

CURRENT BUSINESS TOURISM REFERENCES. CASE STUDY: HOTEL NOVOTEL BUCHAREST

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Abstract

Business tourism has proven to be an important part of the hospitality industry in terms of both travel volumes and generated revenue. This type of activity, far from being a novelty, has expanded and seems destined to continue to grow at a higher rate every year. Growth is particularly marked by international events that bring important financial gains to host cities, generated not only by these activities, but also by the multiplier effect of all tourism activities.

The motivation for the chosen theme results from the fact that in the hospitality industry, business tourism is a segment in which a variety of events can be organized, such as: local, regional and national conferences and meetings - organized by associations and corporations, congresses and conventions, international courses, trainings and induction courses, fairs, exhibitions, product launches, motivation tourism, exchanges addressed to students and teachers, travel of government employees, etc., with major economic impact both at national and international level for the development of society. The evolution of business tourism in Bucharest provides a strengthening of business relations, investments, more efficient use of hotel structures and obvious increases in revenues.

The starting point of this research is represented by an analysis of the current context of the evolution of business tourism and the identification of its potential at the level of the Capital of Romania. Our analysis shows that there is a correlation between the hotel sector specific to events organizing services and the development of the business tourism segment. The case study on the Novotel Hotel in Bucharest brings to light the following striking themes in the field of tourism: the organization of business events as an engine for economic growth and the attraction of new tourists, as well as the impact of events in the MICE industry on the reduction of seasonality in the Capital.

Research based solely on the processing of secondary data does not present issues related to the subjectivity of tourists nor does it present the point of view of the providers. Thus, the analysis of the events organized at the Novotel Hotel in Bucharest during the period 2012-2016 reflects that the business tourism is specific to the area of events, conferences, business meetings, etc., and may have an effect in reducing the seasonality in Bucharest, but also in increasing the economic profit for the hotel industry.

Keywords:

Business travel, MICE industry events, seasonality, profit.

JEL Classification: M2, P0, Z310

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Introduction

Current international context

We live in a period of revolutionary change marked by developments in science, technology and medicine. We identify a growing pace of new product creation and faster growth cycles in the global economy. Global business relationships and networking have fantastic shifts, since more information has been generated over the last three years than in the whole history of humanity. At this point, the increase in international business meetings is inevitable. We are witnessing the world-wide achievement of a well-established MICE industry, which has firmly placed itself at the heart of tourism as one of its main engines and an important generator of revenue, jobs and investments. In addition to important business opportunities, meetings in the MICE industry provide huge benefits

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to the economy as they generate a higher level of spending on average, reduce seasonality, help reinvent destinations, and increase innovation and creativity in the business tourism sector.

Strong international accountability in a globalized economic scenario requires much more attention due to increasingly demanding tourists who are much more independent in the preparation of their itinerary, and more interested in looking for enriched experiences. In this scenario, developing more innovative, creative, competitive, modern, flexible and sustainable models is essential, making investments in the tourism industry more attractive.

Based on the presentation of the specialized literature and the research methodology, the main stages of this research will cover: analysis of the international statistical reports of the Conference Associations for the period 2009-2015, ICCA ranking for the period 2009-2015, documentation on the scientific literature that addresses the impact of business tourism in the current global economic context, case study on the events organized at the Novotel Hotel in Bucharest for the period 2012-2016, and then briefly present the methodology used in the research, the results obtained and the main conclusions.

According to the World Tourism Organization, following the IMEX Policy Forum held in Frankfurt, Germany in 2014, the MICE industry has become widely accepted by governments around the world as a major source of economic growth and nationwide funding. We observe that the focus of the contribution is mostly local, so the city where business tourism is being developed is mostly advantaged. Recognizing this important fact, there is a need to create greater awareness among the industry and the need to provide an opportunity for politicians, both at national and local level, to exchange information and best practices on this sector. (UNWTO Report, 2014)

Globally, between 2009 and 2015, the US ranks first in terms of the number of national conferences. The US hosted about 5395 conferences, the largest number of events organized during the specified period. In Europe, Germany remains the leader, which is globally on the second place in the same period, while Spain lost 3rd place in 2015 to the United Kingdom (UK). France had a significant increase in the number of conferences throughout this period, and it placed in fourth place in 2013. Italy fell from its 4th position in 2009 and ranked sixth in 2010-2015. The Netherlands ranks 9th in 2011-2012 and 2014-2015. China managed to keep its 8th place during the last 3 years, after falling to the last position in 2012. During the analyzed period, the only years Austria managed to keep in the top 10 were 2009 and 2011 (Table 1).

Table no. 1: Global country ranking by number of conferences

Place	2009		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
	Country	No.	Country	No.	Country	No.	Country	No.	Country	No.	Country	No.	Country	No.
1	USA	595	USA	623	USA	759	USA	833	USA	829	USA	831	USA	925
2	Germany	458	Germany	542	Germany	577	Germany	649	Germany	722	Germany	659	Germany	667
3	Spain	360	Spain	451	Spain	463	Spain	550	Spain	562	Spain	578	United Kingdom	582
4	Italy	350	United Kingdom	399	United Kingdom	434	United Kingdom	477	France	527	United Kingdom	543	Spain	572
5	United Kingdom	345	France	371	France	428	France	469	United Kingdom	525	France	533	France	522
6	France	341	Italy	341	Italy	363	Italy	390	Italy	447	Italy	452	Italy	504
7	Brazil	293	Japan	305	Brazil	304	Brazil	360	Japan	342	Japan	337	Japan	355
8	Japan	257	China P.R.	282	China P.R.	302	Japan	341	China P.R.	340	China P.R.	332	China P.R.	333
9	China P.R.	245	Brazil	275	Netherlands	291	Netherlands	315	Brazil	315	Netherlands	307	Netherlands	333
10	Austria	236	Switzerland	244	Austria	267	China P.R.	311	Netherlands	302	Brazil	291	Canada	308

Source: Developed by authors based on information gathered from the international statistical reports of the Conferences Associations 2009-2015

Analyzing the ICCA ranking for the top 10 cities with a significant number of organized conferences, it is noted that Vienna, which ranked first in 2009-2012, fell in the rankings in 2013-2015. The first place was occupied by Paris in 2013 and 2014, and in 2015 by Berlin. Paris was originally ranked 3rd and 2nd respectively. Barcelona came second in 2009-2010, third in 2011 and 2015, fourth in 2013 and fifth in 2012 and 2014. Berlin has had a positive development and managed to reach the 4th place in 2009 and the first place in 2015. Singapore did not keep its 5th position and fell to 6th in 2013 and 7th place in the years 2012-2014. In 2015 Stockholm failed to stay in the top 10. In 2010-2015, Beijing, Sydney, Prague and Seoul are the new entries in the top 10 for the period under review (Table 2).

Table no. 2: Top cities globally by conferences

Place	2009		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
	City	No.	City	No.	City	No.	City	No.	City	No.	City	No.	City	No.
1	Vienna	160	Vienna	154	Vienna	181	Vienna	195	Paris	204	Paris	214	Berlin	195
2	Barcelona	135	Barcelona	148	Paris	174	Paris	181	Madrid	186	Vienna	202	Paris	186
3	Paris	131	Paris	147	Barcelona	150	Berlin	172	Vienna	182	Madrid	200	Barcelona	180
4	Berlin	129	Berlin	138	Berlin	147	Madrid	164	Barcelona	179	Berlin	193	Vienna	178
5	Singapore	119	Singapore	136	Singapore	142	Barcelona	154	Berlin	178	Barcelona	182	London	171
6	Copenhagen	103	Madrid	114	Madrid	130	London	150	Singapore	175	London	166	Madrid	171
7	Stockholm	102	Istanbul	109	London	115	Singapore	150	London	166	Singapore	142	Singapore	156
8	Amsterdam	98	Lisbon	106	Amsterdam	114	Copenhagen	137	Istanbul	146	Amsterdam	133	Istanbul	148
9	Lisbon	98	Amsterdam	104	Istanbul	113	Istanbul	128	Lisbon	125	Istanbul	130	Lisbon	145
10	Beijing	96	Sydney	102	Beijing	111	Amsterdam	122	Seoul	125	Prague	118	Copenhagen	138

Source: Made by authors based on information taken from the International Statistical Reports of the Conferences Associations 2009-2015

The data in the tables show the expansion of business tourism from the point of view of global meetings and European capitals, which contributes to a major economic development. This context can also be exploited by Eastern Europe in a copy-paste way from Western Europe, should there be an interest and awareness of the actors on the profit brought by this industry.

Current context at national and Capital level

National business tourism has a rapid and steadily rising dynamics of economic growth and investments in the hotel sector, being more visible in large urban centers, from Constanta to Iasi, from Brasov to Cluj, from Timisoara to Oradea. We mention that the development of business tourism has a direct influence on the cities that own airports, Romania benefiting from 16 internationally expanding airports as infrastructure and access to external flights. An important but not absolute indicator of foreign tourist traffic is the arriving airflow, which has increased significantly over the last 6 years and has become the second means of transport used by foreign tourists visiting Romania after the car transport.

Romania held the 47th place in 2009 with a total number of 33 conferences, according to the report by the International Conferences Associations. In the following years, the number of organized events increased to 54 in 2012 and 77 to 2015 respectively, and this ensured our 45th and 44th rankings (Table 3).

Table no. 3: Global Position of Romania

Country: Romania		
Year	Rank	No.
2009	47	33
2012	45	54
2015	44	77

Source: Developed by authors based on information taken from the International Statistical Reports of the Conferences Associations 2009-2015

At the national level, the city of Bucharest ranked in the 91st place in 2009 with 18 conferences. Between 2009 and 2012, the number of conferences increased by 10 and Bucharest climbed to 85th position. The number of meetings organized until 2015 almost doubled and Bucharest was ranked 55th (Table 4).

Table no. 4: The position of Bucharest on a global level

CITY: Bucharest		
Year	Rank	No.
2009	91	18
2012	85	28
2015	55	47

Source: Made by authors based on information taken from the International Statistical Reports of the Conferences Associations 2009-2015

1. Literature review - business tourism - MICE industry

Business tourism is the form of tourism that is organized for commercial purposes and which also benefits from the recreational tourism side as a secondary motivation of the participants. Business tourism is defined by the International Association of Conventions and Congresses as "providing facilities and services to millions of delegates who attend annual meetings, congresses, exhibitions, business events, travel, incentives and corporate hospitality" (ICCA World). Business tourism helps growth and economic development of tourist destinations by generating income from accommodation, food and leisure activities after attending a business event (Marques and Santos, 2016). Business tourism also takes place throughout the year in specially designed spaces, providing specific services of exposure, trading, accommodation, security, aesthetic arrangements, means of telecommunication, video-tv, multiplication, transfer, public catering, press and graphics services, etc.

Business trips can lead to the use of spare time for leisure activities, visiting the main tourist attractions of the area and shopping (Carvalho, Márquez and Díaz, 2016).

From the content point of view, forms of business tourism are structured into:

- Individual business trips for which the person concerned accepts to travel outside the city of residence;
- Reunions, meetings, conferences, seminars, team-buildings, product launches, annual meetings of companies or associations that facilitate communication with and between employees, customers, shareholders or members;
- Fairs and exhibitions, generally intended for product presentations;
- Incentive trips that employees receive from their employer as a reward for good work results;
- "Corporate" events to build or intensify business relationships (Davidson and Cope, 2003). According to information provided by the International Association of Conventions and Congresses / ICCA, the issues surrounding the organization of a business event are set by several skilled people. Basically, the destination where the event takes place is set by the International Organization. Local partners, members of the organization, present multiple destinations for that event. They should be encouraged by the event provider to accept hosting a congress. Subsequently, the specialized committee and the local partner who was selected for organizing the event choose the location of the event and the other service providers. The agenda of the event will be established by a specialized commission that may be part of the local commission or may be a distinct international organization.

"Top 3 Meetings" is a Maltese company specialized in MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and events) that created for 2017 a top 8 trends in this industry. So, the most common 8 trends for this year are (Top3meetings, 2017):

1. Increasing pre- and post-event connections through social networking;
2. Personalized experiences for each event, starting from the organization of the event to the end of it;
3. The social and local impact of the event organized in the community which hosts it;
4. Virtual reality and thereafter, virtually the ability to translate reality into the virtual environment to see how the location where the event will take place will look like;
5. The virtual assistance that has grown in organizing business events, due to the development of artificial intelligence. Virtual assistants can be used for both event recordings and event planning stages;
6. Facilitating the interaction between speakers and participants;
7. Non-traditional events venues - every organized event is meant to come up with something unique and new to be successful;
8. Social media - can be an asset for every event organizer, as it can easily collect event data from participants.

2. Methodology of research

In order to achieve the purpose of the research, namely to identify the current context of business tourism at the level of the Capital of Romania, we have used the qualitative research method in this paper, which is usually formulated in general terms and leaves room for a flexible exploratory process. Relying in particular on the analysis of the meaning of words, the qualitative method offers the possibility of a deeper understanding of the subject of the research and, thus, the chance of a more complex explanation (Kuma, 2011). The qualitative approach proposes the analysis of the whole and the fluid dynamics of the relations between the business tourism and the services of organizing events in the hotel sector.

The starting point of this research is represented by an analysis of the current context of the evolution of business tourism and the identification of its potential at the level of the Capital of Romania. Throughout this research, the following methods were used: analysis, synthesis, comparison, observation, documentary research and case study. From the perspective of the data analysis, we used this analysis of the international statistical reports of the

Conference Associations for the period 2009-2015 and the analysis of the ICCA ranking for the period 2009-2015. Based on the information from the reports we used, we identified the current national and international context of Business tourism as a promoter of economic and social development of a community, especially for Bucharest, in our case. As a result of this analysis, we managed to compare globally the rankings of the most important countries, but also their capitals, from the perspective of organizing MICE events, as well as Romania's position from year to year in the rankings (Tables no. 1-4). Another stage of the research was documentation on scientific literature addressing the impact of business tourism in the current global economic context. This type of tourism is a new form of profit for many stakeholders, organizers, event agencies, locations that can be business centers, or hotels, restaurants, transport and communications companies, etc. Business tourism is the source of constant profits for most of the international chains of 4 and 5 star hotels.

Given that we wanted to better understand the correlation between business tourism and the hotel sector, we came to the conclusion that the case study method is the most advantageous. Case study is a method that is defined mainly by circumscribing research to a particular entity, which may be individual or collective (Taris et al., 2010). This qualitative research method is used to collect consistent answers that help us find answers to research questions. The case study on the Novotel Hotel in Bucharest interprets the data available for the period 2012-2016 and discusses the following striking themes in the area of tourism: organizing business events as a driver of economic growth and attracting new tourists, as well as the impact of MICE events on the reduction of seasonality at the Capital level. Thus, the questions raised by our research in the case study are: How many events are organized by the Novotel Hotel? What are the types of events organized? What are the periods, the month, the season? Their duration? Number of participants and their impact at Bucharest level. The research is conducted strictly on the processing of secondary data, which are presented in Tables 5 and 6, as well as Figures 1 to 4 over a 4-year period.

This study demonstrates that there is a correlation between the hotel sector specific to event organizing services and the development of the business tourism segment. Thus, the case study on the events organized at the Novotel Hotel shows us that these events can be an up-to-date method of reducing seasonality.

3. Case study: Hotel Novotel - event analysis 2012-2016

Specialists in this area believe that Romanian tourism is supported by several segments that work well and develop accordingly: rural tourism, spa tourism, adventure tourism and, last but not least, business tourism.

More and more tourists prefer 3-star and 4-star hotels, which are part of the franchises of established international chains, and the motivation of travelling is especially business trips. The percentage of foreign tourists staying in 3-star hotels in Romania is over 30% of all foreign tourists (increasing with the increase of accommodation capacity in this category) and in 4-star hotels the share of foreigners is about 40%. The average length of stay is between 1.7 and 2.5 days, typical of urban business stays, and most of the tourists were from the European Union (PEACOCK Hotels, 2007).

To be sustainable in today's competitive environment, creating a strong name and brand image are crucial to a hotel. Thus, in order to create a strong name, it must have a special performance in terms of service quality and adopt a competitive pricing policy. One of these hotels is the Novotel Hotel in Bucharest, which is a modern hotel, probably located in the most valuable place, not only for the Capital, but valuable from a historical and cultural point of view. Novotel Hotel in Bucharest is part of the Accor international chain of hotels and at the moment, according to Trip Advisor, ranked 22 out of 25 at the level of Romania in the ranking for the 4 and 5 star hotels present on the Romanian hotel market. Within Novotel, dozens of events such as conferences, workshops, and meetings are organized annually.

The case study of this hotel could be achieved by working with the managers of Novotel Bucharest Hotel, through which we could have access to a series of data on the number of events organized each year and their type. The main method used is the comparison of the data identified at the hotel level with the number of events, the type of events and the time of their organization (month, year and season).

Table no. 5 and table no. 6. provide information on the number of business events and private events organized within the Novotel Bucharest Hotel. In the first table, the events are structured on each individual month of each analyzed year (Table 5) and in the second table they are structured on each season (Table 6). Tables and charts have been processed using Microsoft Excel, the table data being manually input. For analyzing such data series, we calculated based on the information available, the total number of business and private events per month / year / season.

Table no. 5: Structure of the number of events at the Novotel Bucharest Hotel

Year/month	2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		Total ev./month	
	No. business ev.	No. private ev.	No. business ev.	No. private ev.	No. business ev.	No. private ev.	No. business ev.	No. private ev.	No. business ev.	No. private ev.	No. business ev.	No. private ev.
January	88	3	85	4	77	3	94	4	108	4	452	18
February	125	9	113	2	113	6	140	6	112	2	603	25
March	148	3	165	12	114	4	171	1	149	5	747	25
April	143	3	148	3	134	1	148	9	142	0	715	16
May	139	7	181	8	156	7	154	10	143	7	773	39
June	152	9	143	11	151	13	177	12	145	6	768	51
July	107	9	158	9	114	4	169	10	62	10	610	42
August	75	2	107	5	71	9	57	5	63	10	373	31
September	94	7	147	13	154	9	126	11	130	9	651	49
October	168	3	180	13	167	12	185	7	162	5	862	40
November	171	6	164	8	163	8	154	9	156	3	808	34
December	106	19	96	21	94	5	105	1	77	0	478	46
Total type ev.	1516	80	1687	109	1508	81	1680	85	1449	61	7840	416
Total ev./year	1596		1796		1589		1765		1510		8256	

Source: Made by authors based on information from Novotel Bucuharest Hotel

We note from the analysis of events that in order to increase the number of events in periods with low seasonality there is a need to identify the types of events organized, their number and the period of the year in which they are organized. Thus, we will see when it is a favorable time to organize an event in the venue of a 4 star hotel in the Capital of Romania and how can business tourism, through its events, reduce seasonality.

Table no. 6: Seasonal structure of the number of events at the Novotel Bucharest Hotel

Year/season	2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		Total ev./sezon	
	No. business ev.	No. private ev.	No. business ev.	No. private ev.	No. business ev.	No. private ev.	No. business ev.	No. private ev.	No. business ev.	No. private ev.	No. business ev.	No. private ev.
Spring	430	13	494	23	404	12	473	20	434	12	2235	80
Summer	334	20	408	25	336	26	403	27	270	26	1751	124
Autumn	433	16	491	34	484	29	465	27	448	17	2321	123
Winter	319	31	294	27	284	14	339	11	297	6	1533	89
Total type ev.	1516	80	1687	109	1508	81	1680	85	1449	61	7840	416
Total ev./year	1596		1796		1589		1765		1510		8256	

Source: Made by authors based on information from Novotel Bucuharest Hotel

4. Results and discussions

The analyzed location is equipped according to the current standards for a 4 star hotel.

During the analyzed period, the total number of events organized within the Hotel Novotel Bucharest was 8256, of which 95% represents business events (Figure 1). If we analyze the number of events organized each month, it is obvious that during the summer, July and August and during the Winter Holidays, the number of events is lower than in the rest of the year.

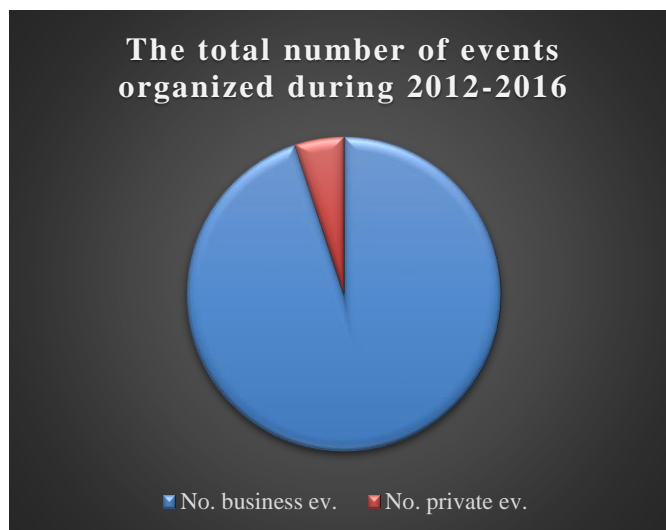


Figure no. 1: Total number of events organized in 2012-2016
 Source: Made by authors

Based on our data, we can observe that the total annual business events in the analyzed period fluctuated, both positively and negatively. In 2013 there was an 11% increase in events organized within the hotel compared to 2012, and in 2014 their number decreased to almost similar to 2012. The year 2015 saw an increase of 11% compared to 2014, but 2016 saw a decline in business events of 14% compared to 2015 and 4% over 2014.

On the other hand, given the fact that business tourism can be practiced several times a year, during the analyzed period there have been at least two consecutive years in which the number of business events is either increasing or decreasing. It is worth mentioning that the number of participants in these events varies according to their type and arrangement of the event room in the hotel, so we talk about a minimum of 10 people and a maximum of 300-400 people per event.

Private events recorded both positive and negative fluctuations from year to year, but the share of changes was up to 5% (Figure 2).

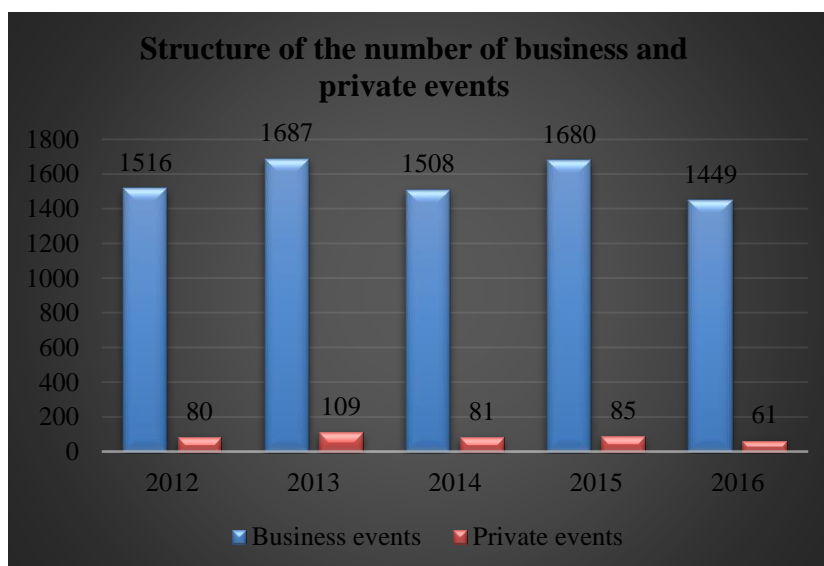


Figure no. 2: Structure of the number of business and private events
 Source: Made by authors

Analyzing the evolution of business events from one season to the next, it reveals that most companies and multinationals increase the pace of development in spring and autumn. During the summer and winter seasons, a large number of companies have a longer vacation period or work with a small number of staff due to vacations. Instead, if we look at private events, we will see that they are growing in the summer and autumn seasons. In spring the number of organized events is 36% lower, and in winter 29% lower compared to the other two seasons. (Figure 3)

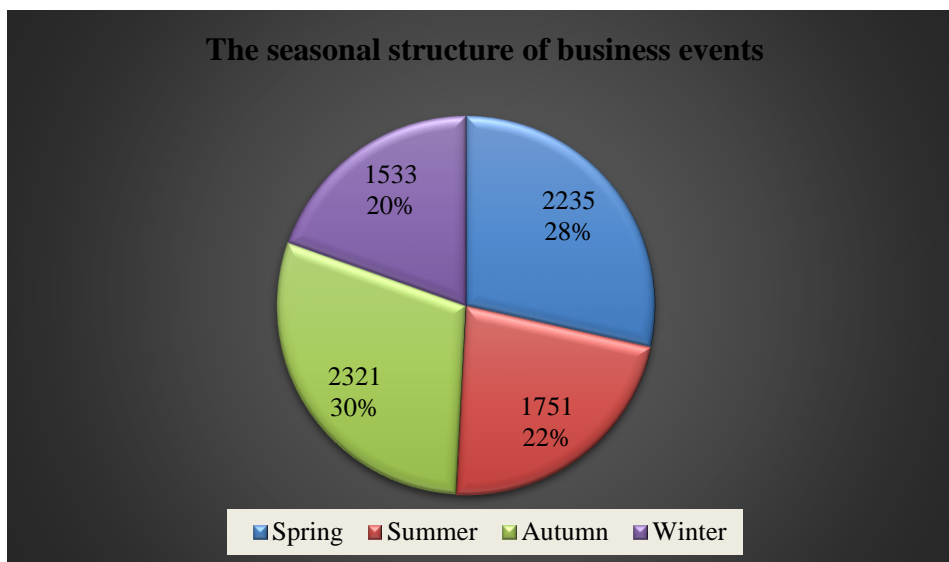


Figure no. 3: The Seasonal Structure of Business Events

Source: Made by authors

Moving forward, we wish to present the evolution of monthly business events. Every year there is a period when their number is significantly lower than in the other months. Next, we chose to see the months for each year where the number of business events is less than 100:

- 2012 - months: January, August and September;
- 2013 - months: January and December;
- 2014 - months: January, August and December;
- 2015 - months: January and August;
- 2016 - months: July, August and December.

Analyzing the distribution of the total number of business events per month, the lowest number of events is in August, totaling 373 events, followed by January and December with 452 events and 478 events respectively. In order to increase the number of events in the less-favored months, a pro-active promotion of the existing offers can be made with the help of the business partners and after signing the contracts for the organization of events, a confirmation of the event can be requested as soon as possible, otherwise the hotel unit may need to rent the venue to another company. October and November are the months when most events are organized, their total being 862 or 808. Private events do not register a high share so that their number is low throughout the year (Figure 4).

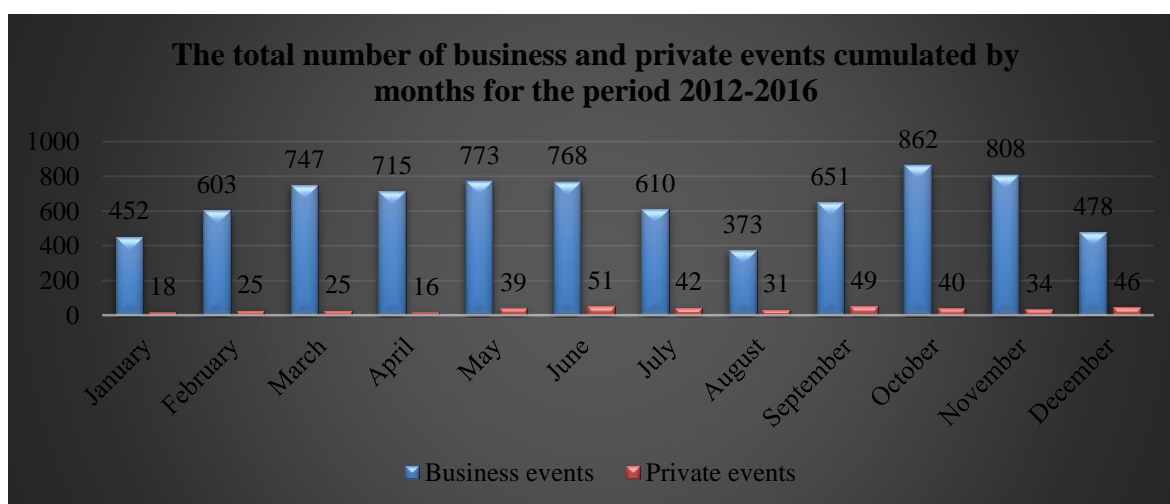


Figure no. 4: Total number of business and private events cumulated for months for 2012-2016

Source: Made by authors

Conclusions

Specialists say that Romania must leverage the advantage of the upward trend of business tourism worldwide and nationally, given the clear economic benefits of this form of tourism. We can state, following the analysis of the specialized literature and the analysis of the statistical reports referring the organization of events in the Capital of Romania that Bucharest may become, in a few years, the prime destination in Eastern Europe from the perspective of business tourism. At least in Bucharest, the number of hotels increases, from year to year, but the accommodation capacity for business (minimum 3 stars) is still insufficient.

Business tourism in Bucharest, as mentioned in this research, is now an important aspect of the economic evolution of the Capital. From the perspective of organizing events specific to the MICE industry, conferences, congresses and even private events, 4 and 5-star hotels are perfect venues for events organizing agencies, being specifically endowed with the requirements of such an event.

The results of the case study on the events organized during the period 2012-2016 within the Novotel Hotel in Bucharest and the information about the business tourism held at this moment can help create ways to reduce the seasonality in the Romanian tourism. The following recommendations are the result of the case study and are intended to mitigate the seasonality effect at the Capital level by:

- the allocation of remaining vacation days from the beginning of the year, so that the company always has business continuity;
- creating personalized offers for partner companies in free periods;
- proposing the organization of exhibitions and fairs;
- launching products or campaigns of major brands on the local, national and even international market, in Eastern Europe;
- full use of the existing technical and material assets;
- development of a calendar of events at the Capital level for the entire hotel industry;
- increasing the quality of services offered to consumers.

In the present research we have encountered limits that can be compensated by a deeper analysis of the issue in qualitative focus group research and quantitative researches, which would reflect on the prospects of both Romanian and foreign tourists, and the opinion of the specific service providers.

We conclude by noting that business events are helping drive hotel customers to increase their flow during periods of low activity. Thus, both the travel agencies that contract the hotel venue and travel agents who sign new contracts with them, can participate in increasing the activity of hotels in terms of increasing the number of business events organized during lower load periods, through promotion of bundled services offered by the hotel, both in the country and abroad.

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