



THE 21ST EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

Current Trends in Business Tourism

Păuna Dan¹, Savin Sorin²

Abstract: The development of international tourism in recent decades has highlighted an increasingly accentuated diversification of travel motives, of which business tourism occupies a relevant place. If once travel was associated mainly with recreation or cultural exploration, today the business travel segment, including both individual travel and the MICE branch, constitutes a strategic pillar of the service economy and an essential catalyst for economic and professional exchanges worldwide. **Objectives:** This article highlights a series of major trends that characterize the current MICE market in response to the need for flexibility, efficiency and accessibility. **Prior Work:** The article records some of the most relevant aspects that characterize the MICE segment, as prioritized and applied within various hotel groups worldwide. **Results:** It expresses practice in the field, with examples, on two levels, namely: the development of the “bleisure travel” phenomenon and how this type of mobility influences work flexibility, and the second level, how digitalization and artificial intelligence in business tourism are relevant processes. **Value:** The core of this analysis is the paradigm shift in the industry: the priority is no longer the volume of travel, but the generation of maximum value from each direct experience with the customer.

Keywords: bleisure travel; corporate transients; future meeting space; workation

JEL Classification: L83; L84; Z32

1. Introduction

Business tourism, which is becoming a dynamic field, located at the intersection of technological innovation, corporate strategy and social transformations, where adaptability and personalization will be essential for future success, is being reshaped.

The business tourism market has undergone significant transformations in the last two decades, influenced by globalization, digitalization and changes in organizational behavior. Although this segment has been strongly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is in an accelerated process of recovery, reinvention and adaptation to the new demands of business customers. (WTTC, 2022).

One of the main post-pandemic trends is the shift towards events in hybrid formats, events that combine physical and online participation, in response to the need for flexibility, efficiency and especially

¹ Lecturer, PhD, International Danubius University, Faculty of Global Affairs and Leadership, Department of Business, Finance and Accounting, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Blvd, Galati, Romania, Corresponding author: paunadan@univ-danubius.ro.

² Graduate, International Danubius University, Faculty of Global Affairs and Leadership, Department of Business, Finance and Accounting, specialization: Economics of Trade, Tourism and Services, 2025, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Blvd, Galati, Romania, E-mail: chivu.sorin@gmail.com.



Copyright: © 2026 by the authors.
Open access publication under the terms and conditions of the
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial (CC BY NC) license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

accessibility. This evolution is supported by the progress of information technology and the availability of streaming solutions, virtual reality and digital collaboration platforms.

At the same time, the trend observed in business tourism is represented by the increase in interest in secondary or emerging destinations, to the detriment of large metropolises, with the following aspects as elements of major interest:

- the attractiveness of business tourism carried out in large cities is experiencing a decreasing trend, with a series of determining factors in the foreground such as: sustainability, costs, and urban agglomeration;
- a stringent requirement for a safer environment free from the stress of structural problems (insufficient infrastructure, low mobility, even concerns about pollution levels);
- the presence of a modern infrastructure that can support the operational needs of companies and mobile teams in the context of business tourism, (refers to facilities and services that allow the efficient conduct of professional activities). On the other hand, professional mobility is increasingly closely linked to the strategic objectives of organizations, being used as a tool for developing commercial relations, training employees or strengthening organizational culture. In this sense, corporate events are becoming more thematic, personalized and integrated into internal and external communication plans. (Cristureanu, 2006).

Another relevant aspect is the growing pressure for financial efficiency and justification of investments in travel and events. This determines a heightened professionalization of organizers and a rigorous selection of suppliers, based on criteria of quality, contractual flexibility and added value. (UNWTO, 2020).

In conclusion, business tourism is becoming a dynamic field, located at the intersection of technological innovation, corporate strategy and social transformations, in which adaptability and personalization capacity will be essential for future success.

Within business tourism, there are two current trends that are of interest, namely, the “bleisure travel” phenomenon, and, “digitalization and artificial intelligence”, both from an economic, social and technological innovation perspective.

2. Current Trends in Business Tourism

2.1. The “bleisure travel” phenomenon

A significant trend reshaping contemporary business tourism is the integration of business and leisure travel, a phenomenon known as “bleisure travel” (bleisure, being a recent term, given to a combination of business and leisure travel, has become increasingly popular. This trend reflects a paradigm shift in the traditional dichotomy between work and pleasure) (Sood & Juneja, 2024).

In specialized literature, the term has recently appeared, being treated as a new concept. Business travel is becoming increasingly important for companies, in the context of allocated time and budgets. (Çetinsöz, & Hazarhun, 2020).

Within business travel, in particular, the connection between work time and leisure time requires reducing stress and increasing positive energy for individuals. Other studies highlight the application of the concept of gamification in the workplace. Furthermore, the benefits of leisure time at work can also affect creativity and individual performance in innovation (Medaille, et al., 2010).

While corporate travel was once strictly functional, today’s professionals are increasingly extending their stays to enjoy personal time or to bring their families, thus combining business with pleasure. This concept is gaining popularity in the current socio-economic climate, where employees often take fewer but longer business trips, combining professional obligations with personal relaxation.

This type of mobility is a global phenomenon, driven by more flexible corporate policies on remote work and an increased emphasis on personal well-being, with business travel becoming a sector of considerable interest as an alternative form of tourism. (Çulfaci, Onursoy, & Akin, 2024).

In a study on this phenomenon conducted in 2016 by GBTA¹, in the case of the North American continent, published in 2017, (GBTA, 2017) it highlights several relevant trends:

- In the past year, one-third (37%) of North American business travelers extended a worktrip for leisure;
- Business travelers are more likely to extend a work trip for leisure in the future when they have done so in the recent past;
- When business travelers extend their work trips for leisure, they typically extend them for a short period;
- When taking bleisure trips, travelers overwhelmingly stay at hotels for both the business and leisure segments of their trip.

If we move forward in time, after a few years, and change the location, on the European continent, in 2025, new trends were recorded in business tourism, compared to those exposed so far, namely:

- tourists, for business meetings, at European level, prefer short-distance rail transport. (38% in 2025). This phenomenon appeared as a response to air transport, since 2002, when the transport market was redistributed, by introducing high-speed trains between Paris-Lyon and Madrid-Sevilla. (see table 1 and 2). In this context of existing regional hubs, the following are relevant: London, Frankfurt, Paris, Amsterdam, Zurich.

Table 1. Passenger transport market share, between air, rail and road modes, before and after the introduction of high-speed trains in France and Spain (%) market

Market Transport modes	French		Spanish	
	before	after	before	after
Air	31	7	40	13
Rail	40	72	16	51
Road	29	21	44	36

Source: processed by the author after (İncili Ö. F. 2021)

A picture of the transport opportunities in 2007, a year in which there was no talk of the phenomenon of “bleisure travel”, as an example, the frequency and times of travel between Amsterdam and some European destinations by different means of transport, represent the determining factor of passenger mobility between the respective means.

¹ Global Business Travel Association

Table 2. Frequency and time for travel between Amsterdam and some destinations, in 2007

Destinations	Daily frequency of means of transport	Travel time (hours)			
		High-speed train	Train	Plane ¹	Car ²
Brussels	26 ³	1,44	2,51	2,30	2,25
Paris	25 ⁴	3,13	4,09	3,30	5
Londra ⁵	9	4,05	6,02	4,10	6,45
Frankfurt	5	3,56	3,56	4,10	4,30

Source: (Jorritsma, P. 2009).

Analyzing the table, we notice that the travel time in air transport is surpassed by high-speed trains, and on distances that do not require crossing by ferryboat, they have sensible times equal to normal trains. In this context in which global mobility is a determining asset, respectively, in which personal comfort during business trips occupies a determining place as an alternative form to classic meetings, statistical data and current trends are circulated that highlight the phenomenon.

- an increase in the phenomenon of “bleisure travel” (72% of tourists attending business meetings extend their trips for leisure purposes);
- 68% of companies offering business meetings implement strict travel policies, focused on sustainability;
- at the European level, business travel lasts an average of 3.1 nights, precisely due to the presence of loyalty programs (there is a relevant percentage of combining business and leisure travel, the trend increasing from 48% in 2019 to 72% in 2024).

This evolution in travel behavior has led innovation hubs like Future Meeting Space⁶ to recommend that employers offer “event budgets,” allowing employees the flexibility to extend their travel in the form of a “workation,” thus increasing motivation and improving work-life balance.

International hotel chains have quickly adapted to meet the expectations of these new “hybrid travelers.” In the post-pandemic era, major brands have launched packages specifically designed for this segment. In addition to standard offerings, the industry is innovating with new room concepts and amenities. Many hotels now offer “hybrid rooms” that function as fully functional offices during the day and comfortable sleeping spaces at night. Similarly, the availability of “serviced apartments” — which offer kitchens and living areas — is increasing to accommodate longer stays and family travel.

Leading hotel brands have led this transformation through personalized programs. Here are a few examples:

- “H”⁷ promoted “staycation” deals, offering discounted rates for extended stays and including recommendations for local recreational activities.

¹ Includes waiting time at the airport and time to arrive and depart from/to destination

² Travel time and a 15-minute break

³ Sometimes with transfer, sometimes without

⁴ Idem

⁵ With transfer in Brussels

⁶ Future Meeting Space is an innovation network focused on the ever-evolving needs of business events.

⁷ A, H, M, G, represent a series of hotel chains, or multinational travel agencies, anonymized, to prevent a possible form of “undeclared conflict of interest” or “camouflaged advertising”

- “M” introduced its “Work Anywhere” program, which offers day-use rooms converted into private offices, complete with high-speed Internet and business amenities.
- “G” expanded its extended-stay options, allowing business guests to stay a few extra days at special rates, recognizing the growing number of professionals who combine work with mini-vacations.

These initiatives are solidifying the concept of bleisure as the “new normal” in corporate travel. Hotels are investing in both the infrastructure needed for work — such as quiet spaces and fully equipped meeting rooms — and in opportunities for relaxation, including local tours, wellness facilities and family-friendly offerings.

2.2. Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence

Digitalization represents a fundamental structural change in business tourism, having a profound impact on the way MICE events are planned, delivered and evaluated. In recent years, artificial intelligence (AI) has become a key catalyst for this transformation, redefining not only logistical processes, but also the personalized interaction of participants with the event and the hotel space.

Digitalization of booking processes and event organization, supported by intelligent platforms using AI algorithms, is crucial for personalizing offers, optimizing logistics and anticipating customer preference. (Sendrea, 2022). A number of digitalization actions used in business tourism (elements of AI-assisted digitalization in MICE) are relevant, and the following examples highlight them:

- Rapid booking platforms: Solutions like “Book-It-Easy” use AI to automatically suggest optimal room configurations, adapted to the type of event and the number of participants;
- Interactive virtual tours: Conference spaces can be explored virtually, with AI assistance highlighting relevant amenities (lighting, acoustics, modular configuration);
- Advanced hybrid technologies: Livestreaming, augmented reality (AR) and AI-based simultaneous translation (e.g. Interprefy) expand accessibility and audience;
- Personalized mobile apps: Integrate virtual assistants for dynamic agendas, networking suggestions and automated feedback;
- Intelligent chatbots and CRMs: Platforms like SAP Sales Cloud or Sales Force use AI to adapt communication based on user behavior;

Globally relevant travel agents have integrated assistance into their MICE tourism activities through artificial intelligence, thus emerging examples of digitalization (Neo platform and integration with Egencia, at the “A Business Travel” level - Neo uses AI to personalize itineraries, optimize costs and comply with travel policies; Egencia integrates 24/7 chatbots, analytics studio for predictive reporting, and cross-device compatibility). Other competitors in the market are also using digitalization for customer, event, or activity management:

- use of digital venue sources, automatic generation of e-RFPs, tour group management, hybrid participation and real-time monitoring;
- investments in online booking and MICE request capture tools. (online booking tools available on the website for selected hotels, which allow meeting organizers to check room availability, get instant quotes and even confirm reservations on the spot. For more complex requests or for

hotels that do not have instant bookings, dedicated RFP (Request for Proposal) web forms are offered for meetings and events, through which clients can detail their event-related needs, each such request being automatically sent to the targeted hotel).

Artificial intelligence (AI) has moved from an emerging technology to a central strategic tool for transforming the travel industry, especially in the corporate sector. Today, AI is redefining the business traveler experience, enabling not only the automation of repetitive tasks, but also dynamic, real-time personalization and predictive analytics with a direct impact on decisions and costs.

The main perceived benefits include:

- cost savings (71%);
- improved traveler experience (68%);
- advanced data analytics (63%);
- increased operational efficiency through automation;
- advanced personalization of the attendee experience;
- reduced environmental footprint through resource optimization;
- increased accessibility and global participation;
- integration with travel policies and enhanced budget control.

These transformations illustrate how digitalization – supported by artificial intelligence – is fundamentally reconfiguring the business travel ecosystem.

3. Conclusion

This study addresses two major components, namely, the “bleisure travel” phenomenon and digitalization and artificial intelligence. Both recent phenomena highlight the post-pandemic transformations in business tourism, the most relevant being the aspect of integrating artificial intelligence into this industry. What are the most relevant conclusions, we have seen them, and what is much more important is how they will evolve.

In the case of “bleisure tourism”, it can usually influence only a few elements of the business trip, which depend largely on the flexibility of the sending institution and the conference organizer (Boros, 2025). The main motivation for this approach to business tourism is based on “stimulating travel motivation”, through the gain of free time. Companies that have recognized the potential of this form of hybrid tourism by incorporating leisure programs into conferences, (acting as a catalyst for a fundamental reconfiguration of the market,) have moved from prioritizing travel volume to maximizing the value derived from each interaction with the group of people involved in this endeavor.

Digitalization and artificial intelligence offer conveniences, in the form of increased productivity in the tourism sector, through the accessibility and personalization of tourism services. The main directions of digitalization are the use of databases that refer to parameters such as:

- Large-scale personalization - the ability to adapt events to individual preferences;
- Simplified planning and execution - AI-assisted analyses have become more predictive, optimizing the space used more efficiently, as well as the resources used;

- AI-based interactions - providing instant, non-stop assistance to participants (answers to questions, information, various services in real time).
- Evaluation of customer behavior and satisfaction - post-event analysis, by processing feedback, sentiments from social networks and engagement indicators;
- Marketing strategy development and reputation management - the future of tourism marketing and reputation management in the MICE sector, by 2026, is characterized by a shift from pure logistics to sustainable experiences, based on artificial intelligence (Fonseca, 2023);

The MICE industry is going through a stage of technological transformation whose purpose will significantly change the way hotels and specialized spaces for hosting large-scale events (convention centers) operate, compete and create value. Artificial intelligence is no longer a concept of the future, but a present solution, capable of bringing concrete results in all dimensions of event management.

References

- Boros, K. (2025). A hivatás- és szabadidős turizmus szinergiája: A bleisure turizmus újító szerepe az élményalapú utazások alakításában [The synergy of business and leisure tourism: The innovative role of bleisure tourism in shaping experience-based travel]. In *BGE Szemelvények* (3rd ed., pp. 23–33). Budapesti Gazdaságtudományi Egyetem.
- Çetinsöz, B., & Cevdet, H. E. (2020). Turizm endüstrisinde yeni bir trend: Bleisure seyahatler ve motivasyon unsurları [A new trend in the tourism industry: Bleisure travel and motivational factors]. *Journal of Recreation and Tourism Research*, 7(4), 500–527.
- Cristureanu, C. (2006). *Strategii și tranzacții în turismul internațional* [Strategies and transactions in international tourism]. Editura C. H. Beck.
- Çulfacı, G., Onursoy, F. M., & Akin, M. H. (2024). Business travel and bleisure tourism: A study on the travel motivations of academics. *GSI Journals Serie A: Advancements in Tourism, Recreation and Sports Sciences*, 7(2), 406–423.
- Fonseca, T. (2023). *Trends in the MICE industry for 2026: Shaping the future of meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions*. Crea Group Events. <https://www.creagroupevents.com/en/blog/trends-in-the-mice-industry>
- German Convention Bureau. (2020). *Future meeting space research: Zooming in on purpose of meetings*. <https://www.gcb.de/en/media/press-releases-archive/future-meeting-space-research-zooming-in-on-purpose-of-meetings>
- Global Business Travel Association. (2017). *Extending business travel into leisure time: Bleisure study: North America-based business travelers*. https://www.stnet.ch/app/uploads/2021/08/GBTA-2017_Bleisure_Study_Preview.pdf
- Global Business Travel Association. (2024). *GBTA business travel index: 2024 outlook annual global report & forecast*. https://preferrednet.net/media/1307132/gbta_bti_report_24_exec_summary_vfinal.pdf
- IMEX. (2025). *IMEX event sustainability report*. https://link.assetfile.io/e58dfHDO8GjdnsU3CE7bv/IF25_Sustainability_Report.pdf
- İncili, Ö. F. (2021). *Dünya’da yüksek hızlı demiryolu ağları: Gelişimi, dağılışı ve geleceği* [High-speed rail networks in the world: Development, distribution and future]. ResearchGate. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/400896319_DUNYA'DA_YUKSEK_HIZLI_DEMIRYOLU_AGLARI_GELISIMI_DAGILISI_VE_GELECEGI
- Jorritsma, P. (2009). Substitution opportunities of high-speed train for air transport. *Airlines E-zine*, (43). <http://www.scribd.com/doc/13498567/43-jorritsma-airail-substitution>
- Medaille, A., Kurt, L., & Kurt, W. (2010). The power of play: Fostering creativity and innovation in libraries. *Journal of Library Innovation*, 1, 8–23.
- Skift. (2023). *The promise of travel in the age of AI*. <https://skift.com/insights/raising-the-bar-for-travel/>
- Sood, D., & Juneja, M. (2024). Bleisure travel: The rise of flexible work and its impact on tourism. In *Bleisure tourism and the impact of technology* (pp. 22–45). IGI Global.

Șendrea, M. (2022). *Digitization and artificial intelligence: Application, necessity, effects*. Academia de Studii Economice din Moldova.

Șendrea, M. (2022). *Digitization and artificial intelligence: Application, necessity, effects*. Academia de Studii Economice din Moldova. <https://irek.ase.md:443/xmlui/handle/123456789/2394>

World Tourism Organization. (2001). *Global forecasts and profiles of market segments: Tourism 2020 vision* (Vol. 7). https://sete.gr/files/Media/Ebook/110303_Global%20Forecasts%20and%20Profiles%20of%20Market%20Segments.pdf

World Tourism Organization. (2025). *World tourism barometer* (Vol. 23, January). <https://hotelespormexico.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2025-world-tourism-barometer-and-statistical-annex-january-2025.pdf>