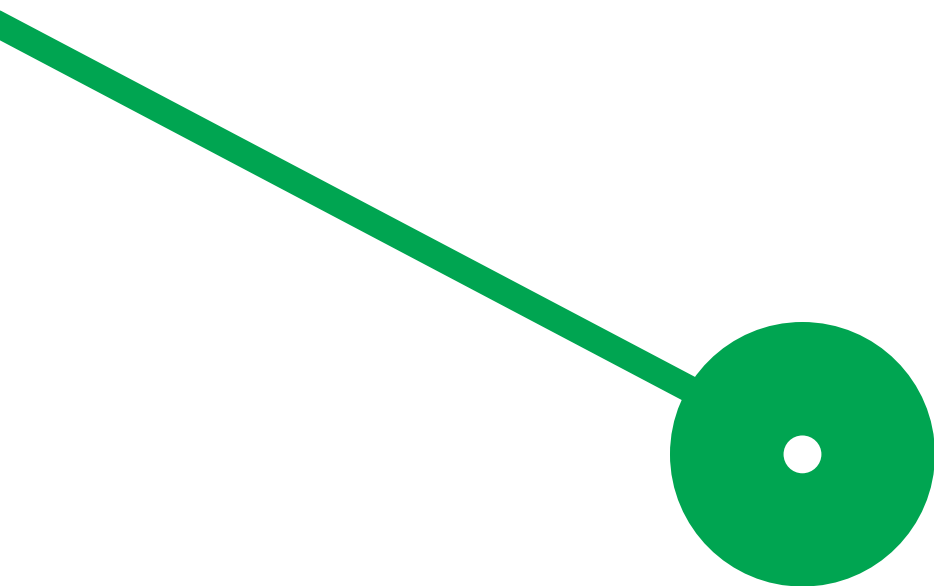




Business tourism in Porto from the perspective of local hotels and travel agencies

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Dissertação de Mestrado
Mestrado em Gestão do Turismo

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Vila do Conde, dezembro de 2025

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RESUMO ANALÍTICO

Nas últimas décadas, os negócios tornaram-se motivos importantes para viajar, participar em eventos e congressos em cidades de destino e despertar o interesse de investigadores de diferentes disciplinas. No entanto, um dos desafios atuais na investigação académica e na indústria do turismo de negócios é o desenvolvimento conceptual relacionado com a opinião dos hotéis e agências de viagens locais sobre o turismo de negócios.

Esta dissertação tem como objetivo analisar o perfil e o padrão comportamental dos viajantes de negócios na perspetiva dos hotéis e agências de viagens locais, bem como a trajetória de evolução do turismo de negócios em Portugal, mais especificamente, no Porto. O principal objetivo deste trabalho é explorar a importância do turismo de negócios no Porto na perspetiva dos hotéis e agências de viagens locais.

Para atingir este objetivo, é utilizada uma metodologia de abordagem qualitativa, recorrendo a entrevistas semiestruturadas. Nas principais conclusões, é possível destacar as opiniões que confirmam as ideias da investigação anterior, ao mesmo tempo que se sugerem alguns novos pontos de vista.

As principais limitações destacadas no presente estudo dizem respeito à fonte limitada de estudos na área, a nível nacional e internacional, e à dificuldade em encontrar entrevistados disponíveis na área das agências de viagens na cidade do Porto.

Palavras-chave: turismo de negócios; Porto; hotéis; agências de viagens; *bleisure*.

ABSTRACT

In recent decades, business has become an important reason for travelling, assisting in the events and congresses in destinations cities and enticing the interest of researchers from different disciplines. However, one of the current challenges in academic research and in the business tourism industry is the conceptual development related to the opinion of local hotels and travel agencies about business tourism.

This dissertation aims to analyze the profile and behavioral pattern of business travelers from the perspective of local hotels and travel agencies, also the evolution path of business tourism in Portugal and more specifically in Porto. The main goal of this work is to explore the importance of business tourism in Porto from the perspective of local hotels and travel agencies.

In order to meet this objective, a qualitative approach methodology is used, using semi-structured interviews. In the main conclusions, it is possible to highlight the opinions which confirm the ideas of the previous research, while suggesting some new points of view.

The main limitations highlighted in the present study relate to the limited source of studies in the area, nationally and internationally, and the difficulty in finding the available interviewees in travel agencies from the Porto city area.

Keywords: business tourism; Porto; hotels; travel agencies; bleisure.

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0. INTRODUCTION

This dissertation was developed in the scope of the Master's Degree in Tourism Management at the School of Hospitality and Tourism of the Polytechnic Institute of Porto.

The general objective of this study is to explore the importance of business tourism in Porto city from the perspective of local hotels and travel agencies. This dissertation intends to be an impulse for the development of further studies in this sector, which are still few. The choice for this theme arises from the fact that although it is a sensitive area that is increasingly developing these days, there are not too many studies from the perspective of hotels and travel agencies as tourism businesses. In recent decades, business tourism has become an important motive for attracting the interest of researchers from different disciplines. Although business tourism seems like a new concept of this era, it is considered as one of two main motivations for travel (Davidson & Cope, 2003). Tourism plays a key role in economic development, being one of the largest sectors worldwide in terms of turnover and revenue. Consequently, business tourism is considered a strategic product that can be considered as an independent or a complementary of leisure tourism.

Regarding the structure of the dissertation, it is divided into 6 chapters.

The first chapter historically contextualizes the evolution, the concept, importance and the strategies for developing business tourism.

The second chapter focuses on business tourism in Portugal, and then more specifically business tourism in Porto. The third chapter deals with the concept of bleisure (business and leisure tourism) which is considered a new part of business tourism.

In the fourth and fifth chapters, the research objectives, methods, data analysis and discussion of results are presented. Finally, the conclusion follows the most relevant final conclusions of the study, and its limitations and suggestions for future research in the area are presented.

1. BUSINESS TOURISM

1.1. History of business tourism

In 1990, in the movie *Pretty Woman*, when the streetwalker character played by Julia Roberts asks Richard Gere character, “So, what brings you to Los Angeles – Business or Pleasure?” she briefly mentioned the two main motivations travelling these days (Davidson & Cope, 2003).

With the Age of the Discoveries, triggered by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century, new maritime trade routes were implemented, especially with the discovery of the sea route to India, contributing to enhance mercantilism in Europe. Piracy (done by English, Dutch and French sailors, among others) although illegal, was also linked to the business activity with strong impacts on the commercial activity of that time. Also, colonization, the slave trade, the spread of religion, the scientific expeditions (Lewis and Clark in the United States, Livingstone in Africa, Darwin and the Beagle voyage, among many others), the Gold Rush in the nineteenth century, can be presented, among others, as travel motivated by business and professional reasons, increasing and developing communications and business networks which, in turn, boosted the business travel market, that needed infrastructure and appropriate support services.

From the beginning of industrialization, business travel increased significantly, namely in Europe. Between 1750 and 1900 three main reasons contributed on a large scale for this situation:

- 1) the Industrial Revolution, which had its beginnings in the UK and quickly spread to the rest of Europe, resulting in a substantial growth in the production of goods that had to be sold, distributed and transported. As a result, the first “salespeople” were born, which meant (and still means today) they were often travelling for business.

- 2) Colonization in Africa, Middle East and Asia, from European countries, which lead to changing the location of people and goods to the colonized countries.

- 3) Transport system development, especially with the development of the automobile (and road network) and rail transport, allowing people to travel longer distances more quickly and more frequently. In this context, the industrial progress of nations, driven by all the reasons just stated, is inseparable from the technique and technological improvements. This diffusion process has different forms (trade fairs,

conferences, congresses, workshops, etc.) in different scales (local, regional, national, international, world) (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001).

Marques & Santos (2017) talked about the first Universal Exposition (EXPO) which was held in London in 1851, the importance of these types of mega events that lead to immense investments in structure and equipment. The EXPO98 also was mentioned in their article, which was held in Portugal with theme of “The oceans, a Heritage for Future” celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Portuguese Discoveries. It resulted in large investments in construction, equipment and recreational areas in Lisbon city, which is still active, being used and known as the Park of Nations. It is also mentioned that participation in events in business tourism category.

At the end of nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth century, a new era in business tourism was born, specifically in the US where the concept of conference and convention began to appear. Industrial, commercial and scientific associations, beside politics, started to organize meetings on a large scale. The growth of such events attracted the attention of potential destinations able to host such meetings for the economic and social benefits they represented. As a result, cities began to improve their resources and attractiveness to host the largest possible number of events. They also talked about the Olympic Games held every two years, Summer Olympics and Winter Olympics, which involve direct participation of thousands of athletes from hundreds of countries which are accommodated in Olympic villages. Although Olympic villages have a very intensive use in time, the planning and development of these areas should consider its future uses in the post event. Because of the large number of participants that an event can bring to the city, cities begin to try to define together the top positions in a global hierarchy of leadership and image that precisely leads to the creation of professional structures capable of continuous monitoring in foreign affairs, image promotion and attractiveness, thus attracting investment.

These days Business Tourism has an important economic role in local and regional economies and relates to a tourism sector with great potential for development. The low seasonality, the controlled environmental impact, the higher income for accommodation and meeting venues, the high demand for food and beverages (lunches, gala dinners, coffee breaks, etc.), the growth in leisure activities, are some of the principal elements that make business Tourism so attractive to

destinations (Swarbrooke & Horner 2001). 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 goes beyond their expectations (Marques & Santos, 2016).

Corporate trips may have become more frequent over the years, because of the increasingly globalized business landscape. Millions of businesses trips are made each year (Finances Online, 2024).

Communication and interaction between people who work and live in widely different places is a need for work organizations. As a result, business travel has been increasing considerably over the last few decades (Gustafson, 2012).

1.2. The concept of business tourism

Business tourism is a type of tourism activity in which visitors travel for a specific professional and/or business purpose to a place outside their workplace and residence with the aim of attending a meeting, an activity or an event. The key components of business tourism are meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions. The term “meetings industry” within the context of business tourism recognizes the industrial nature of such activities. Business tourism can be combined with any other tourism type during the same trip.” (UNWTO, 2025)

Business travel is classified as individual business travel’ or ‘business tourism’. Individual business travel includes regular and necessary base trips so that an individual can perform the tasks or activities based on his or her profession, such as travelling to the place to solve a problem (e.g. computer engineers who travel to solve a problem at a branch of the main company). These trips are mostly done alone and individually, and the destination is not changeable. Business tourism includes meetings, exhibitions, incentive trips and corporate hospitality. The choices of the venues for such events are often flexible and associated with group travel (e.g. a group of university teachers travelling to attend a conference) (Davidson & Cope, 2003).

Business travel at the company level is divided into two distinguished categories: internal and external corporate movements. The first refers to business travel by employees within a company as they travel between places across the firm’s physical network of operational locations. The other category in contrast is considered

with company-level mobility between companies (which are generally clients, suppliers or subsidiaries) (Jones, 2013).

Business tourism or the meeting industry (terms we will use interchangeably hereinafter) is a form of tourism for commercial, governmental and/or educational purposes with the recreational (leisure) part as a secondary motivation. It is commonly known that the duration of the stay in the destination is extended longer than the duration of the business event/professional needs for the visitor to visit the region and its attractions. Moreover, business tourism reduces the typical seasonality of leisure tourism by extending the tourism season and improving the occupancy rate of the accommodation sector. Besides, there is a possibility that the tourist wants to return to the destination where the event took place for leisure reasons. So, the business tourism segment is not only an alternative to leisure tourism but also a complement: it forms the image of a destination and, as such, has a multiplicative effect on economic and social components of the destination. In other words, the low seasonality, the higher revenue of accommodation and meeting venues, the high demand for food and beverage, the growth in leisure tourism and the controlled environmental impact and the relative resilience to economic crises are factors that make business tourism so attractive to destinations (Pinho & Marques, 2020).

According to Nicula and Elena (2014, page 1) “Business tourism is a form of tourism for commercial, governmental or educational purposes, with the recreational (leisure) part as a secondary motivation. There are many kinds of business tourism: individual trips, group trips, displacements at events (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, Exhibitions (MICE), team building and training trips.”

Carvalho et al. (2018) identified ‘controllable’ and ‘uncontrollable’ factors for business tourism destinations. In the uncontrollable factors, they mentioned climate and natural disasters, natural environment, physical, cultural and linguistic distance, physical environment building (architecture, buildings and historical monuments), size of the destination and cultural elements. As controllable factors they identified monetary vacation costs, accessibility, accommodation and meeting equipment, country’s information, dynamism of leisure tourism, urban, commercial and economic regeneration, security, opportunities for cultural and recreation activities, degree of financial and trade opening, dynamism of industry, trade and services, hospitality

facilities and local infrastructures. Regarding Hankinson (2005) there are eight categories for brand images related to a business tourist perspective: physical environment, economic activity, business tourism facilities, accessibility, social facilities, reputation, people's characteristics and destination size. Business travelers prefer flag airlines connection and prefer flying with an airline in accordance with the "time is money" proverb in the business world. Still, air congestion at the airport or frequent delays may deter business tourists from travelling and as previously mentioned, accessibility is a key determinant and a brand image attribute of a business tourism destination (Nicula and Elena, 2014; Hankinson, 2005).

According to Lichy and McLeay (2018) there are studies mostly about travelers with initial business tourism motivations but ending with non-business activities. These travelers combine tourism with professional obligations, blurring the lines between business travel and leisure activities during their business trip. They did a four-phase multi-method qualitative research and according to their findings, there are five types of travelers based on their interests and motivations as business travelers:

1. **Experiential learner:** who is often a young manager or early career researcher.
2. **Escaper:** a person who is looking for autonomy.
3. **Working vacationer:** holiday maker, a person who looks to take advantage of the opportunity to combine work and pleasure, while still respecting his professional obligations.
4. **Altruistic knowledge sharer:** senior academics, eager to share knowledge while travelling.
5. **Research-active trailblazer:** career builder. A person who seeks professional job development by publishing research in ranked journals.

Business events have been changed into a combination of activities. In the past, business events were categorized as meetings, markets, exhibitions, and incentive travel. Nowadays, however, business events can be activities related to a specific goal to develop an industry, economic development or tourism outcomes for a host city or region (Colombo & Marques, 2020).

1.3.Importance of business tourism

Business tourists often extend their stay beyond the business event to explore the place and its attractions, returning as individual tourists or recommending destinations to their circle of influence (friends, family, professional network). To have these benefits, it is important to provide an excellent service that goes beyond visitors' expectations (Marques & Santos, 2017b). Apart from business tourism destination assigning conferences' venues, business hotels and transportation systems, complementary activities like leisure or recreation activities are also highly valued by business travelers (Pinho & Marques, 2020).

Nicula and Elena (2014) talk about the growth of the business tourism market in the contemporary economy.

According to Alananzeh et al. (2019), destination attractiveness and competitive advantages are important not only for business tourists (events' attendees) but also for investors and buyers of business events such as associations, corporations and public organizations.

Stakeholders can have a positive or negative impact on destination promotion (Tahar & al., 2020). It is fundamental that a country with a good image as business tourism destination takes advantage of that position to create harmonies, by improving local business or global business (Marques& Pinho, 2021).

Participating in the conferences as one of the types of business tourism is discussed as follows: making a city more attractive to tourists seems to coordinate with its attractiveness as an international conference site, some destination elements cannot be changed, such as heritage sites, while others may vary somewhat during time, although slowly. This shows that long-term strategies are needed to affect the conference profile of a city. Such strategies most likely need close collaboration between conference organizers and policymakers over several years, but it might be more efficient if a larger number of cities than those already overcrowded with leisure tourists could become attractive conference venues. In addition, those cities that already perform far beyond their desirable number of conferences may have to consider more specific specialization or upgrade in quality instead of continuing to increase the actual number of (mainstream) conferences (Falk & Hagsten, 2018).

Falk and Hagsten (2018) believe that cultural offerings (top museums, world heritage sites), knowledge intensity (highly ranked universities) as well as the presence of FDI inflows (Foreign Direct Investment) in accommodation and size of the city are the most important factors for both becoming a conference host and for the number of meetings held. An airport nearby and sea border is only significant for the probability of hosting a conference (or a few) and global networks are not, in themselves, attractive enough, even though cities hosting international organizations have the highest number of conferences. So, the results show that cities with characteristics that attract visitors in general are also attractive to international meetings, especially if the city is knowledge intensive (with leading universities and FDI inflows (Foreign Direct Investment)). A comparison of the meeting potential, measured as the predicted number with the number of actual events, shows that among large cities, Copenhagen, Edinburgh, Lisbon, Porto and Munich receive many more meetings than their destination attributes indicate.

This efficiency could relate to unmeasured factors such as conference support infrastructures, the availability of suitable conference venues and so on or simply historical factors. Several destination factors cannot be changed at all, like heritage sites, while others may vary somewhat over time, although slowly. This shows that long-term strategies are needed to affect the conference profile of a city.

The Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), and more specifically the Conventions & Visitors Bureaus (CVB), play an important role in the supply structure related to the territory and in the management, planning and development of tourism destinations, especially those which want to assert themselves as successful Business Tourism destinations (Marques & Santos, 2016).

This form of tourism may be more sustainable than other types of tourism because it is non-seasonal and creates employment throughout the year. Business tourism is also a driver for the revitalization of a destination because it attracts capital, thereby helping to improve infrastructure and overall development. The principle of multidimensionality (systematicity) of commercial tourism in planning leads to the realization of principles such as balance, coordination, increased promotion and efficiency, correlation, universality, causality, hierarchy and order, the neglect of which

causes numerous problems. With proper and principled planning, one can contribute to the social, economic and physical progress of the city (Farajirad & Al., 2017).

Among the most important effects of business tourism are economic effects. As a result of the arrival of tourists to different geographical locations, there will be various economic effects on employment, income, and other economic aspects. This requires macroeconomic policies at the global level regarding tourism, which will make tourism a global issue (Sugiyarto et Al., 2003).

Business tourism can be a factor in economic progress for communities and countries that do not have a favorable economic situation and face little income and employment, and do not have sufficient resources to achieve development. Many countries consider this dynamic industry as a major source of income, employment, private sector growth, and infrastructure development (Hajinejad et Al., 2011).

One of the important parts of tourism industry is business tourism, which is booming in various areas, especially cities with suitable commercial locations. Business tourism and its impact on cities reveals itself in various forms and causes various economic changes in cities and other tourist-friendly areas (Hajinejad et Al., 2011).

Business tourism involves a variety of activities that range from the specific equipment and structures, such as conference and exhibition centers, meeting rooms, accommodation, catering and transport, to complementary activities related to cultural and sporting activities, small and large commerce, among others. Therefore, various agents of destinations (public, private and public-private) have dedicated themselves to this market, especially because this segment is very related to the destination management and development processes, planning and definition of the tourism destination policy and this makes their presence a factor of competitiveness and sustainability. In addition, 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, without considering their size, may be of great importance for the development and strategic positioning of the territories along this segment. The presence of a CVB (Convention & Visitors Bureaus) in Business Tourism destinations is very important as it is considered like a presence of an organizational structure which is specialized in the management of resources associated with the territory and in the development and promotion of the

destination's image within this specific segment, trying to attract not only more meetings, conferences and other events, but also the largest possible number of visitors. Even more, the interaction and cooperation with the different stakeholders, the local communities and the influences of the environment contribute to the sustainability and economic and social development of the regions. Business Tourism has much potential, not only in big urban areas and large-scale contexts, but also in territories with lower urban density and lower supply of facilities and services, especially in the case of smaller urban centers that are relatively near each other and may find interesting strategic advantages in joint action, in complementing each other in the integrated supply of tourism products, experiences, services and facilities (Marques & Santos, 2017).

Many Mediterranean tourism destinations are now expected to enter a declining phase which will convert them into less competitive destinations, so it becomes very important for these countries to develop new tourism segments to prevent the losses expected in the traditional tourism segment of leisure. The business tourism segment is a possibility that has received growing interest from many tourism managers and has achieved significant growth in recent years. In their study of 2021, Pinho & Marques found barriers that affect business tourism development in Porto: functional conditioning (business tourism facilities) and management conditioning (individualized rather than cooperative management among tourist agents and insufficient external promotion).

Pyka (2021) talks about the importance of the meetings and events sector in the concept of current global challenges. He also defines the meetings and event sector as a driver to transform an industrial agglomeration into a modern metropolitan.

According to Getz (2008), there has been more interest in business events in tourism, given that all major cities now have impressive convention and exhibition facilities.

1.4.Strategies for developing business tourism

These days there are significant investments in infrastructure, more specifically for the meetings industry, either by building new equipment, or through the conversion

of degraded or poorly explored buildings that are new ways for optimization and profitability in this area. Moreover, the existence of CVBs (Convention & Visitors Bureaus) in destinations that wish to develop Business Tourism should be an important factor to value, due to skilled and qualified contribution to destination management and to the specialized action they represent in the attraction and management of events. In the Portuguese case, for instance, the tourism planning and development policies identify the need to invest in 1 or 2 mega events per decade to contribute to the valuation of the tourism offer, the prediction and the image of the destination. It was the case with the hosting of the UEFA 2004 European Championship and EXPO 98. These policies also highlight the need to organize and promote a national events calendar, composed of 10 to 12 large internationally renowned events, as was the case of the Lisbon-Dakar Rally, the Portugal's Moto GP Grand Prix, the Portugal's Golf Masters, the MTV European Music Awards, the UEFA Champions League Final, the Rotary International Convention, the Web Summit, among others, that contributed to strengthen the value proposition and the destination's brand image.

The major international conferences are part of this strategy precisely because they bring to Portugal many international visitors and contribute to the international image of the destination, thus enabling different scales, from few hundred to many thousands of participants. On the other hand, carrying out mega and major events, related to culture, music and sport, for instance, will also help to increase the tourism offer associated with the destination and to enhance the tourism experience of the business visitors. In addition, the development and performance of CVBs (Convention & Visitors Bureaus) maximize the territories where they are located as Business Tourism destinations. This promotes not only the specific factors related to this segment but also the characteristics associated with the leisure components the destinations must offer to increase destination attractiveness and to enhance the tourism experience (Marques & Santos, 2017).

There are many factors that influence the success of business tourism destinations.

These factors are divided into seven basic factors (Haven-Tang & Al., 2007):

- **Leadership:** Leadership is essential to have an idea of business tourism and a strategy to reach it

- **Networking:** destinations can have clients via destination networks.
- **Branding:** it is important to improve national and regional capital city status in external branding.
- **Skills:** appropriate skills support high quality products and services.
- **Ambassadors:** They can be essential to obtain business tourism for a destination.
- **Infrastructure:** Destination access and transport infrastructure are vital to business tourism success, especially for European and international markets.
- **Bidding:** “Market intelligence (e.g., through professional networks of counterparts in other destinations), product knowledge and identifying and researching potential business tourism clients are key aspects of bidding.”

Regarding Crouch and Ritchie (1997), necessary factors for convention site selection are as follows: accessibility, local support, extra-conference opportunities, accommodation facilities, meeting facilities, information and site environment, potential risks (related to possible strikes at destinations or natural disasters), profit opportunities, association image promotion (in case of association meetings) and destination novelty.

Table 1 - Indicators of the formation and development of business tourism

Component	Index
Environmental	Suitable climatic conditions, suitable green cover, proximity to maritime borders, proximity to commercial markets, and the presence of natural tourist attractions in the region.
Management planning	Government macro-agencies, specialized management, skilled human resources, incentive policies, security, citizen participation, recreational and tourism tours, government support, coordination of organizations, private organizations, reduction of transit restrictions, improvement of political relations, strengthening and increasing trade relations at various levels.
Welfare infrastructure	Road and sea transportation, infrastructure (water, electricity, telephone, gas, etc.), health and medical facilities, welfare services, shopping centers, parking, discounts (possibility of negotiating

	discounts in stores), customer service, availability of additional shopping facilities and amenities.
Advertising, Marketing and Communications	Access to virtual communication networks and appropriate internet bandwidth, new marketing methods, diversification of activities, the existence of tourist tours, the existence of tourist offices, access to a tourism database, media
Sociocultural	Tourist acceptance (cultural acceptance of tourism by the host community), customs and traditions of the host community, gaining a sense of trust from tourists, creating a collective memory among tourists, serving local food, local architecture, festivals, exhibitions, conferences and seminars.
Economic	The presence of suitable shopping centers, the appropriateness of business tourism costs, the presence of a strong private sector, remittances from international migrants, competitive conditions, favorable exchange rates, lower taxes, price advantages, a high variety of goods, the number and diversity of prominent local and international brands.

(Masoumi et al., 2020)

As the number of events increases, it is important for event managers, stakeholders and local tourism organizations to find new ways to make their events continuously successful among their rivals. There seems to be a need to have more creativity and strong investments in continuous innovation to keep attendees interested. When event managers know their target group motivations, they can serve better and according to the needs of their attendees. Observing motivation and satisfaction levels, event managers will get enough information to guarantee that their target group's needs will be satisfied, and their expectations will be met (Colombo and Marques, 2020).

The Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) has an important role to play in a destination that intends to develop business tourism. Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) has been known as a dominant factor that needs to be valued not only because of their specialization and qualification in managing business tourism offers and in attracting and arranging business events but also because they lure the events to the destination, increasing the number of visitors and trying to make the most of their tourist experience and overall satisfaction. Both CVB (Convention and Visitors Bureau)

and CB (Convention Bureau) have been said to have a similar function, but their focus marketing might be different. CB (Convention Bureau) has more focus on attracting and managing business events while CVB (Convention and Visitors Bureau) may have wider area of activities like managing and developing overall tourist experience of visitors (Marques and Ribeiro, 2017).

Carvalho et al. (2018) discuss that revenues from business tourism operated by the Business Tourism Spending variable can be grown, in the short and long term, by private investment in fixed tourist capital and by foreign direct investment. Two specific groups of actors in the destinations may have interest in investing in this area:

- Firstly, economic agents, like companies in the tourism industry that should focus their investments on equipment that creates value along the tourism chain, particularly in the transport sector (buses, taxis and rent-a-car...), equipment for accommodation, meetings and catering (hotels and restaurants...) and equipment for entertainment and culture (bars, nightclubs, shops, sports facilities, amusement and theme parks, theatres and museums...).
- Secondly, policy makers (governments and local authorities), to increase the growth in the short and long run of business tourism revenues of the countries, which should develop policies that encourage private investment in fixed capital in the tourism industry, such as the creation of programs to support investment and licensing in the tourism industry. Also, foreign direct investment and the necessity to create the conditions for foreign investment by policy makers, such as tax and labor incentives for businesses, and the creation of programs to support the investment of foreign companies.

It is not enough to invest only in fixed tourist assets also, it is necessary that the different economic agents, who create value along the tourism chain and policy makers, consider the quality of service provided in the destination as a strategic factor for the success of the industry. Because loyalty and the positive references are a result of the great quality of service provided and the satisfaction of business tourists, which is essential. Policy makers can develop important measures in supporting and financing the development of professional training in hospitality and tourism; and establishing marketing research mechanisms (e.g. conducting surveys in hotels or

Congress centers) that allow a better understanding of tourists' needs and evaluate their destination satisfaction (Carvalho et al., 2018).

According to Lichy and McLeay (2018), there are many hotels and service suppliers that already know the importance of business tourism and provide motivations to business travelers to extend their trips for leisure-oriented purposes. However, many business-tourism-focused travel agencies do not suggest leisure activities to bleisure (business, leisure) tourists. As the majority of bleisure travelers have busier schedule in comparison to leisure travelers, it is essential to categorize them when needed: **Escapers** (People who look for autonomy) and **Working vacationers** (holiday makers, people who look for taking advantage of the opportunity to combine work and pleasure, while still respecting their professional obligations) should be targeted by service suppliers. On the other hand, **Experiential learner** (who are often young managers or early career researchers), **Altruistic knowledge sharer** (senior academics, eager to share knowledge while travelling) and **Research-active trailblazer** (career builder, a person who seeks professional job development by publishing research in ranked journals) need to have customized travel services. Lichy and McLeay (2018) believe that a better knowing of needs and desires of bleisure travelers help service suppliers to customize specialist travel services easier.

2. BUSINESS TOURISM IN PORTUGAL

Tourism has been an important factor of Portuguese economic growth principally because of its important influence in the trade balance (Pinho & Marques, 2021). In a country like Portugal, tourism is a socio-economic part of relevance given the country's tourism potential (beaches, museums, history, nature, wines, regional products, culture, among others), with a consequent vast offer (Fernandes & Al., 2023). Portugal is well positioned according to the value for the originality and mid-range capacity for hosting conferences and events (Marques & Pinho, 2021).

Portugal's Tourism Authority (National Tourism Authority integrated in the Ministry of Economy) has launched a digital platform – “Meeting in Portugal Platform”, whose aim is to develop the country as a destination of choice for events and

conferences, with a special focus on the international market and the corporate market (Pinho& Marques, 2020).

The northern region of Portugal is a very various region, which makes available to those who visit a wide variety of tourist products, ranging from the beach to the mountains, passing by the thermal resorts, even more rural tourism, which has had an important growth lately. It is a region that offers a wide range of tourism supplies available to the tourists, in context of resources and tourist products (Fernandes & Al., 2023).

Marques & Santos (2016) carried out a Delphi study about business tourism in the central region of Portugal, in which the interviewees all agreed on the importance of business tourism in the economic development of the territory, also highlighting the strategic advantages of business tourism and the potential that business tourism has.

Regarding the response of the interviewees about business tourism's advantages and its potential, the answers were as below:

Advantages:

1. Decreasing seasonality through higher hotel occupancy rates
2. Investment and job creation
3. Longer duration of visitor spending in the destination
4. Lower environmental impact due to public transportation of group trips to venues
5. Increasing leisure tourism by using complementary leisure activities by business tourists
6. Developing meetings industry and, consequently, business tourism

Specific characteristics that may improve the development of business tourism:

1. The existence of important industrial areas.
2. The existence of important universities
3. Geographical location and network access
4. The tourism richness and variety of the region
5. The existence of proper facilities and venues.

Business tourism's importance is reflected especially in hotel supply, given that in periods of low season it helps hotels improve room occupancy rate.

Also, regarding the identification of the means to improve business tourism, we have:

1. The need for re-qualification and creating new venues for conferences

2. Upgrading and developing the hotel industry
3. Wider distribution and promotion of the product related to the destination at national and international levels
4. Creation of partnerships/synergies between public and private agents
5. Emphasis on training specialized human resources to have a high quality and professional tourism service (Marques & Santos, 2016)

According to Martins et al. (2024) research on business hotels in Portugal, more than half of the hotels in Portugal can be considered as business hotels, as 54% of the total number of hotels has at least one meeting room. They also found out that 65.9% of Portuguese business hotels are in superior class: 49% are four-star and 16.9% five-star hotels. It indicated that business travelers prefer to receive a higher level of service quality during their stay at a destination. Also, according to the figures in their research, there is an increase in the number of four- and five-star hotels which shows a tendency in higher level business hotels' investments. Also, according to their findings, 67% of business hotels have at least one leisure facility, and 18.6% of business hotels have more than one leisure facility. On the other hand, 75% of non-business hotels do not have any leisure facilities. They also found that half of business hotels in Portugal have a gym or outdoor swimming pool as their leisure facility. They also indicated that most business hotels are in the Lisbon municipality (with 106 hotels) and in the Porto municipality (with 49 hotels).

2.1. Business tourism in Porto

Pinho & Marques (2021) found similar opinions as the previous researchers: Business tourism was defined as a strategic interest for the economic development of Porto and an important complement to leisure tourism. Participants in their research mentioned the privilege of Porto airport localization and its dynamics as a determinant of Porto's business tourism, given that business travelers are sensitive to access time to airports (Marcucci and Gatta, 2012).

According to Marques & Pinho (2021) Porto city has many strengths, including a dynamic business environment, proximity to the Spanish territory of Galicia, an airport,

scientific and technological development units, different tourist attractions and activities to improve business tourism packages, a good reputation as a leisure tourist destination, price competitiveness and friendly people. They believe that Porto has a good number of accommodations in the 4-star and 5-star hotel range (twenty-four 4-star hotels comprising 2591 rooms and seven 5-star hotels comprising 1305 rooms). They think that Porto has the advantage of having a reference conference and event venue – Alfândega do Porto Congress Centre, recognized nationally and internationally with the awarding of several prizes (Europe’s Best Meetings & Conference Centre in 2014 and 2015 by the Business Destinations; Best Congress Space in 2013 and 2014 by the Publituris Portugal Travel Awards; Best Congress Centre In 2006, 2011–2013 and 2015 by the Gala de Eventos/ExpoEventos; Best National Supplier by the International Association of Professional Congress Organizers). This venue has 10,000 m² available for exhibitions, a capacity for congresses of up to 3000 people, for dinners up to 1700 people and up to 12,000 people for concerts. Moreover, the Crystal Palace venue has the capacity to host business events with up to 8000 people. Conference venues are considered a new strategy to increase the city competitiveness as a business tourism destination.

There is the Porto and North Tourism Association, A.R.-- Porto Convention & Visitors Bureau (PCVB) which is a non-profit organization founded in 1995 by a group of institutions with an interest in the development of tourism in Porto and Northern Portugal. The aim of the association is to improve Porto and the North of Portugal as a tourist destination, to promote a prestigious image in the various international markets (PortoCVB, 2025).

Regarding the research of Marques & Pinho (2021), all respondents mentioned three reasons to attribute more importance to business tourism in Porto: combat seasonality, complementarity with leisure tourism and entrepreneurship and business network. They also determined that Porto and the northern region of Portugal have important tourism assets that can improve the business tourist experience, and they indicated the entrepreneurship and strong business network of the northern territory as one reason to justify the key role that should be given to the business tourism segment, especially in the corporate sector. Respondents emphasized the importance of increasing venues supply and accessibility through more direct and regular flights to

Porto. Providing more facilities was also mentioned as a strategy to gain national and international competitiveness.

The second intervention should be an improvement of promotion and sales of Porto as a business tourism destination. Even though Porto already has a CVB (Convention & Visitors Bureaus) whose purpose is, specifically, to improve marketing campaigns with local stakeholders, they highlighted the need to create a multidisciplinary sales team, suggesting the development of a professional organization exclusively dedicated to marketing and to attract international conferences. According to the respondents, it seems that the CVB (Convention & Visitors Bureaus) needs to improve its performance to be identified as efficient by local stakeholders.

The third area of intervention concerns local tourist animation companies: not only venues, accommodation, food & beverage and transport systems are important for business tourism in Porto. Leisure and tourism animation activities are also very important to increase destination attractiveness. In their research, they proved the importance of identifying strategies and policies to develop business tourism in Porto, especially at a time when conference and event organizers seem to change their destinations' selection. Moreover, they believe that there is a tendency to reduce the number of participants in associative meetings while the number of meetings held continues to increase. Therefore, the proposal put forward by participants regarding the need to invest in new and larger venues should be considered even more as this involves many financial resources and high cost in maintenance. For instance, instead of building new and larger congress centers, it will be more efficient to requalify existing venues, which was the context of Super Bock Arena – Rosa Mota Pavilion. This renewed venue has great potential for Porto capacity improvement. Thus, the overall services related to business tourism in general and to venue management in particular, airport logistics and hospitality management should be considered as more important strategic measures than the capacity level of the destination to hold larger business events. The organizations responsible for the development of business tourism in the city of Porto and tourism businesses need to work together. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that there is any collaboration within businesses in the area to develop Porto as a business tourism destination.

It is necessary that the CVB (Convention & Visitors Bureaus) take effective action in developing cooperation between stakeholders and to pressure local, regional and national authorities to develop concerted policies and branding strategies. Although, there is currently some business tourism promotion in the northern territory of Portugal promoted by the regional public tourism organization (Entidade Regional de Turismo Porto & Norte de Portugal), the regional tourism association (Associação de Turismo do Porto & Norte de Portugal) and municipalities or municipal tourism companies. It is, however, still necessary to structure this product in a more serious and collaborative way by including other services (venues, accommodation, catering, transport, tourist attractions, complementary activities, etc.) and the joint action of public and private agents.

As a business tourism destination, the city of Porto complements the offer of accommodation, venues and other tourist components for the Northern Region. In fact, the city of Porto acts as an anchor for the whole region. Over the last few years, important steps have been taken to strengthen Porto's brand and image, leading up to being selected by the European Consumers Choice as Best European Destination in 2012 and again as Best European Destination in 2014 and 2017 (Marques and Ribeiro, 2017).

There is a wide variety of entities associated with the Porto Convention & Visitors Bureau (PCVB) that are classified into different categories:

- Food and beverages.
- accommodation.
- congress centers and other event venues.
- wine cellars.
- Professional Conference Organizer (PCO).
- destination management companies (DMC);
- golf.
- transport.
- public administration, associations (industrial, commercial) and non-profit organizations;
- other services-- which include leisure spaces and facilities, commercial spaces and tourist attractions. (Marques and Ribeiro, 2017).

Marques and Ribeiro (2017) presented the potential for developing Business Tourism in Porto, which has competitive factors that deserve to be valued, especially because Porto has interesting strategic advantages in joining other areas that can complement each other in the structured offer of tourism products and support services and equipment.

Business Tourism is of great strategic interest for the tourist development of territories, especially those with specific tourist attractions. These attractions, combined with the venues on offer, regardless of their size, and the work of an entity responsible for structuring and managing the Meetings Industry offer, is important for promoting and strategic positioning of territories in this specific segment. To achieve it, the territories need to make more efforts to structure and upgrade the specific offer of the main support structures associated with this segment (venues, accommodation, restaurants, activities), especially in improving existing services and equipment, and, even more, better management of the territory's tourism resources and potential (publicizing and promoting the Business Tourism product; involving the different agents; boosting the complementary offer; qualifying human resources), which is essential to improve where CVB (Convention & Visitors Bureau) works.

This results from the need to improve cooperation between stakeholders and to put pressure on local, regional and national public authorities to develop planning and development strategies for tourism in this specific geographical area. Over the last few years, the city of Porto has grown in terms of the number of annual international association meetings. Still, one should also consider the development strategies that can help the city to become a very favorable destination for holding business events. The proximity of the Francisco Sá Carneiro international airport, with internationally recognized quality reflected in the award of prestigious distinctions by Airports Council International (in 2016 it was once again recognized by being awarded the distinction of best airport in Europe for structures between 5 and 15 million passengers), coupled with the distinction of the city of Porto as Best European Destination 2017 and the existence of venues of superior quality, place the city on a competitive level. The joint action of public and private entities and the articulated action of the ERT (Regional Tourism Entities) and the PCVB (Porto Convention & Visitors Bureau) may help to achieve this goal.

3. BLEISURE

According to Lichy and McLeay (2018), there are many hotels and service suppliers that already know the importance of business tourism and provide motivations for business travelers to extend their trips for leisure-oriented purposes. However, many business-tourism-focused travel agencies do not suggest leisure activities to bleisure (business, leisure) tourists. As the majority of bleisure travelers have busier schedules in comparison to leisure travelers, it is essential to categorize them when needed: **Escapers** (People who look for autonomy) and **Working vacationers** (holiday makers, people who look for taking advantage of the opportunity to combine work and pleasure, while still respecting their professional obligations) should be targeted by service suppliers. On the other hand, **Experiential learners** (who are often young managers or early career researchers), **Altruistic knowledge sharer** (senior academics, eager to share knowledge while travelling) and **Research-active trailblazer** (career builder, a person who seeks professional job development by publishing research in ranked journals) need to have customized travel services. Lichy and McLeay (2018) believe that a better knowledge of needs and desires of bleisure travelers help service suppliers to customize specialist travel services easier.

According to Park et al. (2025) there are four types of restrictions in bleisure travel: time, cost, place and personal limitations.

According to the findings of Tsaur and Tsai (2023) there are 4 main experience types that happen during bleisure travel:

- **Job related learning experience:** job related learning experience is a motivation for participation in leisure activities. Such an activity that they can learn and improve their knowledge and skills.
- **Sociocultural experience:** They can get assistance from local work partners to understand the local culture and work values, experience the local culture.
- **Prestige experience:** Bleisure travelers feel respected and the focus of attention during their travel.

- **Smart technology experience:** Bleisure travelers use OTA platforms (Online Travel Agency platform) to search for travel information or use applications related to travel to purchase travel products and tickets.

According to Çulfaci et al. (2024), “**Cultural discovery motivation**” with 40.54% is the most frequent motivation for bleisure travel outside of family. “**Personal Planning**” with frequencies of 16.22% and “**Participation in Activities**” (13.51%) are notable motivation factors. “**Regional culinary exploration**” with 24.24% is the most preferred activity for the participants during bleisure travel. “**Using hotel facility**” with 18.18% and “**architectural and cultural visits**” with 15.16% are the next preferred activities.

4. METHODOLOGICAL FRAME WORK

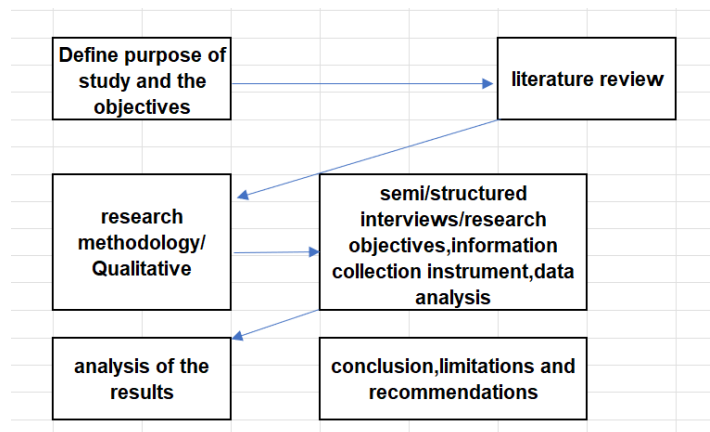
4.1. Methodology

The objective of this part of the research is to present, clarify and justify methodological options. To achieve this goal, at first, it is necessary to determine the definition of methodology. On the one hand, methodology defines the research techniques, on the other hand, it defines the research process.

Once the theoretical framework of the theme is completed, this chapter will describe and develop the entire research model in more detail. Next, the objectives of the research and the semi-structured interview are presented and analyzed. Then, the results and answers of the interviews will be discussed and analyzed.

This chapter finishes with an analysis of the collected data: the results of the interviews. Below, there is a model, showing the map of the path of this research is done.

Figure 1 – Study Model



Source – own elaboration

4.2. Research problems and objectives:

The general purpose of this study, through collecting data, has the main objective of understanding and exploring the importance of business tourism in Porto from the perspective of local hotels and travel agencies.

To achieve the main objective, it is important to define specific objectives that are essential for building a research plan.

Table 2 – General and specific objectives

General objective	explore the importance of business tourism in Porto
Specific objective	understand the percentage of business travelers in hotels / travel agencies in Porto city
	explore if the hotels / travel agencies in Porto host business travelers for small or big events.
	understand the main barriers that affect business tourism development in Porto
	explore the main characteristics of business travelers in Porto city

Source – own elaboration

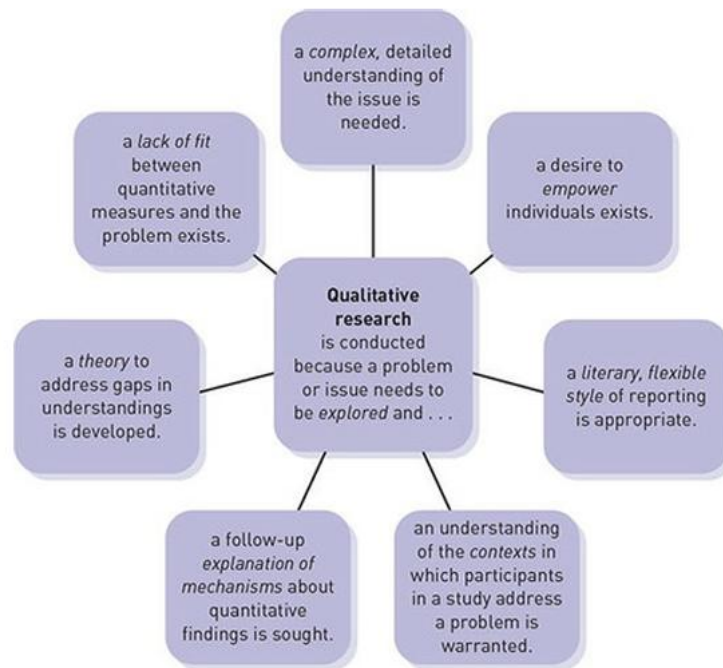
4.3. Research Method

In the scope of this master thesis, the methodology adopted relies on qualitative research, given that, according to Creswell (2013), qualitative research starts with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the pointed individuals or groups attribute to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use a leading qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting of the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. According to Shkedi (2019), there are three principal criteria of qualitative research: the language of words and the natural environment, intuitive inquiry skills and analytical research skills.

According to Creswell & Poth (2018) the motivations for choosing qualitative research lie in the existence of a problem or issue of the research that needs to be explored. This exploration is needed, in turn, because of a need to study a group or

population, identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or hear silent voices. These are all good reasons to explore a problem rather than to use predetermined information from literature or rely on results from other research studies. We also choose qualitative research because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue. This detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories independent of what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature. Qualitative research also empowers individuals to share their stories, to hear their voices, and minimize the relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study. Furthermore, we may collaborate directly with participants by having them review our research questions, or by having them collaborate with us during the data analysis and interpretation phases of research. We conduct qualitative research because we want to understand the context or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue. We cannot always separate what people say from the place where they say it—whether this context is their home, family, or work. We use qualitative research to follow quantitative research and help explain the mechanisms or linkages in causal theories or models. These theories provide a general picture of trends, associations, and relationships, but they do not tell us about the processes that people experience, why they respond as they did, the context in which they responded, and their deeper thoughts and behaviors that governed their responses. We use qualitative research to develop theories when partial or inadequate theories exist for certain populations and samples, or existing theories do not adequately capture the complexity of the problem we are examining. We also use qualitative research because quantitative measures and the statistical analyses simply do not fit the problem.

Figure 2 – When to use qualitative research



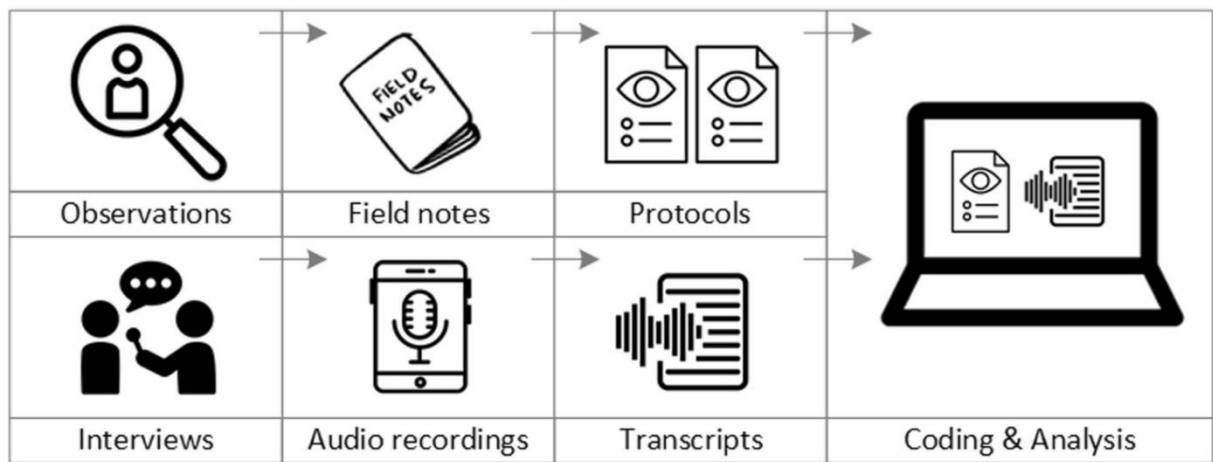
Source-- Creswell & Poth (2018)

4.4. Information collection method

According to Torrentira (2020), qualitative research data collection needs a high level of participant-researcher relationship, as this makes the participant to open up himself to a free-flowing conversation. Common data collection techniques for qualitative research include direct observation and face-to-face interviews (individual or groups). Direct observation helps the qualitative researcher involving himself in the day-to-day activities of the participants. Face-to-face interviews on the other hand enable the researcher to instantly acquire data from the participants in the exchanges following the semi-structured questionnaire.

For this research a semi-structured interview was chosen, which will allow us to have, in addition to a script with previously defined questions, some freedom to modify the order or change the form of the questions. A set of 12 open-ended questions were presented to the interviewees in the questionnaire of the interview.

Figure 3 - From data collection to data analysis



Source- Busetto et al. (2020)

In the first phase it was important to formulate questions that are related to the specific objectives, based on the literature review, that help to achieve the main objective of this study, as shown in the following table.

Table 3 - Theoretical basis of the interview questions

Interview question	Theoretical base
objective 1: understand the profile of business travelers	
1. Do business travelers represent an important percentage of your hotel / travel agency occupancy/ sales ralf? If not, would you like to improve that segment?	Marques & Santos (2017) Carvalho et al. (2018) Lichy and McLeay (2018) Marques & Santos (2016) Martins et al. (2024)
2. Do you prefer to have travelers for big events or small events? Why?	Own elaboration Marques & Santos (2017)
3. Do you prefer to have business travelers or leisure tourists? Why?	Pinho & Marques (2020)
	Marques & Santos (2016)
4. Do the business travelers extend their accommodation beyond the business event? Why?	Lichy and McLeay (2018)
	Marques & Santos (2017b)
	Pinho & Marques (2020)
objective 2: understand bleisure traveler’s needs	
	Lichy and McLeay (2018)

1. Do you agree that” a better knowledge of the needs and desires of bleisure (business & leisure) travelers could help to customize travel services more easily? If yes, what do you do to know better this type of travelers?	Marques & Santos (2017b)
	Colombo and Marques (2020)
objective 3: explore marketing strategies for business tourism development	
1. In your opinion, what are the main barriers that affect business tourism development in the Porto region?	Pinho & Marques (2021)
	Carvalho et al. (2018)
2. Do you have any plans to invest in marketing to have more business travelers? Which plan? Why?	Colombo and Marques (2020)
	Carvalho et al. (2018)
3. What are your strategies for continuously attracting business travelers?	Colombo and Marques (2020)
	Carvalho et al. (2018)
objective 4: explore regional DMO ´s cooperation	
1. How can the regional DMO increase the bleisure segment in the region?	Falk & Hagsten (2018)
	Marques & Santos (2016)
	Marques & Santos (2017)
	Haven-Tang & Al. (2007)
	Marques and Ribeiro (2017)
2. How is the cooperation of public organization with your company?	Marques & Santos (2016)
	Sugiyarto et Al. (2003)
	Haven-Tang & Al.(2007)
	Pinho & Marques (2020)
	Marques and Ribeiro (2017)

Source- Own elaboration

The second question of the first objective (Do you prefer to have travelers for big events or small events? Why?) although I could not find any articles relating to the preference of the local hotels or travel agencies to have travelers for big or small events, in my opinion this question helps tourism industry management for future planning, that is why I included this questions in my interviews´ questions as Marques & Santos (2017) mentioned the importance of big events for investments in infrastructures.

4.5. Population, sample and sampling method

The target population of this research were hotels and travel agencies located in Porto city.

Although at first the target population was local hotels and travel agencies, due to difficulty to find the managers of local travel agencies who has interest in this research, there is only an opinion of one travel agency which mainly works on business tourism in different scales and in this research this travel agency works as an exploratory example, comparing with the answers of the hotels. The interview has been done only with one local travel agency however the professionalism, the experience and the dimensions of the business tourism they work is so considerable that I chose it as the exploratory example among the hotels 'answers.

Basically, it is necessary that qualitative research be reliable and rigorous. And sample size has a vital role in the validity of the research (Rego & al., 2019).

Sample size in a qualitative study is generally influenced by the specificity of the sample, which means the number of participants. In other words, "more specific samples require more homogeneous characteristic", leading to smaller participant sizes.

The size of a sample also depends on the quality of the conversation with participants. In some studies, the researcher has good access to the field, which allows them to obtain good information from a smaller number of participants. When respondents are resistant and grudging, it may be necessary to increase the sample size and search for a larger number of participants (Rego & al., 2019).

The qualitative method is mostly about conducting research based on data, not hypotheses. Therefore, it is important to present and explain the entire process. Claiming to have conducted a large number of interviews but not translating them into something visible (usually in the form of tables) has little value. As a conclusion, presenting the analysis process is more important than the number of participants (Rego & al., 2019).

In this way, the interviews are aimed at all the hotels and travel agencies located in Porto city that, directly or indirectly, have contact with business tourism in Porto city which constitute the sample of this study as well.

4.6. Analysis and processing of the interviews

Characterization of the participants

In the following table, we can see the age of the interviewees is between 27– 51, with of an average of 13 years of professional experience. In relation to academic qualifications, all have higher education qualifications. It was also important in this analysis to understand what functions they currently perform, which are mostly directors.

Table 4 Characterization of the participants

N	Role of the interviewee	Professional experience	Academic qualifications
1	Operations coordinator of a 4-star hotel	15	Bachelor degree
2	Marketing and sales manager of a 5-star hotel	15	Master degree
3	sales manager of a 4star hotel	15	Master degree
4	Technical manager of a travel agency	15	Bachelor degree
5	Account Manager of a 4-star hotel	15	NA
6	Account Manager of a 4-star hotel	15	NA
7	sales manager of a 4-star hotel	15	Master degree
8	sales manager of a 4- star hotel	15	Master degree
9	sales manager of a 5 –star hotel	15	Master degree
10	sales manager of a 5 –star hotel	15	Master degree

Source- Own elaboration

Through the analysis of the interviews, and particularly the four themes identified in table 5, it is possible to identify and understand the various points of view of the interviewees on certain themes that meet the objectives of the study.

Table 5 - Interview topics for analysis

Interview topics for analysis
1. Business traveler´s profile (Purpose of topic- Identify the profile of business travelers and the opinion of hotels and travels agencies about them)
2. Bleisure traveler´s need (Purpose of topic- Identify the needs of bleisure traveler)

3. Business tourism development
(Purpose of topic- Identify the ways the barriers for development and the strategies the hotels and travel agencies use to attract more business travelers)

4 Regional DMO 's cooperation
(Purpose of topic- Identify the cooperations of regional DMOs)

Source- Own elaboration

4.6.1 Business traveler's profile

To define a current profile business traveler in Porto, at first, the interviewees are asked about if they have many business travelers in their hotels / travel agencies.

Both branch hotels managers interviewees with more organized and invested marketing department have a great level of business travelers:

“Yes, X hotel, uh, with 241 rooms, in terms of individual corporate, so the corporate that case. Um, individually. It represents, like 7-8%, but we have, like, a... 60% of corporate, um, groups, so MICE, meetings, incentives, congresses, and events. So, um... for work, I have, like a huge, uh, like, almost 70% of total occupancy during the year. The other hotels, as they are mostly in the city center of the... the city center, um... It's harder to have corporate. Sometimes we don't have, uh, how to measure that. Because they book online, but... They came for work, and we don't know, and we will never know. Um, just if we have some... someone, uh... at the front office, asking. What reason, and sometimes it's harder to... to explain how important this is to our front, uh, front desk. But yeah, I have a lot of, um, corporate segments. Not in the city center hotels, but in X hotel.” (3)

“Yes, our hotels are very well located, which makes them highly sought after by corporate travelers. At present, this segment represents a significant percentage of our overall bookings.” (5)

On the other hand, for the other hotel or travel agency manager interviewees, although they do not have a good percentage of business travelers in their company, they already know the importance of this segment, and they want to improve it:

“We have business tourism all over the year, but it is an important sector of tourism because it helps to have some revenue on the time that we don't have tourism, leisure tourism. So, it's a key product to hotels especially in low seasons.” (1)

“It’s important for us and the thing about business travel, it’s important, all segments are important of course, but they travel in low season as well, so it’s like a supplement in seasons where we don’t have the leisure. So, for us it’s important and we want to grow in this business, in this segment and we are working to grow.”(2)

“What we can see, the business travel is a big concern because who travels for business to make money, so it is important to develop, even the country economy, you know.”(4)

Then, they are asked if they have business travelers for small or big events:

“So, in our case, I would say there are not too big, so maximum 100 people and the reason are that the capacity of our restaurant is, has, we can sit around 50 people with the curtain way out and the meeting space, the capacity is 120 but in quadrilateral layout style is 80 .so of course we are not a big hotel. So, we are not a big hotel that can have big groups, huge groups but up to 100 that 80 -100 that’s the ideal group for us. For example if there is an event in Alfândega but with , that is not too big .they have hotels there and also we know that people will stay in the hotels next to the event but for example in November there is a ICCA congress which will bring around five thousand people to Porto and they need a lot of hotels so of course we get people from there as well because we are not that far so yes in that kind of congresses or event we will get some businesses as well . otherwise if the events in Alfândega up to 500 people or less than that, I don’t think they will come here just because we are not at the walking distance, if you know what I mean .so I think location in this kind of events is the key but of course there are business travelers that they rather prefer to stay in hotels, brands they know, so we get some of those as well .so yes a little bit of everything.”(2)

“Both, big events like sport events, we have some groups with more than one hundred-person, client or travelers and the small events are the persons, the groups are about 15 ,20 person involved. Well, the large events usually are for, the during of the event is about 3 weeks, one month and the small events well, an occasion, one football match or sports events that is few days, 3 or 4days maximum.” (4)

“And in the city center hotels, I have more and more requests for incentives. So, I have more and more requests for Luxury and high-end incentives, mostly in X hotel and also Y hotel. Because I think there are more and more requests for board meetings.

Um, team buildings, but for high-end companies globally, not just in Europe. But mainly from Europe. Or with offices in Europe, and they came all over the world. So, yes, I have big and small events. In all the hotels.” (3)

“We host both big and small business events, although the majority are small or medium-sized corporate meetings, trainings, and kick-offs. Our meeting room and lounge spaces are better suited for these more intimate formats.” (5)

Then they are asked if they have any preference to have business travelers for big or small events:

“We don’t have a particular preference – we are happy to host both big and small events. Our hotels are flexible and can adapt to different needs. Smaller events allow us to provide a more personalized service, while bigger ones give us the chance to welcome more guests and increase visibility. Both types are important for us and complement each other well.” (5)

“For us it’s better the small events as I said because of the capacity of the hotel but also because of it’s easier to manage and if we want to provide certain level of service of course it is 20 people it’s a lot easier to handle to if 200-300. so, we are a kind of boutique hotel, not that big .so we would prefer smaller.” (2)

“Big events give us some expertise and we have adrenaline, runs in our body because everything needs to be ok but in small events, we need to see everything to be ok like the lodgment, hotels, the rent a car or if they need to rent a bus or we even in big or small events we have, also, we have to take care of those small details, the hour, the time, everything. I like both.” (4)

“It depends on the hotels. Is it X hotel? I need big events, because I have 241 rooms. And the meeting space is for 600 people. If I have a lot of small groups. I won't have meeting spaces for all of them, because I have to part, or...to separate them in different meeting rooms, and I don't have that. Uh, of course, I prefer to host big events, because... the revenue is much higher than the small events. And with this I have another kind of revenue, that is F&B (food and beverage department) revenue. All of these big events. Come with the... a high revenue in F&B. And normally, F&B department at the hotels are, like, the... the necessary evil at the hotels, because some... most of the times, they don't transmit revenue to the hotels. They have a huge cost and

they don't pay their own department costs, okay? So, these events help a lot with F&B revenue as well.” (3)

And finally, to define the profile of business travelers, the interviewees are asked if the business travelers usually extend their stay beyond the event.

In most answers, the interviewees define that sometimes there is a request for the extension of the stay of business travelers:

The motivation for this extension mostly mentioned the city and the gastronomy.

“Yes, in some cases business travelers extend their stay to enjoy Porto during the weekend. This happens more frequently when the event ends on a Thursday or Friday. The city’s leisure supply, and gastronomy encourage this behavior.” (5)

“Some peoples not usually, they of course sometimes ask for some 1, or 2 days more, even one week if they have time. They want to know the city and gastronomy, the food, the wine, the Douro region.” (4)

“So, it happens a lot. For my recent experience here, I would say they stay and visit the city and enjoy the city but there are clients that already know that the Douro Valley is so close, and they try to go there as well so it depends on how long they stay. for us, our clients, the average length of stay for individual travelers is 2, 3 nights, I would say 3 nights. and if they stay long, they will stay in Douro valley, usually we recommend that. We have our team at the front desk that they recommend you can in the morning or in the afternoon, you can see the Douro valley, we can organize that. that kind of experience for them as well so it happens as well but it depends on how long they stay because if it’s just 2 nights, it’s usually, they stay here in the city center, they go to Foz, they go around the city.” (2)

“I’ve already seen some clients yes .the last client that I had the experience just I was at the reception at the time and I like talking to the clients and knowing, getting to know some reality bout the hotel, not only at the back office and there was a young boy, a young man on the thirties , he said I was coming for a meeting and my meeting will finish today at the afternoon and I have some few days left and that’s what he said and I want to get to know a Michelin restaurant and I said wow! yes! Nice to know! I can help you! And I said you will be surprised but we have more than one Michelin star restaurant in Porto. And he said oh yes! And I said yes! You didn’t know so I will explain

it to you. We have this one and this one. and he was surprised that in Porto, not a big city, not in comparison of the country he came from and he was surprised and yes, we have some clients that already extend their, or they have some time left and they use to know something about restaurant, something different, cultural, to know the Douro or to go to wine cellars. yes, it has been a one example or the other but yes, I feel so.” (1)
 In table 6 we can see a summary of the main results found in this topic.

Table 6 - Summaries of the main findings regarding the profile of business traveler.

Categories	Results	Limit or reason	Results	Research reference
percentage of having business traveler in their company	· our hotels are very well located, which makes them highly sought after by corporate travelers. At present, this segment represents a significant percentage of our	Limit: Location	· as they are mostly in the city center of the... the city center, um... It's harder to have corporate. Sometimes we don't have, uh, how to measure that. (3)	Nicula and Elena (2014)

	<p>overall bookings. '' (5)</p>			
	<p>· So, um... for work, I have, like a huge, uh, like, almost 70% of total occupancy during the year. (3)</p>		<p>· in the city center we have more a bigger percentage of our client in leisure and not that much for business because business area in Porto is Boavista, around casa da musica so it is a different area where our companies are. (2)</p>	
<p>having and preferring to have business traveler for small or big events</p>	<p>· We host both big and small business events, although the majority are small or medium-sized corporate meetings, trainings, and kick-offs. (5)</p>	<p>reason: size and location</p>	<p>· Our meeting room and lounge spaces are better suited for these more intimate formats. (5)</p>	<p>Carvalho et al. (2018)</p>
	<p>· in the city center hotels, I have more and more requests for incentives. It depends on the hotels. It's X hotel. I need big events. I prefer to host big events, because the</p>		<p>· For us it's better the small events because of the capacity of the hotel but also because of it's easier to manage and if we want to provide certain level of service. (2)</p>	

	revenue is much higher than the small events. (3)			
extension of the stay of business travelers beyond the event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in some cases, business travelers extend their stay to enjoy Porto during the weekend. (5) 	reason: city and gastronomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The city's leisure offer and gastronomy encourage this behavior. (5) 	Pinho & Marques (2020) Hankinson (2005)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some people do not usually, they of course sometimes ask for some 1, or 2 days more, even one week if they have time. (4) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They want to know the city and gastronomy, the food, the wine, the Douro region. (4) 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I would say they stay and visit the city and enjoy the city. (2) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> it's usually, they stay here in the city center, they go to Foz, they go around the city. (2) 	
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we have some clients that already extend theirs, or they have some time left and they use to know something about restaurants, something different, cultural, to know the Douro or to go to wine cellars. (1) 	

Source- Own elaboration

3.6.1. Bleisure traveler's need

Since the behavior of business travelers staying in their company has already been observed, it is important to understand if the needs of bleisure travelers have been studied by the companies or not.

All the answers from the interviewees reveal a concern about knowing the needs of bleisure tourists. Some do so in more innovative and organized ways while the others try to pay attention to the behavior and requests of the bleisure tourists during their trip.

“As I said before, pay attention to client, try to know what he wants, what a purpose of the travel, what he likes, how he likes to travel, what he would like to know even some experiences. I think we must pay attention to the persons, even the cultures because he is interested in history, why not suggest some hotels in historical area? if he likes high tech technology, some kinds of hotels that are not so classic, to admit the personality of the traveler, that is important.” (4)

“Understanding the needs and expectations of bleisure travelers helps us create more personalized experiences. To get to know this type of guest better, we maintain direct communication during their stay, collect feedback through surveys, and observe their booking patterns and preferences. Based on this information, we design offers that combine work and leisure.” (5)

“They still need to feel like home, so, uh...If it's a tourist that comes. Week after week, or once a month, He or she wants to feel at home, so, uh, yes, we do that in our hotels. Oh, we have, like, a PMS, the system, at the hotels. And on profile notes, comments, alerts, and so on. Everyone has to write about that customer. Everything, so, we... it's internal, it's an internal document. So, all of the hotels use that. And if the client arrives today and asks for 2 Boiled eggs. Yeah. Somewhere, that thing will appear right in their profile notes. If they prefer feathered pillows, we will always keep the feather pillows. To the... to their rooms, so, yeah. We really want to know more about the client.” (3)

“It would be very good, very positive to have that information of they need, what they want but to be honest I think we have a little bit what it takes to be in many ways because we have like small room over there where you can sit with your computer and we have a bar serving coffee or tea or whatever. We also have an outside space, so if

you want working but to be in the kind of more relaxed environment you can also go outside, even if you are here to work but you have time to go on leisure one day or two, we have our team like plan for your day, they can help you with that. So, I think we have what that kind of client takes but of course if all of the sudden there is a new need that we are aware of, that we learn about, of course it would be very good to know in advance so we can offer them what they need. We would like that.” (2)

In table 7 we can see a summary of the main results found in this topic.

Table 7 - Summaries of the main findings regarding the knowledge of bleisure tourists’ needs

Category	Results	Research reference
knowledge of bleisure needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · I think we must pay attention to the persons. (4) 	Lichy and McLeay (2018)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · To get to know this type of guest better, we maintain direct communication during their stay, collect feedback through 	

	surveys, and observe their booking patterns and preferences. (5)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · we have, like, a PMS, the system, at the hotels. And on profile notes, comments, alerts, and so on. Everyone must write about that customer. Everything. (3) 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · if there is a new need that we are aware of, that we learn about, of course it would be very good to know in advance so we can offer them what they need. (2) 	

Source- Own elaboration

4.6.2 Business tourism development

Since the behavior of business travelers and the knowledge of bleisure needs have already been discussed, it is important to understand the barriers for business tourism development from the perspective of hotels and travel agencies in Porto and then the strategies they must improve in their companies for this segment.

Firstly, concerning the barriers to business tourism in Porto city, in the opinion of hotels and local travel agencies:

One of the reflections shared by one of the interviewees refers to the fact that there is no special barrier to the development of business tourism in Porto as it is on a good path of improvement.

“I think that we are in a position right now with leadership in Porto also with tourism has been, we are in a position that trying, making effort and making in deliver conditions to be a cosmopolitan place. I believe that we are on that place that we make effort, like sustainability that it’s a thing that also mention every day in the news like the compromise the carbon in the interoperation like one hundred percent electricity or having a metro as a good connection. we already extending our connections with the metro to go places it wasn’t able to do by metro until now, so in terms of transportation, in terms of companies, we are trying to try to be modern but modern green even more.”

(1)

The other interviewee thinks that the construction work in the city and the resulting traffic jams are the only tiny barrier for business tourism:

“Nowadays, the works in the city center, besides that I don’t see any barriers.”

(4)

Two other interviewees think that the poor flight connections can be considered a big barrier for business tourism development in Porto city development.

“Well, the most important is the connections airline that operating the city, the amount of connection flights they do weekly.so, that’s a big barrier for example winter season. That’s what hotels need in. We need business but the connections tend to decrease. For example, to the United States, this winter we will have around 10 flights per week which is very small amount for the amounts of hotels you have in the city which means you are, you will be competing for that small amount of people are coming to porto.so yes, that’s one of the barriers.” (2)

“This kind of business attracts people all over the world. All over Europe. With an economic, um... a state of a little higher. But we continue with Ryanair, EasyJet, 10 times, 15 times a day to Madrid. We are not, uh, opening that much different, um... different routes to world and to Europe. So, we... we keep with this... poor, um...poor air connections with Porto. So, I think that is the biggest, uh, huge barrier. It affects this kind of business to Porto.” (3)

The other barrier that an interviewee mentioning, is the balance of demand and offer somehow is being lost:

“In comparison to most known cities like Paris and. Uh, yes, but they expect that our price must be always cheap, and... Okay, because...Yes, because we were... we

were... we were very cheap. And the best. And we can't...Yes. Mm-hmm. We can no longer be cheap... Um, because we have the hotels, we have the venues, we have services, we have good food, we have an amazing destination. And we have not capacity, so we have more... Demand than offer. And I think we have to increase our prices a little. Not that much, because some hotels, um... are pushing the prices to the limit. And we are sometimes more expensive than Paris, Vienna. Madrid and Barcelona. And if you want to have this kind of business. Um, we can't increase that much. So...We're changing the limit. Pushing the limits, yeah. Yeah, that's it. So, we must stabilize the demand and offer.” (3)

The other interviewees who think that the barrier is the need for more congress centers in Porto:

“In my opinion, one of the main barriers to the development of business tourism in the Porto region is the lack of a larger congress center. Both the Alfândega Congress Center and the Super Bock Arena are great venues, but they have some capacity limitations. Because of this, Porto sometimes loses the opportunity to host bigger congresses and international events.” (5).

“Well maybe we can't accommodate big events at the same time. too much big events at the same time because if you see the infrastructure that we have like Palácio da Bolsa, like Alfândega, they are places that have some limitation and I believe that we will in a short period of time have some news about it, about places that have big conventions, we have. it's a thing that must be changed because there are few places or few hotels with meeting rooms or places like Alfândega, there are not that many places.so we are in the medium scale and things on big scale it can be more much at the same time. Because I believe in my opinion that we still don't have lot of places accommodate lots of people at the same time so those events are a little bit, maybe on the low season that's a fact but not big events at the same time because we still don't have those infrastructures.” (1)

And finally, the opinion held by those who think that we are missing the creativity of creating products and experiences in Porto:

“Maybe we have to be more creative to give different experience to the person that come to Porto so it won't be concentrated to the same place at the same time because it would be crowded ,people want to grab a lunch or dinner , they don't have

availability or they want to work and they don't have some place to be in peace so we have to be creative in knowing city much better and expand the city not to bring all people at the same time to the same places because it will combine a different experiences not that positive so I think we have to be more creative that we have been so far to business tourism, leisure tourism , both to give experiences, different experiences so they don't concentrate maybe." (1)

Regarding strategies to improve business tourism in their companies, some mention having connected with corporate travel agencies:

"We invest a lot in the promotion, to visit travel agencies, it is not only those that are dedicated to leisure but also those that are selling more corporate, more business travels. So, we, yes that's the way, we invest, is going after business, getting new leads, exposing the hotel, presenting the hotel to as much agencies as we can. that's how you bring business, because otherwise nobody knows about you." (2)

"Basically, our main strategy is to keep strong relationships with companies and travel agencies that work with corporate clients." (5)

There are some interviewees whose strategy involves visiting the related fairs and trades:

"We attend a lot of mice events for corporates. Events, meetings, congresses, so... Normally, we have a huge budget for this kind of actions. We spend a lot of money per year to attend this kind of events. we invest a lot in marketing in line with the strategy of the destination of Porto. so, we invest a lot in Mice forums, uh, specialized, um, trade fairs. Uh, but mostly mice fairs. There are a few around the world, and we attend, like, 15, 20 a year." (3)

One of the interviewees mentions the marketing strategy that they have: besides participating in trades and fairs, also having some people located outside of Porto who are focusing on client's strategy:

"Well, in terms of Europe connections I believe that we have persons like we have commercial department also I bring that up again .because the whole hotels that has this department having persons in the outside of the Porto having a job trying to bring different nationalities either than Europeans so I believe if the extension of the strategy abroad is something that I notice on the last years with some persons .they are coming, going to Brazil or some specific event like the tourism event in that place brasil

or in the united states or in China. We already on those places and it's interesting because we see more people from the United States than we saw few years ago and they come for different reasons not also for tourism but also for business tourism because of the trades or something, they are connected to. and I believe this kind of work I've seen in our company on the last years is extend because Europe already has some places some countries that you work, we have different nationalities, the Spain comes only, mainly for tourism but we have Germany they come for two things, we have some company that we work.” (1)

One of the interviewees' strategies is not only being present at the trades and fairs, but also having online advertisements:

“In marketing we use to make some advertisements in the social media, in google page and Instagram, Facebook and participating in fairs, international fairs and trades.” (4)

The other strategy that another interviewee mentions is the special corporate rate:

“We already have several plans in place to attract more business travelers. We offer competitive corporate rates for companies and special discounts on hotel services, such as parking or F&B. These strategies help strengthen our relationship with corporate clients and encourage them to choose our hotels regularly for their business trips.” (5)

In table 8 we can see a summary of the main results found in this topic.

Table 8 - Summaries of the main findings regarding business tourism development

Category	Results	Research reference
barriers of business tourism development	· the most important is the connections airline that operating the city, the amount of connection flights they do weekly.so, that's a big barrier. (2)	Nicula and Elena (2014)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Nowadays, construction work in the city center (4) 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Maybe we must be more creative to give different experiences to the person (1) 	
strategies to improve business tourism in their companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · to visit travel agencies, it is not only those that are dedicated to leisure but also those that are selling more corporate, more business travels. (2) 	Haven-Tang & Al.(2007) Colombo and Marques (2020)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · We attend a lot of mice events for corporates. Events, meetings, congresses (3) 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · In marketing we use to make some advertisements in the social media, in google page and Instagram, Facebook and participating in fairs, international fairs and trades. (4) 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · We offer competitive corporate rates for companies and special discounts on hotel services, such as parking or F&B. (5) 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · having people from outside of Porto having a job trying to bring different nationalities than Europeans. (1) 	

Source- Own elaboration

4.6.3 Regional DMO cooperation

In this part, the interviewees were asked about the regional DMO's cooperation and if they are satisfied and if there is something to improve.

In the opinion of one of the interviewees, the regional DMOs are doing their job well:

“Porto Convention Bureau are doing a good job in this area. Much of the growth in tourism that we see in the city is thanks to their work. Many business travelers end up extending their stay for a few extra days to get to know the city better, and honestly, it couldn't be any other way.” (5)

“I think it's a good work that has been done so far from our tourism Porto, here in Porto and in Portugal so the work has been done, thanks god, Portugal is very trendy, Porto is very trendy, so I think it's working.” (2)

“About tourism, for business, they are doing something, but for leisure, I think nowadays the political not so, they don't invest in culture.” (4)

One of the interviewees mentioned that in addition to the good job that regional DMOs did and are still doing, they may need to have more money for new strategies to improve the destination even more:

“I think, they do a good job and they did with international promotion. But... they need more money to afford, another kind of promotion, another kind of strategies. Imagine we will have the ICCA in Porto in November. And for me, working at the hotels, it's a flop. Because ICCA is trying to have everything for free. All tasks for free, guides for free. Students, like volunteering. working at ICCA just for CV Purposes. And for me, it's not correct. For us to getting the position we want as a destination. It's not fair. And I can feel that because the regional DMO did a lot of bookings at the hotels, so group blocks of 70, 80, 100 rooms. And, until today, I have 5 reservations because they just did reservations in 5-star hotels. And I think the prices were a little higher than the expected from the organization. So, Today, it is a flop. I don't know, tomorrow, nor if just one, uh, one event that goes wrong afterwards, but... For me, today, it's a flop. I don't know. But they keep going, they do a lot of mice events, internationally, they give some financial

support to the hotels to do, as well, the international promotion. But it's harder for them. Let's see.” (3)

In table 9 we can see a summary of the main results found in this topic.

Table 9 - Summaries of the main findings regarding regional DMOs' cooperation

Categories	Results	Suggestion	Research reference	Results	Research reference
Regional DMO's cooperation	· I think it's a good work that has been done so far from our tourism Porto, here in Porto and in Portugal. (2)	DMO may need more money to invest on other strategies	Marques & Pinho (2021)	They do a good job and they did with international promotion. But... they need more money to afford, another kind of promotion, another kind of strategies. (3)	Marques and Ribeiro (2017)

Source- Own elaboration

5. DISCUSSION AND MAIN FINDINGS

This chapter will discuss the main results of the research based on a comparison between the results obtained by the hotels and the only travel agency as an exploratory sample and the literature review.

Regarding to the findings of Marques & Santos (2016) from a Delphi study about business tourism in the central region of Portugal, in which the interviewees all agreed on the importance of business tourism in the economic development of the territory, also highlighting the strategic advantages of business tourism and the potential that business tourism has.

Also, in line with the study of Nicula and Elena (2014) that talks about the growth of the business tourism market in the contemporary economy and that according to 2 interviewees confirms that in fact there is a growth in the number of business travelers in Porto. “For work, I have, like a huge, uh, like, almost 70% of total occupancy during the year.” (9) while the corporate part of the travel agency has more revenue on outgoing corporate travels, but they already notice its importance and they are working on improving this segment (4).

The results of the research of Marques & Pinho (2021), which shows that there is a tendency to reduce the number of participants in associative meetings while the number of meetings held continues to increase, is only confirmed by one of the respondents of this research, “Yes, I agree. Especially since Covid, we’ve seen fewer large-scale events, but the number of smaller meetings has increased. I think people felt they owed it to themselves after spending so much time at home. There’s now a stronger desire to reconnect in person, even if in smaller groups. This trend is also visible in Porto and in our hotels.” (6)

Regarding the research of Pinho & Marques (2020), it is commonly known that the duration of the stay in the destination is extended longer than the duration of the business event/professional needs for the visitor to visit the region and its attractions, the interviewees also think that there are some examples of the extension of the business travelers in the destination, “in some cases business travelers extend their stay to enjoy Porto during the weekend.” (5), “like extend the accommodation and see a few more days to know the city, to get to know the place, to get to know everything, the food, which is very important.” (1), the travel agency also mentions that although

business travelers are busy and have limited time in their schedule, there is a tendency among the corporate travelers to extend their trip (3).

The answer of an interviewee is the same as the findings of Marques & Santos (2017 b) Business tourists often extend their stay beyond the business event to explore the place and its attractions, returning as individual tourists or recommending destinations to their circle of influence (friends, family, professional network), “Business tourism is not a person comes here, goes to a meeting and then home. now, he comes here, he tries a restaurant, he tries a bar, he goes to some museum, and he / she goes home with an image and this image, we are trying this image be more significant for the people to come back as with family or alone or maybe with a friend.” (1), same reasons mentioned by the travel agency (4).

The three main barriers for development of business tourism in Porto said by interviewees: although Participants in the research of Marcucci and Gatta mention the privilege of Porto airport localization and its dynamics as a determinant of Porto’s business tourism (2012), in the opinion of respondents of this study, the flight connections operating in Porto airport in not enough, “the most important is the connections airline that operating the city, the amount of connection flights they do weekly,so, that’s a big barrier.” (2) Nowadays, the works in the city center (4) Maybe we have to be more creative to give different experience to the person (1) as Colombo and Marques (2020) mention that there seems to be a need to have more creativity and strong investments in continuous innovation to keep attendees interested.

Although Marques & Pinho (2021) think that Porto has the advantage of having a reference conference and event venue – Alfândega do Porto Congress Centre and Crystal Palace, the interviewees think that there is a need for more congress centers like those, “Because if you see the infrastructure that we have like Palacio de Bolsa, like Alfândega, they are places that have some limitation. it’s a thing that must be changed because there are few places or few hotels with meeting rooms or places like Alfândega, there are not that many places.” (1)

According to Marques & Pinho (2021) Porto city has many strengths, including an airport, Marques and Ribeiro (2017), also mention the advantage of Porto airport, different tourist attractions and activities to improve business tourism packages, a good reputation as a leisure tourist destination, price competitiveness and friendly people,

that also mentioned by the respondents “What is the difference that it makes from Porto for example to Madrid is prices. In Porto, business tourists feel that it is excellent service, like welcoming people, like infrastructure that we have, it is well connected to the city by transportation. We have the airport which become even more international.” (1)

Regarding Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001 say that business tourism has a high demand for food and beverages (lunches, gala dinners, coffee breaks, etc.), the interviewees also mention that also (2) and (3). even (9) mention the considerable F&B (food and beverage department) revenue that can help the cost of this department more considerably for bigger events taking place by business travelers.

According to Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001 that business tourism has higher income for accommodation and meeting venues, “corporate travelers usually pay higher rates because they have to travel on specific dates and are less flexible with timing.” (6)

As Marques & Santos, 2016 refer to the importance of providing an excellent service to visitors to ensure high levels and according to Martins et al. (2024) that business travelers prefer to receive a higher level of service quality during their stay at a destination. “The business travelers normally, are more dedicated to the destination they travel. They have more money to spend. They are more sensitive to the territory, the destination, the culture, everything they're going to visit.” (10)

The ways to get to know the needs of bleisure tourists as Colombo and Marques, 2020 mention observing and that managers need to have information to guarantee that their target group’s needs will be satisfied, and their expectations will be met, the travel agency mention that paying attention to the needs of its bleisure clients is the key to satisfy them, “you have to pay attention, to see what you can offer the clients, to satisfy the client”. (4)

Following PortoCVB (2025) that the aim of the association is to improve Porto and the North of Portugal as a tourist destination, to promote a prestigious image in the various international markets that Marques and Ribeiro (2017) mention that during last few years, important steps have been taken to strengthen Porto’s brand and image, “I think it’s a good work that has been done so far from our tourism Porto, here in Porto and in Portugal.” (2) but as Marques & Pinho (2021) mention there should be an improvement in the promotion and sales of Porto as a business tourism destination.

“But they need more money to afford, another kind of promotion, another kind of strategies.” (3)

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 • Practical contribution of the work

This work allows us to explore the concept of business tourism that is increasingly known and developed in today's tourism industry, reinforcing its importance in Porto city in perspective of hotels and local travel agencies. To achieve the main objective, a set of specific objectives were outlined, such as, exploring the business traveler's profile, exploring the bleisure taveler's needs, understanding the challenges and strategies of the development of business tourism, exploring the cooperations of regional DMOs. To achieve these objectives, a qualitative approach was selected that focused on the application of 10 semi-structured interviews to different 4- and 5-stars hotels and a manager of a travel agency as the exploratory sample, via zoom, or face-to-face, in order to know their perspective on the evolution and development of business tourism in Porto. The results show that they also know the importance of business tourism for the tourism sector in Porto city, they have some opinions in accordance with previous studies and some new points of view. It is also important to highlight that, the main advantage of this research study is the diversity of perspectives of the various stakeholders, from 4- and 5-stars hotels locating in business part of the city, to luxury 5 stars locating in historical center of Porto, to travel agency director as an exploratory sample, made the study even richer, taking into account the differences between these areas.

6.2 Main conclusions

Objective 1 : understand the profile of business travelers

To understand the profile of business travelers, all interviewees are asked a few related questions, such as, the percentage of the business travelers they have in their companies and if they want to improve this percentage, the main part of business travelers is for small or big events and if there is any preference between these two types. Although all the respondents agree on the importance of business tourism for their business, this segment is not the most important segment for all of them. The

reason that business tourism is not the most important for all of them, as they mention, is the location of the company, in this case, the location of hotels, that does not allow to attract business travelers. As the interviewees (2) and (3) stated, despite having congress rooms in their hotels, there is more of a tendency to have leisure travelers as they are historical city center located, which is justified by the authors (Marques & Santos, 2016), who affirm geographical location as one of the specific characteristics that may improve the development of business tourism.

Then as Pyka (2021) talks about the importance of events and that the meetings and event sector are a driver to transform an industrial agglomeration into a modern metropolitan area, the respondents are asked if they have the business traveler for big or small events and if they have any preference for it. Depending on the size of their buildings and the facilities the interviewees have in their company, the size of the events they have, or the preference differs, for example respondents (2) and (5) prefer to hold small events.

The interviewees are also asked if business travelers extend their stay beyond the event and the reason. All the respondents have had some cases of the extensions, and the reason mention is getting to know the city and the gastronomy, like authors Çulfaci et al. (2024), mention “Cultural discovery motivation” and “Regional culinary exploration” as two of the main motivations for the extension of the business travel.

Objective 2: understand bleisure traveler’s needs

According to all the interviewees, a better knowledge of the bleisure travelers’ needs help to provide better service as the authors Lichy and McLeay (2018) believe that knowing the needs and desires of bleisure travelers help service suppliers to customize specialist travel services more easily. The differences are in the strategies they use to find out these needs as some have more specific strategies while others only find out the needs by paying attention or asking random questions.

Objective 3: explore marketing strategies for business tourism development

Regarding the marketing strategies for business tourism development, the interviewees were first asked about the barriers to the development of business

tourism in Porto. Some of the respondents do not see any special barrier to such development and they are satisfied with the progress of the development, while other respondents mention the construction works that are taking place in the city center, causing a lot of traffic jams, which is a barrier to the development. Also, flight connections that during winter season become less and there are not enough operations of flag airlines in Porto airport as the authors Nicula and Elena, (2014) mention that the preference of business travelers for flag airlines connection.

Regarding the strategies for business tourism development, and according to Masoumi and al. (2020) who refer to the importance of marketing and using new marketing methods, the interviewees are asked about the strategies they use to continuously attract business travelers to their companies. They mention participating in mice events, corporate events, cooperating with corporate travel agencies, offering corporate rates to business travelers and having online advertisement for corporate travelers.

Objective 4: explore regional DMO ´s cooperation

The last objective of the present study is exploring the regional DMOs cooperations. All the interviewees agree on the good work done by local DMOs. There are some suggestions made by some interviewees that the regional DMOs may need some more budget to invest in other forms of developing Porto as a business destination, as the authors Marques & Pinho (2021) state in their article, that there should be an improvement of promotion and sales of Porto as a business tourism destination.

6.3 . Limitations

The present research presented some difficulties during its development. The first limitation was the difficulty in finding studies on the subject, both internationally and nationally. However, interest for this approach has been growing over the years.

Second, the data collection process was not always easy. Regarding the interviews, the unavailability or lack of interest from some interviewees made it difficult and created a huge limitation in the study. About the interviews performed, the initial goal of this study was to have the same number of samples for travel agencies as

well, to cover more interaction and exchange of ideas, which was not possible to achieve, and we only had 1 interview from a travel agency, which was implemented as the explanatory sample.

Thirdly, although in the literature review the article of Lichy and McLeay (2018) mentioning five types of travelers based on their interests and motivations as business travelers, due to lack of information of the managers about the motivations of their business travelers, it was possible to discuss it with the managers.

6.4. Future research

This topic is intended as recommendations for future research within the same theme. These suggestions may continue the present study, exploring other perspectives, using other methodological approaches, or even being applied to other destinations. It is important to continue to proceed with new investigations, allowing for the construction of more solid scientific knowledge around business travel, in Porto city, with a strong focus on statistical data. It is suggested to future researchers in the area, the possibility of continuing this study, highlighting the importance of using a different method, for example a focus group which will allow the gathering of a group of participants, with different cultures, habits, lifestyles, and economic power to discuss, in a conference, a theme that has lately gained more prominence. Another suggested study, but more difficult to carry out, focuses on applying research to gather the ideas of public and private companies of this industry, allowing the analysis of differences in opinions, on the level of supply and demand. In addition to the previous proposals, a study based on a quantitative approach, through the application of questionnaires, is also recommended. Their application will allow us to understand the motivations and the perception of business tourism and bleisure tourism in Porto today, which help future investments.

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ANNEX

Annex A – Interview questions: Hotel Sales manager

1. Do business travelers represent an important percentage of your hotel occupancy rate? If not, would you like to improve that segment?
2. Do you frequently host business travelers for big events or small events?
3. Do you prefer to host travelers for big events or small events? Why?
4. Do the business travelers extend their accommodation beyond the business event? Why?
5. In your opinion, what are the main barriers that affect business tourism development in the Porto region?
6. Do you prefer to host business travelers or leisure tourists? Why?
7. Which are the main characteristics/differences between those two segments?
8. Do you have any plans to invest in marketing for having more business travelers? Which plan? Why?
9. Do you agree with the statement “the number of participants are reducing while the number of meetings increasing”? Does it happen in Porto also? What about your hotel?
10. Do you agree that” a better knowledge of the needs and desires of bleisure (business & leisure) travelers could help to customize travel services more easily? If yes, what do you do to know better this type of travelers?
11. What are your strategies for continuously attracting business travelers?
12. How can the regional DMO increase the bleisure segment in the region?

Annex B– Interview questions: Travel agency technical manager

1. Do business travelers represent an important percentage of your hotel occupancy rate? If not, would you like to improve that segment?
2. Do you frequently host business travelers for big events or small events?
3. Do you prefer to host travelers for big events or small events? Why?
4. Do the business travelers extend their accommodation beyond the business event? Why?
5. In your opinion, what are the main barriers that affect business tourism development in the Porto region?
6. Do you prefer to host business travelers or leisure tourists? Why?
7. Which are the main characteristics/differences between those two segments?
8. Do you have any plans to invest in marketing for having more business travelers? Which plan? Why?
9. Do you agree with the statement “the number of participants are reducing while the number of meetings increasing”? Does it happen in Porto also? What about your hotel?
10. Do you agree that” a better knowledge of the needs and desires of bleisure (business & leisure) travelers could help to customize travel services more easily? If yes, what do you do to know better this type of travelers?
11. What are your strategies for continuously attracting business travelers?
12. How can the regional DMO increase the bleisure segment in the region?

Annex C - informed consent form

informed consent form

I _____ accept to participate completely freely and voluntarily in the research of Elaheh Haghgou (student at Superior school of hospitality and tourism of institute of Polytechnic of Porto, with the master thesis of tourism management. The related explanations are given to me, and I understand the main objects of this research.

Understand and accept to answer the interview that ask about “The importance of Business tourism in Porto from the perspective of local hotels and travel agencies”. I Understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and anytime I can give up the participation and this decision would not reflect any prejudgment for me.

By participating in this research, I will collaborate in the development of the research in business tourism, in the content, not having any direct or indirect benefit by my collaboration.

I also understand that all the information obtained in this research will be completely confidential and my identification never will be released in any report or publication or to any person not directly related to this research unless I written authorize.

Name

Signature

Date