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Article driving forward: Exploring internationalization and innovation in urban road passenger transport—A case study analysis

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Abstract: The process of internationalization and innovation (IPI) in the urban road passenger transport (URPT) sector is driven by the need to provide cities with efficient and sustainable mobility solutions. The objective of this study is to understand the perceptions of URPT employees in relation to PII, based on a comprehensive case study. By exploring how these two concepts interrelate and influence each other, the study seeks to provide valuable information that can help improve strategic planning and policy formulation in the urban transport sector. The research, based on semi-structured interviews with 20 employees, reveals significant gaps in internal communication, with only about half of the participants aware of ongoing national and international projects. Information was often limited to those directly involved, indicating a need for improved dissemination strategies. Despite these communication issues, employees positively view the company's presence at international events and recognize the importance of involvement in European organizations, particularly for knowledge acquisition and networking. Challenges identified include inadequate internal communication and insufficient investment in international projects. However, there was strong agreement on the value of internationalization and innovation process (IIP) for both professional development and organizational growth. To enhance the company's international presence and return on investment (ROI), the study recommends better coordination, improved information sharing, and strategic planning. These findings emphasize the critical role of effective communication and active participation in international initiatives for the sustainable growth of the organization.

Keywords: urban road passenger transport; internationalization; innovation; sustainability; case study

1. Introduction

The urban road passenger transport (URPT) is a critical element in the development of any city, as it influences territorial, social, health, economic, and environmental policies, among others (Verano-Tacoronte et al., 2024). This sector plays a fundamental role in urban areas, as it provides an essential service for people's mobility (Turaev and Rakhmatov, 2022). The efficient development of URPT is a crucial aspect of sustainability, as it not only contributes to reducing urban congestion but is also associated with the minimization of greenhouse gas emissions (Lindkvist and Melander, 2022). In recent years, research on URPT has garnered increasing attention due to shifts in the contextual environment in which they are implemented (Sharifi, 2021; Wolek et al., 2021). Globalization and rapid technological advancement have encouraged companies in this sector to explore new business opportunities to adapt and strategically position themselves in the global market (Knight et al., 2020). In this context, the internationalization and innovation process

(IIP) emerges as a fundamental approach to ensuring the competitiveness and sustainable growth of these organizations (Castaneda and Cuellar, 2020; Vrontis and Christofi, 2021).

Internationalization in the URPT sector involves expanding a company's operations beyond national borders, allowing them to explore new market segments, reach new customers, and diversify sources of revenue (Haddoud et al., 2020). Additionally, it enables access to differentiated resources, such as advanced technology, skilled labor, and specialized knowledge, which contribute to achieving competitive advantage (Albuquerque Filho et al., 2020). Coupled with internationalization, innovation emerges as a key element for the success of URPT sector companies, as the adoption of innovative technical and technological solutions improves service quality, optimizes operational efficiency, reduces costs, and offers a more satisfactory experience to users (Cisneros-Cahueñas et al., 2022; Santisteban et al., 2021). Innovation is also essential for ensuring the success and sustainability of companies in this sector (Skala, 2022), as it provides more efficient, safe, and environmentally responsible services (Bamwesigye and Hlavackova, 2019).

The present research focuses on this theme and aims to understand the perceptions of employees of a transportation company regarding IIP, using a case study as the basis of analysis. Understanding how these two concepts relate to and mutually influence each other is of utmost importance for both companies and professionals involved in the planning and development of urban transportation policies (Lecerf and Omrani, 2020). Thus, four specific objectives were outlined to ascertain whether the study participants were aware of: (a) the national and international projects being developed by the organization; (b) the advantages; (c) the challenges; and (d) the return on investment (ROI) of IIP.

Methodologically, this research employs qualitative analysis through interviews and surveys with employees, providing insights into their perceptions and experiences. Anticipated contributions include a deeper understanding of the practical implications of IIP in the URPT sector, offering valuable information for companies and policymakers to enhance strategic planning and policy formulation. This study aims to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and real-world applications, advancing the discourse on how URPT companies can leverage IIP for sustained growth and competitiveness.

1.1. Urban road passenger transport: Sector characterization

The urban road passenger transport (URPT) sector is integral to urban mobility, providing essential transportation services within and around cities (Porru et al., 2020; Stan, 2022). Additionally, they contribute to more accessible, inclusive, and livable cities by improving air quality, optimizing the use of road space, and revitalizing city centers (Verano-Tacoronte et al., 2024). Characterizing this sector involves examining vehicle types, routes, ticketing systems, operators, government policies, and the socioeconomic contexts they serve (Mukhammadzokir and Murodjon, 2021). This analysis must consider population mobility patterns, peak times, diverse social group needs, and interactions with other transportation modes like metros and trains (Shi et al., 2020). Transport companies significantly impact the economy and society (Bassi

et al., 2022). Over the past decade, these companies have evolved, enhancing user quality of life by improving accessibility and social inclusion (Mejía-Dorantes and Murauskaite-Bull, 2022). According to Jacyna et al. (2014) and Yenisetty et al. (2022), URPT services reduce private vehicle use, thus lowering air pollution and traffic congestion.

The European Commission (EC) estimates that congestion costs nearly 100 billion euros annually, approximately 1% of the European Union's GDP, and will increase to 200 billion euros annually if changes in the mobility system are not introduced (Christodoulou and Christidis, 2020). Following the introduction of European regulations (European Commission, 2007), Portugal implemented a new regulatory framework with significant potential to enhance the competitiveness of public transportation. Consequently, it transferred the planning, development, management, investment, financing, and supervision of public transport systems from national authorities to local authorities. This shift in scale has substantial potential, particularly considering that land use and sustainable mobility strategies are primarily applied at the local level, complementing Municipal Master Plans and Sustainable Mobility Plans (Silva et al., 2021). Over a period of four years, Portuguese municipalities were required to develop a public transportation strategy, define networks and service levels, and launch tenders for these services (Li et al., 2018), as the influence of this sector spans economic, social, and environmental domains, significantly improving urban community life (Ojo, 2019).

Economically, URPT facilitates daily commutes, business opportunities, and participation in commercial and cultural activities, thereby stimulating local development (Porru et al., 2020). It creates direct and indirect employment, promotes tourism and commerce, and supports urban development (Basso et al., 2021). In the same vein, Persyn et al. (2022) state that URPTs, in addition to directly affecting trade flows, also serve as the primary linkage channel between regions. Efficient URPT systems enhance population mobility and productivity by ensuring smooth access to workplaces (Tahmasbi et al., 2019).

Socially, URPT systems provide access to employment, education, healthcare, and leisure for diverse socioeconomic groups, contributing to lower unemployment rates (Saif et al., 2019). They enhance connectivity within cities, fostering interactions among different urban communities and reducing social exclusion for vulnerable groups like the elderly, disabled, and low-income individuals (Al-Thawadi et al., 2021; Bezyak et al., 2020).

Environmentally, while URPT is a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution (Euchi and Kallel, 2021), the adoption of electric and hybrid vehicles can mitigate these impacts. Investing in sustainable infrastructure, such as bike lanes and shared transportation, is crucial (Bamwesigye and Hlavackova, 2019; Costa, 2024). Raising public awareness about sustainable behaviors is essential to minimize environmental impacts (Bezyak et al., 2020). Following this idea, Silva et al. (2021) further emphasize the need to slow down traffic growth and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by promoting the use of public transportation. Studies conducted by Perdiguero and Sanz (2020) in Barcelona demonstrated that within the terrestrial transportation sector, urban transport accounts for 35.0% of energy consumption and CO₂ emissions.

1.2. Internationalization and innovation process

The global economy's rapid changes have created a highly competitive and globalized market. To navigate these challenges, organizations must implement strategies that promote growth and competitive advantage (Albuquerque Filho et al., 2020). Vrontis and Christofi (2021) highlight internationalization and innovation as key strategies for business value addition. Internationalization involves expanding commercial activities beyond national borders, considering investment levels, resource allocation, and market knowledge (Odei and Stejskal, 2020; Reim et al., 2022). Strategies include exporting, licensing, joint ventures, foreign direct investment (FDI), and mergers and acquisitions (Afuah, 2020).

Exporting is the most common form, involving selling domestically produced goods to foreign customers, either directly or indirectly through intermediaries (Steinhäuser et al., 2021). Licensing allows foreign entities to use intellectual property in exchange for royalties (Santos Jhunior et al., 2021). Joint ventures involve partnerships with foreign companies to create new business entities, sharing risks and profits (Nippa and Reuer, 2019). FDI entails establishing operations in a foreign country, providing greater control and market adaptation (Osinubi and Ajide, 2022). Mergers and acquisitions involve acquiring or joining foreign companies to gain local market presence and resources (Eghbal et al., 2020).

Choosing an internationalization strategy depends on the product or service type, target market, resources, and the economic and political conditions of the involved countries. Each strategy has distinct advantages and disadvantages, necessitating careful analysis (Tasel, 2020). The IIP in public land transportation presents challenges such as compliance with host country regulations, cultural context considerations, and infrastructure quality (Broniewicz and Ogrodnik, 2020; Chandra et al., 2020). Understanding local competition and adapting pricing, promotion, and service differentiation strategies are crucial (Topchiy and Bolotova, 2019). A management team that fosters creativity and innovation is essential for navigating these challenges (Flynn and Michaelis, 2020; Paulus and Nijstad, 2021).

1.2.1. Advantages and challenges of the Internationalization and innovation process

In a competitive market, internationalization and innovation are critical for organizational success and survival (Knight et al., 2020). Key advantages include: (a) access to new markets, which allows expanding the customer base and market segments, increasing sales and profits (Pinkow and Iversen, 2020); (b) revenue diversification, which reduces dependence on a single market, minimizing the risks of economic fluctuation (Githaiga, 2022); (c) economies of scale that reduce operating costs and increase profitability (Han and Gao, 2020); (d) learning and knowledge transfer that allows acquiring best practices from different markets, stimulating innovation and continuous improvement (Chandra et al., 2020); (e) access to resources and strategic partnerships that aim to obtain differentiated resources to gain competitive advantage (e.g., technology, skilled labor; Afuah, 2020); and (f) brand enhancement that increases credibility and trust among customers, investors, and partners (Gupta et al., 2020).

Despite these advantages, IIP presents challenges and risks, requiring careful planning (Sowier-Kasprzyk, 2020). Although IIP is crucial for competitiveness and responding to consumer demands, it presents several challenges, namely: (a) regulatory and legal barriers such as customs restrictions, certification requirements and trade policies (Orero-Blat et al., 2021); (b) logistical complexity related to transportation, storage and route coordination (Christopher, 2022); (c) monetary and financial risks: such as interest rates and access to financing for international transactions (Chandra et al., 2020); (d) cultural challenges regarding understanding and adapting to local cultural contexts (Orero-Blat et al., 2021); (e) local competition regarding competition with established local companies (Albuquerque Filho et al., 2020); and (f) management models that need to adapt management practices to different international contexts (Han and Gao, 2020). Proactively addressing these challenges helps companies leverage IIP opportunities for growth, expansion, and competitive advantage (Hermundsdottir and Aspelund, 2021).

The IIP in the URPT sector can yield significant ROI through market expansion, revenue diversification, and operational efficiency (Orero-Blat et al., 2021). Innovation optimizes processes, reduces costs, and enhances productivity (Brem et al., 2017). Internationalization fosters organizational learning and adaptability (Chandra et al., 2020). However, ROI depends on effective strategy implementation, risk management, and market adaptation, requiring solid planning (Lecerf and Omrani, 2020).

The motivation for this study is the growing need for efficient and sustainable urban mobility solutions. Internationalization and innovation in URPT are crucial strategies to achieve these objectives by expanding operations, diversifying markets, and accessing advanced resources, thus gaining a competitive advantage. Based on the works of Cisneros-Cahueñas et al. (2022), Haddoud et al. (2020), and Santisteban et al. (2021), the aim was to contribute to a deeper understanding of the theme of internationalization and innovation as pillars of growth and sustainability in URPT. Despite their importance, there are still many gaps in this area, as studies on the challenges and risks of IIP in URPT focus mainly on the analysis of the private sector. In addition, research on measuring ROI in the internationalization and innovation of URPT and on the effective adaptation of IIP strategies to local market conditions and customer preferences is still scarce. Furthermore, it is crucial to develop more empirical studies on sustainability and environmental impact reduction in URPT.

This research aims to address these gaps and provides a detailed analysis of IIP in URPT, exploring strategies, advantages, challenges, and their impact on service quality and sustainability. The results will contribute to the literature on urban mobility and help formulate policies and implement effective IIP strategies in the URPT sector. Adicionalmente, este estudo analisa as percepções dos trabalhadores sobre PII, nomeadamente sobre os projetos nacionais e internacionais em andamento. Moreover, it emphasizes the significance of participating in international events and the recognition of the value of presence in European organizations for knowledge acquisition and networking. In summary, it contributes to understanding how the PII can be improved within the URPT, from both an organizational perspective and the standpoint of the involved employees.

2. Materials and methods

This research was operationalized through a mixed-methods approach. The qualitative analysis sought to comprehensively understand the company's IIP; and the quantitative analysis aimed to quantify the frequency of the responses given.

The organization from which the data was collected was founded in 1872 with the goal of implementing a transportation system that used horse-drawn carriages and moved along iron rails. Twelve years later, a new type of transportation called the "elevator" was inaugurated, allowing travel on steeper paths. The company has consistently invested in innovation and, in the 1940s, launched the bus transportation service. As a sustainability-conscious entity, in 2001, it acquired its first natural gas buses and began installing video surveillance systems on them. It currently employs approximately 2500 people and has a fleet of 724 buses (15 electric and 240 natural gas), 50 electric vehicles, three "elevators," and one elevator. The company has several international innovation projects, including (a) VoxPop, focusing on the discrepancies between efforts to improve mobility and transportation systems and customer expectations and needs; (b) C-STREETS, aiming to implement intelligent transport systems in urban areas; (c) TRIPS, aiming to make public transport more inclusive and accessible for all (e.g., people with reduced mobility and/or disabilities); (d) MOBIL-T, aiming to centralize different ticketing systems into a single digital system; and (e) Shift-2-MaaS, proposing the development of a mobility-as-a-service application. It is worth mentioning that all these projects are partially funded by European Union funds.

2.1. Sample

Twenty employees from the company under study participated in the research, four of whom are department directors. The majority of participants (52.2%) are male. The sample is convenience-based, as it depends on the ease of access to participants and their availability to participate in the study. It was considered that this sampling technique was the most appropriate; however, data collection coincided with a period when many participants were on vacation, a situation beyond the researchers' control. Nevertheless, the sampling process adhered to the theoretical saturation criteria recommended by Rego et al. (2018). According to McDonald and Eisenhardt (2017), saturation is achieved when there is a strong correspondence among the data, literature, and theory. Consequently, it was determined that saturation was reached upon the interview of the twentieth participant, as conducting additional interviews would not yield new information.

2.2. Data collection

The data was collected through a semi-structured interview consisting of 10 questions specifically formulated for this purpose, based on a literature review. The questions are distributed across four blocks: (a) the first block consists of general questions about the internationalization process (e.g., Are you aware of the international projects being developed by the company?); (b) the second focuses on the advantages of IIP (e.g., What are the main advantages of IIP?); (c) the third addresses the challenges of IIP (e.g., What are the main challenges faced by the organization during IIP?); and (d) the fourth block is dedicated to the ROI of IIP (e.g.,

What could be done to increase ROI?). It is important to note that responses were provided in different formats (e.g., open-ended response, closed-ended response, Likert scale), depending on the nature of the questions and the type of information intended to be collected.

2.3. Procedure

Prior to the commencement of the study, authorization was requested from the organization, which was granted. All participants were briefed on the research objectives. Subsequently, they were asked to provide signed consent authorizing the recording of the interview. It was ensured that the guidelines of the General Data Protection Regulation (European Commission, 2022) regarding anonymity and confidentiality would be adhered to. The interviews were conducted individually and lasted an average of 30 minutes each. Data analysis followed the procedures recommended by Bardin (2011): (a) pre-analysis; (b) information exploration; and (c) treatment and interpretation of results. The content of the interviews was analyzed using MAXQDA software.

3. Results

The data analysis allowed for understanding the participants' perceptions of the organization's IIP. Thus, it was questioned whether they were aware of the national and international projects being developed (first specific objective), and it was found that only 55.0% responded affirmatively, which may indicate some gaps in internal communication. The following statements corroborate these results:

“At the internal level, there could be more dissemination of the developed projects.”

“There is indeed weak internal communication regarding the internationalization process.”

Following these responses, it was considered pertinent to understand how the respondents accessed this information, and it was verified that often the information is only transmitted if the worker is directly involved in the process or belongs to the responsible department, as evidenced in the following testimonies.

“I had contact with the contracts made because it is part of my job.”

“This information was informally conveyed to me in conversations I had with colleagues involved in the internationalization process.”

Subsequently, the interviewees were invited to give their opinion on the company's presence at international fairs and events, and it was found that 45.0% consider it strong, which could be a good indicator of the path being followed. It was also found that 85.0% of the employees mentioned that they follow the work carried out by the company in the European organizations it is part of and consider it very important, despite there being aspects that need improvement. Therefore, they mention:

“Internationalization is quite important and should be encouraged due to its numerous benefits, namely the acquisition and solidification of acquired knowledge.”

“It allows for the sharing of knowledge and experiences and is important for making new contacts with suppliers and increasing networking.”

It was also possible to ascertain that the majority of the interviewees (85.0%) are aware of the events that occur and have knowledge of or are involved in activities promoted by the International Association of Public Transport. When workers know what is happening around them, they are more aware of changes, needs, and new market trends, which is an advantage for the organization. Overall, the employees who participated in events stated that the experience was very positive and brought benefits both personally and professionally, as can be seen through the following testimonies.

“Participation in events is very positive and beneficial because experiences and knowledge are shared with the new contacts made.”

“It is a very important experience to understand what is done in the market, to increase the network of contacts, and to know other realities.”

Participants were asked to rate the importance of events using a five-point scale, where one corresponds to unimportant and five to very important. The results revealed that the acquisition of knowledge is considered the most important factor (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Importance given to factors related to participation in events.

	NI	SI	MI	I	VI
Networking	6.3%	0.0%	6.3%	50.0%	37.5%
Contact with new technologies	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	31.3%	43.8%
Knowledge acquisition	0.0%	0.0%	18.8%	25.0%	56.3%

Note: NI = Nothing important; SI = Slightly important; MI = Moderately important; I = Important; VI = Very important.

Additionally, it was found that whether or not they have direct involvement in the events, all participants consider the IIP to be important because, besides enabling comparisons between operators, it fosters the exchange of information and knowledge that contribute to adding value. The opinion of the employees is evident in the following statements:

“It is quite important for the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and contacts, and it should be encouraged because it brings numerous benefits at both personal and professional levels.”

“Taking part in events is important because, as well as involving people from different areas, it allows us to be with other professionals outside of our day-to-day work.”

Furthermore, an attempt was made to understand the employees’ perceptions of the advantages of the IIP (second specific objective). Similar to what was mentioned earlier, the interviewees consider that the main benefits are related to sharing information and experiences, networking, and contacts with new suppliers, as evidenced in the following statements.

“One of the benefits is the comparison with other operators, which allows us to identify our strengths and weaknesses.”

“Networking with counterparts from other countries shows us new ways of doing things.”

In order to address the third specific objective, employees were asked about the main challenges the company faces during the IIP. The results revealed that three-quarters of the respondents mentioned a lack of internal communication (75.0%),

followed by low investment in international projects (58.0%), as can be seen in the following statements.

“Better coordination between various areas is needed, but for this to happen, a faster response is necessary, and for that, internal communication must be more effective.”

“These projects require investments, which becomes a barrier to their development.”

Finally, participants were asked about what could be done to improve the ROI achieved by the company within the scope of the projects they are involved in (fourth specific objective), and the following responses were obtained:

“It would be profitable to develop the traffic light priority project because it would bring an increase in commercial speed, resulting in significant gains for the company.”

“There is no information sharing, and often projects end without the involved parties being informed about their ROI; it is essential to improve communication.”

The interviewees also mentioned that there are several areas and aspects that need to be strengthened, namely issues related to: (a) ticketing, which should become digital; (b) technical visits to operators, which should not be limited to fairs or events; (c) increasing the number of less polluting and safer buses; (d) technical mobility solutions; and (e) increasing the quantity and quality of information shared with the public. In this way, they consider that the international presence to be implemented over the next two years involves:

“Changing the organizational culture is important because international participation must be a priority.”

“Creating an internal platform so that the main players in international events and associations can share what is relevant to improving the company’s internationalization and innovation process.”

Based on the answers given to the previous question, the participants were asked to express their degree of agreement with the statements shown in **Table 2**. For this purpose, a five-point scale was used, ranging from one (totally disagree) to five (totally agree).

Table 2. Degree to which employees agree with the results of the question relating to the international presence to be implemented over the next two years.

	SD	D	NA/ND	A	SA
Information about the projects, events and associations in which the company participates is not always passed on.	0.0%	0.0%	21.1%	36.8%	42.1%
Attendance at events and associations allows for a constant exchange of knowledge and know-how, which is essential for improving the work carried out.	5.0%	0.0%	25.0%	35.0%	35.0%
Participation in events, projects or associations helps employees develop professionally	0.0%	5.0%	5.0%	40.0%	50.0%
The same people always take part in events	5.9%	35.3%	23.5%	29.4%	5.9%

Note: SD = Strongly disagree; D = Disagree; NA/ND = Neither agree nor disagree; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree.

Once again, the dissatisfaction of the workers with the lack of internal communication regarding the company's IIP is noticeable. Additionally, it was found that internationalization brings benefits to both the organization and the employees, as it contributes to adding value to both parties.

4. Discussion

Globalization and rapid technological evolution have driven companies to seek new business opportunities beyond national borders, leading to the increasing importance of IIP in the URPT sector in recent years (Pavlínek, 2020). This research aligns with this theme and aims to understand employees' perceptions within a company in this sector regarding its IIP. Thus, it began by assessing employees' knowledge of the national and international projects being developed by the organization. Analysis of interview content revealed that only half of the participants are aware of the national and international projects the company is undertaking, suggesting some internal communication gaps. These findings imply a need to improve internal information dissemination, as Santiago (2020) asserts that internal communication plays a pivotal role in organizations by facilitating the exchange of information, ideas, and knowledge among employees. Verčič (2021) adds that well-informed employees feel valued, fostering a greater sense of belonging, which reflects in their motivation levels, commitment, and consequently, their efforts toward achieving organizational objectives. Effective information flow leads to diverse perspectives for problem-solving, resulting in more creative and innovative solutions (Lewis, 2019). Building on this idea, Yun et al. (2020) suggest that when individuals have space to express their opinions, it enhances organizational climate, creating an environment of trust and mutual respect. Salman et al. (2023) further suggest that keeping employees informed about internal affairs significantly reduces resistance to change, contributing to the organization's success and sustainable growth.

Lack of communication can decrease productivity because, when employees are unaware of company priorities, they may execute tasks incorrectly, leading to additional costs for the company (Santiago, 2020). Therefore, it's essential to alert department heads about the importance of implementing effective communication strategies, whether through regular meetings, newsletters, and/or digital platforms, to ensure comprehensive and transparent dissemination of relevant information (Lewis, 2019).

To address the second specific objective, respondents were questioned about the advantages of IIP, and the responses unanimously highlighted information and experience sharing, networking, and contacts with new suppliers. These results align with findings by Chandra et al. (2020), indicating that learning and knowledge transfer stimulate innovation and continuous improvement. In this context, Broniewicz and Ogrodnik (2020) argue that sharing information and experiences among professionals and organizations can help develop skills beneficial to all parties involved. Additionally, networking allows for the establishment of solid, long-lasting professional relationships that can be valuable for mutual support and opening doors to new career opportunities (McDonald and Hite, 2023). Participation in events, fairs,

and international associations is also important for enhancing the company's visibility and reputation and strengthening its credibility in the market.

Next, the aim was to identify the challenges of IIP (the third specific objective), with the difficulty of accessing information mentioned again. According to Verčič (2021), a lack of relevant and up-to-date information can lead to poor decisions based on assumptions or incomplete data, resulting in inefficient strategies and missed business opportunities. Al-Khatib and Al-Ghanem (2022) add that when information is scarce, rumors and speculations tend to increase, creating an atmosphere of distrust and harming the organizational climate. To avoid these situations, employees suggest creating an action plan to define strengths and areas needing improvement in various departments of the company. They also recommend holding regular meetings with department heads to implement the proposed measures. Planning is crucial to ensure idea renewal and promote career development opportunities for all employees (McDonald and Hite, 2023).

Finally, the aim was to understand respondents' perceptions of the ROI of IIP (the fourth specific objective) and their proposals for its improvement. Results demonstrate that IIP brings numerous benefits, as it helps expand the company's business beyond national borders (Treviño and Doh, 2019). By accessing new markets, the company increases its sales and profit potential while reducing its dependence on a single market (Chandra et al., 2020).

4.1. Theoretical and practical contributions

The results obtained contribute to the advancement of knowledge regarding PII in the URPT sector. The conclusions presented offer valuable insights for companies, managers, and researchers to make strategic decisions and develop policies aimed at enhancing the services provided by urban passenger transport companies. This investigation also facilitates the identification and analysis of key factors necessary to drive internationalization and innovation within this sector, including the development of strategic partnerships, the utilization of emerging technologies, and the improvement of service quality. Furthermore, it provides practical contributions to guide and support companies and their decision-makers in implementing more effective internal communication and information dissemination strategies. Identified gaps in internal communication, where only half of the employees are aware of ongoing national and international projects, can be addressed through the creation of digital information-sharing platforms and the organization of regular interdepartmental meetings.

Additionally, the study underscores the importance of investing in PII training programs and workshops to enhance employees' understanding of the benefits these initiatives offer. Increased employee engagement in international events and European associations can also promote the exchange of experiences and the identification of new business opportunities. By improving coordination between different departments and ensuring adequate investment in international projects, companies in the transport sector can optimize their processes, reduce operational costs, and increase their competitiveness in the global market.

Well-structured internationalization strategies, coupled with continuous innovation, will enable companies to quickly adapt to market changes, seize new opportunities, and ensure long-term sustainable growth. This work also contributes to the existing literature by providing a detailed analysis of the perceptions of employees in a URPT company regarding the processes of internationalization and innovation. Moreover, by focusing on a specific case study, this research bridges the gap between theory and practice, offering valuable insights for companies and policymakers in developing more efficient and sustainable urban mobility strategies.

4.2. Limitations and suggestions for future research

The primary limitation is associated with the small number of participants from each department, as many of them were unavailable during the data collection period. This limitation was exacerbated by the fact that the data collection coincided with the vacation period of numerous employees, a situation beyond the researchers' control. Consequently, the representativeness of the data may have been compromised, impeding a more comprehensive and accurate analysis of employee perceptions regarding PII within the organization. Furthermore, the inherent subjectivity of the qualitative methodology, which can affect the interpretation and analysis of data, is emphasized. Therefore, it is proposed that in future studies, data collection be supplemented with the application of questionnaires, as data triangulation contributes to reducing potential biases. It is also considered pertinent to conduct comparative studies among companies in the same sector and/or different sectors to understand if the advantages and challenges of IIP differ depending on these variables. Additionally, longitudinal studies are recommended to understand the alteration of ROI over time, both for companies and for society as a whole. Finally, it is suggested that contextual factors (e.g., local legislation, government policies, specific market characteristics) be considered, as they allow for a more comprehensive view of IIP in the URPT sector.

5. Conclusion

Innovation is a cornerstone for the success of urban passenger transport companies, as it enables the adoption of innovative technical and technological solutions that enhance service quality, optimize operational efficiency, and provide a more satisfactory experience for users. Expanding operations beyond national borders, in turn, allows for the exploration of new market segments, reaching new customers, and diversifying revenue sources.

The relationship between innovation, internationalization, and urban passenger transport is crucial to ensuring the competitiveness and sustainable growth of these companies. Innovation drives internationalization and enables companies to adapt to the demands and expectations of constantly changing international markets. Simultaneously, internationalization offers opportunities for companies to acquire knowledge, experience, and best practices from other countries, driving innovation and technological development.

This investigation enabled the understanding of the perception that employees of a URPT company have regarding the IIP. It was observed that the lack of internal communication needs to be minimized as much as possible so that the organization

aligns with the objectives established in its internationalization process. To achieve this, the creation of an internal platform is suggested to share information gathered from participation in international events and associations, along with quarterly meetings to present past, current, and future international initiatives.

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