

RESEARCH OF CHANGES IN JOBS AND TURNOVER OF EVENT INDUSTRY COMPANIES IN 2018-2020: LITHUANIAN RIA CASE

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Abstract. In today's economy the events industry is very important. It has multiplied impact on other activities: transportation, catering, accommodation, retail chains, advertising agencies and etc. This means that during crisis periods negative consequences have a domino effect. Pandemic restrictions struck mentioned industry in high rates. Different studies indicate loss from 50% to 90% of participants and income. That's why main aim of this research is to find out changes in jobs and turnover of event industry companies in 2018-2020, according to Lithuanian Event Industries Association (RIA) case. According authors' research pandemia and state actions had a negative impact on respondents' income and the number of events organized. The number of events decreased by 69,3%. Although the numbers are grim, they are similar to the results in other countries. Interesting fact is that decline in the number of employees was less significant than the decrease in income. This indicates that analyzed companies considers the existing difficulties as temporal and don't want to waste their staff.

Keywords: MICE industry, events, pandemic impact, employment

INTRODUCTION

In today's economy the events industry is very important. According to data published by the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) in 2019, 13,254 association meetings of various levels took place around the world, the total volume of the global congress market reached 40 million events, 2 billion participants and more than 800 billion euros in annual revenue branch income. In addition, investments in business events in various related industries (for example, restaurant and hotel business, trade, transport, etc.) generate 5-7 times greater economic impact. (Stuglev Khodko & Lyubenova, 2021). At that time, industry representatives expected rapid growth. In 2019 The Global Travel Business Association (GBTA) has predicted that total business travel spending in 2022 will reach EUR 1.5 trillion (Skift, 2019).

COVID-19 fundamentally adjusted the aforementioned plans. Various researchers (Disimulacion, 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Carlsson-Szlezak, Reeves, & Swartz, 2020; Stock, 2020) note that the events industry has been harmed by government efforts to contain the pandemic. Borders were closed, travel was banned, social and business events were canceled and people were told to stay in their homes. Governments around the world who took these steps sought to strike a balance between sustaining their economies and preventing dangerous unemployment and poverty. They tried to respond to public health needs to prevent health system collapse and mass deaths.

Even considering that the strict quarantine in most countries has lasted for several months, the industry's losses are huge. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the impact of COVID-19 is five times greater than in 2009. Consequences of the global economic crisis (WTTC, 2020): potentially affecting up to 1 billion travelers and will bring up to 1 trillion EUR losses for the tourism sector alone. According to the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR - Center for Exhibition Industry Research), 72.6% events scheduled for the first half of 2020 were canceled, so the results of the branch decreased by 15.1% compared to the previous year. (CEIR, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions on economic activity (including representatives of the event industry) had a severe impact on the country's economy in general and the event industry in particular. This is one of the business areas that have been subject to the strictest restrictions. Some companies were forced to completely stop their activities, others to significantly reduce them. There was a real threat not only to the income and profit of companies, but also to jobs and employment. It is true that state support for business was supposed to partially compensate for the difficulties experienced, but is it as effective as expected?

The problem. The events industry is experiencing huge losses in the difficult conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine. What changes did the quarantine conditions bring to the event industry companies in Lithuania?

The main aim. Find out changes in jobs and turnover of event industry companies in 2018-2020, according to Lithuanian Event Industries Association (RIA) data.

The tasks:

- to review the concept (definition, structure, relation to other sectors) of the event industry and reveal the development trends in the conditions of the pandemic;

- describe research methods and conditions;
- present and discuss results of research of changes in jobs and turnover of event industry companies in 2018-2020.

Used methods. The work uses co-scientific research methods: analysis (analyzing the received data), analogies (comparing data), deduction (drawing conclusions from the received data), generalization (isolating the main aspects), induction (moving from individual elements to general conclusions).

THE CONCEPT OF THE EVENT INDUSTRY AND ITS RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER INDUSTRIES

Different definitions of the concept of event can be found in language dictionaries and scientific literature. Despite different interpretations, all authors emphasize three common features: organization, planning and time limitation. In general terminology, the word "event" is an happening at a fixed time and place; a planned public or social occasion. In the context of event management, this term can be defined as "a temporary public gathering of people with a specific purpose". D. Getz (2012) sees the event as a unified combination of words, actions, and images limited in time and space, intended to reveal a certain topic and expressed by appropriate means and methods. T. Kala (2015) defines an event as a specific action or event that takes place in a certain period of time.

If the concept of an event in the texts of researchers has common features, then the name of the relevant industry is still the subject of debate. Three names prevail in the scientific literature: event industry, meeting industry and MICE industry (Meeting, Incentive tour, Convention and Exhibition).

The most common term is MICE (Palrão, Rodrigues & Estêvão, 2021; Mishra, 2020; Rogerson, 2012; Gibson, Kaplanidou & Kang 2012). This concept was introduced in 2006 based on the decision of the International Congress and Conference Association (ICCA), Meeting Professionals International (MPI) and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in order to standardize concepts and create a stronger image of the sector (Smagina, 2017).

The MICE industry is often referred to as the combined industry or integrated industry because of its role in promoting business through exhibitions and conventions (Oh, Nam-Jo, & Kim, 2021). MICE is interpreted as including the "Three Highs" - development prospects, additional advantage and innovation and modernization. In addition, it presents the "Three Larges" - high profits, job prospects and professional and trade associations; and "Three Advantages" - an advantage over competitors in terms of manpower, core competencies and resource utilization (Janakiraman, 2012).

Meanwhile, T. Rogers (2008) states that the most accurate name of the industry should be the Conference and Event Industry, since it plans, sells and provides "stage" products, which are organized events.

Another aspect of the debate is the separation of the industry, its independence or, conversely, its association with other business spheres. Most researchers (Palrão et al. 2021; Oh et al. 2021; Mishra 2020; Rogerson 2012; Gibson et al. 2012) see the event industry as part of the tourism sector. N. Smagina (2017) describes the event industry as a conceptual category of the tourism branch, which is closely related to the tourism and hospitality sector. It is an integral part of the tourism industry, which has a significant positive impact on investment attractiveness and the development of regional areas of the country's economy. The MICE industry creates added value and growth for the tourism sector (this is especially important during the low season period), creates jobs, increases international cooperation and trade, attracts investments (encourages the development of infrastructure, additional services), promotes innovation and creativity. I. Mitrofanova et al. (2021) emphasize that the event industry exists not only on the basis of the tourism industry, but also includes the fields of economy, creativity and production. Scientists, architects, musicians, information technology and entertainment specialists participate in MICE. The industry attracts many professionals working in business, finance and law.

A significant number of researchers (Ahn, Hyun & Kim, 2016; Tiecheng, Li & Namei, 2018; Mohanty et al., 2020; Drewes et al., 2021) agree that the MICE industry contributes to the development of other areas: transportation, catering establishments, accommodation companies, retail chains, advertising agencies, etc. Also, events indirectly affect many other industries, such as finance, press, food suppliers, medical services, various manufacturers, infrastructure developers, transport service providers, rental services. A large number of jobs are created in small and medium-sized businesses.

REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH ON THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE MICE INDUSTRY

The impact of the pandemic on the MICE industry is being studied extensively during the last years. It starts with the overall impact on the economy. Bernd (2022) points out that the impact of the pandemic through MICE industry on the public sector consisted of several parts: lower tax collection (due to the MICE industry itself; due to problems in related sectors, e.g. retail, accommodation, catering, transportation, entertainment, different staff rent and etc.); declining employment and increasing social benefits; shrinking investment. Other researchers examine the impact on the labor market, jobs, employment (Bakar & Rosbi, 2020). The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) mentions that about 50 million jobs are at risk. For example, in Vietnam, 2/3 of the companies in the sector reduced their staff by half, another 20% of companies completely closed (Tuyen et al., 2022).

Another group of researchers looked at the impact on the MICE industry itself: jobs, revenue, customer traffic, order volume, order cancellations and so on. (Gossling et al., 2021; Bernd, 2020; Palrao et al., 2021; Tuyen et al., 2020). Some researchers emphasize different research scales: the impact of the pandemic on the industry at the worldwide level (Gossling et al., 2021; Bremner, 2020), at the regional level (Baum & Hai, 2020; Prideaux et al., 2020), at the national level (Foo et al., 2020; Ulak, 2020), at the local level (Correa-Martínez et al., 2020; Hadi & Supardi, 2020).

It has already been mentioned that the MICE industry is closely related to other activities. It is because of the strong connection with other industries. That's why the negative impact of the pandemic had a domino effect. For example, the closing of the theater causes not only the loss of work for the team, but also for the casting agency, advertising agent, press agent, costume and technical equipment renters, and finally, for all the staff producers, developers and etc. Bernd (2022) describes the negative impact through the MICE industry as follows: direct impact on the MICE sector of the regional/national/world economy; additional negative impact on tourism and related sectors; additional negative impact in the future through infrastructure, investments and etc.

As for specific research results, the numbers show huge losses for the MICE industry. The most important results of several studies can be seen in the table 1.

Table 1

Summary of researches about pandemic impact on event and related industries

Authors	Period	Location	Main results (compared with 2019 respective period)
Gossling et al. (2021)	2020 (quarters)	Worldwide (by regions)	International visitors decrease 50-90% (2020 Q2; depends on region) Airlines capacity decrease 50-90% (2020 Q2; depends on region) Businesses registered cancelations 41 proc. (2020 Q1) Businesses temporarily laid off staff 90 proc. (2020 Q1) Tourism businesses reported difficulties paying invoices 65 proc. (2020 Q1)
UNWTO (2021)	2020 (annual)	Worldwide	Passenger traffic decline 66,6%
Bremner (2020)	2020 (forecast)	Worldwide	Inbound arrivals decrease 47% (2020, forecast) Businesses registered cancelations 73% (2020 Q2)
Bernd (2022)	2020 (annual)	Germany	International visitors decrease 62,3% Overnight stays decrease 61,1% Total revenue decrease 90%
Palrao et al. (2021)	2020 Q1	Portugal	Hotel guests number decrease 64,1% Overnight stays decrease 52,2% Total revenue decrease 70,0%
Tuyen et al. (2020)	2020 Q1	Vietnam	International visitors decrease 18% Local tourists number decrease 48%

Gossling et al. (2021) indicate industry performance in 2020 by quarter according to different regions. The worst results were in the 1st and 2nd quarters of 2020. Depending on the region, international visitors and airline capacity decreased from 50% to 90% in 2020 Q2 (about 50% in the North American and Asian regions and about 80-90% in the Middle East and European regions). At the same time globally, businesses of the sector registered 41% cancellations, around 90% of businesses temporarily laid off staff, 65% of tourism businesses reported difficulties paying invoices. Similar data is provided by the UNWTO.

It is noteworthy that studies from individual countries show similar results. The negative impact on the sector in 2020 was between half and two stretches. In Germany, number of international visitors decreased by 62,3%, overnight stays by 61,1%, and total revenue by about 90% (Bernd, 2022). In Portugal, hotels lost 64,1% of their guests, overnight stays shrank by 52,2%, total revenue by about 70.0% (Palrao et al., 2021). In Vietnam, due to the less developed tourism sector, number of international visitors decreased by 18% and local tourists by 48% (Tuyen et al., 2020).

All this proves the particularly negative impact of the pandemic on the MICE industry in any part of the world. Next, the results of the investigation of the situation in Lithuania will be presented.

RESEARCH METHODS

The initiator of the study is the Events Industry Association (RIA) (<https://www.renginiuindustrija.org>), the executor is the research group of the Business Management Faculty of Vilnius College.

The purpose of the study is connected with the desire to find out how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the RIA members in 2018-2020: employment, turnover (income) and other activity indicators.

The target population of the research consisted of companies operating in the Republic of Lithuania and supplying report sets of annual financial statements, RIA members in 2021 February-March. Thus, the total study population consisted of 44 companies. Because the number of RIA members is not statistically large, to achieve 95% confidence and 5% margin of error, the sample of respondents must consist of 40 RIA members (Creative Research Systems, n.d.), or 90.9% of all members. The research aimed to interview all RIA members or 100% of the population.

The data used in the study were collected from 10 RIA members (hereafter referred to as respondents). All survey questionnaires filled in by the respondents were recognized as suitable for further analysis. It should be noted that this sample of respondents is not statistically representative (it has a margin of error of 27,6%, maintaining 95% confidence).

The following quantitative research methods were used during the study: written survey method using Google Forms survey administration software; methods of systematization and graphic representation of descriptive statistics data using the Microsoft Excel program.

The questionnaire consisted of four blocks. The first block of 7 questions was intended to collect statistical activity data of the respondents' legal entities. The second block of 7 questions was intended to collect information about the respondents' economic activities in 2018-2020. The third block of 5 questions was intended to gather information about State support to respond to the impact of the pandemic. The fourth block of 5 questions was intended to collect information about the respondents' activity plans in 2021.

The survey questionnaire was published by Google Forms in 2021 at the beginning of February. RIA administrator shared the link to the questionnaire with the RIA members. The answers of 10 respondents were received in the period from 2021 February 23 until March 17.

Research ethics. The principles of research ethics were applied:

- The principle of benevolence. In the description of the questionnaire, respondents were invited to participate in the survey freely (voluntarily).
- The principle of the right to receive accurate information. In the description of the questionnaire, respondents were encouraged to provide information and express their opinions openly and were informed about the purpose of the study.
- Confidentiality principle. The description of the questionnaire stated that the information obtained during the survey will be considered confidential and stored in such a way that third parties do not have the opportunity to get to know it or use it. It will only be used for personalized research and delivery.
- The principle of respect for the dignity of respondents. This principle was ensured by objectively presented questions that did not involve special, desirable, possible answers that could distort the true opinion. "Other" option was added to the multiple-choice questions.

EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS

First of all, general statistical activity data were collected: legal form; year of activity registration; ongoing activities; 2018-2020 net sales revenue and etc. Most of the respondents (80%) are profit-seeking business entities. All companies have been in operation for at least 5 years, 70% have been operating for up to

10 years, and 30% for more than 10 years. All respondents are engaged in event organization, 40% of respondents are in the management of performers and 20% of respondents are engaged in other activities.

In 2019 50% of the respondents belonged to micro enterprises, 40% to small enterprises and 10% to medium enterprises. Meanwhile, in 2020 50% of the respondents also belonged to very small enterprises, and the proportion of respondents belonging to small enterprises increased to 50%.

Next, the following information was collected about the respondents' economic activities in 2018-2020: number of events, projects or orders executed and served; number of missed events in 2020; due to the impact of COVID-19 in 2020 non-received income from event execution and/or service activities; average annual number of employees; the average annual number of self-employed persons providing services related to event organization activities to the member of the RIA - performing individual activities or working with business certificates; due to the impact of COVID-19 in 2020 the number of dismissed and laid-off employees related to event organization activities.

The pandemic had a significant negative impact on the company's sales revenue. In 2018-2019, 40% of respondents' annual net sales income did not exceed €700.000, while 60% of respondents' annual net sales income ranged between €700.001 and €3.5 million. During the pandemic, sales revenue dropped significantly. In 2020 even 70% of respondents' annual net sales income did not exceed €700.000, while 30% of respondents' annual net sales income ranged between €700.001 and 3,5 million. €.

According to respondents, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 they did not receive 6,85 million from event organization activities. Further analysis showed that in 2020 the median income of the respondents from event organization activities amounted to €600.000, and statistical mode - €500.000.

The pandemic has significantly reduced the number of events and changed their structure. In 2019 the number of events organized by respondents compared to 2018 increased by 13,6%. But in 2020, due to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the events industry, the number of events organized by respondents decreased by 3,3 times or 69,3% compared to 2019 (Fig. 1).

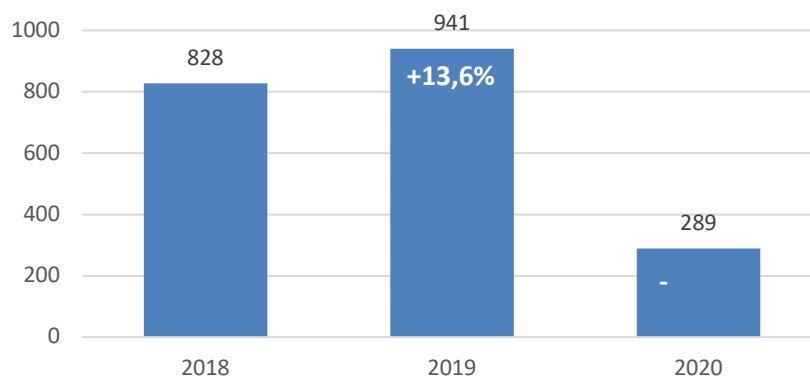


Figure 1. Overall change in the number of organized events in 2018-2020.

In 2018 all respondents organized exclusively live events. Insignificant structural changes occurred in 2019, when one respondent organized 2 hybrid events. And in 2020 the structure of events organized by respondents consisted of 80,9% live, 2,8% hybrid and 16,3% remote events (Fig. 2). It should be noted that in 2020 both Hybrid and Remote events were organized by 20% of the respondents.

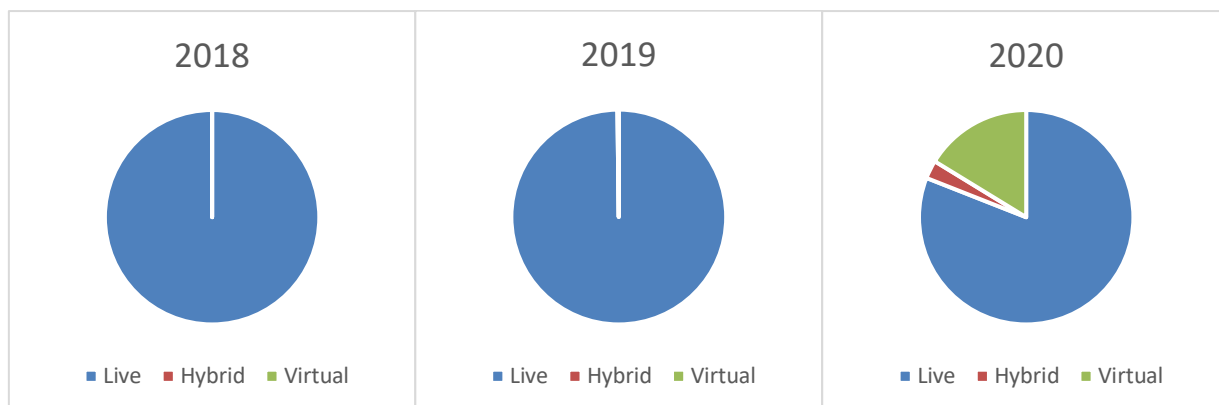


Figure 2. Structure of organized events in 2018-2020.

The decrease in the number of employees was less significant than the decrease in income.

Research data showed that in 2019 compared to 2018 the number of employees working for respondents increased by 5,0%. In 2020 compared to 2019 due to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the events industry, the number of employees working for respondents decreased by 31,1% (compared to a decrease of almost 70,0% of events and revenues).

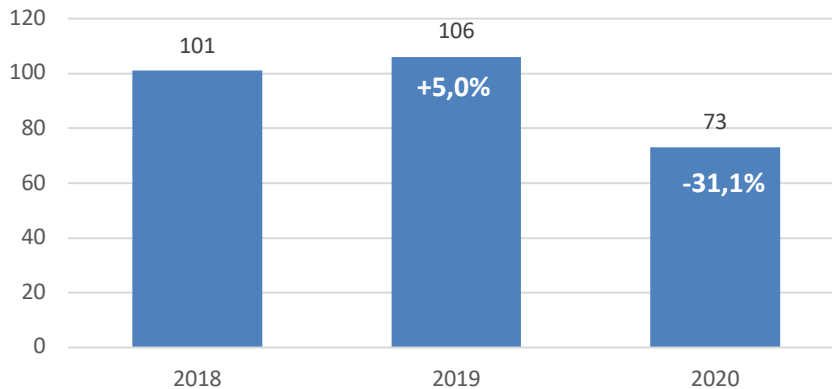


Figure 3. **Total number of employees and its change in 2018-2020.**

Respondents were asked about employee downtime due to the effect of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. 68,5% of respondents reported about their employee release. It should be noted that only 10,0% of respondents did not announce their staff downtime. It is important to state that number of employees decreased much less than number of organized events (31,1% decrease in number of employees to 69,3% decrease in number of events).

State support during the difficult period was very important. All respondents stated that in 2020 received subsidies, loans or other state-funded benefits due to the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on their activities:

- 90,0% of the respondents received subsidies of the Employment Service due to downtime for employers and self-employed (the remaining 10,0% of these subsidies were not received only because of their decision not to apply);
- all respondents sought to obtain subsidies for micro-consciousness (80,0% of the respondents received mentioned subsidies);
- rental subsidies reached 60,0% of respondents, 30,0% of respondents decided not to apply for these subsidies, and for 10,0% they did not belong;
- 60,0% of respondents signed tax loan contracts (temporal delay of paying taxes) without paying interest, 30,0% of respondents decided not to apply for these contracts, and 10,0% didn't know about such possibility.
- Invega measures (guarantees, loans, interest compensation, leasing and factoring transactions, bond purchase, etc.) awarded and received by 50,0% of respondents, for 20,0% of respondents such measures were rejected, 30,0% of respondents decided not to apply for them.

The above-mentioned State support amounts from 1% till 50% of companies' income (statistical mode was around 20%). All respondents (if they meet requirements) plan to take advantage of State aid in 2021.

Finally, information on respondents' activity plans during 2021 was collected. Particularly important question about expected future of remote (virtual) events. The opinion about organization of virtual events was radically distinguished: 50% of respondents do not intend to organize events remotely and 30% decided that they would move all events to a distance.

50% of respondents expressed the opinion that after permission to organize live events in 2021 will be given number of future live events (compared to 2019) will decrease. At the same time, 40% of respondents stated that in nearest future number of hybrid events will not change in comparison with year 2019.

It can be concluded that situation in Lithuania event industry is very similar to other countries' results.

CONCLUSIONS

The scientific literature mainly uses three names of the industry: Event industry, Meeting Industry and MICE Industry (Meeting, Incentive Tour, Convention and Exhibition). The most common term is MICE. This concept was presented in 2006, according to the International Association of Congress and Conferences (ICCA), Meeting Professionals International (MPI) and World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) to standardize concepts and create a stronger sector image.

Many researchers agree with the fact that MICE industry helps to develop other activities: transportation, catering, accommodation, retail chains, advertising agencies and so on. Events also indirectly affect many other industries, such as finance, press, food suppliers, medical services, various manufacturers, infrastructure developers, transport service providers, rental services and etc. At the same time, this means that in a crisis situation negative impact have a domino effect. Negative consequences multiply.

Pandemic restrictions struck MICE industry in high rates. Different studies indicate loss from 50% to 90% of events participants (65% in average), similar income loss. Of course, negative consequences in different regions and countries are different, but they are tangible everywhere.

According to a study conducted, pandemia had a negative impact on respondents' income and the number of events organized. The number of events decreased by 69,3% (from 941 events in 2019 to 289 events in 2020). Although the numbers are grim, they are similar to the results of other countries.

The decline in the number of employees was less significant than the decrease in income. The number of employees in the analyzed companies decreased by 31,1% (from 106 employees in 2019 to 73 employees in 2020). For comparison, the number of organized events decreased by 69,3%. This indicates that analyzed companies considers the existing difficulties as temporal and don't want to waste the staff.

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