWTO, 2006; Rogers, 2008; Getz & Page, 2016). The idea was to substitute MICE and other similar expressions in general and it came into use in November 2006. According to the definition initially proposed, the meetings industry includes activities based on the organization, promotion, sale and hosting of meetings and other events. It encompasses products and services related to corporate, associative and governmental meetings, corporate incentives, seminars, congresses, conferences, conventions, exhibitions and fairs, whose objectives are related to the motivation of the participants, conducting business, the exchange of ideas, learning, socializing and debates or discussions (UNWTO, 2006).

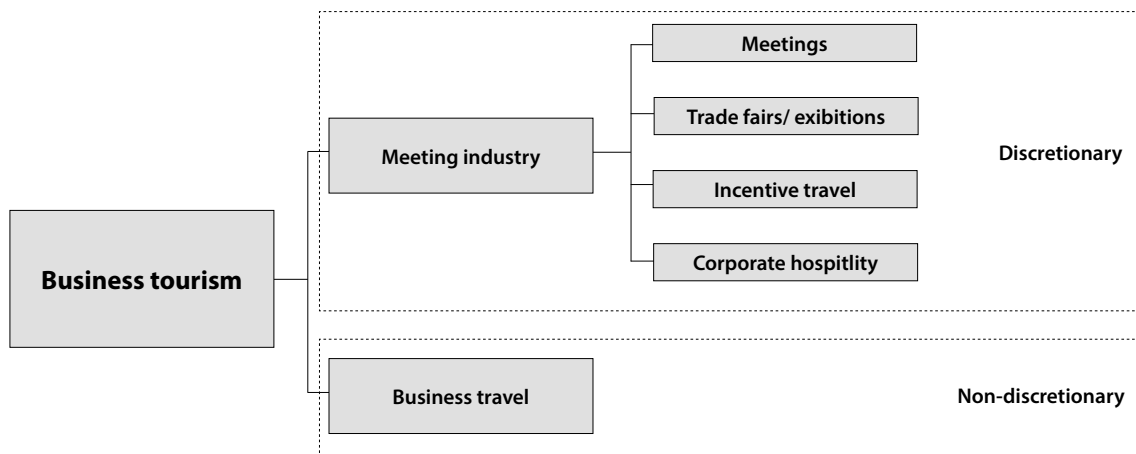
Academics have also discussed the basic terminology used in business tourism. Shone (1998), for example, prefers to use the word conference instead of meeting, defining it as a way of sharing information and as a space for discussion of the most varied issues. Considering that there may be several formats or sizes, Shone subdivides the conferences into: (1) small executive meetings; (2) training events; (3) general management; (4) sales and product launches; (5) conferences with exhibitions and trade fairs; (6) incentive conferences; (7) revenue generation events. Swarbrooke and Horner (2001) make a distinction between the concept of business travel, which comprises the activities and services related to the movement of travellers from A to B, and business tourism, which includes all the elements of the tourist experience and at least a one-night stay. They group the business tourism market into the following sub-sections: (1) meetings, conferences and conventions; (2) exhibitions; (3) training courses; (4) product launches; (5) incentive travel. By grouping meetings, conferences and conventions in the same category, they explore the different concepts depending on the size of the meeting or the geographic area where it is held. The term "meeting" is often used when it refers to a small group of people. The designations "conference", "convention" and "congress" are frequently used in the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the European continent, respectively, to define meetings with many people. In a similar vein, Davidson & Cope (2003) divide business travel into two groups: (1) individual business travel and (2) business tourism. Individual business trips include regular trips so that an individual can perform the tasks or activities inherent in his or her profession, i.e. travel to the place where a problem must be solved. These journeys are characterized as non-discretionary, because the destination of travel is not chosen, but imposed by the demands of the work or task to be carried out. Business tourism is subdivided into meetings, exhibitions, incentive trips and corporate hospitality, and is considered discretionary. The choice of destinations and venues for such events is often flexible and often associated with group travel.

A similar categorization is proposed by Rogers (2008). However, this author includes individual business travel as an integral part of business tourism and replaces the concept of "meetings" with "conferences". Business tourism is considered as a subsector of global tourism and divided into: (1) conferences; (2) exhibitions and trade fairs; (3) incentive travel; (4) corporate events/hospitality (discretionary); (5) individual business trips (not discretionary). This author believes that business travel is part of the concept of business tourism, but stresses that meetings (conferences), exhibitions, incentive travel and corporate events/hospitality make up the four main lines of business tourism that merit special

attention, especially, regarding the marketing activities of destinations and venues, since the location of the event may vary and consequently influence the decision process.

After analysing the different perspectives, business tourism can be divided into two strands: an individual strand, constituted by individuals who travel frequently due to their professional obligations, and a group or collective strand consisting of events such as meetings, incentive travel, congresses or conventions and fairs or exhibitions (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001; Davidson & Cope, 2003; Cunha, 2006; Rogers, 2008; Getz & Page, 2016), usually associated with the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, Exhibitions) concept, now replaced by the meetings industry designation (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Business tourism structure



Source: Adapted from Davidson & Cope (2003), Rogers (2008), Getz & Page (2016).

Although the individual business travel is very important, it is in the group of collective market that lies the focus of destinations' marketing and promotion strategies (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001; Cunha, 2006; Davidson & Cope, 2003; Rogers, 2008; UNWTO, 2006), due to the possibility of attracting more events and visitors. Likewise, the meetings market has been the main target of studies and statistical analyses, although there is often no consistency in characterizing the size and type of meetings (UNWTO, 2006).

Research aims and method

This research work is based on the results of a Delphi study on business tourism in the Central Region of Portugal, from the application of a Delphi study over three rounds of questionnaires between May 2010 and July 2011 as part of the 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. Despite the temporal distance, it should be noted that the theme is still very current.

Some of the main advantages of this technique are flexibility to adapt to a wide variety of subjects, ability to get more rigor in the information obtained and the possibility of developing a more detailed knowledge through greater complexity of investigation, namely in the field of tourism, where the heterogeneity and the constant mutation and evolution characteristic of tourism are evident. Its application is particularly advantageous when there is an inability or difficulty to construct statistically significant population samples, as is the case with individuals considered specialists, or when issues related to available time and geographic dispersion make it difficult or impossible to meet in person.

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

In recent years this technique has been increasingly used in tourism research, as demonstrated by the work conducted by Gonçalves (2003) on the cultural product development in Algarve; Garrod and Fyall (2005) on the potential contribution of marine ecotourism to economic, social and environmental development in coastal communities located on the Atlantic periphery of the European Union; Ramos (2005) on the development of the Portuguese spas as tourism destinations; Fernandes (2008) on the management of tourism in mountain areas; Almeida (2010) on the image of Portugal as a business tourism destination; Marques (2014) on strategies for business tourism development in the Central Region of Portugal; Gil-Lafuente, Merigó and Vizuete (2014) on the analysis of luxury resort hotels in Taiwan and Macau; Torre, Ocerín, Fuentes and Hidalgo (2014) on tequila tourism development in Mexico; Moolman and Wilkinson (2014) on employability of hospitality management graduates in South Africa; Kiss (2015) on developing health tourism in the Balkans; Silveira (2016) on development strategies for yacht tourism in Figueira da Foz; Ribeiro (2016) on the development of a governance and management framework and model for Porto's destination DMO; among others.

With flexible content and a predominantly exploratory nature, its implementation requires a structured and systematic gathering of perspectives and opinions from experts in the subjects under study through questionnaires sent remotely and anonymously that are answered in successive rounds. In each round controlled feedback of responses and perspectives obtained in the previous round is provided, in such a way that each specialist can reflect on the global responses and perspectives of other experts, trying thus to build an acceptable consensus on the subject under study.

As main criteria for selection of experts for this study participants should: (1) have professional or academic experience in the tourism sector and/or in the specific segment of business tourism; (2) develop their professional and/or academic activity in the geographical area under study; (3) know the territory under study. Based on these criteria, a balanced panel was set up, with members from different areas (academics, professionals, institutional) in order to collect different viewpoints and readings on the territory and the subject under study. The initial panel comprised 37 experts from different sectors of activity. These 37 experts, besides meeting the criteria initially established, supposedly possessed the proper motivation to participate in the study, otherwise they would likely have declined the invitation. However, between the first and last round a few dropouts were recorded, which is a phenomenon often mentioned in other Delphi studies (Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Landeta, 2005; Garrod & Fyall, 2005). In the second round, 29 questionnaires were collected (eight dropouts) and 28 in the third round (one dropout). This means that between the first and last round the dropout rate was 24%.

The questionnaire was a combination of open-ended and closed questions in order to collect a comprehensive reading of the territory, its potential and development prospects of business tourism and the creation of an organizational structure such as the Convention & Visitors Bureau. The answers given by the experts were structured in rankings presented in the subsequent questionnaire to be again considered and restructured if necessary. The collected data was processed through Microsoft Office Excel 2007 software in accounting for answers and through the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social

Sciences) V. 19.0 to statistically measure the average rank for each proposal presented and the degree of general agreement in each ranking, by applying Kendall's coefficient of concordance (Kendall's W).

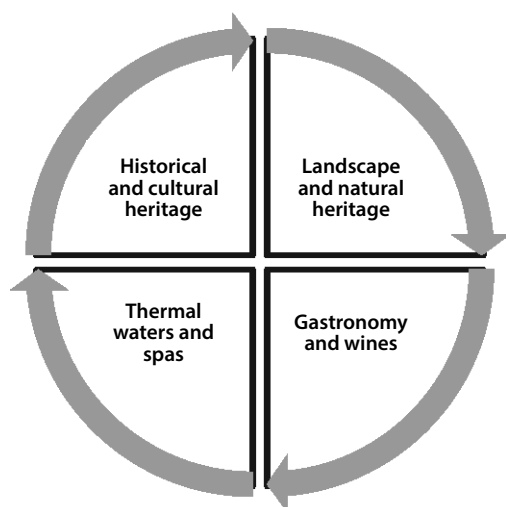
Through application of Delphi method it was possible to identify respondent perspectives on integrated business tourism product development between three cities and steps that needed to be taken to this end. The subsequent two rounds were used to assess the level of consensus reached by the respondents. In every round, the experts were asked to make comments on what they thought necessary or relevant to each issue and allowed consultation of all the answers in the previous rounds. More specifically, through the application of the Delphi technique in it was possible to: (1) identify the products, resources and cultural and heritage attractions of major importance; (2) define strategies of valorisation and promotion of the integrated business tourism destination; (3) define strategies for the development of an organizational structure of the Convention & Visitors Bureau type in order to enhance the development of the product associated with business tourism. It allowed us to put into discussion among the stakeholders (panel of experts) the several questions related to tourism development in the territory and the potential for business tourism. The results are presented below.

Results and discussion

The tourist potential

To explore the territorial characteristics with high potential for tourism, experts were asked to identify the main attributes of the territory. The main characteristics indicated were historical and cultural heritage, landscape and natural heritage, gastronomy and wines, and thermal and water spas, as represented in Figure 2. These main attributes indicate that the territory has important tourism resources that can contribute to enhance the tourist experience of those who visit for business purposes. As an example, the tourist experience can be value-added through visiting and touring activities (historical and cultural heritage; landscape and natural heritage), leisure and relaxing activities (thermal waters and spas), or complementary experiences (gastronomy and wines). Therefore, such tourism offer is very important for the business tourism sector, along with the existence of adequate venues, facilities and support services.

Figure 2
Territorial characteristics that should be valued for business tourism



Beside variety of tourism attractions that complement the main business tourism infrastructure, three main attractions were identified as anchors for business tourism promotion of the region:

1. University of Coimbra, as the most important regional historical and cultural institution. It encompasses all the social and academic culture of the city and region. It was classified as a UNESCO World Heritage in 2013, contributing significantly to the international tourist promotion of this region, which also included the Mondego river, Bairrada gastronomic region and important religious figures: Saint Anthony; Queen Elisabeth, the Saint; sister Lucy, one of the three little shepherds of Fátima (Religious/pilgrimage tourism);
2. Haff-Delta of Aveiro nature reserve presenting great tourism potential as it enables close contact with nature and biodiversity. It integrates natural areas of special relevance, such as the Natural Reserve of the Dunes of São Jacinto, the BioRia project and the coastline including some of the main maritime beaches. This natural context can also be associated with important historical and cultural heritage linked to agricultural activities, such as salt production (salt marshes) and the harvesting of seaweed. All these factors provide a favourable environment for the development of various tourism activities related to cultural, nature or nautical tourism;
3. Local gastronomy, recognized by its quality and diversity, including preservation of traditional recipes associated with local high-quality products (some of which are certified), which are representative of the culture, history and *savoir faire* of the local communities and represent unique aspects of their culture and traditions (conventual sweets, chanfana, roasted suckling pig, among others).

When the experts were asked to identify the main action that need to be taken to foster tourism development, the responses showed a consensus on the necessity for urban refurbishment, improvement of the quality of life of residents and the environment in cities, with special attention given to the rehabilitation of historic centres (Coimbra, Aveiro and Viseu), as main tourism areas, considering functionality and heritage preservation.

Views about business tourism development

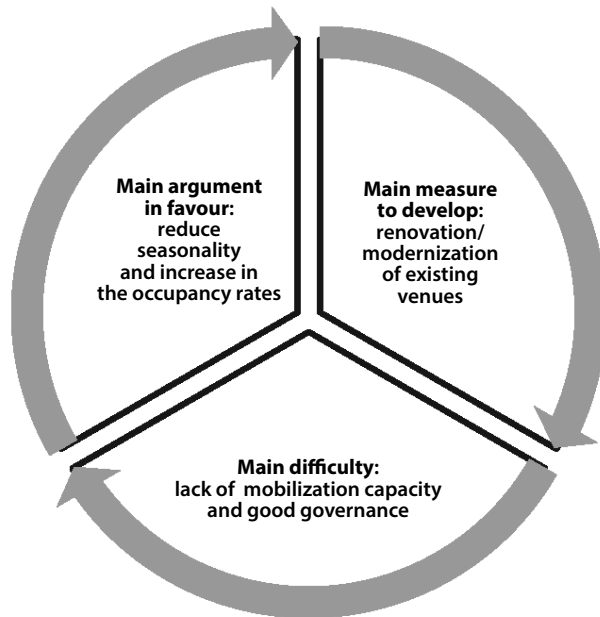
The respondents were asked whether they consider business tourism as an important sector for the regional economic development, given that they have attributed high rate of importance to this type of tourism in the first round. The responses were all positive (100% of respondents answered affirmatively), which significantly reinforces the idea of business tourism's strategic importance to the economic development of the region. In this context, the experts provided justification for business tourism development, articulated measure that need to be taken to foster its developments and identified the most important challenges faced its development (Figure 3).

As the main argument in favour, the experts identified the resilience to seasonality and the increase in hotel occupancy, resulting in an extension of the tourism season and, consequently, higher revenues for hotels, restaurants, venues, and other support services that rely heavily on tourism.

The main measure to develop is renovating existing venues. This measure offers two advantages. First, it will allow improvement in the quality of the existing offer of services and equipment, and second, it will contribute to recover and value built heritage, thus avoiding its degradation. Human resources qualification will be a goal too. The main difficulty identified was the lack of stakeholders' mobilization capacity, low joint efforts, lack of suitable policies implemented by the public sector and weak partnerships between the public and private sectors. In short, the absence of a strategic governance

policy. In addition, it was also explored which would be the main venues of the region and which key actions should be taken to enhance the venues' supply. In total, region poses 235 venues with 658 meeting rooms able to accommodate 114,6 thousand people (TCP, 2013) mostly in hotels (37,9 %) and universities (12,8%). Others include cultural and congress centres, usually endowed with auditoriums with relevant capacity, and exhibition halls with the capacity for thousands of people, ideal for holding large events like trade fairs, exhibitions, conventions and congresses.

Figure 3
Perspectives for business tourism development



The main venues identified by the respondents represent mainly those with greater seating capacity and encompass the following: Hotels (specially 4 and 5-star); Universities (The University of Aveiro and The University of Coimbra); Aveiro Cultural and Congress Centre, with a 730-seat auditorium; Exhibition Park of Aveiro, best suited for holding fairs and exhibitions, with two multi-use halls with the capacity for about 8,500 people each; Arts and Entertainment Centre of Figueira da Foz, with an 832-seat auditorium; Casino of Figueira da Foz, with a main multi-use room with the capacity to host events of up to 1,000 people and the Expocenter Montebelo (in Viseu), with a main multiuse room with the capacity to host events of up to 2,000 people.

As key actions to be implemented, the experts identified the following:

1. Improvement of the hotel industry, upgrading older hotel units and construction of new hotels, to increase the supply of 4 and 5-star accommodation, since business tourism is often associated with the provision of top quality services and equipment. 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 (42.7% of the supply), followed by 2-star (25.5%) and 4-star (23.6%) Accommodation. The least-represented are 1-star (5,5%) and 5-star units (2,7%);
2. Enhancement of wine estates as places for holding corporate meetings where the association with wine and gastronomy can greatly enhance the tourism experience of business visitors (but its importance is revealed not only as unique and varied venues for conducting business events).

3. Creation of a large conference centre in the region with a 1,000-seat auditorium. There was a consensus among respondents that the region needs a large conference venue with a capacity of a thousand seats and, equally important, refurbishments of existing conference facilities, in particular those in buildings of cultural significance. Since then, the Convention and Cultural Centre of the San Francisco Convent, with a main auditorium with the capacity for 1,125 people, opened in April 2016.

It is therefore very important to combine the efforts of stakeholders in structuring the business tourism product and management of the region as a tourism destination with high potential for development.

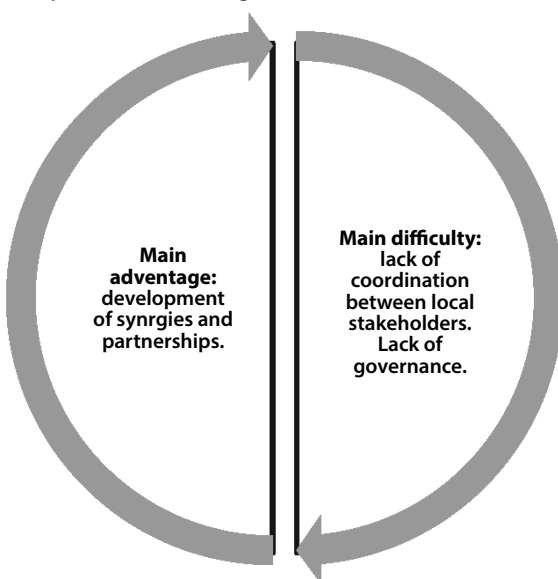
The importance of Convention and Visitors Bureau

As noted before, one of the main objectives of this research work was to study the formation of a CVB and its importance for the development of business tourist destinations.

Through the Delphi study the importance of such an organization in the region was explored with the main aim to develop an understanding of its main advantages and challenges. Thus, in the first round the respondents were asked whether or not they were in favour of the existence of such organizations. Considering the importance of these organizations, all respondents considered CVB to be of crucial importance for a business tourism destination. Moreover, all by three respondents supported the idea of setting up the CVB for the region. Thus there was a high degree of consensus regarding the need for a CVB in the region and, therefore there was not a need to resubmit these specific questions in subsequent rounds.

In the last round, about it was asked about the main benefit of creating a CVB. The answers varied somewhat, indicating a lack of consensus. However, the opportunity to create synergies/partnerships was the most often-mentioned response (42.9%) (Figure 4). Indeed, this refers to a critical point inherent to the performance of a CVB that is the joint action of public and private sectors towards a common good. Through the Delphi study it was evident that the spirit of territorial cohesion among the various stakeholders was not always present.

Figure 4
Perspectives concerning the creation of a CVB



Considering the major difficulties in structuring a CVB in the region, the lack of coordination with local stakeholders was identified as something that could potentially complicate its creation. However, it can also be seen as an argument in favour of this organizational structure. The creation of a CVB could help to overcome or mitigate the lack of coordination or cooperation between local stakeholders currently, through the enhancement of integrative and cooperative destination management processes and the development of an *esprit de corps* that could work towards common objectives.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the process of a destination cooperation for creation of an integrated business tourism product. It was conducted in Coimbra, Aveiro and Viseu, nested between the main cities of Lisbon and Port, creating an urban triangle in the Central Region of Portugal. With the geographical proximity but different geographic characteristics these three cities possess all necessary conditions for creating a joint and complementary business tourism products. To fulfil this aim qualitative study with regional stakeholders was conducted using Delphi methods. As expected, the results show a high level of consensus when it comes to the assessment of regional potential for business tourism development, appraisal of the facilities and attractions as well as the match between business tourism and other regional products and experiences, in particular wine and gastronomy. In principles, the respondents also show a high level of consensus when it comes to understanding the need of cooperation in fostering business tourism among these three geographically clustered destinations and a formation of an integrated business tourism destination. However, it seems that the largest obstacle in fostering such a development is a partnership and cooperation. This issue crystalized in relation to setting up a joint management structure – CVB – where business tourism might be of great strategic interest to the tourism development of many regions, especially those with varied tourism attractions. These attractions, together with the existing venues and the performance of an organization responsible for the management of the resources associated with meeting industry, may be of great importance for the development and strategic positioning of the territories. As such, not only are venues important, but also the existence of natural and cultural resources together with leisure activities that can be valued and promoted to increase the attractiveness of the destinations and attract more events and visitors. In conducting this study, it is possible to conclude that the territory has a set of varied elements that can be valued for tourism, encompassing historical and increase the value of business tourism and the visitor's overall experience at the destination.

In this context, the local stakeholders recognize that the existence of a CVB would be of great importance to the promotion and management of this territory as a business tourism destination. Also, it could contribute to the joint action of public and private sectors towards a common good, in this case tourism development in a common territory. Additionally, it would overcome or mitigate the lack of coordination and cooperation between local stakeholders currently in the territory, through the enhancement of integrative and cooperative destination management processes and the development of an *esprit de corps* that could work towards common objectives.

The realization of this Delphi study was very important to reach the research goals and proved to be very useful, allowing to explore issues of some complexity, mainly due to the limited literature and scarce or disparate statistical data associated with business tourism, that this article also seeks to attenuate. However, it is important to continue this path through future investigations that would foster a more solid and structured scientific knowledge around business tourism, especially regarding statistical data. The heterogeneity associated with the events of the meetings industry makes this a difficult albeit necessary task.

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