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The bleisure tourism trend and the potential for this business-leisure symbiosis in Porto

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ABSTRACT

The combination of business and leisure into one trip – bleisure – is becoming popular. This segment has received a strong boost, especially from Millennials. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the bleisure tourism phenomena and the potential for this business-leisure symbiosis in Porto. A mixed-method approach was adopted through a Delphi technique to explore tourism stakeholder's perceptions concerning both the city's opportunities and strategies that should be followed to boost the bleisure tourism sector. The assets identified as very important for the development of bleisure tourism in the city were unique gastronomy, good wines, the historical center and local people's hospitality. Nevertheless, improve human resource qualification, increase flight connections, enhance local heritage and urban regeneration and fostering collaboration networks between local stakeholders are strategic actions that merit more attention. Many studies have been conducted from the perspective of business tourism activities and impacts; few have been conducted from the bleisure tourism perspective and none have been conducted from the perspective of bleisure tourism in the city of Porto. This work represents the first attempt to elicit experts' opinions about the potential of Porto to develop the bleisure tourism segment. This study aims to contribute to better understanding how destinations can take advantage of this niche segment of the tourism market, which kind of touristic assets can be valued and which specific destination attributes should be considered.

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Introduction

Business tourism is often described as an industry with high economic value (Lubbe, 2019). Its growth relies on demand and supply-related

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factors, such as (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001): growing economies, population increase, globalization, development in transportation systems, improved growth of specialized intermediaries as well as convention and exhibitions centers and new business-related products. Also relevant to this growth was the establishment of industry associations such as the Global Business Travel Association and the Association of Corporate Travel Executives, the deregulation of the airline industry and technological advances, and more specifically information and communication technologies (Lubbe, 2019). The development of transnational corporations with employees traveling in physically dispersed corporate organizations and to physically dispersed suppliers (Jones, 2013) and the development of transnational cooperation and strategic action between countries (e.g.,: belt and road initiative) were also very important to enhancing business travel.

The global spend in business travel has been growing in volume and intensity, except the contraction in 2008–2011 due to the financial recession, reaching in 2018, 22.5% of direct travel and tourism gross domestic product worldwide (WTTC, 2018). Business travel spending is expected to grow 3.1% until 2030 (UNWTO, 2011). This projection will be compromised by the current Covid-19 pandemic and measures introduced to contain its spread, which caused a major brake most business worldwide as well as in all tourism segments and sectors. Revised OECD estimates on the Covid-19 impact point to 60% decline in international tourism in 2020 that could rise to 80% if recovery is delayed until December (OECD, 2020). In particular, the revenue loss of the global business travel market is predicted to reach $810 billion in 2020 (190.5 billion in Europe) (Statista, 2020).

Business tourism has an important economic impact on local and regional economies and has high development potential. Low seasonality, controlled environmental impact, higher revenue for accommodation and meeting venues, high demand for food and beverage (lunches, dinners, gala dinners, coffee breaks), and boost in leisure activities, are some of the main factors that make business tourism so attractive for destinations. Additionally, business tourism can contribute to promote destination image and loyalty (Davidson, 2019; Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001). Business tourists often extend their stay beyond the business 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 that exceeds visitor's expectations (Marques & Santos, 2017). In this context, destination management organizations (DMO), especially Convention and Visitors Bureau, have a key role in ensuring smooth functioning of business tourism by integrating activities of all stakeholders in the process of planning, management, promotion and development of successful business tourism

destinations (Davidson, 2019; Davidson & Cope, 2003; Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001, 2007). Nevertheless, the business tourism sector exists within a competitive environment given that business travelers can select among many nations and destinations. Thus, the country image, the tourism attractiveness and hospitality are very important for business tourism destinations. In this regard, empirical evidence suggests that a favorable match of country image-tourism destination applies to the business tourism in the USA due to county's competencies and character while an unfavorable match appears between business tourism and China due to people and country character (Kladou, Giannopoulos, & Assiouras, 2014). A construct of a positive country-image perception lies in the portfolio of products/activities that enhance business tourism experience (Abulibdeh & Zaidan, 2017; Ahn, Kim, & Lee, 2016; Alananzeh, Al-Badarneh, Al-Mkhadmeh, & Jawabreh, 2019; Falk & Hagsten, 2018; Skinner, 2017). Therefore, in addition to specific business tourism destination attributes such as conferences venues, business hotels and transportation systems, complementary activities such as leisure or recreation activities are also highly valued by business travelers.

The combination of business and leisure into one trip – bleisure, has recently becoming popular (Economist, 2019; Expedia, 2018). 'Bleisure traveler' has been used to define professionals who shun the all-work-and-no-fun toil of business trips by mixing them with leisure time (World Economic Forum, 2016). This symbiosis between leisure and professional business obligations when abroad has received a strong boost from generation Y or Millennials. Younger business travelers combine tourism with professional obligations, reflecting the blurring of boundaries between business travel and leisure activities undertaken during a business trip. With an increase of almost 40% in bleisure tourist detected between 2016 to 2018 further statistics estimate that approximate 60% of all business trips were turned into bleisure trips in 2018 (Expedia, 2018). A recent sample with more than 2500 business travelers from different countries showed that they were more likely to convert business trips to bleisure trips when staying 2 or 3 nights at a destination far from home rather than on shorter or longer stays – on average 2.9 leisure days beyond 3.9 business days (Expedia, 2018).

Recent data (Expedia, 2018), revealed that although, approximately half of business traveler's spending is still allocated to traditional travel expenditures (accommodation and food & beverage), one quarter of the spending is yet allocated to leisure activities (e.g., guided tours, concerts, museums/galleries and sporting events). Accordingly, it is important that a country that has achieved a favorable image as business tourism destination takes advantages of that position to create synergies - by promoting local business or global business as well as fostering links with local communities.

Although the bleisure trend is growing (World Economic Forum, 2016) there is a lack of literature and empirical evidence on this element of the tourism market (Lichy & McLeay, 2018; Unger, Uriely, & Fuchs, 2016) mainly in respect of the relationship between country image perception for business tourism and the increase of bleisure tourism. The present study aims to explore the potential of the city of Porto, the second largest Portuguese city, in developing bleisure tourism. This study is particularly relevant for two main reasons. First, recent studies (Marques & Pinho, 2020; Pinho & Marques, 2019) revealed that the city's potential to become a landmark destination for business tourism far outweighs its limitations. In 2018, Portugal reached the world's top 11 and Europe's top 6 of the most popular destination for international events. Porto reached the 22nd position by hosting 71 meetings (ICCA, 2019). We believe that Porto already has a favorable destination image, provides distinct forms of tourism and can be 'multisold'. Second, the steep reduction in trade across the entire tourism ecosystem and, in particular, the sharp drop in business trips due to the current coronavirus pandemic forces stakeholders to reinvent themselves by creating synergies across different tourism segments not only to survive but also to re launch the tourism industry. Therefore, we intend to investigate tourism stakeholders' perceptions concerning the city's opportunities to develop the bleisure tourism segment but also strategic actions that should be followed to boost this tourism segment. By doing this we seek to reinforce Porto's image as a potential bleisure tourism destination and provide methodological approach that can be replied to other destinations.

Literature review

The term 'bleisure' dates back to 2009 and its origins can be traced to new employees of a younger generation who demanded new conditions for themselves when traveling in the line of duty for their company. Furthermore, it is stated that the bleisure generation was a particularly entrepreneurial type who would turn an evening out over drinks into a networking opportunity (Murchie, 2014). The Y generation has grown up with near-ubiquitous internet access and began their professional careers in the wake of a financial crisis, which affected their life perspectives and aspirations for tourism. This new generation is driving enormous change in the tourism industry. They travel more and spend more money on tourism than any other generation. Empirical evidence suggests that those in the 18–34 age bracket are the most willing to participate in bleisure tourism (Egencia & Expedia, 2013). Business travel is the second most popular travel profile for Millennials (right after foodie travel) (Sofronov, 2018).

Moreover, survey statistics revealed that Millennials engage in bleisure travel to save on vacations costs – 50% of Millennials business travelers say that saving on vacation costs is a major reason to extend business trips into a leisure trip and that is why they always or often book a vacation around a business trip (NCR, 2019). Millennials have different purchasing behaviors that are changing the entire tourism industry. They are interested in authenticity, fulfillment and sustainability. They prefer experience rather than tangible products. For example, hotel lobbies are very important spaces for these business travelers since they want to meet new people, socialize and create connection (networking). Moreover, they like authentic cuisine and to experience local food, prepared with local ingredients bought directly from local businesses. They want to feel like a local rather than a brusque tourist. Nowadays Millennials are powerful forces in the travel industry with particular emphasis on business and bleisure travel segments – representing around 27 percent of the global population or about 2 billion people (Sofronov, 2018).

Since 2009 when the bleisure tourism concept was identified, it has been growing into a common shared travel trend by business travelers (Expedia, 2018). Business travel is typically perceived differently to leisure travel due to its purpose and activities involved (Yoo, McIntosh, & Cockburn-Wootten, 2016). According to Davidson (2003), tourism and recreational activities can be combined with business travel whenever: (i) business travelers extend their trip before or after the business event for leisure purpose; (ii) companions participation in an official spouse or family program or spending free time at a destination by themselves; (iii) attendees engaging in a social and tourism program as a part of the event and (iv) attendees returning with their relatives for vacations after the event they attended.

Over the last number of years, bleisure tourism has received some attention from different scientific areas. From management and marketing, researchers have developed value chains for bleisure tourism segment either from a supply side or industry perspective (DEVCO & UNWTO, 2013; Song, Liu, & Chen, 2013) and from the customer's perspective (Chung, Choi, Yoo, & Kim, 2020) in order to understand business travelers economic contribution. According to Chung et al. (2020), the more tourists are attracted to activities outside the event in which they participate or the hotel where they are staying, the greater economic impacts they will cause. For this to happen, DMO are called to develop bleisure marketing strategies.

Bleisure marketing strategies should then facilitate attendee access to local business and attractions. This requires a close collaboration between DMO, local business and meeting organizers in order to enhance the business travelers experience as well as stimulating their extra spending. Thus,

revenue can be shared with the bleisure tourism stakeholders. The human resource area started to be interested in this hybrid segment of tourism since destination activities were recognized as key components (among others – travel competence and social support) of the coping strategies business travelers utilize to decrease stress on the road (Chen, 2019). Indeed, bleisure can be seen as a way to increase employee' motivations (Chen, Petrick, & Shahvali, 2016; Etzion, 2003) and their quality of life since work, leisure and happiness seem to be interrelated (Haworth & Lewis, 2005). Moreover, a recent survey indicated that bleisure travelers reported significantly higher levels of satisfaction with their quality of life compared to non-bleisure travelers (93% vs 75%), with their work/life balance (87% vs 64%) in addition to feeling more focused while on business trips (NCR, 2019). According to the experience economy theory, four type of experiences can be offered to bleisure travelers (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 1999): (i) educational (e.g., promoting a factory tour); (ii) esthetic (e.g., promoting the visit to local art galleries or architectural landmarks) (iii) entertainment (e.g., promoting authentic cultural programs or culinary tourism) and escapist (e.g., promoting adventure programs with extreme the practice of extreme sports). Empirical evidence suggests that esthetic and entertainment experiences seem to be of the greatest valued to bleisure travelers. Recent studies revealed that entertainment/interesting activities such as exploring local cultural and historical places as well as local food and unique cuisine were critical factors affecting business travelers decisions to extend their stays for additional days (Economist, 2019; Expedia, 2018). In this regard, the 2020 state of business travel survey revealed that for more than 31% of respondents, destination is the number one factor that determines whether travelers include leisure activities in their business travel (NCR, 2019). More recently, Lichy and McLeay (2018) based on the social capital theory, the expectancy theory, the boundary-less career theory and also the experiential learning theory identified five types of bleisure tourist motivations: experiential; learners, escapers, working vacationers, altruistic knowledge-sharers and research-active trailblazers.

Methodology

Data collection

To meet the study's aim, an online mixed-method approach through a Delphi technique was adopted. Mixed-methods studies are becoming increasingly popular and are becoming recognized as the third major research approach, methodology or paradigm (Creswell, 2014). This approach is surrounded by philosophical assumptions, which argue that the concomitant or combined use of diverse types of data provides a more

comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2014). Although, there is still some debate in the literature about whether the classical Delphi technique should be considered qualitative, quantitative or a mixed-methods approach (Brady, 2015) we share the opinion of Whitehead and Day (2016) that classified the Delphi technique as a mixed-method approach. The Delphi technique is a communication method based on the principle that decisions from a structured group of individuals are more accurate than those from unstructured groups (Rowe & Wright, 2001). Indeed, the critical opinion of specialists or experts in a particular area is set forth in successive rounds until a consensus has been reached (Landeta, 2005). Participants are asked to respond to questions without coming into face-to-face contact with each other. Panel participants are not identified to each other during the course of the study and comments of the panelists are always included anonymously in each stage of the inquiry. This process has the advantage of elimination of all interpersonal dynamics that tend to exist in face-to-face decision making. In recent years, Delphi techniques have been widely used in the tourism field (Lin & Song, 2015 for a review).

A self-administered web-based questionnaire was delivered online between September, 2018 and January, 2019 and three rounds were conducted. The use of online research has been largely used by scholars of different fields and disciplines and its advantages and disadvantages have been widely discussed in the literature (Pahlevan-Sharif, Mura, & Wijesinghe, 2019 for a review).

Experts

The eligibility criteria of this study dictates that participants should, cumulative, meet the following requirements: (i) have professional or academic experience in the tourism sector and/or in the specific business tourism segment; (ii) develop their professional and/or academic activity in Porto and (iii) have extensive knowledge of the city of Porto. After a careful research of the potential stakeholders that fulfilled the eligible criteria, an invitation was sent by email, to each of the fifty-five stakeholders identified. Twenty eight agreed to participate (final response rate of 51%), thus constituting the initial panel. Participants in the panel were experts from seven different areas, namely: four academics; four individuals from business and trade associations, four venues representatives; five accommodation and travel agents, four cultural, leisure and recreation suppliers, four individuals from public and institutional entities and three tourism managers. Their age ranged from 30 to 53 years old with a mean work experience of 18 years. There were 18 males and 10 females and all participants completed, at least, higher education. Most of the experts (85%) have never worked abroad but all reported often attending training activities in the tourism sector.

The sample size decreased between rounds. From the first to the second round, two participants withdrew (sample size 26). In the third round one more respondent did not fulfill the questionnaire (final sample size 25).

Questionnaire and Delphi rounds

The study presented here uses only part of a wider questionnaire (results of the remaining questionnaire are described elsewhere; Pinho & Marques, 2019; Marques & Pinho, 2020). Therefore, only this part will be explored. Data was collected in three rounds. In round one, a qualitative approach was used. Here, participants were asked four open-ended questions concerning the potential symbiosis between business and leisure tourism in the city of Porto. They were asked to identify: (i) strategic tourism products in Porto; (ii) strategic assets on offer to business travelers; (iii) steps that could be taken to improve the relation between business and leisure tourism, i.e., actions that would encourage business travelers to stay in the city beyond their labor duty and (iv) products that may attract tourists, mainly Millennials to travel for business purpose to the city of Porto. In round two, a quantitative approach was used to compile and organize the opinions/suggestions obtained in round one. Participants were then asked to indicate the level of importance they attach to each statement of questions two to four on a five-point scale (not important, slightly important, important, significantly important and very important). In the first question, respondents were asked to use a four-point scale (consolidated, emergent, complementary; without expression) to classify the strategic level of development of each product according to the scheme presented by the National Strategic Plan for Tourism (PENT, 2007): Consolidated – refers to the most well-known and consumed products in a market, already established; Emergent: refers to segments that already exist or may exist, with potential for growth but with the need to structure their offer; Complementary: refers to the potential to articulate with other products, and Without expression: refers to products without a major impact on the territory, at present.

In the final round (three), a quantitative approach was used since participants were faced with the results of the second round, whenever there was a tie in the answers. For these cases, participants were asked, once again, to indicate their opinion based on the same five or four Likert scale. The process in the second and third round is merely descriptive.

Data analyse process

Through the Delphi technique, the analysis process takes place simultaneously with the collection process data, since the preparation of the forms for the subsequent rounds are justified from the findings of the previous

Table 1. Strategic matrix of tourism products in Porto.

	Consolidated	Emerging	Complementary	Without expression/ Need development
City breaks	66.7%	33.3%	–	–
Business tourism (MICE)	50.0%	50.0%	–	–
Gastronomy & wine	66.7%	33.3%	–	–
Cultural and landscape touring	66.7%	33.3%	–	–
Religious tourism	–	–	50.0%	50.0%
Sun & sea	–	50.0%	16.7%	33.3%
Nautical tourism (cruises)	–	66.7%	33.3%	–

rounds. The first round is comprised of open-end questions, to increase comprehensiveness and provide sound interpretation of the data, respondents answers were analyzed by all the authors of the study.

For the analysis of the quantitative data, which correspond to the data of the second and third rounds, descriptive statistical analysis was performed.

It is expected that at the end of the process of collecting and analyzing the data, we can reach a consensus on the potential of Porto to attract bleisure tourists as well as the strategies that must be undertaken to better address current weaknesses.

Results and discussion

Strategic tourism products in Porto

Table 1 summarizes experts' opinions concerning the main tourist products in Porto. Experts classified city breaks, gastronomy & wine, cultural and landscape touring as consolidated products. The consolidation attributed to city breaks drifts from the overall attractiveness of the city, highly promoted over the last years through its cultural and historical heritage, UNESCO classification, proximity to an international airport and marketing campaigns. As a result, Porto has gained more and more recognition and awards such as the European Best Destination in 2012, 2014 and 2017.

The consolidation classification assigned to gastronomy & wine, to cultural and landscape touring is related to the opportunities that exist beyond the city of Porto. Actually, apart from typical Porto restaurants and urban landscape the whole Northern region has a wider range of gastronomy richness, wine experiences and touring opportunities. This regional context is, indeed, an important opportunity to enhance Porto attractiveness.

Business tourism was considered by stakeholders, simultaneously, a consolidated and an emerging tourist product. Statistics show that Porto has reached a relevant position in the ICCA rankings and has established its position in this market segment by demonstrating a constant increase in the number of meetings throughout the last two decades (ICCA, 2019). For this increasing relevance of the city of Porto in attracting events the conference and event

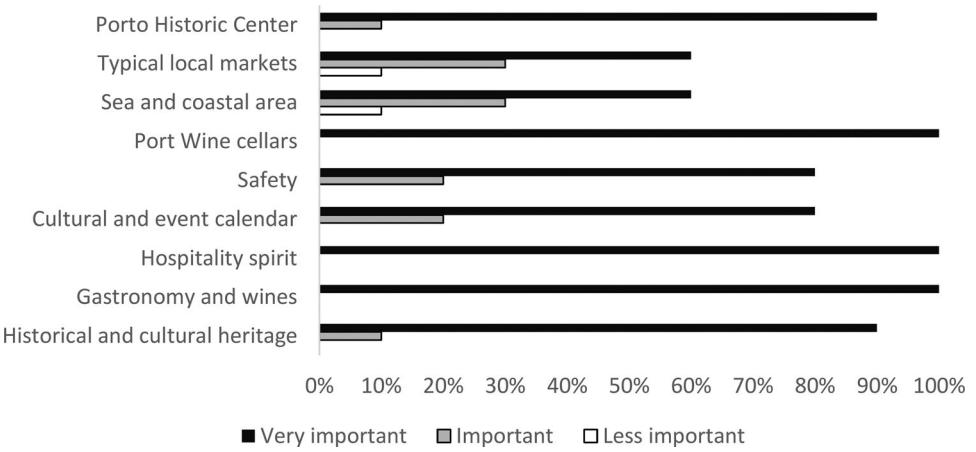


Figure 1. Strategic tourism assets for Porto.

venue known as Alfândega Porto Convention Center, with 10,000 m^2 available for exhibitions, was essential. The Alfândega Convention Center has been recognized both nationally and internationally with the awarding of several prizes – the International Association of Professional Convention Organizers; 'Best Convention Center' in 2006, 2011–2013 and 2015 by the Gala de Eventos/Expo Eventos; 'Best Convention Venue' in 2013 and 2014 by the Publituris Portugal Travel Awards; 'Best National Supplier' in 2015 and 'Europe's Best Meetings & Conference Center' in 2014, 2015 and 2017 by the Business Destinations. Although, Porto reached an important position in the ICCA ranking (22nd position worldwide) experts believe there is still potential for growth. This belief is related to the recently renovated venue – The Super Bock Arena, Rosa Mota Pavilion, that has become the largest event space in the city, comprising a capacity to host business events up to 8000 people.

The sun and sea that Porto has to offer is seen by respondents as an emergent product with potential to growth. The same happens with nautical tourism, essentially cruises, that could be further developed.

These findings reinforce the data presented in the Expedia study, which indicates that 56% of bleisure travelers tend to place more value on local cuisine/local restaurants, 52% like to go to beaches and 49% of them enjoy historical monuments/sightseeing (Expedia, 2018).

Strategic assets on offer to business travelers

Figure 1 presents the level of importance assigned to strategic leisure assets that Porto has to offer to business travelers. All experts who were queried identified the Port wine cellars, the hospitality of the people of Porto and the gastronomy & wines as the assets most important to make business

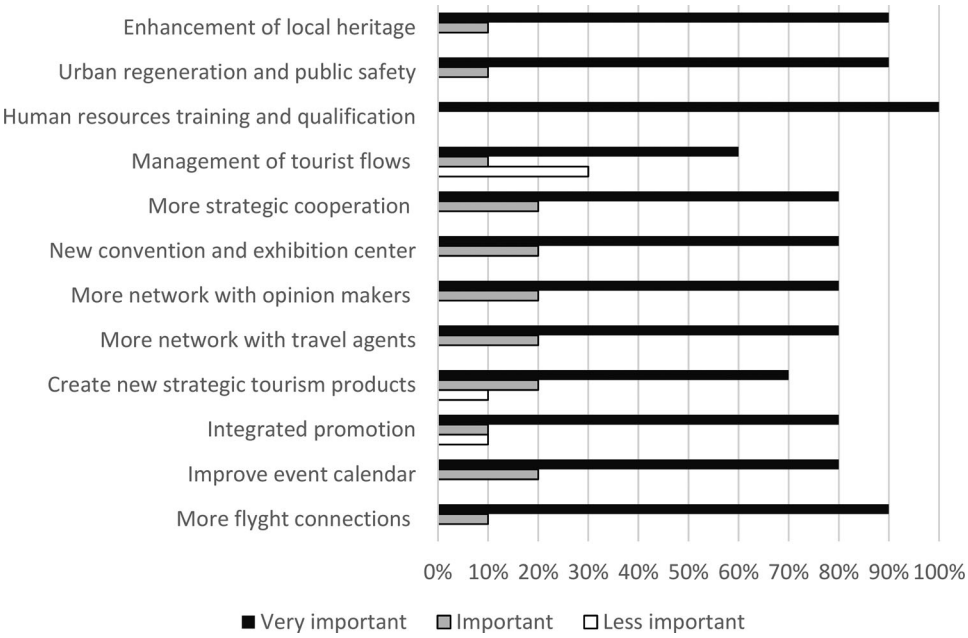


Figure 2. Actions to improve the interface between business and leisure tourism.

travelers extend their stay in the city beyond professional obligations. The Porto historic center as well as historical and cultural heritage was considered very important by most of the stakeholders followed by safety and cultural & event calendar. In fact, wine cellars and the historic city center (UNESCO classified heritage) can be seen as iconic tourist attractions in Porto. These assets were also recognized as important by Expedia. Accordingly, 39% of bleisure travelers look for iconic/bucket list/must visit places and 43% said that these aspects can actually lead them to extend their stay (Expedia, 2018). Finally, the typical local markets and the sea & coastal areas were considered very important assets for around 60% of respondents, important for 30% of experts while the rest found these assets less important.

Actions to improve bleisure tourism

Figure 2 identifies the main actions proposed to enhance bleisure tourism potential. All stakeholders pointed the need to increase human resources training and qualification. Improving service delivery in a professional way coupled with the hospitality that is inherent to local citizens can become a differentiating element of Porto and, consequently, an important competitiveness factor. Enhancement of local heritage as well as urban regeneration and public safety and also increasing the number of flight connection were three actions that almost all experts identified as being very important areas of concern. The relevance of air connections was previously recognized by

Table 2. Tourism offer to attract Millennials business travelers.

	Consolidated	Emerging	Complementary	Without expression/ Need development
Nightlife	92%	8%	–	–
Independent hotels with personalized and customer-centric services and that foster relation with the local community	40.0%	60.0%	–	–
Offer packages to showcase off-site leisure facilities in the neighbourhood/surrounding	86.5%	13.5%	–	–

Expedia – on an annual average, about 29% of bleisure travels are international (Expedia, 2018).

Four-fifths of respondents pointed as very important the need to increase strategic cooperation and an integrated promotion, the creation of new convention and exhibition centers, promote more networks with opinion makers and with travel agents and improve events calendar.

The management of tourist flows was the measure considered less consensual among the experts queried. It is worth considering this result especially in the Covid-19 pandemic phase currently unfolding. About one third of respondents consider relieving tourist massification a less important action to follow. Thus, some experts seem to be uncomfortable with the idea of redirecting tourists' flows to surrounding areas of Porto.

Services to attract millennials business travelers to Porto

Table 2 summarizes the main service supply that tourism experts suggested to increase Porto attractiveness, particularly for Millennials. The experts queried gave a strong emphasis to accommodation supply. They seem to be aware of the new generations' wants and needs. Since Millennials are experiential and want to meet people, an interesting and dynamic nightlife allows social engagement and satisfies these requirements. In this regard, stakeholders were almost unanimous in considering that Porto has a consolidated nightlife. This is reinforced by the Expedia study which indicates that 48% of business travelers extend their stay for bleisure because of the city's entertainment/activity (Expedia, 2018).

With regard to accommodation, Millennials seek customized experiences, personalized and customer-centric services. According to Expedia (2018), 32% of bleisure budget is allocated to accommodation. They prefer independent hotels instead of big hotel chains, located in hip and vibrant neighborhoods that reflect local culture. Smaller hotels can increase the self-esteem of Millennials by giving them more attention. In this regard, most of the experts queried believed this service is still emerging. However, given the innate hospitality of the Portuguese in general and the people of Porto in particular this service will certainly reach the consolidation classification stage very soon. Finally, experts recognize that convenience is a key factor

for business traveler lack of time. To that end, hotels should promote activities and sights in the surrounding locations. According to the majority of respondents' perception, this offer has yet to be consolidated.

Conclusions

The study presented here explores tourism experts' opinions concerning the capacity that the city of Porto has in enhancing the development of bleisure tourism as well as the strategies that should be developed to boost its development. The findings give more insight into the scarce body of knowledge regarding this topic and contributes to better understanding how destinations can take advantage of this sector, which kind of touristic assets can be valued and which specific destination attributes should be considered. The main goal is to provide valued tourism experiences, based on specific services together with complementary activities to lead business travelers to spend more in leisure activities and contribute to fair distribution of the economic impact in local communities. In this regard, Porto has an advantage since the city has achieved a very favorable image as a leisure and business destination. Thus, tourism policies should be directed to make the most of both segments, to merge them into one and thus take advantages of available synergies. This match between country image and tourism potential provides tourism practitioners with strategic advantage to get the attention of business travelers and business events promoters. The findings of this study suggest that experts are aware of the opportunities that the city has to boost the bleisure tourism segment. Moreover, Portuguese experts opinion are in accordance with the conclusions drawn by Expedia (2018). Unique cuisine and good wines as well as the Porto historical center and people's hospitality were the city's assets identified by stakeholders as very favorable for bleisure tourism development. These factors have been identified elsewhere (Economist, 2019; Expedia, 2018) as being decisive for business travelers to extend their stay for additional leisure activities. Therefore and according to the experience economy theory, Porto has the potential to offer esthetic and entertainment experience to bleisure tourists. Our findings also identify actions that should enhance bleisure tourism, namely, improving human resource qualification, increasing flights connections, enhancing local heritage and urban regeneration as well as fostering greater and better collaboration between stakeholders in the tourism sector. In this regard, DMO and event's organizers should act together to encourage extra spending by business travelers in line with the experience chain model. As concluded elsewhere (Chung et al., 2020), a bleisure marketing scheme should promote local business, develop ancillary programs, facilitate access to local business and share the value and profit with stakeholders.

Finally, the experts of this study seem to be aware of the changes that the new generation of business travelers will impose in the tourism sector, mainly in accommodation. Hoteliers need to act in accordance with millennial mindset by adapting their offer to the changing nature of this generation.

Nonetheless, the findings of this study should be read bearing the limitations on the available research An inevitable drawback of this study is its online qualitative approach. Although some authors considered qualitative research as conceptually and methodologically weak approaches, qualitative online approach has abounded in tourism literature (Pahlevan-Sharif et al., 2019; Xiao & Smith, 2006). Moreover, we used a Delphi technique that we acknowledge as having some limitations, namely, the definition of a correct panel expert, the best way to present feedback or even the sample size limitations. However, evidence suggests that reliable outcomes can be obtained from a Delphi panel consisting of a relatively small number of experts selected via strict inclusive criteria (Akins, Tolson, & Cole, 2005). It is our contention that these drawbacks are overcome by the contribution of this study.

Overall, our findings suggest that the city of Porto holds a great potential for bleisure tourism. Based on its favorable destination image either as business tourism destination and leisure destination, the city meets all conditions to explore and increase the bleisure tourism segment. This is even more important nowadays due to the significant reduction in the volume of trade that the tourism industry is suffering due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the measures introduced to contain its spread. The impact of the crisis extends to the entire tourism ecosystem. The coming times will be difficult given the sharp drop in business trips for economic reasons, for health precautions and the massive adherence to videoconferences. Bleisure tourism has never been as important as nowadays.

The conclusions drawn from the case of Porto give us a context that can be applied to other destinations: the development of bleisure in cities should be developed based on the valuation of specific services (venues, accommodation, support services), local tourist resources (natural resources, culture, heritage), accessibility and connection to the world (especially through air connections), hospitality (qualified technical human resources but also the hospitality provided by the local population) and the promotion and marketing strategies of the destination. All of these in articulation and joint way among local stakeholders.

Disclosure statement

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