

A Work Project, presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a **Master's degree in Management** from the Nova School of Business and Economics

**POSITIONING PORTUGAL AS A WEDDING DESTINATION:
TARGETING THE AMERICAN MARKET**

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Abstract

Tourism has increased exponentially in Portugal, currently representing 52,3% of service exports. Within the scope of events tourism, wedding tourism represents one of the fastest-growing markets worldwide, showing an estimated annual growth of 75% in current years, thus presenting a potential high-yielding market for Portugal.

However, empirical research is scarce on the subject. Therefore, the present project aims to understand the actions that should be taken to promote the country as a wedding destination for the American market, through a qualitative research methodology, to understand how to fully leverage and develop the sector's opportunities for the Portuguese tourism and economy.

Keywords

Hospitality; Wedding-Based Tourism; Events Tourism; Destination Weddings

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Introduction

The custom of marriage is universal and has been central to human societies for thousands of years (Wimalasena 2016). In present days, with a growing globalization, couples wish more and more to celebrate their marriage ceremonies in unique, exotic, and intimate settings. Thus, the market of destination weddings presently represents one of the fastest-growing markets within the entire tourism industry, with significant economic and development potential, embodying 25% of all weddings globally and showing an estimated annual growth from 10% to 75% in recent years (GlobalData 2018; Szczepanik and Wiesner 2018).

In Portugal, tourism is a crucial sector, as one of the country's main drivers of economic growth. Within the sector, Events Tourism represents a considerable contribution to the country's GDP, by increasing tourism influxes and proceeds, average expenditure in the destination, length of stay, and leading to job creation. Therefore, *Turismo de Portugal* has been focusing its efforts on reinforcing the perception of Portugal as an events destination, mobilizing the “Estratégia Turismo 2027” (Turismo de Portugal 2017).

However, until date, scarce research has been conducted on small events and wedding tourism, their impacts, and how to develop the sector sustainably in Portugal. Thus, the present project aims to address this matter, by contributing to the expansion of the knowledge on wedding tourism in Portugal.

Therefore, a literature review was conducted, henceforth deriving the following research question drawn: “How can Portugal best position itself as a wedding destination?”. Consecutively, three hypotheses were formulated regarding the potential for a substantial impact of destination weddings in the Portuguese tourism industry, the main motivations behind foreign couples choosing Portugal as their wedding destination, and the markets with the highest potential in the Portuguese destination wedding segment. The hypotheses were followed by an explanation of the methodology applied, comprised of a qualitative study, to

ascertain the veracity of the information stated in the literature review and explore the limitations of the market.

Conclusively, the limitations encountered while performing the study were stated, and recommendations on how to attract the European and American wedding market were drawn based on the analysis of the study, followed by suggestions for future research on the subject.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Events Tourism

Events are temporary occurrences and are associated generally with experiences. Planned events are a vital stimulator of tourism and have been proven to significantly increase a destinations' competitiveness (Wise 2013; Oklobdžija 2015). The denomination "event tourism" first appeared in 1987, "when The New Zealand Tourist and Publicity Department reported that event tourism was a significant and increasingly growing segment of international tourism" (Getz 2008, 205), central for every destination's development and marketing strategy.

As maintained by Getz (2008) and Zlatanov (2015), destinations produce and market a range of events to attract tourism and increase activity on the destination, particularly on the low season to counteract seasonality issues, i.e., tourism flows condensed in short periods of the year. Events help destinations create a progressive image for themselves and ultimately increase their attractiveness. From the tourism industry's perspective, events are perceived as great catalysts, place, and image marketers (Getz 2008). Events help promote a positive picture and contribute to the positioning and branding of the tourist destination, enhancing its marketing and co-branding, attracting media exposure, and developing its image (Zlatanov 2015; Getz 2008). Moreover, it contributes immensely to the economic growth of the area where the events are located (Bond 2008).

Furthermore, event tourism has tangible long-term effects by developing the infrastructure of the areas where the event is located, the quality of life, and the general tourism capacity of the destination, adding further significance to the character of the destination (Zlatanov 2015). Tourists might want to decide for pre, or post stays as well, which facilitates the promotion of other products the destination has to offer and increases the number of local businesses and hospitality suppliers used (Zlatanov 2015).

1.2. Wedding and Honeymoon Tourism

By origin, weddings are inserted under the term "event," a temporal public or private planned occasion. Weddings are small to medium events organized for individuals, families, and social groups (Getz 2008); therefore, they are inserted in the private events sphere. A destination wedding is a subdivision of event tourism and can be defined as a planned wedding ceremony commemorated outside the bride and groom's area of residence (Daniels and Loveless 2007).

The designation "wedding tourism," also known as wedding-based tourism, is defined as "the total of travel activities for a young couple and their possible visitors [...] where no one [...] is a resident of a given region [...], and the primary purpose of the trip is to marry" (Szczepanik and Wiesner 2018, 41). However, UNWTO defends that the description has limitations, as tourism is deemed people's displacement from their regular location to other areas (Szczepanik and Wiesner 2018). Thus, when referring to wedding tourism, "domestic travelers [with the same purpose] are considered as an equal part of wedding tourism as international [...] travelers" (Szczepanik and Wiesner 2018, 42). Therefore, wedding tourism's most adequate definition refers to the circulation of tourists due to marriage ceremonies commemorated in a destination dissimilar from the permanent residence of both bride and groom (Bertella 2015).

From the guests' perspective, wedding tourism concentrates on traveling to be co-present with significant others, fulfill family obligations, and reproduce social networks (Bertella 2015). Therefore, it can be acknowledged as a form of “visiting friends and relatives' tourism” (Bertella 2015) and moves numerous tourists to visit new destinations every year (Szczepanik and Wiesner 2018).

The tourism derived from destination weddings is significant, as the couple and guests are later converted into regular tourists who practice active tourism activities, spend more money than locals, and spread the word about the destination (Szczepanik and Wiesner 2018; Khodzhaeva 2016). Thus, the wedding tourism sector plays a significant role in the tourism industry since it generates notable amounts of money and has shown a positive evolution over the years (Bertella 2015; Khodzhaeva 2016). Furthermore, the wedding sector comprises numerous suppliers, from venue and accommodation suppliers to wedding planners and travel agencies. Hence, wedding tourism creates various development opportunities for wedding-related businesses (Szczepanik and Wiesner 2018) and contributes to job creation and development, in order to absorb the demand (Khodzhaeva 2016).

1.3. Destination Wedding Market Growth

Wedding tourism is one of the fastest-growing markets within the entire tourism industry, with significant economic and development potential. Between 2002 and 2007, the sector showed an estimated annual growth of 10% (Szczepanik and Wiesner 2018). In the following years, the increase was steeper, with a growth of 75% from 2007 to 2012 (Szczepanik and Wiesner 2018). When looking more specifically at destination weddings, the research is limited. However, it is possible to infer a strong and growing impact of the segment, as demonstrated by the fact that in 2018, up to 25% of all weddings were destination weddings (GlobalData 2018). Furthermore, in 2014, the values estimated were around 15%, which suggests a substantial growth

(Khodzhaeva 2016). Considering that the overall global wedding industry is estimated to be worth 300\$ billion a year (The Economist 2020), it could be extrapolated that the destination wedding industry would be valued at around a quarter of that value (around 75\$ billion a year). Moreover, when considering that the benefits of a destination wedding also impact the tourism industry, in addition to the wedding industry, one could argue that the segment's value is much larger than the previously assumed. In fact, according to How-Choong (2018), the total market worth of the global destination wedding industry in 2018 was 94,5\$ billion.

The substantial growth of the destination wedding market has been established, as well as the significant weight of the sector in the tourism industry. The reasons behind this growth are the following. Firstly, one of the main motivations, which is also tied with the significant growth in the overall tourism industry, is the fact that traveling has developed significantly in the last decades, becoming more convenient and affordable (Vidauskaite 2015). Additionally, the worldwide increase in wedding ceremonies and receptions can also explain the trend (Del Chiappa and Fortezza 2013). Furthermore, one of the most important reasons behind the rise in destination weddings is the reduction of costs for the couple. With fewer guests, destination weddings become more affordable for the bride and groom. For instance, in 2008, the cost of a destination wedding was 7 percent lower than the expenditure of a traditional ceremony (Vidauskaite 2015). Likewise, the possibility of combining the wedding with the honeymoon may also contribute to lower costs (Del Chiappa and Fortezza 2013). On the other hand, couples' desire to marry in a unique, exotic, and intimate setting is rapidly increasing, as the inclination to escape social and family obligations underlying in the traditional wedding grows more prominent (Del Chiappa and Fortezza 2013). Finally, the "emergence of new trends, such as civil marriages, second or third marriages, and same-sex marriages" (Vidauskaite 2015, 19), along with a decline in religious wedding ceremonies, also contribute to the growth of the destination wedding sector (Vidauskaite 2015).

1.4. Tourism in Portugal

Tourism is one of the most important sectors in Portugal, as one of the country's main drivers of economic growth. In 2019, the industry accounted for 52,3% of service exports and 19,7% of total exports. Furthermore, in the same year, revenues from the sector directly contributed 8,7% to the Portuguese GDP. However, when considering indirect contributions, the value rises to 19,8% of the GDP, further establishing the impact of tourism on the country's economy and its dependence on it (Costa 2021).

Additionally, Portugal is a leader in the global tourism industry, as supported by the recognition received by several distinguished institutions. Portugal has attained "Europe's best tourism destination" in the last four years. Moreover, the country received 24 prizes in the latest edition of the World Travel Awards, including Europe's "leading beach destination", "leading adventure tourism destination", "leading cruise destination", and "leading city break destination". Finally, Portugal has the best-ranked tourism promotion in Europe and the third best in the world, according to Executive Digest (Costa 2021).

Furthermore, the Portuguese tourism industry exhibited substantial and steady growth in the years preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly from 2012 to 2019, as demonstrated by Graph 1. According to the bar chart, from 2006 to 2019, the number of arrivals in tourist accommodation more than doubled, increasing from 13,1 million to 27,9 million, representing a growth of 113% (Statista 2021b).

When analyzing only foreign visitors in Portugal, the results in 2018 totaled 22,8 million, a growth of 7,5% compared to the previous year. As for the total revenue deriving from international tourists, the results in 2018 totaled 16,8€ billion, which, compared with the 2017 results, constitutes an increase of 8,3% (OECD 2020). In the following year, the number of non-

residents arriving in Portugal recorded an even sharper increase to an estimated 2,6 million, corresponding to a growth of 7,9% (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2020b).

Furthermore, in 2019, the leading inbound markets were, in order of importance, Spain (share of 25,5%), the United Kingdom (share of 15,4%), France (share of 12,6%), Germany (share of 7,9%), and Brazil (share of 5,5%). These represented 66,9% of demand. Of the mentioned, the ones that recorded the most significant growth compared to the previous year were Brazil (+13,9%), Spain (+8,9%), and the United Kingdom (+7,6%). Nonetheless, the inbound market which exhibited the most representative increase was the United States, with a growth of 23,2% (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2020b).

In 2020, COVID-19 deeply affected the Portuguese tourism industry. The reasons behind the considerable impact are tied with travel restrictions, mandatory interruption of activities for hotels, restaurants, and bars, as well as many other measures taken to stop or mitigate the spread of the pandemic. Furthermore, the significant power of the sector in the country's economy also led to a consequent influence on the overall economic activity and societal pressures (Costa 2021). The impact can be measured in the staggering fall in touristic quantitative indicators. In the first six months of the year, the number of guests exhibited a decline of 64,1%, the accommodation nights decreased almost 66%, and the revenue from non-residents dropped 54,4% (Turismo de Portugal 2020). Overall, in 2020 the revenue in the sector only reached 663\$ million, a stark contrast to the 1.982\$ million recorded in the previous year. Furthermore, in the same year, the total contribution of the travel and tourism industry to the GDP dropped from 42,8\$ billion in 2019 to less than half in 2020 (18,7\$ billion) (Statista 2021c).

Nevertheless, the situation has been slowly improving, and the revenue in the sector in Portugal is projected to reach 902\$ million in 2021, an increase of 36% over 2020. Moreover, according to Statista (n.d.), the revenue is expected to grow 32,84% per year, culminating in an estimated

revenue of 2.809\$ million in 2025. The latter represents a growth of 41,7% compared to the pre-pandemic results in 2019, suggesting that the effects of COVID-19 will be mitigated and overcome in the long run.

1.5 Events Tourism in Portugal

The importance of Events Tourism has been emerging in Portugal over the years. The worldwide evolution of the tourism industry and crescent globalization created the need for a strategic differentiation among destinations, to ensure competitiveness. Thus, *Turismo de Portugal* has been centering its attention on the development of events in the country since the early 1990s, to promote its image internationally (Ramalho 2013). As Araújo (2018), President of *Turismo de Portugal*, stated, “[events] give [Portugal] great visibility to the outbound markets, allowing us to [...] attract more tourists and continue to grow sustainably”. He further mentioned that events have “the ability to project the country's image, increase the destination's notoriety in international markets, and generate new demand and attractions throughout the year and throughout the territory” (Araújo 2018), fighting seasonality and promoting the decentralization of the touristic demand.

Hence, *Turismo de Portugal* has been focusing its efforts on mobilizing the “Estratégia Turismo 2027”. One of the strategy's main goals is to reinforce the perception of Portugal as an events destination, concurrently promoting the national economy (Turismo de Portugal 2017). As part of these efforts, for instance, in 2021, *Turismo de Portugal* created a 15 million aid program, intending to invest in the area and promote the sector's development (Neto 2021).

As a result of the continuous investment, according to the report of “Associação Internacional de Congressos e Incentivos”, in 2018, Portugal achieved the 7th position in Europe and 11th position worldwide, in the ranking of countries that most receive and organize big events. In 2017, 61 events and congresses were organized in the whole country. Moreover, in 2019,

Lisbon held second place in the category “cities with most international events”, having hosted a total of 190 international congresses and events (AED Portugal 2020).

Economically, Events Tourism contributes hugely to the country’s GDP. By conducting to the increase of tourism influxes and proceeds, average expenditure in the destination, length of stay, and job creation, events are recognized as hefty contributors to the Portuguese economy (Simões 2012).

To illustrate, according to Palrão and Filipe’s (2017, 1326) study, “all the major sports events held in Lisbon from September 2014 to August 2015 had an economic impact of 93 to 103 million euros”. Furthermore, the “Volta a Portugal em Bicicleta” generated a direct impact of 1,3€ million and a total impact of approximately 3,7€ and 4,4€ million on the region’s economy (Costa 2020).

Regarding cultural events, it is estimated that Web Summit generated 115€ million in revenue for Portugal between 2016 and 2019, and 252€ million in value-added tax. Moreover, nearly 6.895 jobs are believed to have been created due to the event being held in Lisbon (Taylor 2021). Furthermore, by analyzing occupancy rates of nearby hotels, it can be concluded they are positively affected by events such as NOS Alive, registering a correlated growth; thus, impacting the region’s tourism revenue directly (Umbelino 2018).

Therefore, events represent a considerable contribution to the Portuguese economy as aforestated. However, existent research is mainly focused on sizeable events, majorly inserted in the cultural and sports category, not considering the potential economic and touristic impact of small events such as destination weddings.

1.6 Destination Weddings in Portugal

As the impact of the Portuguese wedding industry declines, a new trend in the country emerges: destination weddings. In fact, the number of marriages in Portugal dropped from 63.752 in 2000

to 31.478 in 2014 (Coimbra 2016). More recently, such a substantial decline was no longer identified; however, the results remained more or less stagnant with a few ups and downs, culminating in a recorded 33.272 weddings in 2019 (last pre-pandemic results) (see Graph 2) (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2021a). On the other hand, a significant rise in the number of weddings of foreign couples in Portugal was detected within the mentioned data. From 2000 to 2014, the results indicate a growth of 439%, culminating in 856 foreign couples marrying in Portugal in 2014 (Coimbra 2016). The latter represents 2,72% of the total weddings celebrated in the country in that year (31.478) (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2021a). The growth continued to remain positive in the following years, with 1409 foreign weddings recorded in 2019, an increase of 65,6% compared to 2014 (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2020a) (see Graph 3). The mentioned value corresponds to 4,23% of all weddings celebrated in the country in 2019 (33.272), which, contrasted with the previously calculated 2,72% in 2014, implies a growing impact of destination weddings in the Portuguese wedding industry.

As stated by Paula Grade, the co-founder of the Portuguese agency *White Impact*, “the financial impact of foreign weddings in Portugal is big” (Diário de Notícias 2019). Indeed, according to Multisector (2016), the bride and groom spend an average of 10.000€ – 30.000€. Moreover, a destination wedding brings an average of 50 to 100 guests. According to Mendonça (2020), most destination weddings in Portugal round 87 guests, who usually stay in the country for about a week, practice extra touristic activities aside from the wedding itself and invest more money in the celebration than national couples. Overall, considering the multiplying effect of the guests, the consulting company argues that one destination wedding represents a revenue of over 50.000€ for Portugal (Multisector 2016). Therefore, considering the 1409 foreign weddings celebrated in 2019 and assuming that the previous estimate for each destination wedding’s revenue is reliable, it can be deduced that destination weddings are at least an annual 70,5€ million industry in Portugal, and growing.

When analyzing the data by region, the most prominent Portuguese wedding destinations in 2019 were the Lisbon metropolitan area and the Algarve, with 510 and 550 weddings, respectively. Whereas the impact of the destination weddings on the total weddings of the whole country is relatively small (4,23%), the effect is more prominent in these two regions, particularly in the Algarve, which is known for its touristic reputation and branding. Firstly, the foreign weddings in Lisbon account for 5,75% of the total weddings in the area (8.874). As for Algarve, the impact in the region is much more present, with 31,8% of all its weddings (1.729) being celebrated by a foreign couple in 2019 (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2020a). One of the reasons that may explain this trend is the strong presence of the UK market in this region (Coimbra 2016). Another territory worth mentioning is Madeira, whose 2019 foreign weddings (101) represented around 10,5% of its total weddings (966) (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2020a).

According to Pinheiro (2018), in 2018 the main markets for the Portuguese destination wedding industry were Brazil, Ireland and UK. For the Brazilian market, the primary motivations for getting married in Portugal are related to the country's easy access (Oliveira 2020), the shared language, and the closeness to other European countries (Quinta do Torneiro n.d.), as well as the lower costs compared to Brazilian weddings (Martins 2019). When it comes to the UK and Ireland, the two countries have the most presence in the Algarve. For these markets, the choice of Portugal as a wedding destination is mainly due to the weather and cost-related factors, as well as the already strong impact of the markets on the region's tourism (Barbosa 2015).

Overall, the main reasons pointed to the preference of Portugal as a wedding destination are the landscape and heritage features, gastronomy, weather, cultural offer, among other factors, such as the quality-price relationship (Multisector 2016; Khodzhaeva 2016). Furthermore, the fact

that Portugal is a small country where every region is easily and quickly accessible is another contributing factor (Barbosa 2015).

The branding of Portugal as a wedding destination is, at the moment, minimal. As stated by the ex-president of the Portuguese Tourism Board, João Cotrim de Figueiredo, the organization “never made an effort to promote Portugal as a wedding destination”, adding that the rise of the segment in the country “is a natural consequence of the country’s promotion as a touristic destination” (Barbosa 2015). Nonetheless, as proven by the impact and growth of the industry stated above, destination weddings are a niche market that would be worth exploring. Furthermore, the industry also brings other benefits to the national tourism segment. For instance, the sector would bring more medium to high-class tourists to the country (Multisector 2016), who would spend more and, consequently, have more impact in the tourism industry. Additionally, foreign couples get married throughout the week, which could counteract the tendency only to sell accommodation nights during the weekend and allow for more than one wedding in a week (Barbosa 2015). Finally, a considerable number of couples book their weddings in Portugal without ever even visiting the country (Pinheiro 2018), which might generate a wave of new tourists who would have not visited the country otherwise.

Lastly, the conclusions of a study conducted by Peste (2016) will be analyzed. The study attempted to determine the main motives behind the choice of Portugal as a wedding destination for foreign couples. The methodology used comprised a questionnaire survey directed at foreigners who decided to celebrate their wedding in Portugal. Firstly, Peste concluded that the medium through which the most extensive number of newlyweds became acquainted with Portugal as a wedding destination was the “Internet”, followed by “word of mouth”. Interestingly, only 6% of respondents stated the “country’s communication” as a channel for their first perception of Portugal as a wedding destination. Therefore, the author recommends

that the marketing and promotion of Portugal as a wedding destination should be improved, in order to reach a more significant impact within the market. Furthermore, the main motivations behind the choice of Portugal as a wedding destination were concluded to be the “good weather, beach and services”, “cost” and “attractive image of the destination”. These motivations were similarly referred to in the study conducted by Mendonça (2020), in which the main motivations mentioned were “good atmospheric conditions” and “impressive landscape”.

Additionally, Peste’s study found that 82% of guests stayed in the country after the wedding, from which 55% stayed for longer than five days. As for the bride and groom, 82% of respondents also stated that they remained in Portugal after the wedding and 77% of these stayed for more than five days. Moreover, 64% of couples spent their honeymoon in the country.

2. Research Question and Hypotheses

Deriving from the theoretical overview conducted above, it was concluded that there is a lack of action in the destination wedding sector in Portugal. Connected to the constantly growing tourism economic sector, it represents a critical niche in the developing events tourism segment, presenting unquestionable profitable development prospects (Khodzhaeva 2016). Therefore, to address the issue, the country should use destination weddings as an effective means for the development of tourism and adopt a long-term, strategic approach to the sector, in the course of planning and development, to realize its full wedding destination potential (Zlatanov 2015; Oklobdžija 2015).

While reviewing the existent literature on the topic, a research gap has been identified. The studies conducted by Peste (2016) and Mendonça (2020) on the subject of destination weddings in Portugal characterized them on the mode through which couples get to know the destination,

the main motivations behind their choice, as well as statistic indicators on the length of stay of the couple and guests. Nevertheless, little research has been conducted to identify actionable approaches to improve the country's destination wedding sector, and existent research on the topic focuses only on single stakeholder actions, such as wedding planners (Leitão 2019) or vendors (Mendonça 2020), not considering a holistic strategy.

Thus, our starting question arises: “How can Portugal best position itself as a wedding destination?”. In order to find a solution, the research presented below was conducted.

Prior to the implementation of the study and based on the findings arisen from the literature review chapter, three hypotheses were formulated. They are the following:

- **Hypothesis 1:** The potential for a substantial impact of destination weddings in the Portuguese tourism industry is significant.
- **Hypothesis 2:** The main motivations behind foreign couples choosing Portugal as their wedding destination are tied with the weather, costs, landscape, gastronomy, and cultural offer.
- **Hypothesis 3:** The markets with the highest potential in the Portuguese destination wedding segment are Europe and Brazil.

Once the research is conducted, the veracity of the mentioned hypotheses will be analyzed, to ultimately reach a conclusion about the previously stated research question.

3. Methodology

In the interest of addressing the question raised in the “Research Question and Hypotheses” chapter and ascertaining how to best position Portugal as a wedding destination, two methods of data collection were used.

Secondary Data Collection was employed “to apply theoretical knowledge and conceptual skills in order to utilize existing data to address the research questions.” (Johnston 2014, 620). The data collection was materialized in the “Literature Review” chapter, to provide the theoretical background to many concepts approached, and stipulate the basis that supports the relevance of the dissertation topic chosen.

Furthermore, Primary Data Collection in the form of individual semi-structured interviews was implemented. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method to gather insights from industry experts, to sustain better and support the information obtained by the Literature Review and address the “Research Hypotheses” raised.

Qualitative interviewing was chosen in detriment of other methods, due to its flexibility. (Rabionet 2011). As the goal was to gather specific insights into the industry, there was a recognized need for an in-depth, open-ended conversation with industry experts, within defined topics. Thereby, a set of questions were developed prior to the interviews and adapted during the discussions, in accordance with how each dialogue was flowing. The main objective was for the neutral interviewers (Maria Vidal and Sofia Dias) to obtain comparable information from a non-representative sample size (Edwards and Holland 2013).

At the start of all interviews, there was verbal consent from all interviewees stating their permission for the audio to be recorded and the information collected used for academic purposes. Moreover, all participants were told they had no obligation to answer questions they did not feel comfortable responding to, and the questions were carefully reviewed to be respectful and culturally sensitive for the interviewees.

With regard to the Primary Data Collection, two focal stakeholders in the destination wedding tourism sector were contacted: 100 business-owner Portuguese wedding planners and 6 venues (hotels and “Quintas”). The first contact ensued through email, where participants were briefly

informed of the purpose of the dissertation. 11 wedding planners and 4 venues responded. Of these, 3 wedding planners and 2 venues stated they could not partake in the interviews due to schedule constraints.

In total, 10 validated interviews were conducted online through the platform “Zoom”. 8 wedding planners and 2 venues were interviewed. On average, destination weddings represented 95% of the totality of the interviewed wedding planners’ business. The audio was recorded on a mobile phone, and the online *modus* was chosen due to Covid-19 pandemic precautions, which require a safe distance among individuals and as little physical contact as possible; and practicality in the coordination of schedules. Each interview was conducted in Portuguese and had an average duration of 45 minutes. They were later translated and transcribed directly into English.

4. Limitations

Within the course of the collection of Primary Data, several limitations were encountered. Firstly, the lack of theoretical information on the topic, both globally and in Portugal, deeply affected the Secondary Data Collection, which, in turn, impacted the hypotheses derived from the literature review. Thus, the assumptions created prior to the interviews might have been limited and consequently affected the overall study.

Moreover, the sample size denoted another limitation. Due to time constraints and the Covid-19 pandemic, as there were only three months to arrange and conduct the interviews, it was not possible to acquire a larger sample, which might have provided more accurate results. The online format of the interviews conducted through the platform Zoom may have also negatively impacted the study. As on face-to-face interviews the conversation is more fluid, the online format may have prevented more extended discussions, with more valuable information

exchanged. In addition, there was a subsequent constraint in the visibility of gestures and expressions, which might have helped gauge undertones on the responses.

Additionally, the proportion of stakeholders was not balanced, as a considerably higher number of wedding planners was interviewed, when compared to venues. Therefore, the conclusions may be biased towards the former group's experience. Also, the number of venues is low and may not be representative of the segment. Furthermore, the wedding professionals questioned are not representative of the entire country, as most interviewees work in the regions of Lisbon, Douro, and Algarve. Hence, the generalization of the results obtained might not be valid.

The language used in the interviews might have also presented a limitation to the Primary Data Collection. As the interviews were conducted in Portuguese, for the ease of the wedding professionals, and later translated to English for the purpose of this paper, the translation might present some errors or misinterpretations, which may affect the conclusions derived.

Finally, during the course of the interviews, there was a possible bias in the elaboration of the questions, since the interviewers may have involuntarily led interviewees to answer what was needed to corroborate the formed theories.

5. Research's Insights

Ensuing, the Secondary Data Collection performed in the "Literature Review" chapter will be crossed with the Primary Data Collection, a qualitative study founded on the expertise of national wedding professionals.

To do so, the hypotheses mentioned above, which represent assumptions based on the knowledge acquired from the theoretical background, will be analyzed and compared to the findings arisen from the interviews.

5.1 Hypothesis 1: The potential for a substantial impact of destination weddings in the Portuguese tourism industry is significant.

The relationship between Portuguese tourism and the destination wedding segments is tightly connected, as a dual-sided effect can be identified. On the one hand, Portuguese tourism impacts destination weddings in the country, as established by the overall consensus among interviewees that the recent development in the Portuguese tourism industry is tightly connected with the rise in demand for destination weddings in the country ⁽¹⁾. As stated by Célia Pratas, a wedding planner for *Pratas Wedding Design*, foreign couples getting married in Portugal are looking for a “touristic experience” for themselves and their guests, in addition to the wedding experience itself. Thus, the substantial improvement in the structure of tourism in Portugal in the last ten years and the increased popularity of the country as a touristic destination triggers the growing attraction of Portugal as a wedding destination for foreigners as well. Moreover, interviewees agree that with more and more tourists visiting the country, word of mouth, along with satisfied returners, play a significant role in the choice of Portugal as a wedding destination. That is, if tourists leave the country contented with its offer, they may either take advantage of their wedding to return and bring along their family and friends, or they may spread their satisfaction with their close connections and through social media, which will, consequently, increase the number of couples interested in getting married in Portugal.

On the other hand, it is vital to consider the effect of destination weddings on Portuguese tourism. According to the literature review conducted above, including Mendonça's (2020) and Khodzhaeva's (2016) conclusions, once the sector is developed, the potential for destination weddings to achieve a substantial weight of the tourism industry in the country is very significant. Therefore, the assumption was conveyed in Hypothesis 1 and later confirmed by the wedding professionals questioned ⁽²⁾.

Firstly, all the interviewees (except one) agreed that destination weddings in Portugal have undergone an overall growth in the last few years ⁽³⁾, according to their experience. As many professionals pointed out, the only exceptions were the pandemic years (2020 and the first half of 2021) ⁽³⁾. Nevertheless, João Silva, *Verride Palácio Santa Catarina*'s hotel manager, mentioned that since August, the growth has been significantly better than expected and considerably higher than the pre-pandemic progress, which was rising at a slower pace. Additionally, according to Denise Cavaco, a wedding planner from *Romance Events*, the recent demand growth is expected to be maintained and followed by a steady and steep increase in the following years. In fact, the expansion of the segment in the country is so significant that, according to several interviewees, Portugal is becoming a solid competitor and being compared to “giants” in the European destination wedding industry, such as Italy, France, and Greece ⁽⁴⁾. Furthermore, all interviewees stated that the weight of destination weddings in their business (out of the total number) is at least 95% ⁽⁵⁾.

Moreover, the majority claimed that, at the moment, they actively choose to target foreign couples ⁽⁶⁾, even though most did not focus on the international market when they began their operations. The reasons behind this trend depend on the type of stakeholder. The wedding planners concentrate on the foreign market because they have concluded that the Portuguese public is not prepared to hire their services. On the one hand, locals already have some knowledge and connections which help them in the organization of a wedding. On the other hand, the domestic market is not as willing to spend money on a planner as foreigners, who need more guidance on the destination. Furthermore, as stated by Teresa Perdigão, a wedding planner from *Something Borrowed*, “Portuguese people use wedding planners as last-minute problem solvers” during or close to the wedding day, instead of reaching out to them for continuous support during the entire planning process. For venues, the indicated primary

motivations for focusing on the international market relate to the foreigners' higher buying power and willingness to pay, compared to the locals.

Regarding the profile of the clients, according to interviewees, they can be very varied. In terms of age, the average client for the wedding professionals is between 25-45 years old ⁽⁷⁾, of which most already have fixed jobs and income. The mentioned age group, which roughly corresponds to the Millennial generation, is among the highest spending when it comes to travel (Varricchio, Kosciulek and Stickles 2019). Additionally, as claimed by Célia Pratas, João Silva, and Joana Ribeiro, a venue manager at *Quinta do Pé da Serra*, many couples enjoy getting married abroad for their second or third wedding, which usually involves an older couple and a more intimate and smaller ceremony. When it comes to the economic and social status of the couple, interviewees characterized it as middle to high class ⁽⁸⁾, which generally results in higher budgets and willingness to spend in the destination.

According to the interviewees, the couples' overall budget for the wedding and trip is highly diverse, and it depends on the socio-economic status of the clients and their desires. "If they have it, they will spend it", claimed João Silva. Within the overall budget, typically couples spend the most on the wedding reception, followed by the accommodation and finally, travel (flights and transfers) and touristic activities, according to interviewees. As for the celebration itself, the budget usually depends on the number of guests and size of the wedding, even though the quantity and quality of suppliers also play a significant role. For most wedding planners interviewed, the average budget for their clients starts at 20.000€/30.000€ and can go up to 150.000€/200.000€ ⁽⁹⁾, and it includes the venue, F&B, entertainment, the photographer, decoration, flowers, hair, and makeup. Thus, the margins on the destination wedding industry are immense, and there is a very powerful niche in the market, who is willing to spend considerably. In fact, the highest budget on a wedding organized by Lucyana Sposito, a

wedding planner from *LS wedding planning*, consisted of 2€ million, a value considerably above average.

Moreover, the average length of stay in Portugal differs for the couple and guests, according to the wedding professionals. The bride and groom stay on average one week to two weeks in the country, with a minimum of 2 nights ⁽¹⁰⁾. Typically, the couple arrives a few days before the wedding to prepare for the ceremony and give their input, and many “end up having a mini honeymoon before leaving” (Teresa Perdigão), which extends their stay and investment in the destination. The guests, who typically consist of 50-100 people, generally spend five days to a week in the country ⁽¹¹⁾. However, these numbers depend on several factors. According to Teresa Perdigão, the length of stay varies according to whether the guests are on paid vacation, the month of stay (in July and August, guests tend to stay longer in the country), and the nationality. For instance, European guests are more likely only to stay two nights during the weekend, whereas guests from the United States of America (USA) tend to stay around two weeks. Since the latter come from farther away and spend more money and time on transportation, they prefer to stay for extended periods to take full advantage of their investment. Furthermore, according to several interviewees, travelers arriving from more distant and larger countries are more inclined to extend their stay past the wedding, in order to explore the whole country ⁽¹²⁾, which is comparatively much smaller and accessible than theirs, but still has extensive diversity. Thus, the considerable average length of stay of the destination wedding visitors, along with the significant budget and buying power of the entire group (50-100 people), exponentiates the segment's impact on Portuguese tourism.

Additionally, other benefits to the tourism industry can be found in the segment. Firstly, according to Denise Cavaco, for each wedding, the couple travels to the destination at least 2/3 times prior to the celebration to visit venues, amid others. Moreover, the celebration of such a milestone in Portugal will undoubtedly create a deep connection and loyalty of the couple

towards the country, as declared by Karina Sousa and Joana Ribeiro. Finally, Isabel Dentinho, a wedding planner from *Algarve Prestige*, stated that “[foreign couples] get married during weekdays”, which can help counteract the weekend seasonality for tourism businesses.

Lastly, the focus will be on the impact of destination wedding travelers on touristic activities. The consensus throughout the interviewees was that most couples and guests want to live the “Portuguese experience” ⁽¹³⁾. Therefore, cultural activities, such as a visit to the wine cellars in Porto, an olive oil tasting in Alentejo, a boat tour in Lisbon, or a beach day in Algarve, are top sellers among the foreign groups. Furthermore, the most popular activities are local food tours and gastronomic experiences ⁽¹³⁾, supported by regional restaurants and local suppliers.

Overall, as stated in Hypothesis 1, the impact of destination weddings in the Portuguese tourism is very promising. According to Marta Sousa, a wedding planner from *Como Branco Weddings*, “even though [the segment] is a niche market”, for only one wedding “100 people visit the country and pay for accommodation, have dinner in restaurants and practice touristic activities in pre or post stays of 1 to 2 weeks”.

5.2. Hypothesis 2: The main motivations behind foreign couples choosing Portugal as their wedding destination are tied with the weather, costs, landscape, gastronomy, and cultural offer.

Tourism is composed of inseparable products. Therefore, it is crucial to perceive travel as a combined experience of numerous dynamics. Hence, traveling is a continuous process which might be influenced by several factors and motivations, which are the underlying drive and pushing force to adopt certain behaviors (Getz 2008; Khodzhaeva 2016). In tourism, motivations for traveling have been discussed by numerous authors, connecting them to the tourists' behaviors, desires, and needs, to understand what influences an individual to be interested in a destination (Khodzhaeva 2016).

Upon a thorough analysis of numerous sources presented in the literature review, Hypothesis 2 was drawn, concerning the decision-making process and the main motivations of couples who choose Portugal as a wedding destination, with the intent to analyze its veracity and ascertain the attractive appeal of Portugal as a wedding destination. Furthermore, in pursuance of a better understanding of tourists' travel experience and their motivations towards visiting the country, a focus was placed on the most widely accepted theory concerning tourist motivations: the "Motivation's Theory", also identified as the "Push and Pull factors" theory (Crompton 1979; Yiamjanya and Wongleedee 2014; Huang 2015).

According to several authors that discuss the "Push and Pull" theory (Yiamjanya and Wongleedee 2014; Huang 2015), tourists make travel decisions based on two factors. The push factors consist of "internal motives or [motivational] forces that cause tourists to seek activities to [appease] their needs" (Khodzhaeva 2016, 6). The pull factors are based on their knowledge about the destination, and a set of destination attributes that enhance their desire to visit a particular place. Pull factors may also consist of traveler's perceptions and expectations such as novelty, benefit expectation, and marketing image of the destination, and are considered essential in explaining the destination choice (Seebaluck et al. 2015).

Referring to wedding tourism specifically, each couple has very different needs and desires. Thus, the motivations vary greatly. Present literature mentions the primary pull factors as being social incentives such as "prestige and status, economic [stimuli] such as saving money, [...] [and] the celebration of [the wedding] in a unique way and place, especially outside of the traditional [area] where the bride and groom live" (Khodzhaeva 2016, 7).

Considering pull factors, the literature review states the main motivations behind the choice of Portugal as a wedding destination were concluded to be the "good weather, beach and services", "cost"/"quality-price relationship", "attractive image of the destination", "landscape and heritage features", "gastronomy" and "cultural offer".

According to all interviewees, Portugal has a higher period of good weather, in comparison to other countries, verifiable for instance, by the sunny weather and 20°C temperature recorded in the last months of October. Isabel Dentinho stated that mostly in Algarve, the wedding season is prolonged, as there are many months in the year when couples can get married without experiencing bad weather, from April to October. As Lucyana Sposito mentioned, “the risk of bad weather in the summer is minimal”. Additionally, Isabel Dentinho stated that when there is an ominous weather prediction, usually it stays sunny during the day and rains at night. As João Silva also declared, Portugal is chosen for its excellent weather because “everyone is afraid of rain on their wedding day”.

Regarding the cost of weddings in Portugal, 70% of interviewees mentioned Portugal's reputation as an affordable destination. Teresa Perdigão and Célia Pratas revealed that many of her clients choose Portugal as their wedding destination due to the lower required budget compared to countries with similar weather and location next to the sea. Lucyana Sposito also stated that one of the first reasons for the choice is the price, considering Portugal is cheaper than countries such as the USA and France.

However, many pointed this motivation as a false illusion. Marta Sousa and Teresa Perdigão said a myriad of their clients assume Portugal is a “cheap” destination, but for their companies’ level of service, the couples spend an identical amount of money as they would in other countries. Thus, most interviewees do not consider Portugal a less expensive country, but agree it has a high cost-benefit. Ivanna Jahate, from *The Wedding Wonderland* company, stated that couples can have access to more services and products in Portugal than in Germany, the USA, or the United Kingdom, with the same budget. Additionally, João Silva and Joana Ribeiro declared the country is affordable for the conditions offered, particularly considering the wedding guests’ expenses as well.

Furthermore, the Portuguese gastronomy was mentioned as one of the motivations by 90% of interviewees. Karina Sousa, a wedding planner from *Algarve Wedding Planners*, stated it is very well regarded by most of the interviewees' clients, and considered better in taste than competitor countries such as Italy, France, or Spain. Moreover, Isabel Dentinho mentioned that supplementary to the quality of the food itself, the way it is presented stands out from other countries as well.

In conjunction with the aforementioned motivations, the “landscape and heritage features” (40% of interviewees) and “cultural offer” (60% of interviewees) represent a significant motivation for couples to get married in Portugal. Cultural tourism has developed over the years, becoming an attractive feature of many destinations, as a result of people's curiosity to experience cultures and environments other than their own and “moments of involved or experienced authenticity” (Ramkissoon and Uysal 2011).

Portugal is known for its vast history; therefore, according to some interviewees, several couples search for the authenticity of its historical heritage, especially venues such as palaces and castles, that are not available in their countries of origin ⁽¹⁴⁾. In addition, in consonance with Teresa Perdigão, Portugal has a peculiar characteristic, divergent from other countries, involving its monuments and landmarks. Whereas in other countries, national monuments have restricted access and extensive bureaucracy to access them, permissions to host events in unique locations in Portugal are easily obtained. Despite not mentioning history, the remaining interviewees alluded to the country's natural landscape and coastline as a luring factor and referred to its extensive tourism offer in a “compact” area, since it is a small country.

Thus, the information acquired in the interviews matches the information found through research (see Table 2). However, motivations do not rely solely on pull factors. Therefore, the hypothesis is true, but incomplete. Push factors influence the destination decision as well.

Push motivations are related to the traveler's emotional, intangible, and intrinsic desires, such as self-actualization, escape, rest, health and fitness, leisure, adventure, prestige, or social interaction. In contrast, pull motivations are related to external, cognitive factors and tangible resources of the destination such as landscapes, climate, hospitality, facilities, historical resources. These factors compile the motivations for a tourist to travel to a particular place and trigger evaluations that tourists could make about a destination (Correia et al. 2013; Negm and Elsamadicy 2017). The major push factors related to wedding tourism are mentioned as being the “natural environment, local legislation about weddings, culture, accommodations, food and beverage services, transportation, and travel services” (Khodzhaeva 2016, 7).

Drawing a parallel between push factors and Maslow’s Hierarchy theory (Motivation’s theory) (see Figure 1), it was concluded that Portugal offers conditions to satisfy every level of need present in the theory.

The physiological needs are considered the most important and placed at the bottom of the pyramid. As mentioned previously, Portugal’s gastronomy is widely recognized and addresses the “food” as well as “water” need. Furthermore, as João Silva stated, the accommodation suppliers in Portugal provide an excellent service, answering the “accommodation” needs.

Thereafter, the second level of needs has to do with safety. During the interviews, “safety” was one of the most mentioned factors, as Portugal is considered the fourth safest country globally, according to the Global Peace Index (Institute for Economics & Peace 2021). As Célia Pratas and Joana Ribeiro mentioned, couples worry not only about their safety but also their guests and family's safety when traveling to a different country to provide them with the best, safest experience; therefore, their need for security is met by the conditions offered in Portugal.

The third and fourth levels of the pyramid mention “love and belonging” and “esteem”. As couples travel to Portugal to get married, they want guests to accompany them on their special day, to create a loving and supportive environment, contributing to their life-long achievement

(wedding). Three interviewees mentioned that this is usually possible due to Portugal's accessibility, as the country is located centrally in the world. Teresa Perdigão stated that there are direct flights from all the most dominant destinations (USA, European countries, Dubai, among others), and Karina Sousa mentioned the proximity to destinations such as the UK and countries of Europe, which constitute a considerable market.

At last, the self-actualization factor is fulfilled by the sense of belonging in the country. Portugal is known for the genuine hospitality it displays towards tourists, according to 4 interviewees. Furthermore, according to Célia Pratas, several couples choose Portugal due to its sentimental significance, as the proposal occurred in the country.

Therefore, the intrinsic characteristics of Portugal fulfill tourists' needs; information which can be transposed to the assumption that the country will fulfill the foreign couples' needs as well.

5.3. Hypothesis 3: The markets with the highest potential in the Portuguese destination wedding segment are Europe and Brazil.

Considering the continuous growth of destination weddings globally and in Portugal specifically, Hypothesis 3 was devised to understand whether the country should focus its efforts on attracting the mentioned markets or different ones. According to the literature review, the current leading inbound markets in Portugal are European countries and Brazil, although the inbound market that exhibited the most significant increase was the United States. This information is pertained to the destination weddings sector as well, with Europe representing a strong inbound market, accompanied by Brazil.

However, the information obtained on the interviews rendered, contrary to the affirmed on Hypothesis 3, stated the European ⁽¹⁵⁾ and American ⁽¹⁶⁾ markets as the ones with the highest potential in the Portuguese destination wedding segment, due to both the high volume of inbound couples, as well as their superior economic power. According to most interviewees,

the USA brings the most revenue ⁽¹⁷⁾ due to their higher budgets and expenses with touristic services such as accommodation, restaurants, and activities. Within the European countries, the UK represents the most potent economic market, followed by Switzerland. Although representing a strong financial inbound market, Brazil is surpassed by the previously mentioned. On the other hand, the interviews show that the farthest markets, such as the Asian market, represent the least potential (Japan, Thailand, among others).

Ivanna Jahate asserted that in the beginning, her services were more searched for by British and Irish couples that already had a long relation with Portugal; nowadays, her clients are majorly from the USA. This demand derives from the fact that their country is vast, hence the higher number of inbound couples, and culturally, Americans attribute greater importance to weddings and their celebration, thus choosing an original celebration in a foreign country. Secondly to the USA, her clients are mainly from the UK and Ireland. Just as Ivanna Jahate, Marta Sousa's primary market is also the USA and Canadian Market, followed by European countries such as Switzerland, Germany, and the UK. The Brazilian Market was mentioned in third.

João Silva, Teresa Perdigão, and Joana Ribeiro stated their respective clients are mainly from the USA due to their economic power, which translates into higher budgets to perform weddings outside of their country of origin. The second biggest market for their businesses is Europe, with clients coming from the UK (decreasing due to Brexit), Ireland, France, and Germany. Furthermore, Teresa Perdigão declared that Brazilian clients have been declining and are rare these days, an affirmation replicated by Isabel Dentinho. Additionally, just as João Silva, Teresa Perdigão, and Joana Ribeiro, Lucyana Sposito's biggest market is the USA, followed by European countries such as Switzerland, France, and the UK.

Karina Sousa said her clients originate predominantly from European countries such as Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, and the UK and Ireland, derivative of their strong connection with the Algarve, since their families have been traveling to Algarve for years and friends have

beach houses there as well, making them feel like they are at a second home. American clients represent the second biggest market for her, followed by Brazilian clients. Moreover, Célia Pratas' predominant volume of business derives from European countries as well, such as Switzerland, Scandinavia, Finland, Sweden, with the USA representing a close second, followed by Canada, and PALOP (Portuguese-speaking African countries), with Brazil and Russia signifying a small percentage of her business. Finally, Denise Cavaco's biggest market is also European, composed chiefly of clients from the UK, followed by the USA market.

In conclusion, the Hypothesis stated is considered false, as the markets with the highest potential in the Portuguese destination wedding segment detected are Europe and the American market, hence the need to focus on these markets to develop the segment.

6. Discussion

6.1. Positioning Portugal as a Wedding Destination for the American Market

The North American market, specifically the United States of America, embodies a solid touristic market. Outside of the European Continent, it represents the second leading inbound market to Portugal, only surpassed by Brazil. Pre-pandemic, there has been a continuous growth of American tourists in Portugal, increasing 23,2% compared to 2018 and culminating in a 3,8 percentage of the total tourists visiting the country. Additionally, 40% of US couples' destination weddings are reported in international locations (BusinessWire 2019). Thus, Portugal has been growing as a touristic destination for the American market, consequently representing an appealing destination for American destination weddings.

By analyzing the literature review, the conclusions on Hypothesis 3, and the interviews conducted, two main reasons were recognized for Portugal's choice among the American couples.

First and foremost, the pricing in Portugal is considered vastly affordable for the average American, as stated by Multisector (2016) and Khodzhaeva (2016) and verified by Isabel

Dentinho and Teresa Perdigão on the interviews. Compared to an average American wedding, the pricing of services in Portugal is much less expensive. Furthermore, a destination wedding in Portugal is customarily a more intimate ceremony, with fewer people, which implies fewer charges overall. Hence, including everything from transportation to wedding planner services, and venue renting, a destination wedding in Portugal is less expensive than the organization of a wedding in the USA.

Secondly, according to Khodzhaeva (2016, 7), one of the primary motivations for the choice of a destination wedding is to celebrate the occasion "in a unique way and place, especially outside of the traditional local [sic] where the bride and groom live". In accordance, Ivanna Jahate stated that the American population seeks authenticity and culture, to incorporate in the aesthetic aspects of the wedding, such as the venue, architecture, and decoration.

Moreover, Marta Sousa affirmed that Portugal attracts many Americans who wish to incorporate its culture and history into their weddings and appreciate the romantic aesthetic of the authentic palaces and castles present in the country. Accordingly, Célia Pratas remarked: "plenty of American couples come to Portugal for the palaces, castles, history, and architecture that they do not have in their countries – they want 'fairytale weddings' ". Additionally, Teresa Perdigão stated that Americans desire to get married in Portugal because they "wish to demonstrate in an obvious way that they are getting married in a country different from theirs, by incorporating traditional decorations and cultural elements of Portugal in their weddings".

Culturally, American couples are characterized particularly for two factors: their willingness to spend more money in return for good service and their familiarity with destination weddings. Americans spend more money and give more importance to their weddings than European countries, for instance (Ivanna Jahate and Marta Sousa), and are culturally used to destination weddings, since many choose to get married in different States (Ivanna Jahate). Furthermore, as Khodzhaeva (2016, 8) states, "wedding tourists tend to be a higher spending target market than

typical vacationers, because they want to enjoy a unique and memorable experience to the fullest extent available".

Thus, considering the abovementioned information, the USA market signifies a high growth potential for destination weddings in Portugal and should be developed by addressing existing issues in the sector and investing in the destination's marketing.

Therefore, using Aharoni's (2017) successful theory for rebranding as a basis, infrastructure enhancements and micro-marketing¹ activations targeting American engaged couples should be developed to position the country's image as a wedding destination. Aharoni's (2017) study concluded that Israel successfully rebranded itself into an attractive country to visit, through the government's investment in positive publicity for the country, actions to promote word-of-mouth, and micro-marketing investments in social media engagements, alternatingly using new marketing approaches.

Transposing knowledge, an identical strategy could be implemented in Portugal to brand the country as a wedding destination for the American market. Firstly, by developing its infrastructure, as "without a 'high-quality product' marketing will not be enough" (Aharoni 2017, 293). Secondly, by marketing the country as a multidimensional brand, as the country holds vast touristic characteristics which can contribute to its appeal as a wedding destination, in addition to the attractive traditional wedding elements it already offers (venues, catering, and others). Thus, the following recommendations intend to build the growth potential, to best position Portugal as a wedding destination for the US market.

¹ “approach to advertising that targets a specific group of people in a niche market” (Twin 2021)

6.1.1. Improve the Quality of the Suppliers' Services Offered

In the interviews conducted, the most talked-about infrastructure lapse in Portugal was the quality of the wedding services. Although the quality-price relation is decent, the overall opinion centered on the importance of the development of the service offered by catering companies, venues, and others, in order to have the competency to host more American destination weddings in Portugal ⁽¹⁸⁾, with better quality, as the American client values service above all (Denise Cavaco and Isabel Dentinho).

Ivanna Jahate and Lucyana Sposito stated that Portugal has all the resources of countries such as Italy and Greece, considered high-grade wedding destinations. However, the service offered is low-level, so Portugal cannot attract American clients with a higher budget. As she stated, she cannot provide the level of quality required by clients with higher budgets, with Portuguese suppliers and accommodation providers. Furthermore, catering and decoration suppliers do not offer particular services the couples request, compelling her to resort to foreign suppliers numerous times, as there are no qualitatively comparable services or professionals in Portugal. In addition, according to Teresa Perdigão, American clients are sometimes adversely surprised with the tardy response time from suppliers, the unprofessional approach to some matters at a professional level, and the lack of organization in services. For instance, "the clients once booked a venue for a wedding, and six months later the venue said the price was too low, and upped it from 6.000€ to 32.000€" (Teresa Perdigão). Moreover, Karina Sousa stated that some venues disturb the wedding planners' jobs. The venues take over all the details, resulting in a worse service offered, since the wedding planners are the ones that know the couples' needs accurately.

Therefore, to promote Portugal as a wedding destination for the American market, the stakeholders and suppliers need to be aligned to work professionally, with quality and ethically, or the image of Portugal and the wedding business can deteriorate.

To deal with this situation, the sector's suppliers should be given formation, by the institution *Turismo de Portugal* and private entities such as companies with vast experience in the industry, in the form of Workshops or Masterclasses. This formation should be based on benchmarks from countries such as France (Muriel Saldalamacchia Academy, n.d.) and Italy (Accademia Degli Eventi, n.d.), whose wedding businesses thrive, and would teach the suppliers the benefits of improved service and the "client comes first" mentality of the USA.

As Teresa Perdigão stated, an American couple might invest more in the venue and catering to have more quality. So, the efficient formation and development of these services is beneficial not only to the services themselves but to the entirety of the industry as well, economically and quality-wise. In some cases, for instance, the catering companies' staff does not speak English nor integrate the culture of the couples while serving their wedding, so training should be given to reduce the language barriers and teach the staff how to assist American clients best.

Moreover, there would be an accompanying certification system to verify who acquired the formation. The certification would also identify to foreigners and wedding planners which companies and venues offer the best services, just as it is practiced in Canada (WPIC n.d.). Finally, the system would also represent an incentive for suppliers to improve their services to achieve the certification, which would bring them more business in turn.

Lastly, captivating conditions and packages should be included in the vendors' offers to cater to the services to the American destination weddings specifically, with special prices in the low seasons (Mendonça 2020).

6.1.2. Develop the Destination Wedding Sector Technologically

Marta Sousa pointed out that electronic services in Portugal are not well adapted to the increasingly tech-savvy American couples. The main issue she faces is related to payments from the couples to the services they hire. Whereas in other countries, the couples have several payment options and acceptable fees, Portugal has endless bureaucracy, and most payments are

made through wire transfers. Correspondingly, Mendonça's (2020) study concluded that a point of enhancement in Portugal should be the improvement of the transaction payments since it is difficult to wire transfer money to all vendors.

The solution lies in the industry's investment to improve payment options, by expanding the array of payment methods and reducing the fees paid due to the dollar conversion and credit card companies charges. The Global Payments Insight study discovered that "both businesses and consumers agree that reducing the number of fees collected in the value chain – such as the ones collected by credit card networks – would enhance the payment experience. This improvement could partly be addressed by forging direct relationships with banks – and according to the study, 85 percent of banks indicated they are interested in working with businesses to reduce these types of costs" (Walker 2016).

In addition, Khodzhaeva (2016, 9) affirms that the government should “facilitate the legal process of obtaining marriage licenses and minimize pre-wedding residence requirements for foreign couples”. Correspondingly, Karina Sousa mentioned that communication with official government institutions is recurrently difficult, because most of the communication tools used are obsolete, and there is extensive bureaucracy involved in the permits for American couples. To address this concern, a communication system should be created to facilitate the request and grant of wedding permits to foreign couples. The system could be implemented through existing websites, e.g., government official websites such as ePortugal, or existing platforms, e.g., eSmart Permit – a fully automated permitting process. The system would standardize and automate the license approval process, helping to build a seamless communication platform between the couple or wedding planner (applicant) and the government (approval board). Through this solution, the applicants could easily submit a request for the marriage permit, monitor its progress, and download the license once it is granted. In addition, the government would also benefit from the platform, as they could gather statistics on foreign marriages in the

country and periodically analyze the system to evaluate its performance and enhance the decision-making process (eSmartPermit n.d.), saving time and resources.

6.1.3. Improve the Tourism Offer

To best position Portugal as a wedding destination for American couples, tourism stakeholders such as the accommodation providers should adapt their offer accordingly, to target the groups that arrive for the weddings.

Tourists from the USA, according to João Silva, have the mentality and culture of traveling with family, do a buyout of the hotel, have all the staff turned towards satisfying their needs, and require a tailor-made feeling in their stay. Therefore, they do not complain easily and pay well, as long as the service provided meets their criteria.

Thus, hotels should promote extended stays for these groups, investing in the promotion of pre and post stays by offering special rates or conditions. Conjointly, Destination Management Companies or travel agencies could organize authentic experiences involving local culture, explicitly tailored for American groups traveling for destination weddings. The experiences could center around obtaining knowledge about the local culture (Paulauskaite et al. 2017). Co-creation would also contribute to the feeling of authenticity, given that value is jointly produced through the interaction of the tourist and the destination (Paulauskaite et al. 2017).

As Americans value culture and learning the history of the countries they visit, possible experiences could be organized tours, that would take the groups to visit the most iconic local monuments and landmarks, eat in local restaurants, engage in traditions (e.g., go to a Fado show) and connect with the locals (e.g., workshops in locals' traditional houses).

6.1.4. Institute Micro-Marketing and Investment Actions

The total aforementioned recommendations contribute to the improvement of Portugal's image, through the development of the services and offers available. Notwithstanding, Portugal should

strive to position itself as a wedding destination through its marketing as well (Mendonça 2020; Khodzhaeva 2016).

Turismo de Portugal's website and marketing campaigns are known for their effectiveness and creativity, accentuated by the "World's Leading Tourism Authority Website" awards in 2018 and 2020. Additionally, as Parreira (2018) mentioned in her study, *Turismo de Portugal's* digital campaigns are proven to attract individuals to visit the country.

Subsequently, the institution could produce an online campaign depicting the country as a wedding destination, as currently there is no marketing focused on the sector. Furthermore, *Turismo de Portugal* could offer short online marketing courses through its "Academia Digital" to sector professionals (Turismo de Portugal n.d.). The courses would teach them the basics of promoting the segment, developing the communication of the wedding industry, and understanding how to target high-end markets.

To date, according to Ivanna Jahate, Portugal has not been able to position itself at a high enough level to attract, e.g., celebrities and high-profile clients, which constitute crucial targets to develop the country's image as a wedding destination, in consonance with Leitão (2019). If *Turismo de Portugal* focuses its efforts on promoting the sector and teaching the industry professionals, the joint work between the institution and the industry members will contribute to the country's positioning.

As mentioned previously, Portugal is considered an affordable country for the average American and is rich in culture and history. Therefore, the marketing campaigns to the US market could be focused on the mentioned factors, e.g., the videos shown on the *Turismo de Portugal* campaigns could feature an American wedding occurring in Portugal, alongside the historical monuments they visited and the landscape they experienced.

According to Karina Sousa, Marta Sousa, and Lucyana Sposito, the American couples are very similar, as they all come from the same country. Nevertheless, they present some differences,

largely dependent on their State of origin. For instance, couples that derive from coastal States, such as California or New York, tend to prefer more metropolitan weddings, centered on the party section of the wedding, while couples from central States, such as Texas and North Carolina prefer more traditional venues and weddings. Thus, *Turismo de Portugal* could develop different marketing campaigns targeting the various States, focusing on each one's preferences in each campaign.

Additionally, the professionals in the industry, more specifically wedding planners that work with destination weddings, could contact American travel agencies specialized in destination weddings and divulge Portugal so that the agencies will send more couples to the country.

Moreover, employing social media to reach online users and promote the country is one of the best ways to get the message across (Leitão 2019; Mendonça 2020; Aharoni 2017). Hence, an effective and indirect marketing strategy would be using influencers to promote destination weddings in Portugal. By attracting American celebrities or influencers focused on weddings, who have plentiful followers on social media, the country would build trust through influencers who already have an engaged audience. They would display all the romantic and touristic features of the country, captivating the couples to get married in Portugal.

There are also paid marketing opportunities on social media platforms, such as sponsored advertisements to help increase visibility (Leitão 2019). *Turismo de Portugal* and wedding planners could leverage the tool in order to target people based on their location, age, or demographics, discerning the young couples pretending to get married and targeting them with promotional destination wedding campaigns.

To conclude, an investment in the sector is needed, as stated by Mendonça (2020). Through international recognized entities, such as *Turismo de Portugal* and the government's economic investment in the destination wedding sector in Portugal, the country would be more easily positioned as a wedding destination. Furthermore, research could be conducted by the

Portuguese Tourism Institutions to benchmark ideas from countries with a significant wedding destination market, such as Italy and Greece, understand what their government and institutions are developing, and invest in the sector accordingly. Additionally, conversations should be established with USA travel agencies and tourism-related institutions, to understand from the source the best course of action to attract American couples to get married in Portugal.

6.1.5. Promote Stakeholder Actions

Regarding actions the stakeholders can take, Karina Sousa mentioned in her interview that several American wedding planners have already heard about Portugal at least once and would like to come to the country, but have never made the trip because they did not have enough incentives. Therefore, action could be taken by the industry stakeholders to attract wedding planners, so they can get to know the country and bring their clients subsequently.

This promotion could be accomplished through the organization of American wedding planner FAMs (familiarization trips) to Portugal. A FAM trip happens when a supplier invites prospective clients to experience a hotel or an activity in-person. Hence, Portugal and specific services would be shown to the wedding planners to allure them to the country and subsequently attract American clients through their recommendation.

As there are existing Exhibitions focused on destination weddings in the USA, Portuguese stakeholders could also participate in several Exhibitions, promoting Portugal as a wedding destination for American clients. Exhibitions such as the "Wedding Merchants Business Academy", the largest conference for wedding professionals globally, pose an excellent opportunity for the Portuguese industry to learn the latest in business and trends. Additionally, Portugal could invest in attracting more wedding fairs, such as the *Amour* Event, which will happen in Cascais in 2022.

To conclude, Portugal is known for its hospitality, greatly appreciated by the American population, as concluded in the study conducted by Mendonça (2020) and confirmed by 60%

of interviewees. To leverage the full potential of this attractive factor, the marketing campaigns could additionally focus on the familiarity of the Portuguese people, and the homelike feeling of the country once visited, which poses an appealing aspect to celebrate a personal milestone such as a wedding, in the country.

7. Final Remarks and Future Research

As previously concluded, destination weddings are a fast-growing developing sector in the tourism industry, with enormous potential for economic impact on the destinations. Throughout the course of the paper, the importance of the segment in Portugal has been established, as well as the growing impact it might have on the country's economy in the future. Thus, the need to develop the industry's structure and promotion arises.

Nevertheless, research on the topic is scarce, both globally and nationally. Hence, further exploration of the subject is required to fully understand the impact and potential of the destination wedding segment, as well as to establish actionable insights.

Firstly, a comprehensive quantitative study on the impact of destination weddings on a destination's tourism and economy should be conducted, as the information on the subject is limited. Furthermore, research on how to develop the industry, in terms of suppliers and infrastructures, should be tackled.

When focusing on the Portuguese destination wedding sector, due to space constraints, the present paper was centered on two markets: USA and Europe. However, further investigation on other high-potential markets should be conducted. Based on the stakeholders' interviews, possible markets were identified: Brazil, due to its linguistic and historic connection with Portugal, as well as the country's high demand for European destination weddings; India, since it is a fast-growing market for destination weddings, which is willing to spend considerably and whose weddings last longer; and the Middle East, as it was characterized by several interviewees as the highest spending market.

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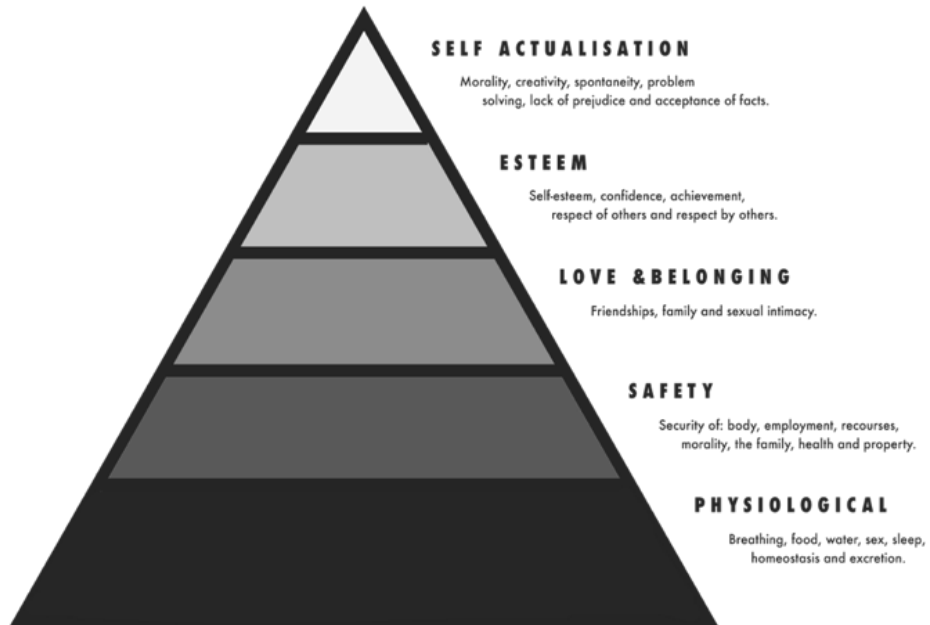
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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Figures

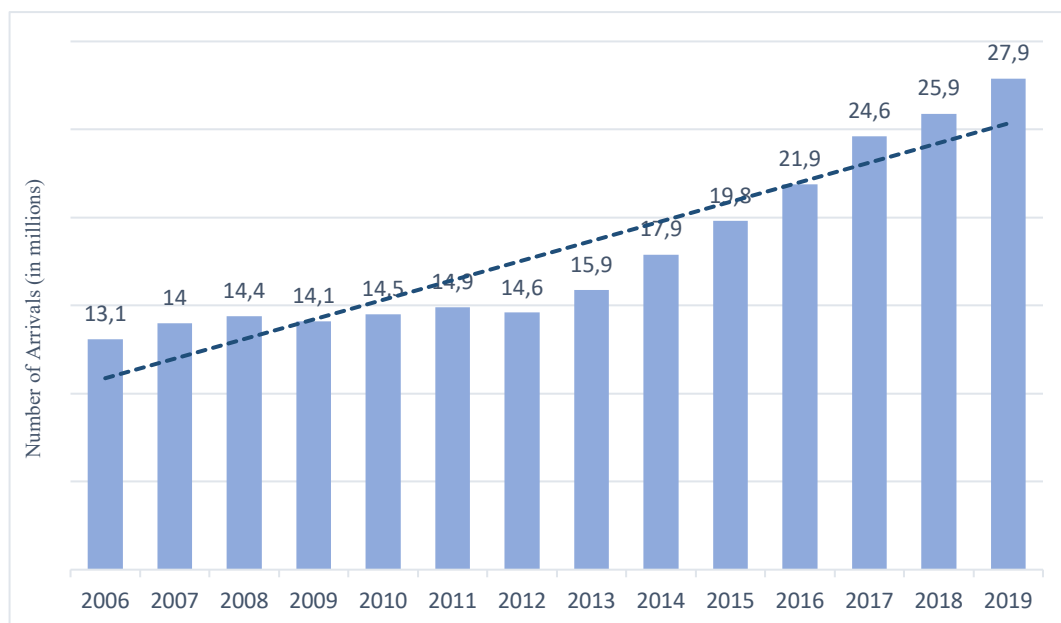
Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid



Source: *Kenney 2018*

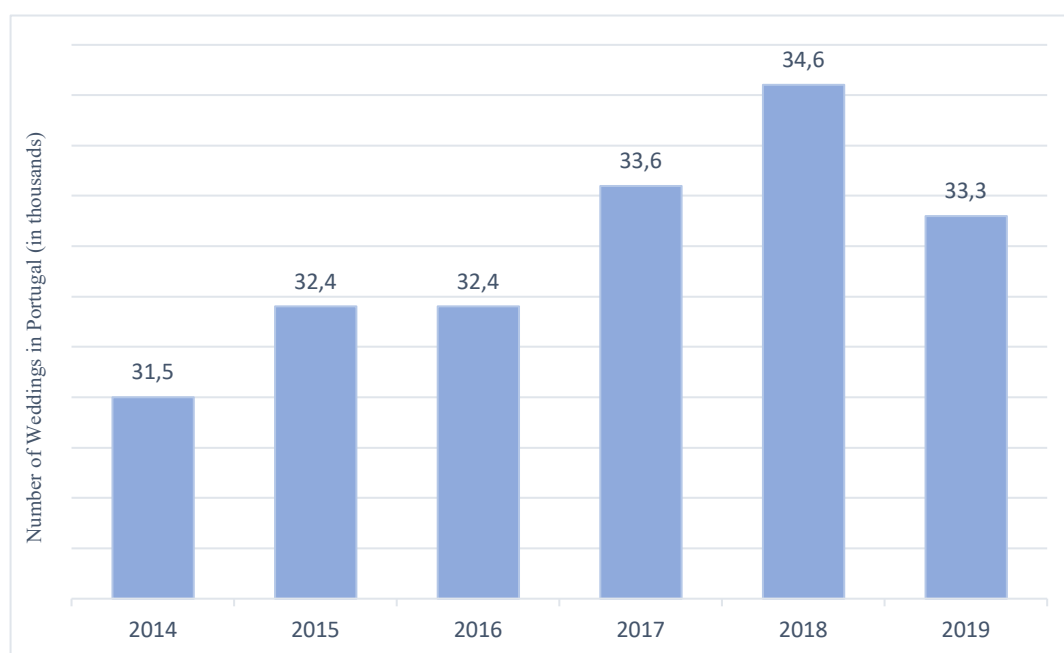
Appendix 2 - Graphs

Graph 1: Number of Arrivals in Tourist Accommodation in Portugal from 2006 to 2019



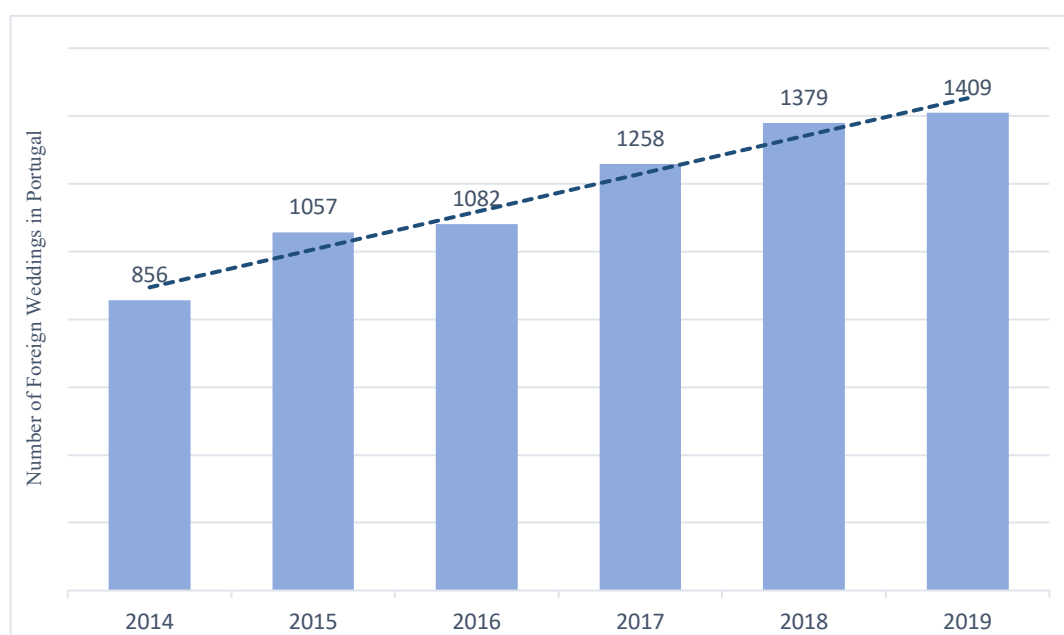
Source: *Adapted from Statista 2021b*

Graph 2: Growth of weddings celebrated in Portugal from 2014 to 2019



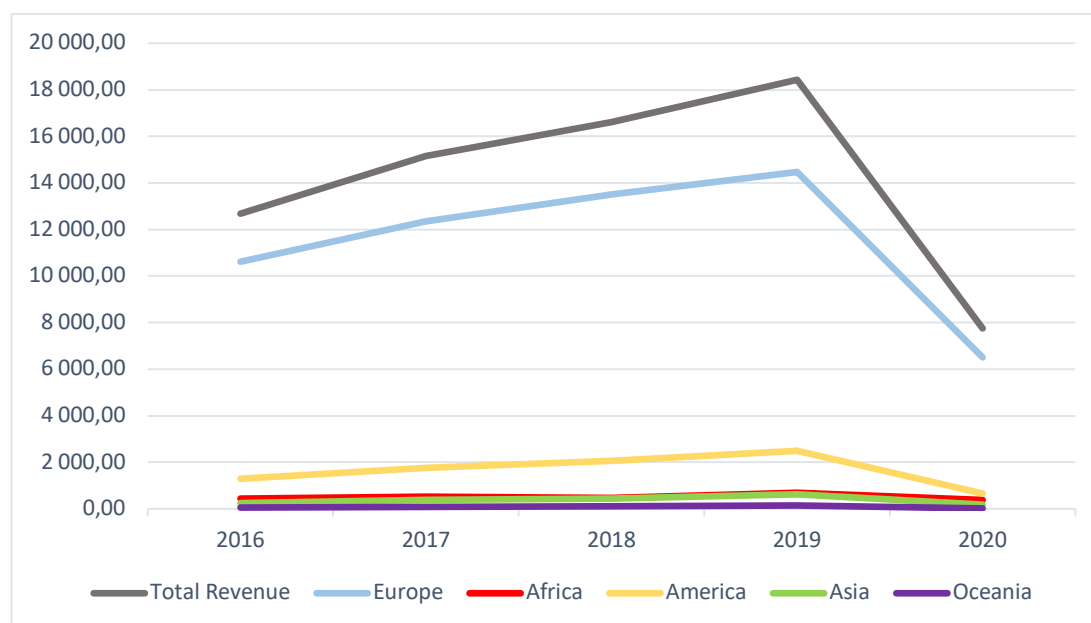
Source: *Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2021a*

Graph 3: Growth of weddings celebrated by foreign couples in Portugal from 2014 to 2019



Source: *Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2020a*

Graph 4: Revenue in the Portuguese Travel and Tourism Industry from 2016 to 2020 by Continent



Source: *Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020b, 2021b*

Appendix 3 - Tables

Table 1: Conclusions derived from the Stakeholders' Interviews Conducted

Conclusions	Percentage of Interviewees that Mentioned It
The development in the Portuguese tourism industry causes the rise in demand for destination weddings in the country. ⁽¹⁾	60% (6/10)
Destination weddings have the potential to achieve a substantial impact in the Portuguese tourism industry. ⁽²⁾	60% (6/10)
Destination weddings in Portugal have undergone an overall growth in the last few years (except during the COVID-19 pandemic). ⁽³⁾	90% (9/10)
Portugal is competing and being compared to “giants” in the European destination wedding industry, such as Italy, France, and Greece. ⁽⁴⁾	30% (3/10)
The weight of destination weddings in the stakeholders' businesses (out of the total number of weddings) is at least 95%. ⁽⁵⁾	100% (10/10)
Stakeholders actively choose to target foreign couples instead of Portuguese couples. ⁽⁶⁾	70% (7/10)
The average client for the wedding professionals is between 25-45 years old. ⁽⁷⁾	70% (7/10)
The average client for the wedding professionals belongs from the middle to high class. ⁽⁸⁾	50% (5/10)
The average wedding budget for foreign couples ranges from 20.000€/30.000€ to 150.000/200.000€. ⁽⁹⁾	50% (5/10)
The couple stays on average one week to two weeks in Portugal, with a minimum of 2 nights. ⁽¹⁰⁾	100% (10/10)
The guests stay on average five days to a week in Portugal. ⁽¹¹⁾	70% (7/10)
Travelers arriving from more distant countries are more inclined to extend their stay past the wedding and travel within the country. ⁽¹²⁾	50% (5/10)
The most popular touristic activities for the visitors are typically Portuguese/cultural activities, as well as gastronomical experiences. ⁽¹³⁾	60% (6/10)
Foreign couples commonly look for historical venues, such as palaces and castles, particularly when they do not have that type of venue in their countries of origin. ⁽¹⁴⁾	60% (6/10)
The European market is one of the biggest markets in the Portuguese destination wedding sector. ⁽¹⁵⁾	70% (7/10)
The American market is one of the biggest markets in the Portuguese destination wedding sector. ⁽¹⁶⁾	80% (8/10)
The American market is one of the markets that bring the most revenue to the Portuguese destination wedding sector. ⁽¹⁷⁾	80% (8/10)
The Portuguese wedding industry is not prepared to provide the level of quality that the market demands, thus services must be developed for a higher-quality offer. ⁽¹⁸⁾	40% (4/10)
Social media, particularly visual platforms, is an essential promotion tool for the promotion of Portugal as a wedding destination. ⁽¹⁹⁾	50% (5/10)
The profile of European clients varies considerably, according to the country of origin. ⁽²⁰⁾	60% (6/10)

Source: *Thesis Authors - Stakeholders' Interviews (Primary Data Collection)*

Table 2: Main Motivations for Choosing Portugal as a Wedding Destination, according to the Stakeholders Interviewed

Main Motivations	Percentage of Interviewees that Mentioned It
Weather	100% (10/10)
Gastronomy	90% (9/10)
Affordability	70% (7/10)
Culture and History	60% (6/10)
Hospitality	60% (6/10)
Safety	30% (3/10)
Landscape	30% (3/10)
Length and Convenience of Travel & Proximity to the Country of Origin	20% (2/10)
Diversity of Environments	20% (2/10)
Unique Venues	20% (2/10)

Source: *Thesis Authors - Stakeholders' Interviews (Primary Data Collection)*