

Individual level of the business tourism: different perceptions of the people involved in the industry

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## **Individual level of the business tourism: different perceptions of the people involved in the industry**

### **Abstract:**

Before the pandemic COVID-19 business tourism was characterised with increase and high competition among destination for the opportunity to organise an event. As a result, quality changes and new participants have appeared on the demand side of business tourism and new event types (digital or hybrid meetings) on the supplier side. Although it is called MICE tourism in the segment in academic literature, there is no consensus in naming the branch. The aim of this study is to present a systematic review of the current international terminology of business tourism and the process of choosing destinations from event organiser aspect.

*Keywords: MICE tourism, Meetings Industry, destination selection criteria*

## **1. Introduction of Paper**

The topic of this paper is business tourism which is among the first industries drastically affected by the globally spread Coronavirus. Although the research does not focus these impacts, it is inevitable to mention it, since the experiences gained during this period will influence the new direction in the reset phase, of which business tourism is not an exception either. Before the worldwide epidemic the professional statistics and figures and researches (WTTC, UNWTO) were about the global prosperity of the branch, since in 2017 in Europe the spending from leisure tourism – generated by inland tourists together with ones from other countries – gave 77,8% of direct touristic GDP and spending from business tourism meant 22,2%. In 2018 according to the expectations they increased by 3,4%, however by 2028 it will have raised by 2,3% and reached 480,3 million USD (WTTC, 2018) Not only its contribution increased, but international arrivals too (the number of the tourists who spent at least five days in one destination). In 2019 world tourism reached 1.5 billion arrivals which meant 60% increase within 10 years in 2009 892 million arrivals were registered worldwide) (UNWTO, 2020). Analysing the aim of the visits, business tourism took 19% while holidays, recreations and other leisure tourism forms took more than half (56%) of the arrivals. Travels for other reasons such as visiting friends or family – also known as VER standing for visiting friends and relatives in international academic literature (Jackson, 1990) – for religious reasons, and for health care reasons took 27%. The visits without specific aims took 4% (UNWTO).

Realising the positive potential in business tourism, destinations started to open to this segment and invest resources in it. The quick development of infrastructure results in high competition for market shares among the destination. Understanding the key factors of choosing venues of business meetings, conferences and incentive trips by the organisers can mean competitive advantages for certain destinations. One of the consequences of the current situation is that online events are spreading. Although their realization still needs as much professional expertise as in case of traditional business tourism, it requires different skills and resources from a certain point of view. According to a moderate forecast the market of association conferences are not affected by the pandemic as much as the one of the corporate meetings, since the arrangements of conferences and congresses rotating int he world, organised regularly and are with high participant number starts 3-4 years before the events.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### *2.1. Terminological evolution of business tourism*

According to the basic theory of tourism (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001) the segmentation of the touristic market is based on the needs and the satisfying of requirements form the demand side which takes travel aims, motivations and methods of payment into consideration. From them one can differentiate the following categories: leisure travel (private tourism market) and business travel (business tourism market) (Davidson & Cope, 2003). A conception of business travel and business tourism appear in several contexts of academic literature, however according to Davidson and Cope (2003), in classical rule of three, namely tourism needs time, money and motivation, business tourism means those travels in which everything is related to work. So, the travels take place in working hours on the employers' expenses and interest are indicated as business tourism (Newstrom & Scannell, 1998). In secondary resources dealing with this segment we can meet more and more definitions of these fields.

Nowadays the branch is not only referred to be business tourism but new concepts such as MICE tourism (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Conventions, Exhibitions), Meetings Industry (MI), MCCI (Meetings, Congresses, Conventions and Incentives) Industry, MECE (Meetings, Events, Conventions, Exhibitions), MCE (Meetings, Conventions, Exhibitions), CEMI (Conventions, Exhibitions, Meetings, Incentives) or MC & IT (Meetings, Conventions & Incentive Travel) can be found in academic writings and literature (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001; Weber & Chon, 2002; Davidson & Cope, 2003; Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007; Rogers, 2008; Happ, 2015; Getz & Page, 2016a; UNWTO, 2019).

Differences in definitions can be experienced in geographical placement. The widely accepted MICE tourism is mainly used in regions where the tourism industry is fast growing such as India, China and the Near East (Israel, UAE), in Southeast-Asian countries (Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore). It is also popular in Central and Eastern Europe, and favourably mentioned as a professional definition in the Visegrad Four (i.e. Czechia, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia), and also in the touristic terminology of Slovenia and Croatia. Business tourism is the most accepted expression in interdisciplinary researches of tourism, and it is originated from North America. Although in the USA, business/work and tourism are opposite of each other, the North American academic literature connected these words and refers to the branch as business tourism (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001; Weber & Chon, 2002; Davidson & Cope, 2003). The expression of Meetings Industry (MI) was officially introduced in the academic literature in 2006 (UNWTO, 2006; Rogers, 2008). The MI concept expands the definition of MICE tourism and includes those activities that deal with the organization, promotion, sales and hosting of business events. MI is mainly used in Western European countries (e.g. UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria). Business events as an alternative expression is spread in Australia and Canada, the scope and tasks of which is determined by the academic literature the similar way to other events (e.g. cultural, social, sporting events).

As a consequence, a single definition does not exist to refer to the segment, yet in the international academic literature MICE tourism is the most accepted one (Cieslikowski, 2015). The definition of MICE tourism is a mosaic word which stands for the above-mentioned English words (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Conventions, Exhibitions). The new trend on the market of MICE tourism is that the role of unique and new destinations is developed which has generated changes after a period of cooperating with the several-time chosen Western European cities. This new interest is mainly highlighted with conference groups (ICCA, 2018). Mainly, the organizers seek for programs providing unique experience for groups with high number of participants, high cost and one week stay. According to the current trends not only capitals are popular but those destinations on countryside within short trip reach from the hotels of the capitals (UIA, 2018).

## *2.2. The characteristics of the components of business tourism*

The first letter of MICE tourism stands for *Meetings*, that is to say business trips, negotiations which contain corporate organising and planning elements with limited incentives. The aim of the corporate meetings with minimum 10 participants is to discuss certain topics or execute certain actions in permanent venues or on regular basis (Trišić & Arsenov-Bojović, 2018). There is no exhibition connecting to the event. They tend to be on high level with prestige values which directly contribute to the positive image communication of the company. The segment is highly sensitive to exterior and interior changes and reacts dynamically (for instance economic recession in 2008, world political factors, pandemic COVID-19), besides that the developing industry also has influence on the segment. Security assessment also plays important role in choosing the venue alongside with the presence of employees in the given region.

*Incentives* are usually for employees with good results (usually sales representatives, distributors) or partners who also provide excellent performances. This segment is very profitable for the destinations, since in this case the tendency on expenditure is the highest. Generally, we can say that number of participants is high whose entertainment is provided by expensive programmes. From the destinations' point of view the emphasis is on the attraction and the offer of the hotels, while the conference rooms are in the background (usually the meetings take no longer than half day). With the evolvement of medical business trips, transparency became highlighted, education was in focus. These changes relocate incentive trips from holiday resorts into 'city break' destinations, since they possess enough infrastructural backgrounds to include corporate elements in incentive trips. In many cases business elements are included such as in for of strategic discussions (Rogers, 2008). Parallely, elements of social and corporate awareness also appear.

*Conferences and congresses* in MICE are usually organised upon the order of associations, the aim of which is to provide common platforms to discuss certain topics, to share knowledge, to consult and solve issues on academic, sport and cultural fields (Trišić & Arsenov-Bojović, 2018). The clients can be any legal entities such as foundations, state organisations, or any other for-profit organisations. The associations are usually non-profit organisations which are engaged to education, industry development and any academic fields or governmental lobbies. Their conferences are mainly high cost with high number of staying and expenditure. The participants are generally from other countries, so these conferences can generate economical profits for the chosen destination (Crouch & Weber, 2002). They are considered to be one of the most predictable segments, since it mostly resists global events and economical changes.

*Exhibitions* are B2B and B2C events where products and services are presented. Trade exhibitions generally called trade fair or expos are usually arranged by organisations or industrial participants with unique interest whose aim is to present their new products or services, to study the actions of competitors, to examine current trends and possibilities. (Trišić & Arsenov-Bojović, 2018). Some of them are open for public, while some are exclusively for representatives of the corporation and media. These events can stimulate as many as, or ten thousand visitors, they are usually organised yearly and belong to business tourism. It may also have economic impact on the destination, since they are cost effective and serve as a platform for clients and partners to meet personally and stimulate business among them.

### **3. Characteristics of Business Tourists**

While target audience of leisure tourism is determined as individuals, the participants are leisure tourists, MICE Industry focuses on companies, organizations and associations, the participants are business tourists. It is important to be aware that sales channels are also different between leisure and business tourism. In case of incoming leisure tourism tour operators, travel agencies, personal travel advisors, online pages are on stage, while in case of business tourism business tour operators, Destination Management Companies (DMCs), incentive agencies, Professional Congress Organizers (PCOs), Event Management Companies (EMCs), exhibition and event organizer companies, business travel agencies, convention bureaux and Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) are the participants (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001).

Differences can be experienced between required services. Both in leisure and business tourism competitive accommodation and infrastructure play an important role, however in the case of leisure tourism, touristic attractions, sightseeing, boat tours, restaurants and shopping facilities appear as important decision factors. For business tourists, competitive venues, unique event venues, high quality of catering and entertainment are essential criteria (Boniface & Cooper, 2005).

In the decision-making of choosing a destination, regarding business tourists, the primary decision factors are the appropriate infrastructure and capacity and opportunities professional development (Rogers, 2008). In the case of leisure tourists, the exploration of the destination and relaxation are a determining motivation of destination choice (McNicoll, 2004). One of the main benefits of business tourism is that the events are easily organized on long term since outstanding conferences and exhibitions, trade fairs, incentive trips with high number are booked 3-4 years in advance by the organizers (Allied Market Research, 2016). Nevertheless, at smaller scale corporate meetings the trend is the booking periods are getting shorter and the leading date is closer to the date of arrival (UNWTO, 2018) making the aforementioned advantages of business tourism more relative (Oršič & Bregar, 2015; Millán, Fanjul & Moital, 2016).

Business tourism is not only the driver of the touristic sector, but it is also the one of the engines of the other branches, since the conference guests are leading representatives of their own field who can lead their branches to the prosperity with their innovative ideas (Davidson & Cope, 2003). When introducing the advantages of business tourism, it is important to mention the re-visit intention of the conference guests as leisure tourists. This effect is, however, out of the scope of the present study. An outstanding conference increases the awareness and reputation of the hosting town with which contributes to the positive strengthening of its image and by its multiplier effect it can contribute to economic development (Marques & Santos, 2016; Getz & Page, 2016b).

#### **4. New Trend: Bleisure Tourism**

Bleisure is the merging of business and leisure tourism and is an observably spreading phenomenon. It is a new trend which influences both segments of tourism – leisure and business tourism – furthermore the members of demand and supply side. In recent years, according to Lichy and McLeay (2018) the popularity of bleisure tourism - the fusion of business and leisure tourism - has been spreading bleisure tourists complete or finish their business trips with leisure activities, so the borders leisure and business tourism is slurring. The concept of bleisure traveller is determined as follows: those professionals who avoid the trap of sacrificing everything to work and leaving nothing to entertainment, by including leisure activities within their business trip (Bridge Street Global Hospitality, 2014; WEF, 2015).

Although in the age of time management, according to the statistics of World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2018, the number of travellers in bleisure tourism who connect work with leisure activities is constantly growing, this hybrid type of travels is less researched academic field. Since the phenomenon is inevitable for those who research in business tourism, I try to involve examining common fields of business and bleisure tourism into my primer research. There are some studies which completely focus on bleisure or business trips, besides them in some articles there are references on it which deal with the circumstances and physical requirements of the events (Gustafson 2014), on gaining experiences on business trips (Unger, Uriely, & Fuchs, 2016), activities during the business trips (Smith & Carmichael, 2007) or the working tourists (Uriely & Reichel, 2000; Cohen, 2011). Researches in their academic work deal with the border disciplines of bleisure tourism, such as stress, tension, work-family balance (Westman, Etzion & Gattenio, 2008), accommodation choice of business tourists (Sammons, More, Benson & Demicco, 1999) and with the fact that business tourists return as leisure tourists later (Kerr, Cliff, & Dolnicar, 2012)- however they are different from types of bleisure tourism. The border between business and leisure trips is more and more nuanced since more and more people look for professions with travel opportunities. The number of business tourists is growing year by year and it can be experienced that more and more participants lengthen

their trips in order to enjoy the leisure facilities of the given destination. Currently this rate is approximately 60% of business tourists (Expedia Group Media Solutions, 2018) and the number of those ones who take time on leisure facilities in a business trip. According to Expedia Group Media Solutions (2018) the following factors are determining in bleisure tourism: Exceptional and unique programme opportunities (48%), Must-visit locations (43%), Accessibility within the city (38%), The length of the journey (37%), Proximity of weekend to the business trip (37%), Extra costs (37%), Good recreation facilities (34%), Join of friends and family (32%).

The new trend offers new opportunities to local suppliers since bleisure tourists are usually already experienced travellers. Both groups (business and bleisure tourists) possess travelling habits that differ from the ones of average tourists. They look for precious, authentic, unique and personalized leisure facilities in the given region. As a result, event and conference organizers try to find an attractive venue to the requirements since a destination with a positive image can contribute to increase the number of business events in the hosting area.

## **5. The process of choosing destinations from event organiser aspect**

Tourism happens in space, the venues are destinations with complex features (Howie, 2003). The destination is defined by its touristic offers, the choice of services fusion of favourable geographical area in academic literature, which factors attract tourists to the destinations and meet the demand through a complex experience offer (Gunn, 1994; Leiper, 1995; Buhalis, 2000; Kozak & Baloglu, 2011; Durasevic, 2015). In our globalised world not only the conditions of leisure tourism are becoming easier, but the ones of business tourism, too. As a result, there is a high competition between destinations in order to get on the mental map of decision-makers (in case of leisure tourism the tourists themselves, in case of business tourism the final client such as an association, a firm, the assistants of company leaders. Destinations offer more variable products and services to the visitors in order to provide unique experiences to make the visit memorable.

Business tourism covers the tourists from other types of tourism who look for and require high level services and tend to spend most per head due to the contribution of the company they represent (Dwyer, 2002; Wan, 2011). More and more destination recognise the potential in the competition, so the sector influences the offer of the destinations (Gustafson, 2012; Smith & Garnham, 2006). Weber and Ladkin in their academic research (2004; 2009) explore and acquaint a new trend which affects the congress industry: from governmental side there is a higher and higher interest due to its economic profit. The reviews present the conference tourism (Yoo & Weber, 2005; Mair, 2012), and touristic researches of congress and negotiation management (Lee & Back, 2005). Mair (2012) reviewed 144 articles from the academic literature which were written between 2000 and 2009 and mainly published in Journal of Convention and Event Tourism.

The researches according to thematic deal with event organisers, the technology. the estimation of economic influences, the assessment of questionnaires, the process the destination choice, the role of the image of the destination influencing destination choice (Jin & Weber, 2013), however none of the researches continued with the harmonisation of the results and the demand side, so as to building requirements in the prices of destination choice of the final clients (individuals, corporations, associations). It is a general trend that on the market of MICE tourism the role of the new and fresh destinations are valorised during the process of destination choice, which has brought changes to the offices working in international stages and also to the associations after the several times tried significant West-European cities.

This new trend is highly visible in case of conference groups (ICCA, 2018). Primarily the organisers seek for venues offering special and unique experiences for groups with a lot of members and high expenditure. and in lot of the cases with up to one week long staying. According to the trends we can say that nowadays not only capitals are popular, but basically those destinations which are a day trip from the capital and reachable with short travel from the hotel (UIA, 2018). The study of Marais, Du Plessis and Saayman (2017) gives a complex table on how to determine the key factors of business tourism using and analysing the seconder sources in the topic published from 1985 to 2015. As a result of overviewing the academic literature and the qualitative research shown in the study, four key factors are having been determined by the authors which can make the destination of business tourism successful: 1. finance, 2. human resource, 3. the product, 4. customer-oriented approach. Other studies (Crouch & Louviere, 2004; Boniface & Cooper, 2005) putting the aspect of event organisers forward consider the following elements the most important factors of choosing the destination: 1. location. 2. safety, 3. air travel, 4. accessibility, 5. cost, 6. the attraction of the destinations, and 7. the quality and hospitality of service providers. It is worth according the factors from demand and offer side, since it is very important to know how diverse these factors from demand side (final clients, conference and congress organisers) and from offer side (congress venues among others, special gala dinners, restaurants) are, since in most of the researches above the answers from demand and offer side are analysed together.

## **6. Summary, Limitations and Further Research Avenues**

In the study the terminology of business tourism has been presented from which it is visible that a common agreement does not exist in the naming of the sector. According to the UNWTO (2019), the branch is called Meetings Industry. Based on its definition the trip has business and professional aims which can be divided into further motivations such as a participating in corporate meetings, conferences or conventions, trade fairs and exhibitions and other business and professional aims. The 'Meetings Industry' expression is used by most of the international business tourism associations (Meeting Professionals International (MPI), International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), the Reeds Travel Exhibitions and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)) instead of the MICE mosaic word. Although MICE does not acknowledge the industrial features of business events it is still, due to the lack of a commonly accepted definition, the most popular and used in tourism. In the four subsegments that MICE stands for, the aim of the travellers is business and professional, however all the four have different features. The focus of the research in the study deals with conference tourism since it is exclusively B2B form as opposed the other three subsegments in case of which B2B and B2C are hardly isolated.

In the case of business tourism, being aware of the primary factors of choosing destinations is important, as paying attention to them and with upgrading their level the image of the destination can be made more appealing and as a result this image can contribute to the growing number of conferences on the given hosting country. The key factors of choosing a destination is known from the organizers' side, however, from the participants' side – we are hardly informed what they mean by the system of this kind of tourism and by the particularity of the destination. As a result, it would be essential to set up a scientific gap research on the individual level, in other words within conference tourists. Tourism takes place in the physical environment (Butler, 1980). As such, it is imperative to set geographical boundaries to a such study. For the sake of the present research, the sample would be composed of international conference tourists arriving in Budapest. Because of the nature of the study, a nonprobability sampling will be used. In order to answer the research questions, it is worth conducting a survey



in several conferences with a high number of participants in Budapest. The aim of the quantitative research is to examine the key factors of conference tourism and its attendance, focusing on the destination from the visitors' point of view. Before the questionnaire semi-structured interviews will be used because of the deeper understanding of the topic. Semi-structured interview is useful for investigating complex behaviours, opinions, emotions and affects, and for collecting a diversity of experiences. This method does not offer me a route to 'the truth' but it gives a route to partial insights into what people do and think (Longhurst, 2016).

Revealing all these factors can contribute to a better understanding of the demand side and being aware of them may provide a guide on how to harmonise the offer and demand side of conference tourism. Besides Budapest as a destination, the model set up from the research results can assist in forecasting the future of destinations involved in international conference tourism.

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