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Business Tourism Market Developments

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the developments of business tourism market in the current economic environment. Internationally, business tourism has reached impressive levels; the World Tourism Organization estimated it at over 14% of the tourist movement and nearly 20 % of all tourist revenues. Given the close connections with diverse areas, the business tourism was marked recently by an increasing trend closely related to the overall economic development manifested worldwide, with the opening of new markets, the intensification of international relations and contacts of all kinds.

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1. Introduction

Business tourism corresponds to very different domains, its field enrolling alike: global diplomatic meetings and meetings between representatives of different countries, economic and trade negotiations meetings, meetings for the exchange of scientific and technical information and communication of the results of certain research and development projects, cultural and educational meetings, as well as events specific to various forms of cultural manifestation, sports competitions, etc.

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.

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Business tourism operates with a wide range of business corporations: hotel chains, tour operator travel agencies, organizers of trade fairs and exhibitions, business centers, which are grouped in most countries in professional structures or associations bearing the name "Convention Bureau".

As defined by the International Association of Convention Visitors Bureaus (IACVB), the notion of convention bureau defines those non-profit organizations aimed at representing a specific destination and encouraging long-term development of the local community through strategies and policies for tourism development. Worldwide, the industry of organizing the meetings, conferences and exhibitions, business and motivational tourism (MICE industry) is a dynamic phenomenon with numerous operative or associative structures between professionals; organizations like Convention Bureaus represent everywhere the association structure most commonly found.

As the only multi - professional association in Romania dedicated exclusively to meetings industry, RCB brings together members of several public and private companies whose activity is related to the organization of events: congresses, conferences, seminars, specialized exhibitions, national and international fairs, festivals, destination management, business and motivational tourism.

2. Business tourism – present and perspectives

2.1. MICE – conceptual delimitations

Business tourism includes broadly human travelling for purposes related to their work, more specifically business and commercial trips or other kind of trips, participation in events organized by various economic enterprises or administrative bodies for their representatives (Minciu Rodica, 2003).

In terms of content, the forms of business tourism are structured in (J. Newstrom, E. Scannell, 1998, R. Davidson, B. Cope, 2003):

- individual business trips (delegations) common to many occupational areas wherefore people involved accept to travel outside the city of residence;
- tourism of reunions and meetings, that include a wide range of events (conferences, seminars, team-building, product launches, annual meetings, etc.) of companies or associations to facilitate communication with and between employees, customers, suppliers, shareholders or members;
- varied trade fairs and exhibitions for product presentation in general;
- stimulative (incentive) trips and those trips that employees receive from employer as a reward for good results in related work;
- corporate" events including generous forms of entertainment that companies offer to their most valuable customers or potential customers in order to build or enhance business relationships.

One of the main directions of modernization and increase of competitiveness of any country's tourism offer consists in the diversification of additional services, by encouraging business tourism.

If the spatial extent of international tourism activity in each country depends to a decisive extent on the distribution and quality of natural factors and anthropogenic elements that attract foreign tourists, business tourism development, especially viewed through the prism of economic effects, lies in a direct correlation with the volume, diversity and quality of additional benefits. Given the fact that the basic tourist services are performed at parameters comparable to those of competing countries, business tourism services can play a key role in ensuring the force of attraction of a destination (Stanciulescu Gabriela, Tigu Gabriela, 2005).

Among the peculiarities of business tourism which have contributed to this characterization, we mention: high profits of the organizers and service providers; independence up against natural conditions and contribution to mitigating seasonality; use better material facilities; reduced environmental impact.

2.2. Developments in the international tourism market

WTO estimates that in 2020 the number of international tourism arrivals will reach 1.56 billion, and in 2030 1.8 billion. 1.2 billion out of this number will be trips to neighboring countries (regional) and 0.4 billion will be long distance trips (inter-regional).

Long distance trips will have a higher growth trend (5.4 %/year) than short distance trips (3.8 %/year). In terms of receipts from international tourism, it is estimated to reach USD 2000 billion in 2020.

World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) shows that in 2013 the direct contribution of tourism to the global economy has exceeded two billion dollars (1.5 billion euros). Tourism generates now over 360 million of jobs, of which over 100 million are direct.

The total contribution of tourism to the global economy, including its direct, indirect and induced effects, exceeded 6.5 billion dollars (nearly five billion euros), accounting for 9 % of global GDP.

In 2013 there were 1.087 billion international tourists, with 52 million more than the previous year, according to the latest barometer of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Much of Europeans chose this year proximity destinations. Spain has surpassed China, and it came in third place in world ranking. The 5% increase in the number of international tourists has exceeded expectations of UNWTO, which had forecast an increase of 2%. This increase is two times higher than the average growth rate of international tourism in Europe since 2000 (+2.7 % between 2000 and 2012).

Tourism has proved so its great adaptability in an environment characterized by profound economic difficulties and despite the human and natural disasters last year.

Europe leads in terms of the number of international tourist arrivals, reaching a total of 563 million tourists, with 29 million more than in 2012, which represents a percentage increase of 5%.

Total overnight stays in tourist accommodation establishments of the twenty-eight EU member states increased by 1.6% compared to 2012, reaching a record high of 2.600 million.

Regions that have increased the most within the European continent were the Central and Eastern Europe, by 7% , and Southern and Mediterranean Europe (6%). The most notable increase occurred in Spain, which has recovered third place in world rankings of tourist countries, exceeding China nearly five million tourists, compared to the 2012 ranking , which looks like this: France, 83 million (+1.8 %); United States, 67 million (+6.8 %); China, 57.7 million (+0.3 %); Spain, 57.7 million (2.7 %).

The European Commission, based on the latest Eurobarometer survey, states that it is expected a rebound in tourism in 2014, driven by strong national and European demand, and the current economic situation will not cause significant changes in the holiday plans of potential tourists.

In 2013, 38 % of Europeans (5 % more than in 2012) spent the main holiday in another EU Member State; only 42 % (5 % less than in 2012) spent the holiday in their own country and only 19 % (2 % less) have traveled outside the EU; in 2013, 70 % of Europeans have traveled for personal or professional reasons, sleeping at least once away from home; Europeans (46 %) prefer light sun and beach life; the same percentage of respondents mentioned the natural features of a place as the main reason why they would return to this tourist destination.

Major projections for 2014 are: only 11% of Europeans believe that they will not travel in 2014; four out of ten Europeans plan to spend their main holidays in their own country; three out of ten Europeans believe that they will spend the holidays in the EU; more than four out of ten Europeans intend to make at least one trip in the EU in 2014; 24% plan to travel outside the EU, although only 16 % will go out of the EU for their main holidays; the proportion of those who were going to go on vacation without a change of plans for economic purposes varies between 75 % in Austria and 10 % in Greece.

Along with Euromonitor International, World Travel Market (WTM) held in London in November 2013, presented the study Global Travel Trends Report, which shows the following conclusions: tourist arrivals and tourism expenditure will continue to be important during 2014-2017, with an increasing demand from emerging countries; the importance of online travel agencies is increasing with Expedia and Priceline dominating the market; mobile bookings acquire a significant importance worldwide, reaching a double-digit share of online sales of a few players of online travel agencies and hotels; travel companies are increasingly using mobile phones in order to meet customer needs before, during and after the trip, although videoconferencing format is further used, face- to-face meetings are still preferred to do business at a high level.

In 2014, according to estimates presented by the ITB World Travel Trends Report, prepared by the consultancy company IPK International, tourist trips of European consumers will grow between 3 % and 4 %.

But recession, stagnation or economic uncertainty affecting several European countries will continue to affect millions of Europeans when planning their trip.

In this regard, when respondents were asked recently if the economic and financial crisis affects consumption patterns of trips, 38 % answered yes, two points more than in 2013.

On the other hand, when consumers were asked whether they intend to carry out any travel abroad (with a minimum stay of one night), the responses were as follows: 28 % will travel more abroad, 42 % will make the same journey as in 2013; 21 % will travel less; 9% will not travel abroad.

As respects tourism emitter countries, the survey commissioned by ITB Fair in Berlin (March 2014) shows that there will be an increase in trips abroad by 10 % compared to 2013 in Russia, under conditions of economic and political stability in the region (recent events in Ukraine?).

Other emitter markets as Switzerland, United Kingdom, Sweden and Germany will increase by 3%. Spain will return timidly after several years of decline, however, tourists from France, Italy and the Holland will record moderate growth rates, according to IPK estimates.

Asia-Pacific region has seen a significant growth of 6 %, reaching 248 million tourists thanks in particular to South-East Asia region, where growth was 10 %, due to the expansion of the middle class, the investments made and improvement of the visa policy.

Africa has also seen an increase in the number of arrivals by 6% and added 56 million tourists; America grew by 4% to 169 million tourists, while the Middle East has remained at the same level as in the previous year, namely 52 million tourists.

China and Russia have stood out among the ten most important emitter markets, last year China became the first tourist emitting country in the world, between 95 and 97 million tourists (dates to be confirmed), with an increase of 28% in this chapter.

It should be remembered that in 2012 China became the first tourist emitting market for the volume of total expenditure made by its travelers abroad, surpassing Germany and USA. Thus, Chinese tourists who traveled abroad in 2012 spent a total of 79.4 billion euros.

Among advanced economies, France has the highest growth as the emitting country (6 %), followed by the U.S., UK, Canada and Australia, while Germany, Japan and Italy decreased travel expenses.

Table 1: Top 20 emitting markets according to international travel expenses

Emitting markets	Travel expenses for the year 2012 (million euros)	The variation in 2013 (%)
China	79.400	+ 30,6
United States of America	65.000	+ 1,4
Germany	64.900	+ 0,4
Great Britain	40.100	+ 1,9
Russia	33.300	+ 28,2
France	30.400	+ 1,6
Canada	27.300	+ 3,6
Japan	21.700	- 5
Australia	21.400	- 0,7
Italy	20.500	- 2,6
Singapore	17.400	+ 4,1
Brazil	17.300	+ 14,6
Belgium	15.700	+ 24
Holland	15.700	- 1,3
South Korea	15.600	+ 7,6
Hong Kong	15.600	+ 3,2
Saudi Arabia	13.200	- 6,3

Norway	13.100	+ 7,7
Sweden	12.000	+ 5,5
Spain	11.900	- 1

Source: WTO, 2013

We are witnessing a double digit growth in China in 2013, recording a 22% increase in tourist expenses.

In its turn, Russia, the fifth tourist emitting market grew by 29 % in 2013, and Brazil (+15 %) and Belgium (24 %) show a remarkable growth in 2013 among other markets.

Instead, the increase of emitting markets of advanced economies was relatively low. Thus, Canada (+3 %), the United States and France (+2 %) grew moderately, while Japan and Australia have declined expenditure.

The four European emitting countries show a more modest trend in travel expenses in 2013: Germany (+0.4 %), Great Britain (+1.9 %), France (+1.6 %) and Italy (-2.6%).

Positive results of 2013 and improving global economy for 2014 create a favourable environment for another year of good results for international tourism with growth estimated between 4 and 4.5%.

For this year, the WTO considers three specific challenges that support the tourism industry: facilitating travel items, especially visas. (Starting March, for example, UAE visa will be granted for more countries directly at the airport including for Romanian tourists); increased air connectivity; a new policy of fees and taxes ("a smart tax").

The World Travel & Tourism Council and Oxford Univeristy will develop a study based on analysis of all taxes affecting the tourism industry (airport, customs or air navigation, etc.), after which it may propose eliminating barriers to international tourism development.

2.3. Global trends in MICE planning

United States maintained first place in the ranking of MICE destinations - it hosted 833 congresses and conventions recorded by the International Congress & Convention Association (ICCA) in 2012, compared to 759 events in 2013:

Table 2: World ranking of MICE destinations

Number of meetings per country			Number of meetings per city		
Rank	Country	Meetings 2012	Rank	City	Meetings 2012
1.	U.S.A	833	1.	Vienna	195
2.	Germany	649	2.	Paris	181
3.	Spain	550	3.	Berlin	172
4.	United Kingdom	477	4.	Madrid	164
5.	France	469	5.	Barcelona	154
6.	Italy	390	6.	London	150
7.	Brazil	360	7.	Singapore	150
8.	Japan	341	8.	Copenhagen	137
9.	Netherlands	315	9.	Istanbul	128
10.	China – P.R.	311	10.	Amsterdam	122
11.	Austria	278	11.	Prague	112
12.	Canada	273	12.	Stockholm	110
13.	Australia	253	13.	Beijing	109
14.	Switzerland	241	14.	Brussels	107
15.	Sweden	233	15.	Lisbon	106
16.	Republic of Korea	229	16.	Bangkok	105
17.	Portugal	213	17.	Helsinki	100
18.	Argentina	202	18.	Seoul	100
19.	Belgium	194	19.	Buenos Aires	99
20.	Denmark	185	20.	Budapest	98

Source : International Congress & Convention Association (ICCA), 2013

ICCA records all professional events with over 50 participants taking place regularly rotating in at least three countries. In 2013 there were approximately 11.500 such events worldwide, with 1.000 more than last year.

There is no change up to number seven in the list from the previous year, keeping this order: USA, Germany, Spain, Great Britain, France, Italy and Brazil.

According to the annual survey conducted by the United States Tour Operators Association (USTOA), the turnover of 89% of the members of the association increased in 2013 compared to 2012 and 62.5 % recorded an increase of 10 % or higher. There was also an increase in the number of customers for 92.2 % of the tour operators, 60 % reporting increases of 10% or even higher.

Most popular destinations for their customers in 2014 are Italy, Great Britain, China and Peru, while emerging destinations that grow the most are Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia and India.

China, which was ranked eighth in the previous edition, fell two positions (up to tenth place), and it gives way to Japan, thus entering the top moving up five positions from the 13th place occupied in 2011. Holland keeps the ninth position and Austria falls one position, ranking the 11th place and it is out of the top ten.

Analyzing data from events organized in Europe, by country, Germany, Spain, Great Britain, France and Italy are on top positions. Referring to events organized in cities, Vienna and Paris lead rankings, keeping positions on the first and second place, and Berlin manages to climb to the third position.

Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) states that expenditure on business trips have increased in Great Britain and Germany, estimating that in 2014 they will reach pre-crisis levels in the euro area.

In Europe, in 2014, the number of meetings will remain approximately at the level of last year, while total expenditure in companies, and the number of meeting assistants will decrease slightly, by 1.8 %, according to Global Meetings Forecast 2014 conducted by American Express Meetings & Events.

With the exception of France, the survey shows optimism in February 2014 in all European countries, compared with 2013, there are signs of economic recovery in certain European markets such as Great Britain and Germany in particular, which have relatively stronger economies than other countries.

It is expected, however, an increase in expenditure in all categories mentioned. While face-to-face meetings are still considered globally an important tool for business, it is expected to increase the demand for local meetings as companies seek to make the most of limited budgets.

Global economic uncertainty is the external factor that will have the biggest impact on MICE & business travel segment over the period 2014 -2022. This is indicated by over 70% of the tourism industry managers in a survey conducted by the consultancy firm Fast Future.

Other factors that will be relevant for the future of MICE industry will be: technological quality improvement and lower costs for virtual conferences (say 49 % of respondents); faster and shorter cycles in business (47 %); as well as economic and political increasing influence in Asia (46 %).

Just to reduce the vulnerability of tourism events, congresses and conventions to these shorter economic cycles, 91 % of managers surveyed believe that the tourism industry must demonstrate a return on investment (ROI) to be reached by all customers.

The survey conducted by Fast Future presents also other trends among this tourism form: what areas will be targeted for cost control; new categories of income; the requirements of Enterprise customers in the coming years, etc.

For example, while 76 % of managers surveyed believe that tangible ROI will be demand number one, 59 % are also anticipating a boom in customized events and 51 % believe that a greater emphasis will be put on interactive learning experiences.

The study also shows trends and innovations stipulated in the technology related to tourism meetings. Thus, 71 % of managers believe that mobile applications designed for delegates in a meeting to connect with each other and to share knowledge is the most important development; 65 % betting on the free Wi-Fi and 56% predict that videoconferencing connections will have greater importance to communicate with groups who could not attend an event; social networks have also their own section in the survey for managers in the industry, so 63 % expect that Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, etc. will be crucial before closing the event, while 60 % predict that social networks will allow instant feedback during conventions and events.

The role of convention centers, hotels, convention bureaux and travel agencies are also analyzed in this survey.

In North America, about half of meeting planners surveyed expect a slight increase in the number of meetings that will be held in 2014 (1.5 % of the region). It is estimated that the number of workers will increase slightly, as companies try to maximum total amount contributed by each event and to reduce the average cost per participant.

Asia-Pacific region appears to decrease after two years of positive forecasts, and it is expected to record a decrease in the number of meetings in the region of 3.6 % and a 2.4% decrease in the number of participants per meeting.

It is expected that the total number of meetings in Central America and South America remain unchanged, while the total expenditure of companies will decrease slightly by 1.4%. In Argentina, the possible increase of taxes on purchases made abroad along with major sporting events scheduled for this year in Brazil will play a decisive role in a possible increase in the activity of local meetings in the region.

According to experts from the American Express Meetings & Events: looking to 2014, meetings and events will likely continue to be the key players for companies in order to align strategic business objectives and communicate effectively with employees, customers and partners around world; in an environment of tailored and restricted budgets, companies in all regions review their strategies in order to meet the policies aimed at increasing efficiency and control over the budgets of local and regional meetings; increased interaction through social networks and applications; for the second consecutive year, London will occupy the first place in Europe as a destination for meetings, followed by Paris and Berlin, according to survey results. Again, Barcelona, Amsterdam and Brussels are among the most requested destinations for conducting meetings in Europe.

Meeting planners who responded to the survey identified in 2014 the following trends in all regions: it is expected that the approval to hold meetings is becoming more rigorous both for the delays and for changing the extension approach of external meetings; group rates - to optimize costs; non-traditional locations - industry professionals who were interviewed indicated that they were already looking for new locations less traditional for meetings, such as outdoor locations, universities and aquariums, fashionable premises and unique destinations for organizing promotional events (an increase of 2.5 % in the use of such spaces).

In 2012 trips for vacation, recreation and other leisure were a little over half of the total number of international arrivals (52 % or 536 million arrivals).

About 14% of international tourists indicated that they traveled for business or professional reasons and 27 % did so for other reasons, such as visiting relatives and friends (VFR), religious or pilgrimage, health care, etc.

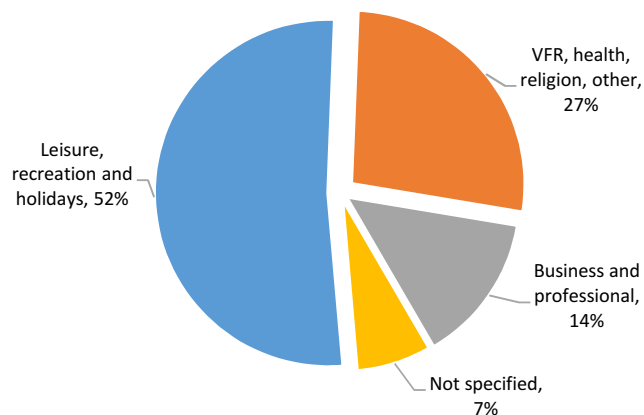


Figure 1: Inbound tourism by purpose of visit, 2012
Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) ©

Cost reductions from suppliers, particularly airlines, diminished quality of services according to a survey conducted by Mondial Assistance in France among business travelers.

Survey results indicate that 42 % of business travelers confirm that the quality of services decreased in 2012 (56% air transport and 34 % rail transport). The survey shows a clear trend of low cost model from suppliers: the study

confirmed that 51 % of business people have traveled by low cost airlines in 2012, twice more than in 2010. In addition, 52% of surveyed tourists traveled in the economy class, 13 % in the premium economy class, 35 % in Business Class and none of those interviewed first class. Regarding the criteria for choosing one or another class when flying, the first is flight time: 40 % of respondents indicated that they travel in Business Class if the flight lasts more than ten hours, 22% if it exceeds eight hours, 13 % for flights of more than five hours and 17 % never.

On the other hand, corporate travelers surveyed fear that strict policy of travel cost adjustments will reduce more the use of business class and superior hotels (five star category) and 69 % of them believe that the crisis has returned in the French market and the travel rules will become tougher in the next period.

Accor hotel group, which has over 2.000 hotels specialized in MICE segment worldwide, has identified a number of major trends affecting most hotels dedicated to business tourism for 2014: pharmaceutical companies, which are among the largest customers of MICE segment, as a result of new codes of conduct approved by the pharmaceutical industry, will put more pressure on hoteliers to both reduce the number of conventions and to stay in hotels with fewer stars, which will increase the demand for less luxurious hotels (midscale) of MICE segment, hotel chains within the group as Novotel, Mercure or Ibis are advantaged in this respect; in contrast with the growth of midscale hotels, it is also noted an increase in demand for some upscale brands, designed with cutting-edge facilities for international travelers; new online intermediary platforms gaining a good place on MICE market that allow meeting planners to request budget to more hotels in the same time, which will allow them to compare offers and prices for rooms, halls of events, etc. in less than 24 hours; hospitality industry specialized in tourism of meetings will also have to get used to a greater uncertainty caused by shortening of the booking period; increasingly more meetings have their own application (delegates that download the application of the congress or event on their smartphone or tablet); we have a much more interactive world in MICE segment, the number of meetings will continue to grow but their format and interactivity are elements of change, which oblige hoteliers be proactive in order to adapt quickly to these changes.

Organizing hybrid events, those who "pay attention to what is happening on the ground and what is happening online" as defined by the consultancy company Rosa Garriga, is still experimental, but it is important how quickly it gains followers in the tourism of meetings.

And, unlike the current, hybrid events are not subject to limitations of time and space, so they provide opportunities for dissemination and marketing infinitely greater than the first ones.

The new formats, trends and technologies generated by this type of events consist in applying the techniques of the game to convey knowledge (gamification); a new profile of participants present or virtual, which are no longer spectators, but involved in events and interact via social networks (networking); transmission of live events or recorded (Webcasting), virtual reporters, etc.

Direct contribution of tourism to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Romania is about 1.5% below the world average of 5.2%. In other countries in the region contribution to GDP is much higher: in Croatia is 11.9 %, 5.8% in Hungary 5.8% and in Bulgaria 3.8%. The number of employees in tourism area in Romania, is 2.3 % of total employees, approximately 193.000, while the global average of those who work in tourism and related services is 11.9 %.

Romania ranks 68th in a ranking of 140 countries in tourism competitiveness, published in the 2013 report of the World Economic Forum (WEF).

MICE events industry generates annually about 70-80 % of the income of hoteliers in Bucharest. Romania is not yet perceived as a destination for tourism of events, opportunity that entrepreneurs should allocate more resources. In 2012, at the European level, a participant spent an average of 1.620 euros for an event, which means about 437 euros/day/delegate, while the tourist that comes in a simple trip spends an average of 150 euros/day. Of course, in Romania, according to the available data, a participant in an event spends less, about 250 euros/day. The best example to understand the importance of the events industry is the Great Britain, which manages to raise the budget over 40 billion pounds annually. In Germany, this industry generates revenues of about 65 billion euros annually; there are local communities that live almost exclusively from the MICE industry benefits.

The events tourism is the tourism that connects the corporate world and organizations with the travel world (tour operators, DMC, hotels). There are many corporations in various fields coming at MICE international fairs such as IMEX and EIBTM and seeking tourism companies to cooperate with, destinations where they organize events, partner Convention Bureau.

Events industry is a very important business but, unfortunately, Romania lacks some important data to be truly present in this market. Bucharest needs an exhibition and conference center with a capacity of 7000-8000 seats, about 25 meeting rooms with a capacity between 50 and 300 seats and adjacent exhibition spaces, costs for such an investment are about 60-80 million euros.

In terms of hotel infrastructure, Romania is likely to generate significant revenues from the events industry, the number of 4 and 5-star hotels is much higher than those of 2 and 3-star. However, Vilnius organizes for instance more events than Bucharest. Moreover, Romania ranks 26 out of 35 European countries in terms of organizing international events, while Serbia is ranked 24. Also, Bucharest ranks only 51 out of 178 European cities organizing the events. Sibiu, Cluj, Timisoara, Arad, Iasi are a few other cities designated by MICE representatives as having the potential to become destinations for the events industry.

Business tourism in Romania is a growing market in recent years, because of the need of companies to use this tool to develop their business in the current economic context. In Romania, although there are no statistics on the value of this business travel market, operators estimate it somewhere around 150-200 million euros annually, with growth prospects in the coming years.

Currently, over 60 % of the overnight stays in hotels of higher category in Romania are represented by business travel. The percentage increases to 75% of all overnight stays in major cities in Romania and 93% in hotels in Bucharest.

Happy Tour, the largest travel agency in Romania according to its turnover, announces an increase of 16 % of revenue from corporate events (M.I.C.E.) in 2013.

In 2013, M.I.C.E. team (Meetings, Incentives, Congresses, Exhibitions) of Happy Tour managed over 1.500 events attended by over 45.000 people, 70 % of the events held in Romania and 30 % abroad, with a rich experience in organizing business trips in the incentive system. The company's strategy is to continue to focus on corporate and M.I.C.E. area, aiming that in three years events organization represent 20 % of the total activity of Happy Tour. Happy Tour developments in recent years in M.I.C.E. area brought the award "Best Travel Agency in Romania" and the award of the "Best Business & M.I.C.E. Agency in 2013", awarded at the gala Hotel Tourism & Leisure Investment Conference 2013. M.I.C.E. division (Meetings, Incentives, Congresses, Exhibitions) is a growing business line for Happy Tour, currently totaling 8% of the overall activity of the travel agency. The turnover for the Happy Tour group in 2012 was over 57 million. Perfect Tour Travel Agency recorded an increase of 88% of the total turnover, from 110 million lei to over 206 million lei in 2013, due to the contribution of cruise sales and business segment of the company.

Eurolines Romania Group, which includes 20 companies from Romania, Germany and Republic of Moldova, achieved in 2013 a turnover of 330 million lei, up 30 % compared to 2012.

Danubius Travel, the tour operator of Eurolines group specialized in incoming and business travel, will have an increase of about 35 % of turnover in 2014 compared to 2013, up to about 37 million lei. The number of foreign tourists who come to Romania by Danubius Travel will grow by 55 % this year, over 100.000 people.

3. Conclusions

Competition between companies and destinations will become more intense in the context of globalization and the level of customer requirements will increase. Therefore, there is an increasing pressure on the tourism industry, continually seeking new systems and technologies to reduce costs, increase sales and improve the traveller experience. Because of this need for continuous innovation, investments in technology are becoming increasingly important. Information Technology (IT) will play a major role, but there are other technical innovations and trends that need to be considered in the future, such as: use of mobile phones in choosing a tourist destination (exponential growth from year to year), mobile web applications, micro-segmentation in sales campaign, customization to improve travel experience, tourism virtual offices through social networks, Tablets and Smart TV in hotels; a new relationship with the customer, check-in automation via mobile phones, check-out and payments by fingerprint biometrics, free Wi-Fi, socialized hotel guests, extend mobile payments, multi-screen consumers, integrated digital management, computerized hotel.

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