HYBRID EVENTS: BREAKING THE BORDERS

Transferring your hybrid event into an engaging and inclusive experience for different audiences and stakeholders

Abstract

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Abstract
This thesis explores hybrid events and how they can be made into an engaging experience for different audiences and stakeholders. Changes in the factors affecting choosing of a conference location due to the COVID-19 pandemic will be reviewed and what that will mean for the face-to-face and virtual meetings moving forward.
The main goal of this study is to produce beneficial information and recommendations for event organizers, Messukeskus Helsinki and other conference venues on how to plan engaging hybrid events.
The primary data sources for the empirical study was a survey where event industry professionals answered questions regarding situation before and after COVID-19 pandemic and what it could potentially mean for the industry. Expert professionals were interviewed after the results came in to gain insights on the research questions. The aim of the qualitative method was to find out more about the hybrid events and how they can be made engaging.
The findings indicated that hybrid events will be the new norm in regards event organizing moving forward and for those events feel engaging, there needs to be interaction between all stakeholders. This paper will only be dealing with part of the study results that are relating for the subject at hand. Further research will need to be conducted to get a deeper understanding on how other industries could be helping in understanding different stakeholders.

Keywords
Event, Hybrid, Engagement, Stakeholders

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

MPI = Meeting Professionals International
CVB = Convention and Visitor Bureau
FCB = Finland Convention Bureau
ICCA = International Congress and Convention Association
GMID = Global Meetings Industry Day
PMI = Project Management Institute
MICE = Meetings, Incentives, Conferencing, Exhibitions
COVID-19 pandemic = ongoing pandemic of coronavirus disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)
CSR = Corporate Social Responsibility

FIGURES

1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background

An event is a carefully crafted experience delivered to make an impact on the person in attendance. Regardless of the type, event planning requires people who can design the event, manage human and material resources, plan strategically, conceptualize the logistics of event, manage time effectively, and forecast and budget finances. (Greenwell et al., 2019). Events have a big role not only in networking, learning, sharing and experiencing but they also impact the economy. Scientific and professional conferences gather professionals from different fields to share their latest knowledge, and festivals will create life and sense of community to even smaller places. When a city gets a big event, such as an international conference, the monetary value of that event spans all over the workforce, restaurants, accommodation, tourism and advertising. Therefore, countries, cities and venues are always competing for international congresses (see e.g. www.uia.be/history). The brand and image of each location will either support or undermine its reputation as a reliable, interesting, and professional place to organize a conference.

Path of the modern event industry has not always been smooth, and it has faced many challenges in its short history. These include terrorist attacks, SARS, major upheaval in the global insurance industry which has led to the industry having to adopt strategies for managing the risks of events. As we entered the mid 2000's, the specter of climate change began to affect the industry as the world became increasingly aware of the threat of global warming. Environmental sustainability became a key event management concept, with green initiatives adopted to reduce the environmental impact and the carbon footprint of events. (Allen 2012, 10)

1.2   Purpose of the study

Finland's biggest event venue, Messukeskus Helsinki, Expo and Convention Center, requested research on their competitiveness in bidding for international congresses and what are the reasons that Messukeskus (Helsinki, Finland) does or does not get chosen.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the focus and direction of this study shifted from conference bidding. As the events industry was one of the first industries directly affected by the pandemic due to governments banning gatherings and events as well as events being cancelled around the world, (Yle 2020) the researcher felt it to be important to look at the future predictions as they would be relating to both face-to-face and virtual meetings and what this would mean for the future of conferences.

The COVID-19 pandemic was the main driver for change and forced the events industry to re-evaluate the way that they do events. The researcher has worked in the events industry and been part of it for over two decades, as well as has a broad understanding and experience from both local and international perspectives. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, there was a personal interest in the subject to try to look past it and see how the industry itself will be able to recover from it.

In 2018 ICCA conducted a survey that showed that digitalization will continue, with technology forming a larger part of service provision and business development. This is something that ICCA members had understood and prepared for with investments, but no one was prepared for the speed of this technology leap that needed to be taken due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The researcher took part on an online event held on the 16th April 2020 as 12,500 professionals from the event and hospitality industry gathered virtually to commemorate Global Meeting Industry Day (GMID). There were participants from around the world (Canada, USA, Mexico, India, Argentina, United Kingdom, Philippines, Colombia, Singapore, Kenya, Portugal, Croatia, Malaysia, Brazil, Finland, Denmark, etc..). This event was also an attempt to break the world record, which was not reached but also to gather the industry together and show support for one another during this shocking time of the pandemic. During this half hour online event, there were some questions asked from all the attendees as a pole and it was one question that affected the direction of this study for the researcher. It was about how will live events change after the crisis is over? From the 7086 poll respondents 62% predicted that most events will become hybrid as well as 17% predicted a greater demand for virtual events once the crisis is over. (GMID Goes Virtual 2020)
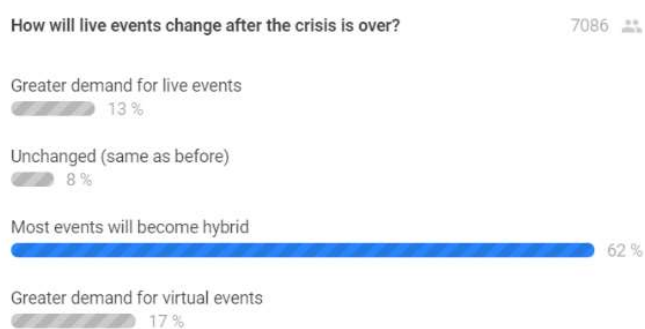

Figure 1: Poll results about how live events change after the crisis is over (adapted from GMID Goes Virtual 2020, appendix 1)

The researcher saw these results and results from a study in 2012 by Fryatt et al. (2012) showing similar results with 70% thinking that hybrid events will be important in the future as an important indication to look further into hybrid events. These were the reasons why hybrid events became the focal point of the study. Further information on the results of the poll can be found in Appendix 1 (Slido Infographics 2020). Thesis objective and research questions

The main objective of this thesis is to study hybrid events and how they can be made into an engaging, inclusive experience. Changes in the factors affecting choosing of a conference location due to the pandemic will be reviewed and what that will mean for the face-to-face and virtual meetings moving forward? To find answers to these questions and to be able to present some predictions, questions were asked from event industry professionals.

The objectives of this work are as follows:

Firstly, the knowledge base of this study will have a short introduction to different forms of virtual events. Secondly, the hybrid event form will be focused on. Thirdly, the results will give further insights for Messukeskus and other event organizers on how to make sure that different stakeholders (remote and in-person) are being taken into consideration when planning an engaging hybrid event. Based on these objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1. How can a hybrid event be transferred into an engaging experience?

RQ2. How to include your different audiences and stakeholders?

This study will be focusing on finding answers on how to make the hybrid event into an engaging experience as well as how to include stakeholders into them as well. For this study, event professionals around the world were asked to answer a survey on how the future of the event industry might look like post pandemic. The final research strategy consists of qualitative survey, individual interviews from industry professionals, as well as materials from books, publications and articles. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, no face-to-face interviews were conducted. The interviews were conducted and recorded with an online tool called Zoom.

1.3 Research methology and limitations

Qualitative research was chosen as individuals' perceptions of the future of the events industry were asked and to explain the results and to understand the current solutions in the constantly changing environment. To represent the critical areas of factors affecting

decision making in choosing conference locations, five main areas were taken into consideration in the survey and interviews. (Goundar 2012)

The research method of the study was both the survey and interview method. This was used as the individual people's opinions were used as the unit of analysis. Expert sampling technique was chosen as the professionals responding to the survey were from the events industry. The data was gathered from the survey and interviews using qualitative analysis. The findings are representing conclusions from the literature review, event canvas tool as well as the data received from the survey and interviews. (Emerald Publishing 2020)

There were two professionals who were interviewed who were chosen in a non-random manner based on their expertise to obtain a further understanding into the results of the survey conducted and to get a better understanding of the research questions. The research is limited due to the narrow sample of the events industry professionals due to time constraints of data collection, but the advantage of this approach was that since experts tend to be more familiar with the subject matter than non-experts, opinions from the sample of experts will be more credible than a sample that includes both experts and non-experts. Other industries are not included in the scope of this study.

1.4   Thesis structure
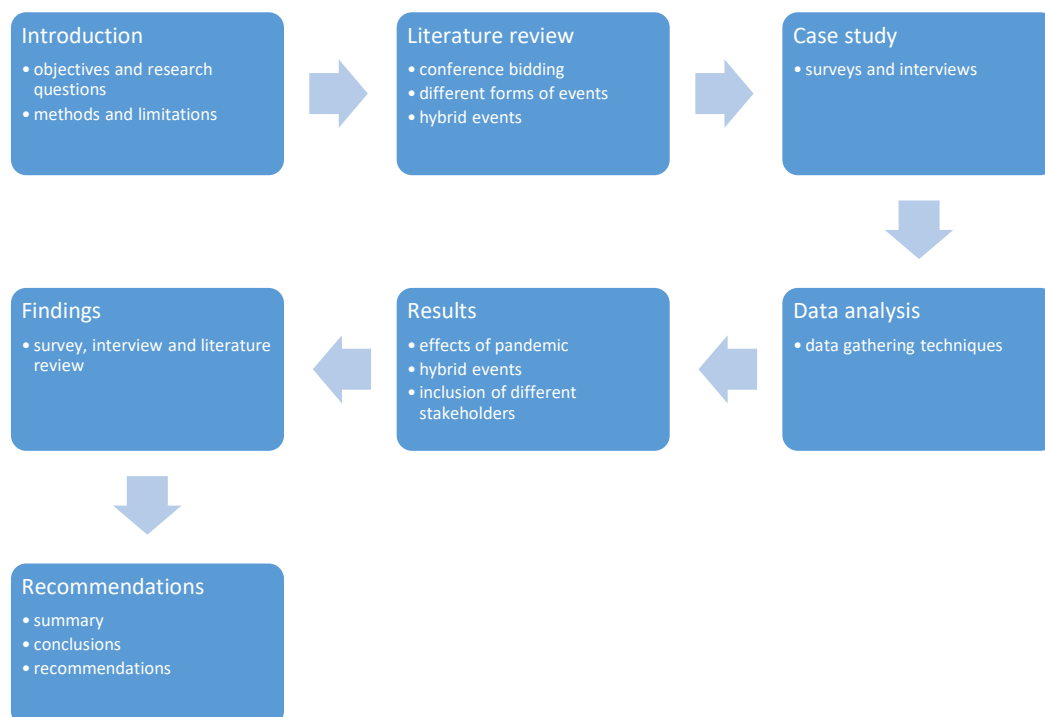
Figure 2: Structure of this thesis

This thesis follows a typical structure. In the introduction section, background and purpose of the study are being explained. Thesis objectives are presented as well as research questions. Research methodology and limitations are being introduced. Source criticism will be discussed in this section as well. After introduction, the study moves into the literature review in which different forms of events as well as further focus on hybrid events are being presented. Third section will be using event canvas tool to help include different audiences and stakeholders into your event. Section four will be discussing the data gathering techniques that were used and chapter five will be presenting these results in three categories: decision making factors when choosing a location before and post pandemic, hybrid events and how to include different audiences and stakeholders at hybrid events. Findings from the literature, survey as well as interviews with professionals will be presented in section six in the order of the research questions. Section seven will discuss the conclusions as well as giving recommendations for future research as well.

1.5   Source critisism

There is only a limited amount of information and studies done on hybrid events. The research data is heavily based on previous research done by Fryatt et al. (2012). The number of respondents in the survey despite being a great amount of industry leading event professionals, does not present them worldwide as the respondents were only from North America and Europe, but a general picture of the situation in the industry was gathered. One of the risks of the research is the narrow sampling of the industry professionals interviewed, despite their expertise on the subject. Another threat on the subject is that there were three different parts to the study, despite them having connecting moments, this could pose to be too much of a generalization in these subjects.

2   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Decision making factors when choosing a conference location

When choosing a conference location, multiple factors must be considered. How do event planners choose their locations? The decision-making factors are both rational and emotional and there are emotion-based expectations about the conference or event. When considering bids, organizers identify those that are as close as possible to the goal of their event. (Tore 2018)

Yoo & Chon (2008) developed a measurement scale for factors affecting convention participation in decision-making which revealed five underlying dimensions of convention participation decision-making: destination stimuli, professional and social networking opportunities, educational opportunities, safety and health situation and travel ability.

Houdement (2017) researched attributes that affect the decision-making process when choosing a destination and determined their importance and influence. Their findings confirmed their hypothesis that destination image is the main determining site-selection factor. As their study revealed the need for further examination on the destination promotion and their positioning, this study will focus more on the factors surrounding the actual bidding process. When selecting venues to be able to host a hybrid event, you need to take into consideration connectivity, camera view, sound and lighting (Fryatt et al., 2012).

2.1.1   Bidding for conferences

Excellent air connections, destination attractiveness, competitive conference venue and hotel guest room rates are common main requirements as well as the space and the venue layout for winning an international conference to your city. A good bidding competition document is one where you speak about your advantages, convenient logistics, the awareness of the topic. You will also need collaboration with academic associations as well as the support of the country, city and convention bureau and how the venues are cooperating with the local CVB's and hosting City officials. (Tore 2018)

2.1.2   Event tourism

International events are growing in popularity and are on the rise — due to globalization and the dramatic growth or the experience, cultural and creative industries, and the rapid increase in linkages between people, places, communities, countries and markets. One cause for this has been the technological developments in transport, telecommunications, internet technologies and social media. Event or festival tourism has become an

increasingly important feature of the tourism development strategies for countries, governments and communities. In addition, specific attendee segments have shown to exhibit distinct types of consumer behavior, for example repeat visitors spend more money and stay longer in location compared to first-time visitors. (Ferdinand & Kitchin 2017, 11)

The MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferencing, Exhibitions) industry represents one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry. Yet, it is only in recent years that the economic contribution of this industry segment has been recognized and the relationships among the various industry players have been examined in more depth. The convention and visitor bureau (CVB) industry has grown into a major driver of economic development for many cities and destinations around the world. (Forda & Peeperb 2006). Finland Convention Bureau (2018) has done research on the attractiveness of the country itself. Finland has consistently ranked among top 20 congress destinations in the world. There have been around 600 international meetings annually which have been about 70,000 delegates.

2.2   Virtual meetings/ events

Virtual meetings have made possible for potential clients across all business units to get a consistent experience in a systematic way. Virtual meeting is when people around the world are using video, text, and/or audio to link together despite of their physical location. They have been designed to replace in-person meetings so that the person does not have to travel to the actual location. Instead, you can attend it from wherever you are. (ezTalks 2020)

> *In any meeting, virtual or in person, you should have clear expectations, agendas, and outcomes. Unlike in-person meetings, virtual meetings are often easily recorded so you have a record of all proceedings. This can help your groups and teams be more accountable, take more responsibility, and generate faster action. (Schiefelbein 2018)*

2.2.1   Description of different kind of virtual events

Events can be group gatherings from the same or different companies, countries, workplaces, industries etc. In terms of conference, people usually travel from various places. (Arndt 2011). There are multiple different tools around the world for holding virtual meetings and events, but you need to consider which ones to use depending on your events goals. **Face-to-face meetings** mean meetings where the attendee will be meeting other attendees and participants in-person.

2.2.2 Choosing between Virtual and face-to-face meetings/ events

With workforce around the world these days, virtual meetings such as conference calls, web conferencing, and video conferencing have become the popular options. Clements (2019) states that the fact is that both virtual meetings and face-to-face communication have their advantages. Different formats of virtual meetings will be further explained in 2.2.3. of this study.

When Fryatt et al., (2012) did their research, they found that there were certain events/meetings that were perceived as more suitable for face-to-face or virtual environments. As seen in the Figure 3 below, internal meetings were perceived as the ones that could be done online and networking, sensitive issues, incentives as well as celebrations were best done face-to-face.

Choosing Virtual Over Face-to-Face

Meeting Purpose	Face-to-Face	Virtual	Notes
Networking	✔		Most virtual platforms have limited networking capabilities
Sensitive Issues (personnel, business, other)	✔		These issues are best handled in person
Incentives	✔		
Celebrations	✔		
Client-Facing Meetings	✔		In the research, the strength of this response depended on the industry in which the respondent worked
Collaborative Team Building	✔		Simulation workshop exercises must be done face-to-face
Company Updates		✔	One-way presentations can be done on corporate TV, webcast or other formats
New Product Updates		✔	
Internal Meetings		✔	
Updates for Field Sales or Regional Offices		✔	
Individual Project Meetings		✔	
Supporting Daily Meetings		✔	
Staff Meetings		✔	
Recruiting		X	

Figure 3: Choosing virtual over face-to-face (adapted from Fryatt et al., 2012)

According to Schiefelbein (2018) virtual meetings are not taken with the same level of seriousness as in-person meetings are, because attendees are behind screens and a layer

of technology. She feels thought, that with the right tools and tips, you can make your virtual team meetings just-as, if not more, productive than your face-to-face gatherings.

Settle-Murphy (2014) was discussing on her article in regards the frustrations about the online meetings in general due to her own experience, but gathered a point at the end of it about creating a perfectly level playing field where all the attendees are attending the same way. This was the case in some way, when everyone was forced to use the tools online, but after COVID-19 pandemic, the reality is that these events will be attended by various stakeholder groups. It is important to create a meeting environment where remote callers feel like equal participants and that requires thought and special skills.

2.2.3 Virtual meeting formats

> *Virtual meetings require extensive planning skills with understanding and familiarity of online marketing and technology. In addition, the virtual meeting planning team should have members with understanding of digital user interface, customer service and organizing skills as well as flexibility. (Fryatt et al., 2012)*

There are eight different formats, or categories, of technology for virtual meetings. Those are: Video conference, Conference call, Online meeting, Webcast, Webinar, Virtual Trade Show, 3D Virtual World or Hybrid meeting. You will need to review each and determine which technology works best for your organization or your event, depending on what the goal of your event is.

Options for virtual meetings

Based on research by Debi Scholar and **http://www.teplus.net**.

Complexity	Format	Description
1	Video conference or telepresence	User-friendly video conferencing technologies such as GoToMeeting, Skype and Webex make up the most common types of virtual meetings. Usually limited to 25 or fewer participants, these meetings require little setup time. Some consider teleconferences and instant messaging as additional options in this category.
1	Conference call	
1	Online meeting	
2	Webcast	Because these types of virtual meetings may include more than 25 participants and a more sophisticated functionality, they require the expertise of a consultant or vendor. These events can require days to a few weeks for proper organization. Technological support is necessary for content delivery and strong connectivity. A virtual meeting planner provides project management communications, social media marketing, content development, rehearsals and reporting. A virtual meeting specialist, may be an internal or external resource.
2	Webinar	
3	Virtual Tradeshow	This complex level of virtual event requires a lot of expertise. A virtual meeting planner works with a virtual event production coordinator and an experienced team provided by the technology supplier to deliver such experiences as a virtual tradeshow, job fair, expo or symposium. Some of these events may feature 3-D immersive experiences and require months to produce.
3	3-D Virtual World	
3	Hybrid Meeting	

Figure 4: Options for virtual meetings (adapted from Fryatt et al., 2012)

Virtual meetings provide tools for measuring delegate behavior that face-to-face meetings lack, because everything that happens in the platform is recorded although other

measurements can be taken in other ways that do not require the use of virtual tools. For virtual meetings that are held to educate delegates, measurement can be the increase in learning. In this case, learning can be measured by conducting a post-meeting test. Tracking engagement is key to knowing the event's effectiveness. It is useful information to know if your participants are actively or passively listening. Most virtual technologies provide these metrics automatically. Participants' satisfaction with the content and the experience of a virtual meeting can be measured with polls and surveys, for example using five-point scales (strongly disagree to strongly agree) and statements such as "This meeting is relevant to my current work".

As there are multiple different ways to measure effectiveness which depend on your objectives and capabilities some measured immediately and some months later. Just as Fryatt et al. (2012) found in their study that virtual meetings are suitable for information sharing and internal training as they are measuring on the extent that the participants have learned new information and skills, Clements (2019) stated that virtual meetings are an ideal option when you want to save time and money on travel, managing a global team or bringing them together from different locations around the world, hiring or if you are conducting product and safety demos.

When selecting venues to be able to host a hybrid event, different things will need to be taken into consideration such as connectivity, camera view, sound and lighting (Fryatt et al., 2012).

2.2.4 Fears towards hosting event online

According to a study in 2012 by Fryatt et al. remote attendance has been positioned negatively compared to face-to-face attendance, only 15% had said that it is a positive thing. Meeting professionals employ hybrid event technologies to share content, ideas and experiences with attendees across multiple geographies and time zones, but many still oppose the medium, citing technology failures and potential cannibalization to face-to-face events. The data revealed there to be anxieties surrounding the degeneration of in-person events. In addition, there was a lack of price standards for hybrid events as there are too many vendors, with too many price points, researching a vendor takes too long, most venues are not equipped for hybrid events, and the ones that have the potential, lack the knowhow on addressing the essential questions concerning connectivity & capacity.

Survey done in 2018 by ICCA showed that digitalization will continue, with technology forming a larger part of service provision and business development. According to their survey, over 60% of venues include free Wi-Fi in the price for exhibition hall rental. Venue

members also named several new technologies as having an influence on how they generate new business. For example, digital marketing, database, CRM and other Big Data tools, High-speed in-house Wi-Fi, online offer system, site visits, interactive maps and social media presence. However, rather than converting into direct sales, respondents reported that social media marketing is currently providing to be used most effectively to raise awareness, share expertise and increase community engagement. Paid social media marketing is employed by over 60% of the ICCA survey respondents.

2.3   Hybrid meetings/ events

Hybrid meetings integrate technology with traditional event practices to create new types of attendee experiences and content delivery tools. They include any meeting or event with at least one group of face-to-face participants that digitally connects with participants in another or multiple locations. The purpose of the hybrid event is to create unique experiences for different types of participants in different places. Combining functionalities of face-to-face events and those of virtual meetings into hybrid events enables meeting planners to have a much broader spectrum of options to engage delegates. (Fryatt et al. 2012)

Morell (2010) had been discussing on her article about the gut that face-to-face meetings are more powerful than virtual meetings and to not view them as threats. They are here to force us to become better, more relevant and more engaging. Similarly research done by (Fryatt et al., 2012), hybrid events is an emerging event type that requires meeting professionals to stretch their creativity, strategizing, execution, and measurement and integrate technology with traditional live events to create new types of experiences and content delivery tools. There are four main formats of hybrid events which are broadcasts to remote delegates, connecting remote office locations to a main event, including remote speakers into your event or connecting multiple sites to a broadcast studio.

Fryatt et al. (2012) as well as Morell (2010) found that the hybrid meeting will be able to extend the life of a meeting. Hybrid events can also give you an opportunity to add value by reaching more delegates (face-to-face plus virtual), providing new content delivery and communication options. You will be able to connect multiple events occurring concurrently or at different times or locations. Meeting professionals employ hybrid event technologies to share content, ideas and experiences with attendees across multiple geographies and time zones, but many still oppose the medium, citing technology failures and potential cannibalization to face-to-face events. Your event content will not be just one off event as you will be able to extend the reach of your message by repurposing part of your event content and make it possible for everyone to take part, even if they are not able to travel to the location, or would have other reasons why you would not make it.

Unlike face-to-face meetings, virtual events require more initial setup, but can be replicated and scaled much more efficiently over time. The ability to duplicate meeting environments and repurpose content adds life and extends the reach of your message. (Fryatt et al., 2012)

Planning a hybrid event is almost like planning two events, which takes extra effort. Hybrid events are considered pricier to organize, even though they can be more cost effective. The study done by Fryatt et al. in 2012 also revealed the need for more information about sponsorship opportunities in these events was mentioned. Meeting professionals are also trying to determine the right revenue models and value proposition from free to on-demand.

2.4   How can hybrid events include different audiences and stakeholders?

When it comes to remotely engaging events, there is no one size that fits all. The question that you need to be constantly answered throughout the design and production of your event is: what I am seeking to achieve? Understanding what outcome, you want, will naturally lead you to being able to create your program. To actively engage your audience, you need to be clear on your objectives from the outset. This becomes important when you have a remote audience. You are no longer restricted by the physical constraints of the venue and with the ability to extend the life of your content beyond the few days of the conference, you have an opportunity to increase the impact of your events exponentially. (Cook & Shepherdly 2016)

2.4.1   Sense of belonging

For remote audiences it is important to create a sense of belonging, taking their questions and providing them with exclusive content. Some are also using virtual emcees and facilitators. There is a need for training the speakers for hybrid events as they need to be even more engaging than normal. (Cook & Shepherdly 2016)

2.4.2   Gamification

Gamification is one of the most often heard buzzwords now in the conference and events industry. Attendees are wanting interaction, that is what gamification is all about. As per Oxford Dictionary it defines gamification: The application of typical elements of game playing (e.g. point scoring, competition with others, rules of play) to other areas of activity, typically as an online marketing technique to encourage engagement with a product or service. (Cook & Shepherdly 2016).

Hybrid events is an emerging event type that requires meeting professionals to stretch their creativity, strategizing, execution, and measurement and integrate technology with traditional live events to create new types of experiences and content delivery tools. (Fryatt et al., 2012)

2.4.3 Different audiences and stakeholders

As hybrid events require new means of content delivery and engagement, you must be able to recognize the diverse audiences and their needs. Additional challenges come as not all content from live events are good for remote, so it is important to adapt the content from face-to-face to remote by offering shorter sessions as the attention span is shorter. It is said that the most effective hybrids are like TV shows, which then give new tools to design and deliver content such as man-on-the-street interviews, talk shows and news desk formats. Digital event tools can allow the collection of more in-depth data. If used effectively it can facilitate more output driven metrics. (Fryatt et al., 2012). Sports event broadcasts could be used as an example as they have professionals doing these broadcasts, all parts have been carefully planned and this can be the case in hybrid events.

Sport is widely marketed as entertainment already, and many spectators attend for reasons beyond just watching the players on the field. Major sporting events also include fancy halftime shows, on-field contests, and promotional giveaways. Relaxation and pleasure are common motivational factors for many tourists and some fans use sport tourism to escape from under stimulation and boredom from overstimulation and stress. Sport tourism has been described using a theatrical analogy suggesting that players represent the actors, sport spectators are the audience members, and the stadium or arena is the theater. (Greenwell et al., 2019)

For example, Shiao (2008) discussed how the National Football League (NFL) is an event planning organization. The NFL runs a year-long series of events, from mini-events, to large scale events to mega events (e.g. The Super Bowl). They do have half-time shows on TV. He is advising that instead of a one-off event, or experience to try to extend the lifetime of the event. NFL ecosystem relies on the partners to extend and reinforce their brand. It can be teams, broadcast partners, press, relative content providers and merchandise retailers. This can be related to conferences through the exhibitors, sponsors, speakers, presenters, content providers and service providers. The NFL has numerous ways to monetize its audience, in the form of ticket sales, merchandise sales and corporate sponsorships. There's also TV commercials, the content of which has nothing to do with football.

2.4.4 Event Design

In Poetics, Aristotle wrote: "*A whole story is what has a beginning and middle and end.*" In the event world, the terms of pre-event, during and post-event are being used. First the event needs to be defined. Event on its own is a fixed period group activity, with multiple stakeholders, which are designed to produce a service, resulting in product. Event is temporary. It has a defined beginning and an end time and for that reason a defined scope and resources

Event Canvas model is being introduced shortly to give a guide on how to include various stakeholders into creating a successful and engaging event. The design of these virtual events is crucial when you want to engage audiences from around the globe or virtually in general.

When starting an event/project, the planning is the most important part. For the purposes of this study, EventCanvas™, an event design template launched at the 2014 MPI World Education Congress (WEC) will be used as an example to work through a process of creating an engaging hybrid event experience. This tool is used as it investigates each stakeholder and their interests as a whole and has been used to create engaging, award winning events. The creators of Event Canvas, and the co-founders of the Event Design Collective say that their Canvas is not just a useful collaborative tool, but a tool that enables teams to look at the big picture goals they have for their event design process.

Roel Frissen and Ruud Janssen, are the inventors of #EventCanvas and the co-founders of the Event Design Collective. Their Europe-based enterprise uses #EventCanvas for its own clients, which include groups ranging from the International Olympic Committee to the Global Spine Congress. They also teach the usage of the template in workshops and certification programs around the world. The creators say their canvas is not just a useful collaborative tool, but also enables teams to look at the big-picture goals they have for the event design process. (Stiteler 2017)
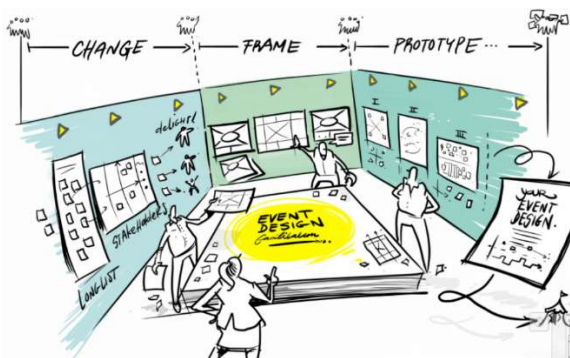

Figure 5: Event Canvas planning process (adapted from https://edco.global/)

Frissen et al., 2016 stated that the best results are gathered from bringing people together in an event, or from collaborating in the design of an event. Event canvas model is based on empathetic approach in designing events, to take different stakeholders into consideration right from the start. A key ability in being successful in Event Design is to see different experiences and outlooks of a variety of strangers.

As this tool helps to put the entire event design into a single sheet of paper, it makes the process more approachable for all the stakeholders, and when going over all 14 building blocks on the canvas, they will feel as part of it. This canvas approach promotes inclusiveness and everyone from beginners to more experienced can come to the table -together. When involving as many stakeholders in the process as possible, they all will bring different perspectives that will allow the design of experiences to be more meaningful to a broader cross section of event participants.

When involving as many stakeholders in the process as possible, they all will bring different perspectives that will allow the design of experiences to be more meaningful to a broader cross section of event participants. (Frissen et al., 2016)

Stakeholder analysis should always be done before starting any project to avoid forgetting someone potentially important. The way you manage your different stakeholders could mean the difference between these stakeholders helping you enthusiastically to make this conference a success. Event projects require approval and guidance and engagement from a wide range of people. If you are not able to get these stakeholders to agree with the objectives or execution, they can become obstacles for the success of it. But if you can receive the trust, approval and help from these stakeholders, they can help you to succeed.

The Canvas needs to first be divided into three groups of blocks so that the interactions within the Canvas and order will be suggested. Those being change, frame and design. (Frissen et al., 2016,18) The change states the details before and after the event, frame is the part that happens in between. Design is a process that is guided by a goal, a strategy, and boundaries. It is in this stage that the constraints in which the Event Design must meet its intended value. (Frissen et al., 2016, 55)

As hybrid events require new means of content delivery and engagement, you must be able to recognize the diverse audiences and their needs. Additional challenges come as not all content from live events are good for remote, so it is important to adapt the content from face-to-face to remote by offering shorter sessions as the attention span is much shorter. It is said that the most effective hybrids are like TV shows, which then give new tools to design and deliver content such as man-on-the-street interviews, talk shows and

news desk formats. Digital event tools can allow the collection of four more in depth data that if used effectively, can facilitate more output driven metrics. (Fryatt et al., 2012).
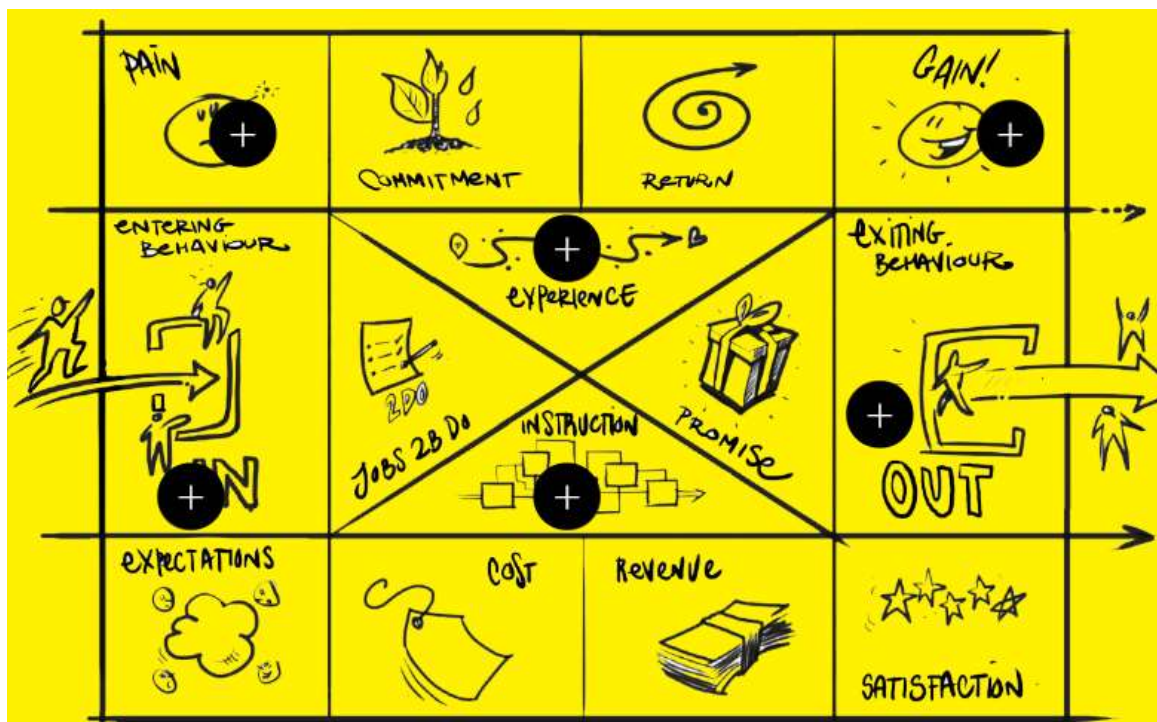

Figure 6: Event Canvas Empathy Map (adapted from https://edco.global/)

When starting to think about different views and needs of stakeholders, the Event Canvas tool can be used to go through each step by step

Describing the entering behavior of the stakeholder

As it is challenging to describe the entering behavior of the stakeholder for all humans being unique, we need to generalize a bit and find commonalities. When thinking about a hybrid event for example, there will be the possibility to attend either in person, or virtually. Both of our attendee are stakeholders who are interested in the subject of the conference, looking to find new trends in their industry and to network in the hopes to meet new potential clients.

Pains

These stakeholders' potential pains are that they are very busy in their life and do not have time to waste.

Expectations

Expectations could be to get an experience. As explained by Frissen et al. (2016) the first step in changing the behavior of stakeholders is to determine the patterns of behavior before the event, and the next step is to describe the desired behavior.

The desired behavior

The desired behavior of both attendees will be to say that they feel like they were part of the event.

Gains

Gains for both attendees could be that the time on this event, gave them enough information for them to walk away from this event feeling like they were part of the experience.

Satisfaction

As Frissen et al. 2016 have stated, the expectations are a crucial part of how, and with what mind-set, someone will start his or her journey, but it is its after counterpart, satisfaction, that is the result of that journey. We are of course hoping to always meet and exceed expectations. When discussing the satisfaction in this hybrid event example, it could be that the remote attendee would be happy on how all the technology worked, and they were able to feel engaged throughout the event and similarly it could be that the in-person attendee would be very pleased with the food and beverages were served at the location. They both could have similarities in regards satisfaction for the content and speakers.

Commitment

Commitment could be the time that they are spending to attend this event, the money that this has cost them. This part is explaining the sacrifice that they are making.

Return

As stakeholders, they have something at stake and have made the commitment for this event. What is their ROI (Return-On-Investment)?

Cost

Cost could be money that they have paid to participate, or time they are away from their work or families.

Revenue

As important as it is to view the costs there is the other side, in which there is potential for revenue that they will be able to get.

Jobs to be done

Their jobs to be done could be directly related to increase sales, but due to intense competition in the field, or they need to find new ways to do business and differ from their competitors.

Promise

This promise is the answer to their pains, increasing their gains and helping to accomplish their jobs to be done.

In the design stage is where the team will start to talk about the event itself.

> *"A successful event consists of both an emotional experience and a logical instruction. "(Frissen et al., 2016)*

The experience journey

The experience journey is cumulative moments of interaction that a Stakeholder experiences in the event -listening, reading, watching, debating, mingling, speaking -that build the experience for them. Different stakeholders have different journeys. (Frissen et al., 2016, 70)

Instructional design

Instructional design covers what needs to be learned and how that is best done. In this part, the designing team will consider which methods, formats, and interactions will be the most effective for each stakeholder to retain the key learnings. It is combined with the experience journey to determine the array of interactions that a stakeholder has with the event environment. It interconnects with the physical environment, down to invitation fonts, time of day, keynote speaker etc. For this example, remote attendee, this would mean how the invitation to them would be, how the broadcast etc. would look like, to make them feel the way that we are hoping for the outcome to be. (Frissen et al., 2016)

When you think about all your stakeholders from their perspectives and what their needs are, you can design an event that will be successful and catering to your stakeholders need and expectations.

2.4.5 Interviews with the engagement specialists

There were two one-on-one interviews conducted to be able to ask the view of the professionals in regards the results that came from the survey. These interviews are primary data as well as the survey, as the professionals chosen were asked to reflect on the results of the survey done and further analyze the responses received through their own professional opinions and knowledge and to get their input on them to be able build a better understanding on the research questions.

Another aspect of this research was to get information on how to make these virtual/hybrid events engaging as you will have to be engaging different stakeholders. For that reason, both interviewed professionals were chosen due to their expertise in event engagement. Both the survey and the interviews were used as primary data.

3   SURVEY AND EXPERT INTERVIEWS

One of the reasons for this research was to find information on how factors when choosing a conference location have changed since the pandemic and what that would mean for the face-to-face and virtual meetings moving forward. Therefore, event professionals around the world were asked to answer a survey on how the future of the event industry might look like post pandemic.

3.1   Survey

The survey questions were formed to reflect the previously mentioned research done by Yoo & Chon (2008) on developing a measurement scale on factors affecting convention participation and the five underlying dimensions that were destination stimuli, professional and social networking opportunities, educational opportunities, safety and health situation and travel ability. Questions in regards the opposing of this medium due to technology failures and potential cannibalization to face-to-face events were also asked that had arisen from the research done in 2012 by Fryatt et al. As they had also researched hybrid events at that time and how to engage people in these virtual events and meetings, questions regarding this were also presented to see if the view on them has changed in the last few years or due to the pandemic.

Survey had multiple choice questions combined with few open-ended questions. Data collection was carried out once for the survey, with the option for further in-depth interviews. The survey was conducted in the beginning of May 2020 using virtual technology by an online form from Google Forms. The link was shared to only event industry professionals in LinkedIn, a specific group in Facebook as well as Meeting Professionals International Forum, which is only visible to members. All participants were advised that their responses were anonymous, but should they want, they could leave their contact information for questions on the subject. Results of the survey were also promised to be shared on these same platforms as a thank you as well to help the industry in general.

The survey contained six different sections all together. Consisting of 20-23 questions depending on your industry affiliations. First section was asked from all participants and questions were to find out some main demographics as well as industry involvement in years. In this section, the importance of communication from an event, as well as if they had attended conferences in the past. If yes, they would be able to respond to questions in section 2. Section two had questions relating about attending conferences and their pricing points. Section three looked more into their industry involvement, as that would

affect the questions that would be asked from the participants moving forward on the survey.

Section four was intended for planners, as this group would have the information on how they are choosing their locations for their events and what factors they are taking into consideration when doing so. This section was also comparing the effects that the pandemic had for their responses. Effects of CSR in decision making was asked due to Messukeskus' heavy investment on sustainability in the last few years. A direct question if the pandemic changed their process on how to choose location was presented. Due to results from the GMID poll (appendix 1), the increase of hybrid events was predicted. After this section, the planner participants were skipping section 5 and going directly to section 6. Section five had one question in which it was reflecting those same results from the GMID polls (appendix 1) to find out if the suppliers companies were set up in a way that they would be able to start doing them moving forward. Section six was intended for the event engagement questions and all the participants opinions on networking.

3.2 Interviews: Descriptions of the professionals chosen

This study aimed to look further into hybrid events as well as how to make sure that these events will be engaging. Therefore, it was important to discuss the findings of the survey with professionals in the field. In terms of Hybrid events, Paul Cook was interviewed, as he is the author of books about" Remotely engaging" and" Risk It!". In which area he has already been working for the past 10 years. In regards engagement at these events, Cyriel Kortleven, TEDx talker, author of books such as" The Change Mindset"," Yes and... Your Business" was asked to reflect on the results as well. With Ruud Janssen the researcher was not able to get an interview time set up due to availability, but had received materials from Janssen on the subject as he had been part of the industry wide survey research group in 2012 (Fryatt et al. 2012) as well as the creator of the Event Canvas model. Both Cyriel and Paul were interviewed via Zoom online meeting tool.

3.3 Research method

Qualitative research was chosen as individuals' perceptions of the future of the events industry were asked and to explain the results and to understand the current solutions in the constantly changing environment. To represent the critical areas of factors affecting decision making in choosing conference locations research done by Houdement et al. (2017) was used as guidance.

The survey method was used as it has individual people as the unit of analysis. This scientific method operates primarily at the empirical level of research, i.e., how to make observations and analyze these observations. There was a risk of having a too narrow of a selection but social media where the survey was posted on industry groups, enabled the possibility to make sure that the participants would be qualified participants. Due to the links being open, it was open for potential wrongdoing by people not within the industry.

3.4 Limitations of the study

Due to the qualitative research method of in-depth interviews as well as survey chosen as the main way to gather data, there is always the chance that some of the data could be affected by the researchers own views and experience gained in the event industry throughout the years and something that is clear for the researcher, might be overseen for that reason. There has been a lack of studies on hybrid events, and what is out there, a lot of generalizations need to be done, and until further research on the subject, many of the suggestions and recommendations can only be that. As the research data collected for this study is heavily based on Fryatt et al. (2012) three different articles as well as the material that Ruud Janssen shared with the researcher, could be too much from one point of view, even if the survey data for their study was a big amount within the events industry, compared to the amount that was able to be gathered for this study. The geographic limitations were present, as the survey respondents as well as the interviewed industry professionals were only from Europe and North America. The findings represent a combination of the conclusions from the literature review, the data received from the survey and interviews with the professional.

3.5 Reliability of results

As discussed in the section 1.5 of this study discussing the sources, the previous research about hybrid events and engagement in them, was very limited. At the current stage, further research and results will surely come due to the increase need for them and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of respondents in the survey despite being a great amount of industry leading event professionals, does not represent the whole world. One of the risks of the research is the narrow sampling of the industry professionals interviewed, despite their expertise on the subject. Another threat on the subject is that there were three different parts to the study, despite them connecting, could pose to be too much of a generalization. One subject could have been chosen to be researched further and in more detail.

4   RESEARCH RESULTS

This chapter focuses on understanding the results of both the survey as well as the inter-
views conducted by the researcher with the event professionals. These results will be ex-
plained through the three focus parts of this study: *factors affecting decision making when
choosing a conference location, hybrid/virtual events as well as how to include different
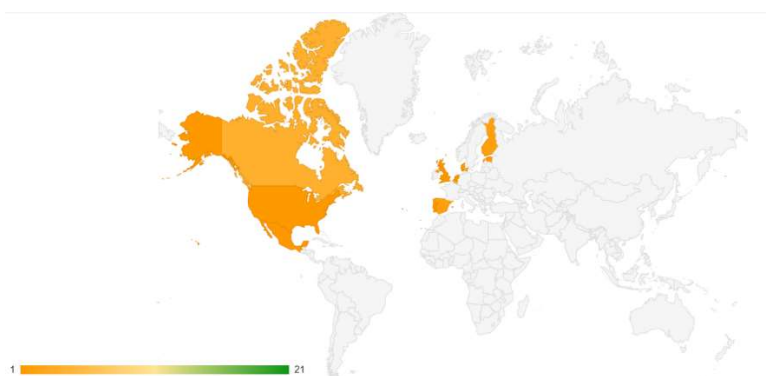audiences and stakeholders.*

Figure 7: Survey participants by location on a map

Most of the survey responses were from event professionals in North America with 57,8%
and Mexico with 2,2%. The rest of the responses were from around Europe. 86,7% of the
participants were female.
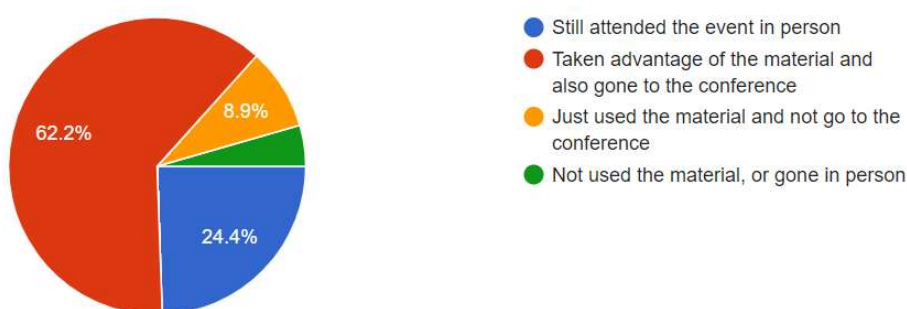
Figure 8: Survey result on attending in-person is content also online

If the content from conferences attended by the participants before the pandemic would
have been available online the participants were asked if they would have attended them
in person if the content from them would have also been available online. Over half of the
attendees would have gone to the conference in person and taken advantage of the
online material as well. Only 8,9% from participants would not have gone, if the same

content would have been available to them online. For 24,4% of the participants responded that the material being online would not have made the difference, they would have gone to the event, as per usual.

If the content from these conferences that you have attended would have been given to you online as well, would you have been willing to pay

45 responses
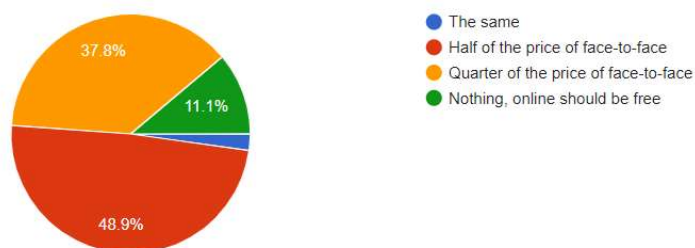
Figure 9: survey results on how much willing to pay for online conference

These participants were asked to think about these past conferences to see if they would be willing to pay something for the online content. Just as they would be for an event, they have paid the entry fee for, from the participants only 11,1% would not be willing to pay anything as they feel online content should be free. Almost half (48,9%) would be willing to pay half of the price and 37,8% would be willing to pay quarter of the price of face-to-face event.
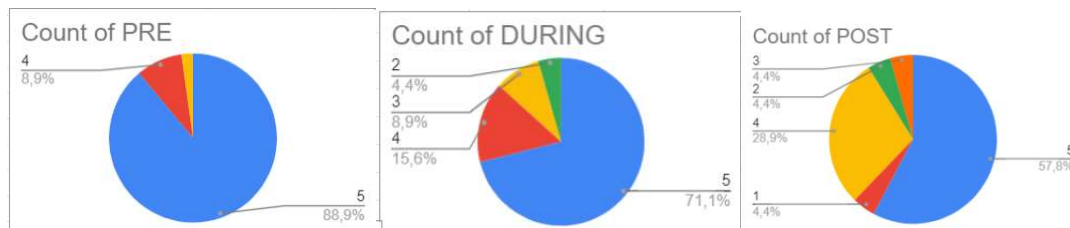
Figure 10: importance of communication from an event

Participants were asked about the importance of communication from the event itself, results showed that pre-event communication was found to be the very important by 88,9%, communication during event was very important to 71.1% of the participants and post-event communication was felt to be very important by 57,8%. Post event communication was the least important by 8,8% of the respondents, where the pre-event communication was important or very important by 97,8% leaving no responses for not important.
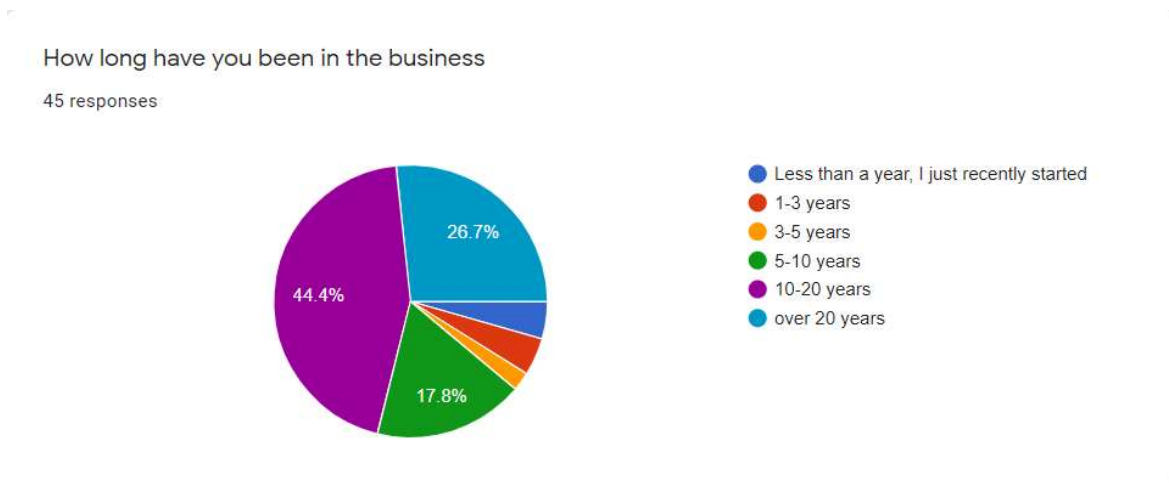
Figure 11: Years in business

Participants of the survey were event professionals. 44,4% of them had been in the industry for 10-20 years and 26,7% had been in the industry for over 20 years. The third biggest group was professionals of 5-10 years. Due to years of experience in the industry, the results of the survey as well as their answers would be very trustworthy source for the views of the industry and its future.
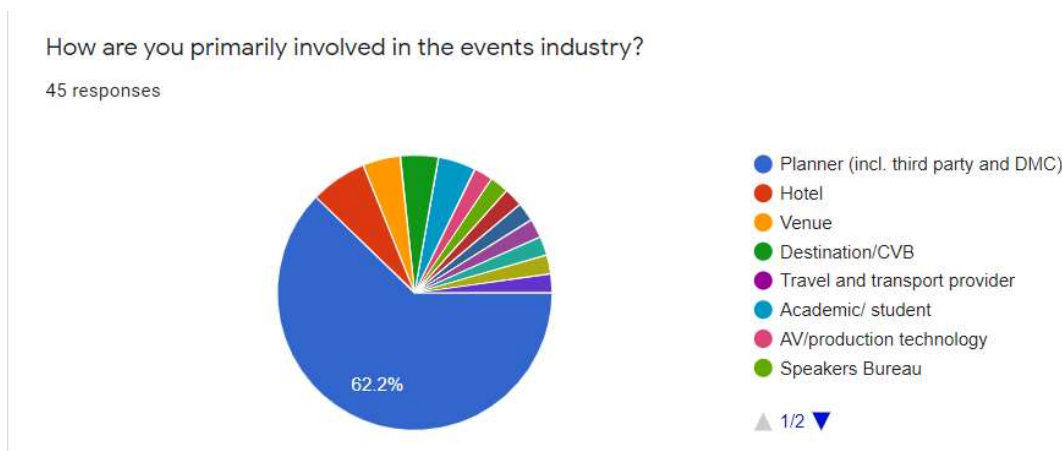

Figure 12: Involvement/ role in the industry

4.1 Factors affecting decision making when choosing a location

When participants were asked about the decision making factors when choosing the location, Yoo & Chon (2008) factors were taken into consideration when forming the questions but were also reflected into the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 spring, in order to help the industry. The following factors were asked from the participants to scale them from 1-5, with 5 being very important. These were reflected both pre and post pandemic to see if there were any changes.

When looking at the very important (5) and important (4) scores given by the participants, the following results were received:

	Before pandemic (5/4)	After pandemic (5/4)
Location	59,5%/ 32,4%=91,9%	64,9%/ 18,9%=83,8%

Count of What was the importance of the following when choosing your event location before COVID-19 (1 - being not...

Count of What will be the importance of the following after COVID-19 when choosing your event location (1 -being not i...

Air travel routes	18,9%/ 37,8%=56,7%	27,0%/ 29,7%=56,7%

Count of What was the importance of the following when choosing your event location before COVID-19 (1 - being not...

Count of What will be the importance of the following after COVID-19 when choosing your event location (1 -being not i...

Amount of people that a location can fit	51,4%/ 32,4%=83,8%	62,2%/ 18,9%=81,1%

Count of What was the importance of the following when choosing your event location before COVID-19 (1 - being not...

Count of What will be the importance of the following after COVID-19 when choosing your event location (1 -being not i...

Hotel beds at the location	27,0%/ 37,8%=64,8%	29,7%/ 29,7%=59,4%

Count of What was the importance of the following when choosing your event location before COVID-19 (1 - being not...

Count of What will be the importance of the following after COVID-19 when choosing your event location (1 -being not i...

City and what it has to offer	10,8%/ 62,2%=73%	10,8%/ 48,6%=59,4%

Technology   29,7%/ 43,2%=72,9%   54,1%/ 35,1%=89,2%
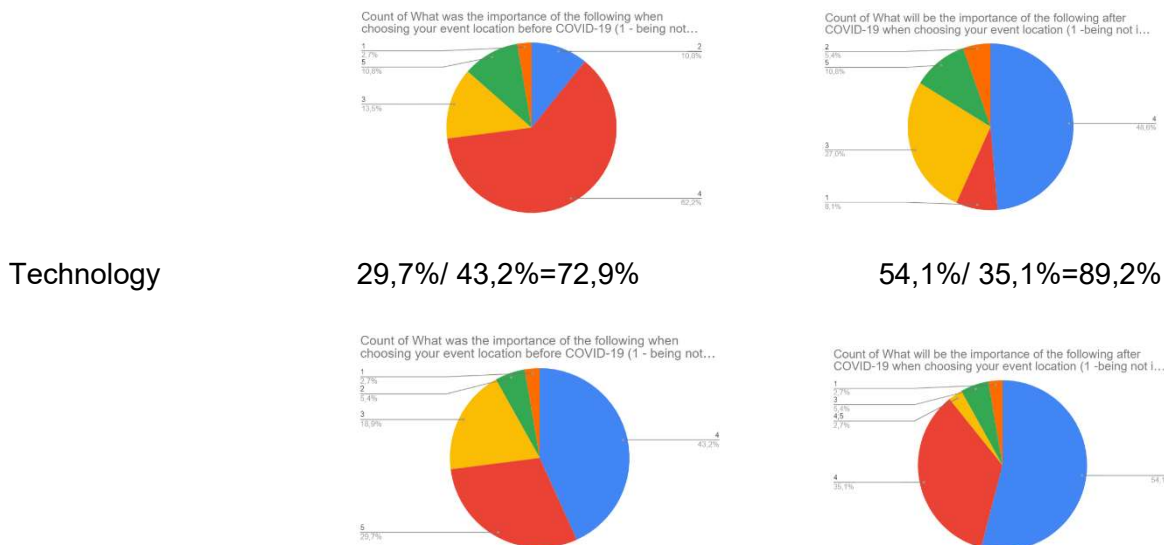
Figure 13: results of pre -and post pandemic choosing factor importance

When comparing the two, the *location* is perceived as less important factor when choosing a location with almost 10% in overall, but very important has increased by 5% from before pandemic. *Air travel routes* the around the same importance overall, but when comparing very important, there is a slight increase. *Amount of people that a location can fit* saw a slight decrease overall but increased in the very important section.

Hotel beds in location decrease in overall, but slight increase was seen in the very important section. *City and what it has to offer* has decreased in overall, stayed the same in the low number when comparing the importance of choosing a location before and after the pandemic. Importance of *technology* had a clear difference in regards of the importance on when choosing a location with the overall increase of almost 20% as well as when comparing very important before and after. There is a clear indication that the change has happened compared to before the pandemic.
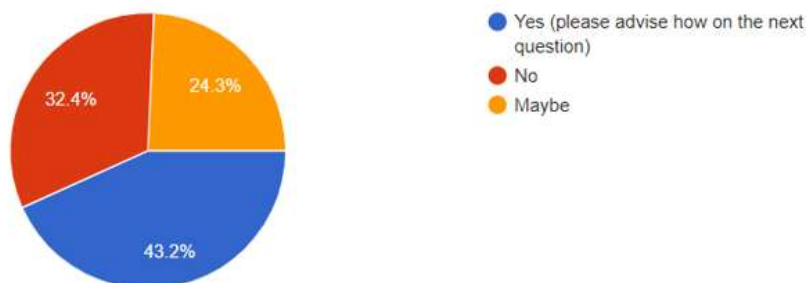
Figure 14: change in the process of choosing a location after pandemic

The next question in which the participants responded if their process on how to choose a location has changed. 43,2% responded yes, and when asked to clarify as to why, the

main concern seemed to clearly be the social distancing, and the need for space in doing so. Different sorts of safety and sanitation procedures were of clear concern. How food and beverage will be handled moving forward (for example not having a buffet table) and how that will be taken into consideration in the new situation.

Figure 15: word map on the results of change in choosing a location post-pandemic

Messukeskus has put a lot of investments in Corporate social responsibility (CSR). Therefore, it was important point of view to be asked from the planners – that is, its importance on decision making factors when choosing a location for the next conference. 37,8% found it to be important factor and only 16,2% found it to be very important factor before the pandemic, totalling to only 54% of the respondents. These numbers increased after pandemic, as 35,1% found it to be very important and 35,1% found it important, equalling to 70,2% of all the votes. This shows an increase of 16,2% after pandemic.

4.2 Hybrid events

Planners

As this study aims to give help to venues like Messukeskus in the industry to be able to get a glimpse of the direction that the industry will be taking after the pandemic, the emphasis was on the planners side and what factors they are taking into consideration when choosing a location. 62,2% from the survey participants were planners.

Before the pandemic, were you planning

37 responses
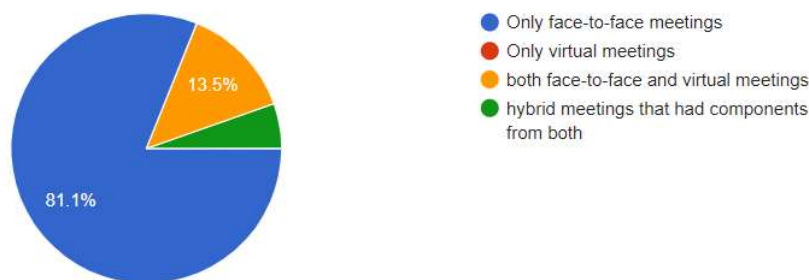
Figure 16: What kind of events were planning

Pre-pandemic and its effects on the decision making were researched. Out of the planners, 81,1% were planning only face-to-face meetings and 13,5% were planning both face-to-face meetings as well as virtual and only 5,4% were planning hybrid events.
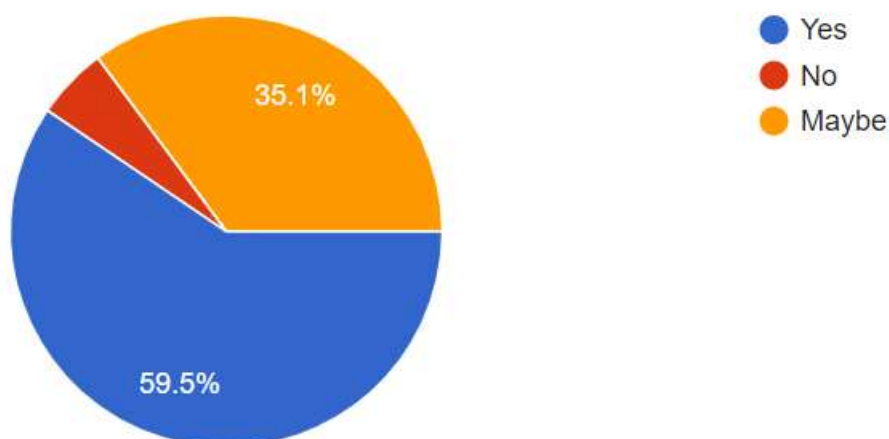

Figure 17: Survey results on if will plan hybrid events moving forward post pandemic

When asked if they were going to start planning hybrid events moving forward 59,5% said yes, and 35,1% Maybe. This shows that the interest to plan hybrid events has gone up, and from the planner's point of view, what has only been a 5,4% market share in the past, has now increased 89,2% into totaling 94,6%. It also shows that 5,4% of the respondents will not be doing hybrid events in the future, equaling to the same amount that had mentioned in the past to be doing hybrid events. In other words, face-to-face and hybrid events have switched their spots.

Suppliers

The supplier participants of this survey were asked similar question in regards hybrid events, but from the point of view that if they were ready to start organizing hybrid events, in case future will require them to do so.

When GMID Goes Virtual Event on 14th April 2020 conducted a poll*) for a group of event professionals, they were asked how live events will change after the crisis is over. 7086 responded, out of which 62% predicted that most events will become hybrid. Is your company set up in a way that it could start having hybrid events moving forward, or to support them?

8 responses
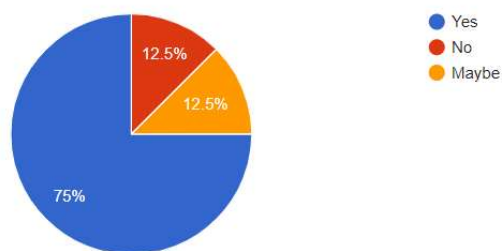
Figure 18: Is your company set up to start having hybrid events

Out of the supplier respondents 75% advised that they were equipped to do so, with both maybe and no receiving 12,5% of the responses. If the demand in the future for hybrid events is 94,6% based on the planners' responses, 87,5% (yes and maybe combined) that suppliers are prepared for, might not be enough. This is something for the venues to take into consideration when moving forward.

One of the focal points of the research is to see what the perception in regards virtual/hybrid events is and to see how they are compared Face-to-Face meetings. For that reason, the opinion of the participants in the subject was asked if they think, that virtual/hybrid events will cannibalize the face-to-face meetings?

Count of Do you think that virtual/hybrid meetings will cannibalize the Face-to-Face meetings in the future? Why?...

Yes
6.7%
Maybe
11.1%

N/A
17.8%

No
64.4%
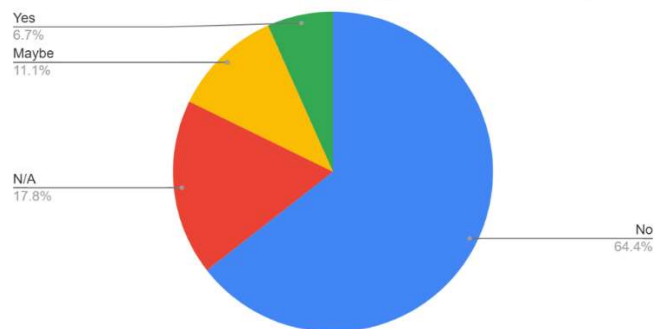
Figure 19: opinions about virtual/hybrid meetings cannibalizing the Face-to-Face meetings

64,4% of the respondents responded that no, they do not think that. Only 6,7% felt that they will and 11,1% thought maybe. The 17,8% of the responses did not comment either or.

For the purposes of this study, to help understand the view on how these hybrid events are being seen, the participants were asked if they perceive these hybrid events to cost more or be cheaper to organize than face-to-face meetings. Results were almost half to half, with 51,1% perceiving these to cost more.

Are hybrid events in your opinion cheaper or more expensive than a regular face-to-face meetings?

45 responses
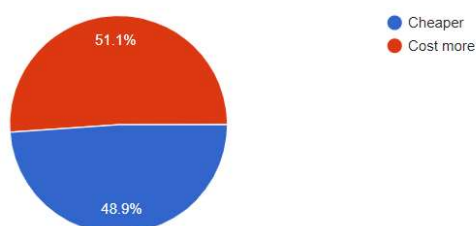
Figure 20: Cost of hybrid event compared to face-to-face

4.3 Including your different audiences when planning a hybrid event

Engaging online

Are you able to network in online conferences?

45 responses
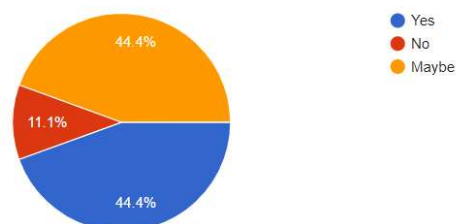
Figure 21: ability to network in online conferences

When respondents were asked if they believed that networking online was possible, only 11,1% said no. Maybe and yes both received 44,4% of the responses.

When asked about impact of networking at virtual meetings, 42,2% felt it to be just average. Only 11,1% felt that the impact was extremely high. Same question was asked about face-to-face meetings, and 84,4% felt that the impact of networking at these live events was extremely high.

One of the pains of the participants on the survey found that when comparing the impact of networking between the in person and online events there was a 73,3% difference with offline events being clearly considered more impactful in terms of networking. When discussing these results with Cook (2020) he feels that virtual events could be better for both networking and education but sees that some people are not very good in remote talking, and this could potentially make this more challenging.
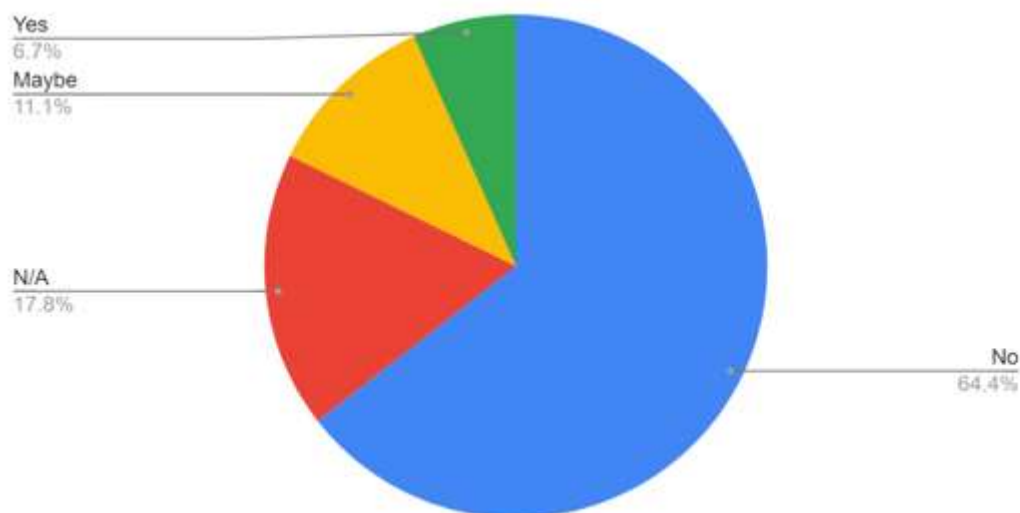

Figure 22: Survey results about virtual/hybrid meetings cannibalizing face-to-face

The results of the survey on networking and its hardness in online events was also discussed with Kortleven (2020) who gave his thoughts in regarding virtual events cannibalizing the face-to-face meetings. He suggested that the eleven percent thinking they would cannibalize could be explained due to people not knowing on how to do these virtual events.
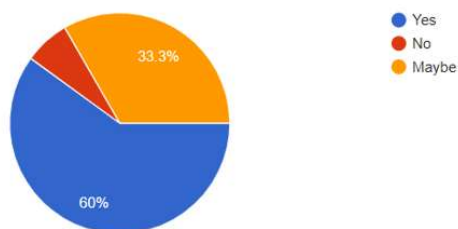
Figure 23: engagement in online events

When participants of the survey were asked if they feel that online events can be engaging, 60% believe that to be the case. There were 33,3% of participants who thought maybe, and only 6,7% thought that they cannot.

Figure 24: analysis of the responses on how to engage attendees online

When participants were asked to provide some examples of ways to engage attendees online, the top 5 based on their responses were: polls, breakout rooms, active participation, camera and gamification. Analysis view was done with Quirkos visual analyzing tool.

Figure 25: Image of the sponsorship opportunities in virtual events

The participants were also asked about sponsorship opportunities in virtual/hybrid meetings with an open-ended question. When summarizing the responses from the open-ended question asked: sponsored speaker or sessions were mentioned the most as well as different kinds of forms of branding, like banners etc. Sponsor videos between sessions were mentioned quite often. Results also showed that there were many people who had no experience about sponsorship in online events and were not able to give a response.

5   FINDINGS

Houdement et al. (2017) had researched attributes that affect the decision-making process when choosing a destination and their findings showed that the destination image was the main determining site-selection factor as discussed in section 2.1. of this study. As this study was looking into the effects of the pandemic, the results from this research showed that location as well as city and what it has to offer were indeed very important decision making factors when choosing a location before the pandemic but this saw a decline when looking at the situation after. Location went down from 91,9% to 83,8% and City and what it has to offer went down from 73% to 59,4% as the results show in the figure below. Importance of technology increased in the importance after pandemic. CSR was considered more important as well. Air travel routes importance was the only one staying the same.

FACTORSCONSIDERED IMPORTANT IN DECISION MAKING WHEN CHOOSING A LOCATION BASED ON SURVEY RESULTS	BEFORE AND AFTER PANDEMIC
Location	91,9% > 83,8%
Air travel routes	56,7% = 56,7%
Amount of people that location can fit	83,8% > 81,5%
Hotel beds at the location	64,8% > 59,4%
City and what it has to offer	73% > 59,4%
Technology	72,9% < 89,2%
CSR	54% < 70,2%

Figure 26: Survey results on the importance of factors effecting decision making before and after pandemic

Importance of technology when choosing a location increased overall almost 20% when compared with before and after pandemic data, which is something that the venues and planners of future events will have to take into consideration. This was also supported by the information conducted from the ICCA (2018) results where the venues had already invested in new technology as well as bandwidth in locations. It will remain to be seen, if those investments have been enough as suppliers who responded to the survey that the researcher conducted, advising that 75% of them were equipped to be hosting hybrid

events. When selecting venues that will be able to host a hybrid events, you need to take into consideration the connectivity, camera view, sound and lighting as per study by Fryatt et al. (2012).

In the context of global intercity competition, cities' major goal is to increase their competitiveness, in which the positioning and attractiveness of a city have a critical function. Emphasis will be increasingly on less costly and more synergistic city marketing, which utilizes city branding and "city profiling" that aim at attracting high value-adding services or high-tech firms. (Anttiroiko, 2014). International events contribute specific economic outcomes that can be quantified, not only by visitors spending in the area concerned, but also through assessment of the number of business start-ups, as well as jobs created and retained through stimulation of a visitor economy (Ferdinand & Kitchin 2017, 18-19).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is something that Messukeskus has put a lot of investments in and thus was important point of view to ask from the planners in regards its effects on decision making factors when choosing a location for the next conference. 37,8% found it to be important factor and only 16,2% found it to be very important factor before the pandemic, totaling to only 54% of the respondents. These numbers increased after pandemic, as 35,1% found it to be very important and 35,1% found it important, equaling to 70,2%. This shows an increase of 16,2% after pandemic.

When Fryatt et al. (2012) did their research, as previously discussed in section 2.2.2.1 they found out that there were certain events/meetings that were perceived to be more suitable for face-to-face environments and certain events to be more suitable for virtual. Internal meetings were perceived as the ones that could be done online and networking, sensitive issues, incentives as well as celebrations were best done face-to-face as per their results.
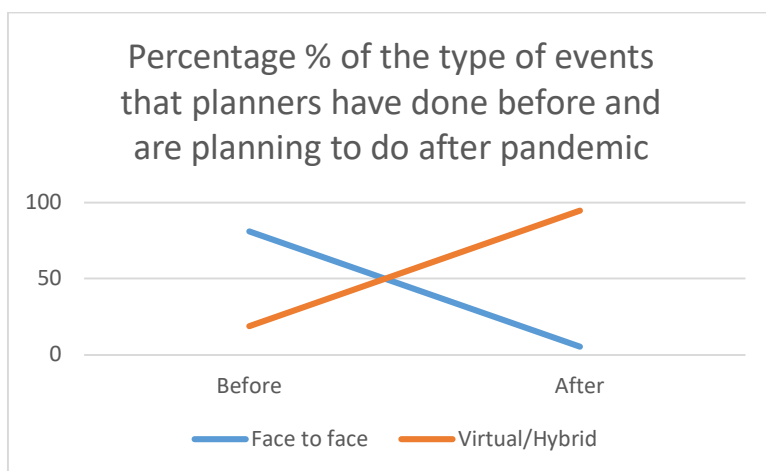

Figure 27: Survey results on the types of events done before and after pandemic

As GMID Goes Virtual (2020) poll showed, as well as a study done in 2012 by Fryatt et al. (2012), there was a clear indication that hybrid events will be important in the future. This was also seen from the results of this study, when 5,4% of planners had organized virtual (13,5%)/hybrid events (5,4%) before the pandemic, showed now an increase of 75,7% with planners planning to do hybrid events after pandemic as can be seen from the figure above. From the planners 35,1% responded maybe for planning hybrid events moving forward. This information is important for venues like Messukeskus to be able to take this into consideration for future events and make sure that their events will be equipped to handle this event type.

In 2012 this study done by Fryatt et al. (2012) revealed a lack of sponsorship opportunities for which the participants were asked to give some thoughts on how this could be done online. Many of the respondents did not have any experience on this as they had not organized or attended that many virtual events, some ideas came as sponsored speaker or sessions as well as different kind of forms of branding, like banners etc.

Sponsorship can be one of the most powerful ways for a company or brand to increase their exposure to a target audience. Your precisely defined membership represents a pre-qualified audience for a company wishing to reach your industry or sector. Putting your conference sessions online; in other words, taking the presentations out of the confines of the congress center and making the knowledge available after the event (sometimes for a considerable period of time) enables the creation of sponsorship opportunities of significantly greater value and duration than the packages to which sponsors have all become accustomed. And it is always good to have something fresh and new to offer sponsors. (Cook & Shepherdly 2016)

5.1 Engagement

As hybrid events can have many different forms, we can try to find examples from other events such as sporting events broadcasts in the need to engage both in-person and remote attendees, which was mentioned by Fryatt et al, as well as in the survey responses discussed in section four (Figure 25). Engagement requires a different mindset and different approach from the speakers, moderators and the event organizers. Preparing well in advance is the key. (Kortleven 2020)

To make sure that the remote audience will feel engaged, few tips arose from participants responding to the survey done by the researcher as well as the professionals interviewed for this study. One was to have your camera on, having smaller groups discussing subjects together, for example, Zoom's breakout rooms were mentioned. Importance of hiring

a moderator or making sure that the speaker knows how to speak to an audience seemed to be one of the most important factors for engagement as well. Smoothness and testing of the technology in advance were a crucial part for the remote audience especially with good sound and image quality. Interactive tools such as polls, quizzes, chat boxes, games etc. were mentioned as well. Most importantly, to remember to include the remote attendees into your event one way or another.

When asked to provide some examples of ways to engage attendees, the top 5 based on the quotes in their responses were: polls, breakout rooms, active participation, camera and gamification.

5.2 Possibilities and limitations on virtual/hybrid events based on professional interviews

- not asking anyone to travel or spend more time at an event than absolutely have to
- helping with carbon footprint
- focused education
- ability to reach more people
- more scalability and can be replicated
- travel or other mobility limitations are being taken away, anyone can attend
- enabling to share content, ideas and experiences across multiple geographies and time zones
- event can be repurposed and shared with others

- require more initial set up (like planning two events)
- technical difficulties

Figure 28: possibilities and limitations on virtual/hybrid events based on professional interviews

One pain for the stakeholders which Cook (2020) mentioned was that in the future the insecurities around hygiene and sanitation will be playing a big part. Venues and organizers will also need to understand that people will not necessarily want to come and attend these events in person unless they can demonstrate that they have put enough safety measures in place. Hygiene and security were not as part of the survey questions. Gains as per discussion with Cook (2020) was that you are not asking anyone to travel or spend more time in that event than they absolutely must. This in turn will be helping with the

carbon footprint. He also sees focused education and knowledge to be gains for virtual events.

Costs for the stakeholders were discussed with both Kortleven (2020) as well as Cook (2020). Part of the survey participants had stated that the online content should be free, to which both seemed to disagree due to the time and effort involved when planning the content, just as it would be for a live event. As events are experiences, the experience journey of the different stakeholders is important and for that reason people need to feel included. Cook (2020) also advised that you need to be clear in what you are asking people to do. For that reason, clear instructions as well as instructional design are very important for a successful event as mentioned in Event Canvas (Frissen et al., 2016).

As discussed previously in this study, hybrid events give you an opportunity to add value by being able to reach more people (face-to-face plus virtual) and for that reason you need to be able to cater to both these audiences. Planning a hybrid event is almost like planning two events (Fryatt et al., 2012). What might work for in-person audience, might not be working for the remote audience. As discussed earlier in this study, virtual events might require more initial setup but can be replicated and scaled much more efficiently over time. Not all forms are good for virtual meetings and vice versa.

> ***You can try to copy and paste your face-to-face meeting into a virtual or hybrid event, but it does not work. (Cook 2020)***

As we have seen through the COVID-19 pandemic, hybrid and virtual events have been able to take away limitations such as travel restrictions, country borders etc. And people around the world have been able to attend conferences and events that they might not have done in the past or had the opportunity to do so. This new situation has forced us to use new technologies which in turn have enabled us to be able to share content, ideas and experiences across multiple geographies and time zones.

Due to the nature of hybrid events the event content will not just be a one off event, but can now be repurposed and shared with others, and no matter what kind of limitations there would be for travel, you would be able to connect with these people.

6   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1   Summary

This thesis explored hybrid events and how they can be made into an engaging experience for different audiences and stakeholders. Changes in the factors affecting choosing of a conference location due to the COVID-19 pandemic will be reviewed and what that will mean for the face-to-face and virtual meetings moving forward.

The main goal of this study was to produce beneficial information and recommendations for event organizers, Messukeskus Helsinki and other conference venues on how to plan engaging hybrid events. The main research question on how a hybrid event can be transferred into an engaging experience were discussed through the results of the survey as well as interviews with professionals. Second research question was presented through the steps of event canvas on how to include your different audiences and stakeholders into the process.

6.2   Validity of the study

Although the research of the study was conducted with a small sample some interesting insights can be made from the results. For example, contrary to previous opinions regarding online events and how they would not be participated as easily as tangible events, the pandemic changed the current consensus to pro-online. In addition, the survey confirmed that the industry professionals will be looking into the future to organize more hybrid events and the engagement on these events will be important to take into consideration when thinking about different stakeholders.

6.3   Recommendations

This thesis confronted multiple obstacles on the way. The first and biggest of them being COVID-19. However, the pandemic also raised an interesting question on how online or hybrid events would evolve. As the pandemic progressed and people were stuck at their homes due to restrictions to limit the spread of the virus, the world online revealed its possibilities. The event industry suffered enormously of the cancellations of mass events and suddenly, event organizers had no more work. Companies started to move their procedures online and the same happened to events. When there is no other option, more people will find the alternative. Thus, this study shifted its focus from looking at conference location choosing to examining the hybrid events and their future possibilities.

This study had a limited sample of responses. With more systematic and broad approach, more valid conclusion can be made. However, this study will give ideas how to further research on the topic. As there probably will be more research done on various topics regarding the time before and after COVID-19, in the field of hybrid events some interesting directions could be such as how to help the tourism and travel industry when venues, hotels, meeting spaces and flights are not booked. A program has already been launched at Messukeskus that aims to ensure a safe start-up of events when Covid-19 restrictions are dismantled. (Gordienco 2020)

The findings indicated that hybrid events will be the new norm in regards event organizing moving forward and for those events feel engaging, there needs to be interaction between all stakeholders. This paper will only be dealing with part of the study results that are relating for the subject at hand. Further research will need to be conducted to get a deeper understanding on how other industries could be helping in understanding different stakeholders.

This study discovered that choosing the location for a conference and the factors affecting them have changed from the time before the pandemic, and for that reason, it will be very important for the venues and other event professionals to keep in mind the new limitations in meeting, traveling etc. and fears that people might have.

Various sources (see e.g. Fryatt et al., 2012; GMID poll [appendix 1]) have suggested that hybrid events will be the new norm. This has been confirmed with this study as well. Event venues such as Messukeskus will need to take this into consideration moving forward. Promoting a hybrid event does not necessarily mean less people will attending your event, as explained in section four of this study.

For that reason it is advised to take the time to discuss your event with all different stakeholders and as suggested in this study, tools such as event canvas can be helpful to take different stakeholders and their pains and gains into consideration thus making sure that everyone is involved, including attendees will feel like they have gotten

Sponsorship in these virtual spaces is a new area and should be researched further, we do have great examples of these sponsored features on sporting event broadcasts that can be looked further as an example as well. Respondents of this study were able to give some ideas such as preferred speaker series, just like in offline events. Short videos of sponsors before, during and after the meetings, visibility at the virtual studio, sponsored keynote sessions or sponsored speakers et. Virtual and mailed in advance goodie bags were also mentioned. Advertising in different places like during a break, website, as well as marketing pre- and post-event.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: GMID Goes Virtual poll results 14th April 2020

Event industry participants on the call on 14th April 2020 sent 46 794 votes in 8 polls
https://infographics.sli.do/?i=OTAwNjNkMzYtZjk2OS00N2ZiLWJlZmQtOT-
BjY2ZlYjZkYzhm

as follows:

Q1:

Where in the world are you joining us from?	1978
Thailand	
Italy	
Canada	
Canada	
United Kingdom	
UK	
Canada	
Slovakia	
England	
Canada	
Hungary	
Argentina	
USA	

Q2:

In one word, describe how you're feeling right now.	6027
Hopeful	
anxious	
Frustrated on this furlough until June 1	
Kak	
Motivated	
Hopeful	

Q3:

How are you primarily involved in the meetings industry? 6113

Academic/Student
2 %

AV/Technology
4 %

Destination/CVB
9 %

Hotel
14 %

Planner (inc. 3rd party & DMC)
53 %

Speaker
2 %

Travel and Transport
1 %

Q4:

When is the earliest live event you are planning or looking to attend right now? 6335

May
3 %

June
15 %

July
14 %

August
16 %

September
27 %

Q5:

Of your previously planned live events for 2020, what portion has gone virtual/online? 6445

None (0%)
34 %

A small portion (+/- 25%)
45 %

Around half (+/- 50%)
11 %

Most (+/- 75%)
7 %

All (100%)
3 %

Q6:

How will live events change after the crisis is over?   7086

Greater demand for live events
13 %

Unchanged (same as before)
8 %

Most events will become hybrid
62 %

Greater demand for virtual events
17 %

Q7:

What is the first thing you want to do once the crisis is over?   7063

Hug

Meet

Meet friends

Travel
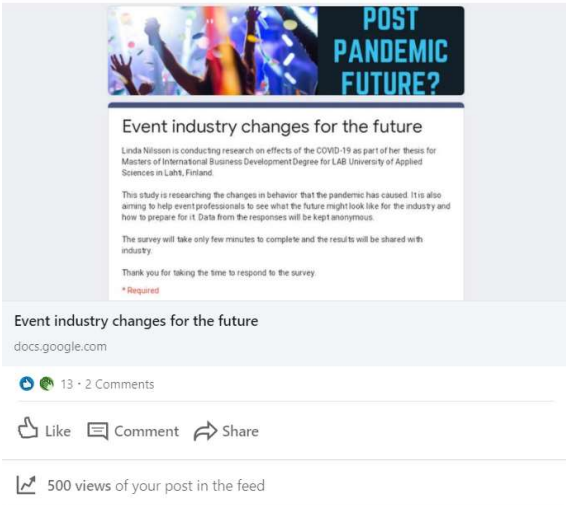
Meet clients personally

Music

Appendix 3: <u>LinkedIn post published 4th May 2020</u>

It was posted on the 4th May 2020, asked to be responded by 7th May 2020, but the time was extended to 10th May 2020 to be able to get few more additional responses.

Another <u>post published the day after (5th May 2020)</u>

Appendix 3: Facebook post published 5th May 2020

Facebook post -Meetings Mean Community Closed Facebook Group

Linda Nilsson shared a link.
May 5 at 12:29 PM

My dear meetings family. 🤗
I was wondering if you would be able to help me by filling this quick survey about the future in events industry and virtual events in it?
It is part of my thesis work. I will be sharing the results with our industry as well, and hopefully it will be helpful for you in some way as well.
I really appreciate any help that you can give me. Please ask your colleagues to respond as well. 🤗🙏
Thank you already in advance!

POST PANDEMI FUTURE?
rent industry changes for the future

DOCS.GOOGLE.COM
Event industry changes for the future
Linda Nilsson is conducting research on effects of the COVID-19 as part of her thesis for Masters of International Business Development Degree for LAB University of Applied Sciences in Lahti,

👍 3   1 Comment

Appendix 4: Post published 5th May 2020 on MyMPI Online Forum (members only)

| Home | Chapters ▾ | Communities ▾ | Directory | Events | Browse ▾ | mpiweb.org | Participate ▾ | | search |

Linda Nilsson 10 days ago
My dear community,. Would you please be so kind and answer this quick survey? I am conducting re...

1. Help with Event Industry Survey   0   Recommend

Posted 10 days ago   Reply ▾

Linda Nilsson

My dear community,

Would you please be so kind and answer this quick survey?

I am conducting research as part of my thesis for what the future of events will look like.

Hopefully the findings of this will be helpful for you as well and I will be sharing them with our industry.

Thank you in advance to anyone that can help.

You can find the survey here:
Survey about the Future in Events

Sincerely, Linda Nilsson

EVENTS POST PANDEMIC FUTURE?

Linda Nilsson
MPI Finland
President Elect

Appendix 5: Survey

Section 1 of 6

Event industry changes for the future

Linda Nilsson is conducting research on effects of the COVID-19 as part of her thesis for Masters of International Business Development Degree for LAB University of Applied Sciences in Lahti, Finland.

This study is researching the changes in behavior that the pandemic has caused. It is also aiming to help event professionals to see what the future might look like for the industry and how to prepare for it. Data from the responses will be kept anonymous.

The survey will take only few minutes to complete and the results will be shared with industry.

Thank you for taking the time to respond to the survey.

What country are you located in? *

Short answer text

Which gender do you identify yourself with *

○ Male

○ Female

○ Non-binary

How long have you been in the business *

○ Less than a year, I just recently started

○ 1-3 years

○ 3-5 years

○ 5-10 years

○ 10-20 years

○ over 20 years

○ Other...

How important is the communication from an event on a scale of 1 to 5 (1-being not that important, 5-very important)? *

	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-event	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
During event	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Post event	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Have you attended conferences in the past? (For work or other purposes) *

○ Yes

○ No

Section 2 of 6

Conference details

Description (optional)

If the content from these conferences that you have attended in the past would have been given *
to you online as well, would you have

○ Still attended the event in person

○ Taken advantage of the material and also gone to the conference

○ Just used the material and not go to the conference

○ Not used the material, or gone in person

If the content from these conferences that you have attended would have been given to you *
online as well, would you have been willing to pay

○ The same

○ Half of the price of face-to-face

○ Quarter of the price of face-to-face

○ Nothing, online should be free

Industry involvement

Description (optional)

How are you primarily involved in the events industry? *

○ Planner (incl. third party and DMC)

○ Hotel

○ Venue

○ Destination/CVB

○ Travel and transport provider

○ Academic/ student

○ AV/production technology

○ Other...

Planner

As you chose planner (incl. third party and DMC), please respond to these questions below

Before COVID-19

Please reflect the following on how things were before the pandemic

Before the pandemic, were you planning *

○ Only face-to-face meetings

○ Only virtual meetings

○ both face-to-face and virtual meetings

○ hybrid meetings that had components from both

What was the importance of the following when choosing your event location before COVID-19 *
(1 - being not important at all, 5- being very important)

	1	2	3	4	5
Location	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Air travel routes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Amount of peo…	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hotel beds and …	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
City and what it …	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Technology	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

How important was Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability as a factor before *
COVID-19 when choosing a location?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very important

After COVID-19

Please reflect the following on how you see things being after the crisis

What will be the importance of the following after COVID-19 when choosing your event location *
(1 -being not important at all, 5 -being very important)

	1	2	3	4	5
Location	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Air travel routes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Amount of peo…	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hotel beds and …	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
City and what it …	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Technology	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

How important will Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability be as a factor after *
COVID-19 when choosing a location?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important	○	○	○	○	○	Very important

Has the pandemic changed your process on how to choose a location now? *

○ Yes (please advise how on the next question)

○ No

○ Maybe

As you responded YES to the previous question, please advice on how

Long answer text

:::

When GMID Goes Virtual Event on 14th April 2020 conducted a poll* for a group of event professionals, they were asked how live events will change after the crisis is over. 7086 responded, out of which 62% predicted that most events will become hybrid. Are you going to start planning hybrid events moving forward? *

○ Yes

○ No

○ Maybe

Section 5 of 6

Supplier

You chose hotel, venue, destination CVB, travel and transport provider, AV technology etc., so please respond to these questions below

When GMID Goes Virtual Event on 14th April 2020 conducted a poll*) for a group of event professionals, they were asked how live events will change after the crisis is over. 7086 responded, out of which 62% predicted that most events will become hybrid. Is your company set up in a way that it could start having hybrid events moving forward, or to support them? *

○ Yes

○ No

○ Maybe

Section 6 of 6

Event Engagement

Description (optional)

Are you able to network in online conferences? *

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Maybe

In your opinion, what is the impact of networking at face-to-face meetings? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very little	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very big

In your opinion, what is the impact of networking at virtual meetings? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very little	○	○	○	○	○	Very big

Do you think that virtual/hybrid meetings will cannibalize the Face-to-Face meetings in the future? Why? Why not? *

Long answer text

In your opinion, can an online event be engaging? *

○ Yes

○ No

○ Maybe

Can you share 2 or 3 small things that people have done to increase the interaction during online meetings? *

Long answer text

Are hybrid events in your opinion cheaper or more expensive than a regular face-to-face meetings? *

○ Cheaper

○ Cost more

What sponsorship opportunities could there be for online events? *

Long answer text

Free comments on the subject:

Long answer text

Thank you for your answers and taking the time to respond. Please fill in your email address if you can be contacted for further questions in case will be needed. *) more information on the poll done by GMID Goes Virtual, please visit https://gmidgoesvirtual.com/.

Short answer text