

Higher Education Institution

ICHEC - ISC St-Louis – ISFSC Group



Long-term Higher Education Institution of University Level

# **The Impact of the Pandemic on the Event Industry: The Case Study of Project 12**

Thesis Submitted by:

**Manon Vanwoonsel**

To obtain the diploma of:

**Master in Business Administration**

**MIBM 120**

Academic Year 2020-2021

Promoter:

Mrs. Sophie Peters



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## **ANTI-PLAGIARISM COMMITMENT**

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# General Introduction

Last year, the pandemic of COVID-19 started to disrupt our lives in a way that we could not have imagined. The event industry became one of the sectors the most impacted by the virus due to the fundamental nature of an event. Indeed, as the virus spread around the globe, it also became increasingly forbidden to gather in any kind of circumstances in order to slow down its transmission.

The purpose of this thesis is therefore to analyse the impact that the pandemic has had on the event industry and, more specifically on Project 12, a Belgian event company specialized in business-to-business (B2B) events. It is the company in which we did the totality of our internship. The CEO of Project 12 kindly agreed to let us study the case of his company. The research question for our thesis will be the following:

**“What impact has the pandemic had on the event industry, and more specifically on Project 12?”**

We chose that topic for several reasons. First of all, we have been interested in the event industry for a while now. That interest comes partly from the fact that, being a scout leader, we have developed a taste for the organisational aspect of everything that has to do with the organisation and setting of a camp and therefore, by extension, an event of some kind. Being sensitive to our ecological footprint, we first wanted to focus this thesis on finding a way for event managers to reduce their wastes and be more environmentally responsible because we realize how much events can quickly become a source of a lot of wastes. Then, the pandemic started, and we started to wonder what impact it could have had on the industry. This is why we changed the focus of our thesis. Indeed, as events usually involve more-or-less large gathering of people, we thought it would be interesting to study the consequences of the pandemic on it. As time passed, the situation did not appear to change for the industry, and we started to see some companies reinvent themselves to survive the crisis. All these aspects put together motivated us to study that topic. Especially because we wanted to see how professionals were able to reinvent themselves and adapt to a particularly difficult situation.

This thesis is structured around three main parts.

We will start by giving you all the theoretical information related to our research question. We will first cover the history of the event industry and how events evolved and became an important part of our lives. Then, we will define the concept of events and event management. We will also describe the importance of the concept of experience and risk management. In this part, we will also cover the place of technologies in the industry and the role of data. Following this, the context in which this work was written will be described. To do so, we will define what a pandemic is and how COVID-19 impacted the world and the event industry more specifically. Different solutions that event managers found to survive the crisis are going to be explained. We will also present Project 12 and its CEO in this part. Lastly, the evolution of the situation since the beginning of this work will also be analysed.

The second part of this work focuses on the methodology used to collect data. Two tools are going to be used. The first one is a qualitative interview with several professionals of the industry, each one of them being specialised in a different field. One of them is of course Mr.



Cautaerts, the CEO of Project 12. The aim of these interviews is to get different perspectives on how their different businesses were impacted by the pandemic. We also wanted to know their opinions about the future of the industry. The second tool that we used is a quantitative online survey. Through our survey, we wanted to know how the general public perceived the future of the sector. Indeed, since the main focus of an event is on the consumer's experience, we wanted to see if the pandemic would have had impacted their point of view.

In the third and last part, we are going to analyse all the data collected through both our interviews and our online survey. We aimed at analysing three things. First, we wanted to know if all the companies of the sector were impacted in the same manner or not. Then, we were interested in how the companies perceive the future of their profession. Lastly, we wanted to see how the pandemic had impacted the points of view of the attendees when it comes to events and their future.

# Part I: Theoretical Information

In this part, we will gather all the necessary information and definitions to fully understand our research question which, as a reminder, is the following:

**“What impact has the pandemic had on the event industry, and more specifically on Project 12?”**

We will first look at the history of the event industry; it will allow us to understand its place in our lives and how it arrived there. Then, we will give a purely theoretical point of view of what an event is, what event management means and also a few definitions of concepts that are closely related to the event industry and its management. That will allow us to better understand the relationship between the event industry and the pandemic. In this part we will also explain the place of technologies in the event industry. We will then briefly explain the context in which this work was realised. To do so, we will give a brief definition of the pandemic and how it is affecting the event industry. We will also present Project 12, the company in which we did our internship and its CEO. Lastly, we are going to develop the latest updates we found about the evolution of the situation in the world.

## 1. History of the event industry

To really understand the concept of event management, we need to look first at its history, where does it come from and why is it such a huge part of our lives. One way or another, events have always been part of our lives. We can find traces of it in the Jewish and Christian Old Testament. (Bladen & al., 2017) It helped people and communities to connect over centuries. (Mehrotra & Lobo, 2020) According to Getz (2005 in Mehrotra & Lobo, 2020), events are important and add to the vital individual experiences, they are grounded in our ethnicity and can help to define a civilization.

Back to the Roman Era, Queen Cleopatra used to organize extravagant meetings in pursuit of lovers. Further in time, during the period of the French Royalty, huge parties and events were organised by people from high society to show off their wealth. After the industrial revolution, the event industry grew even further as wealthy people of a new kind started spending more money on hosting events. (Mehrotra & Lobo, 2020)

Today, celebrations like Christmas and Halloween are still part of our lives and have their roots in the ancient festivals mentioned in those previously mentioned sacred texts. Nonetheless, most festivals have been founded in the much more recent past but are still a common form of cultural practice. (Bladen & al., 2017)

Nowadays, events are a central part of our daily lives as perhaps never before. Whether in our private or public life, we find ways to mark important occasions. (Bowdin & al., 2010) The leisure industry is no longer seen as only for the “rich”. (Tarlow, 2002) Indeed, according to Goldblatt (2000 in Mehrotra & Lobo, 2020), the shift in income and time have led to an increase demand in events worldwide. We can now see all kind of generations attending events, from Pre-Boomers up to Gen Z. A variety of different cultural backgrounds are also attending events as attendees are able to travel the world to come to one. (Boshnakova & al., 2016) Furthermore, events now have a broader social responsibility than just the need for celebration and ritual, they can generate income, increase tourism, improve media coverage and prestige. (Brown, 2014)

We have seen huge developments in the industry since the 1980s when the profession was beginning to be more recognized. (Bowdin & al., 2010) It is now identified as an industry, with its own practitioners and the development of training programs and career paths. (Bladen & al., 2017) It used to be characterized by volunteers but as it became more complex, professionals were needed. The professionalisation of the event industry is characterized by an increase in professional training courses, research and an increased number of staged events. (Brown, 2014) Events and meetings are now businesses that employ hundreds of people and involve large amount of money. (Tarlow, 2002)

Most governments now recognize events as an asset for their economic development and a key element in promoting their country or city as a destination for tourists. It helps them to enhance their image. (Bladen, Kennel, Abson & Wilde, 2017) But this growth in the leisure industry not only brings benefits. It also increases risks and there is therefore a greater need to manage them properly to preserve a country's reputation. As we are going to see further in this work, an incident occurring at a particular location can destroy the local tourism industry or the reputation of an event. (Tarlow, 2002)

Lately, the introduction of new technologies in the industry is also revolutionizing it. Technology can be used to gather more data and improve the attendees' experiences, but it can also allow the event organizer to better prepare the event. (McVeigh Global Meeting and Events, n.d.) The development of phones and internet has also had an impact on event planning. These small devices have dramatically increased what is accessible and possible for the consumer. The latest software and websites allow events to be advertised very easily by providing formats that are user-friendly and professional. They also greatly facilitate the process of creating an event. (Mehrotra & Lobo, 2020)

The success story of the event industry and, by extension, the tourism industry, also brings its drawbacks for public health when a pandemic emerges such as COVID-19. Diseases can be carried from one nation to the next and potential violent behaviour also increases. (Tarlow, 2002)

## **2. Events and Event Management**

In this part, we will try to define the concept of events and event management to have a better understanding of it from a purely theoretical point of view. We will also explain how an event is created, from the concept to implementation. To do so, we will include all the steps that need to be fulfilled in order to produce a successful event.

### **2.1. Definition of concepts**

It is difficult to find only one definition of the concept of "event" because it depends highly on the person defining it. (Bladen & al., 2017) The difficulty also comes from the fact that festivals, sporting competitions, weddings, parades, business events, parties and so on are all captured by the title of event even though they all differ from each other in many ways. (Brown, 2014) However, in every definition we can identify the following characteristics:

- They are temporary in nature: They possess a finite beginning and end. We are able to clearly identify when they start and when they end.
- They are gatherings of people: Even though the number of attendees might highly vary greatly from an event to another, events comprise people.

- They often involve displays of ritual: Events are characterized by rituals, symbols and artefacts which themselves denote meanings.
- They are unique occurrences: Even events that take place every year are always different from one another. A music festival for example will propose different headliners every year.

(Bladen & al., 2017)

Even if events were formerly part of the travel, hospitality, leisure, and tourism industry, we have seen that it now an entire industry by itself. (Bowdin and al. in Mehrotra and Lobo, 2020) However, they still contribute to a country's reputation; they can enhance it as much as they can destroy it. Indeed, when event goers travel from abroad to attend an event, many will stay in a hotel and eat in local restaurants and, therefore, will contribute to a country's economy. The leisure industry and all its components are seen as dependent on one another. That means that a problem in one component of the event industry is bound to create problems for the local entire local industry and, in the end, has the potential to destroy it. (Tarlow, 2002) More than never, event managers need to be flexible and attentive because the attendees are various and come from all kinds of backgrounds. (Boshnakova, Goldblatt & Lee, 2016)

Events can be classified in function of their size, form, or content. When it comes to their size, events can be local or attract people from around the world, they can be quite discrete or be subject to large media coverage. (Bladen & al., 2017) They are a planned occurrence which are the outcomes of the deliberate actions of an event planner, and their success is held to achievable objectives. (Brown, 2014) No matter their sizes, events follow the same kind of patterns. (Tarlow, 2002)

To be successful, all events should at least have a clear mission and a clear vision. On the one hand, a vision statement is what the event seeks to become and to achieve in the longer term. It is often brief, precise, and motivational in nature. A mission statement, on the other hand, is usually seen as the means that are put in place in order to realize the vision of the event. It describes the tasks that need to be done. (Bladen & al., 2017)

The mission statement is then used as a basis upon which goals and objectives are set and strategies established. Goals are defined as a broad statement that seek to provide direction to those engaged in the organization of the event and objectives are used to quantify and assess progress towards those previously set goals. It allows event managers to evaluate if they have failed or succeeded to reach their goals. (Bladen & al., 2017) Objectives can be of all forms, they can concern commercial, marketing, cultural, and ceremonial purposes amongst others. (Brown, 2014)

Event management is thus the organization and coordination of the activities required to achieve the objectives of events. (Bladen & al., 2017) The three key objectives of the profession are to satisfy the strategic objectives of the organization, satisfy the customers' wants and achieve efficient use of resources. (Brown, 2014) Putting it simply, event management is the organization of an event in a professional way. It comprises planning, budgeting, selecting the site, authorization, transportation, entertainment, catering and security. (Mehrotra & Lobo, 2020)

## **2.2. The process of creating an event**

Nowadays there is a greater emphasis on event design or employing an audience centric approach. Event design is the creation, the conceptual development and the staging of an

event using event design principles and techniques to capture and engage the audience with a positive and meaningful experience. (Brown, 2014) It is the mental creation of an event, the idea the event manager has of it. In the earlier stage of event design, it used to be just the gathering of various logistical elements. But nowadays, the focus is on the attendees' experiences which is based on everything at the event, from the catering through the venue, the timing, the entertainment program and even the lighting. (Bladen & al., 2017)

To create an event properly, Goldblatt (in Bladen & al., 2017) provided a framework of five questions that should be asked and answered. These are the following:

- Why must we hold this event?
- Who will be the stakeholders for this event?
- When will the event be held?
- Where will the event be held?
- What is the event product that is being developed and presented?

The last question refers to what should be achieved in the experience of the attendees of the event. (Bladen & al., 2017) Indeed, event management is not the management of a thing but the management of all the actions and processes that will lead to staging of an experience for the participants. (Brown, 2014)

Once the questions have been answered, the event planner can then set design objectives that can be linked to an appropriate theme and the event production can begin. That step refers to the actions taken to deliver the event. (Bladen & al., 2017)

Lastly, an event theme is defined by Bladen & al (2017) as the unifying idea which gives meaning to the event or is the object of celebration or commemoration. It will influence all the aspects of the event design and production and it will serve as an effective communication medium to avoid any "leakage" of meaning between the parties involved.

### **2.3. The concept of experience**

As we briefly mentioned earlier, a characteristic that all events share, no matter their size or their purpose, is the experience they provide to their attendees. Indeed, the event industry is part of what we call the "experience economy". (Bladen & al., 2017) It is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as an economy where many goods or services are sold in order to emphasize the effect they can have on people's lives. ("Experience economy", 2020) What that truly means is that as a society we have changed our focus in the way that we consume. We used to spend a lot of money in order to own beautiful objects, such as houses or any other material elements. But with the experience economy we can see people increasingly investing in experiences that will give them unique feelings and memories they will take home afterwards.

Events constitute strong experience for customers (Richards & al., 2020) who expects from the events they attend to give them a unique experience. Participating in an event is also a way for human beings to satisfy their need for love and sense of belonging to a group. (Bladen & al., 2017)

The consumer experience is primarily based on the sensorial stimulation of their five senses, all evolving around the theme and design of the event. (Bladen & al., 2017) Experiences have to be created, they do not exist on their own and they need the input of the event organizer in

order to be activated. (Berridge, 2007) They are the packaging of a collective memory associated with a or several specific place(s) in time or space. (Tarlow, 2002)

According to Pine and Gilmore (1999 in Berridge, 2007), a good experience is one that fulfils the 4Es:

- Education: Attendees can learn something from the event
- Escapism: The event constitutes a change from their daily routine
- Entertainment: Attendees were entertained during the event
- Esthetics (Aesthetics): They were able to enjoy the physical surroundings.

(Berridge, 2007)

The experience also depends on both the event context (the opportunity) and on the visitors. The characteristics and background of attendees will affect the experience they have as much as the intentions designed by the producer. It is the interaction between these two that will build the final experience. Attendees are not passive actors; they respond to what happens during an event and are engaged in the context in which it occurs. (Richards & al., 2020)

For a lot of specialists of the industry, an experience at an event involves three dimensions that are interrelated:

- Behaviours - also called the conative dimension
- Emotions, moods and attitudes - referred to as affective dimension
- Awareness, perception and understanding - attributed to cognitive dimension

(Richards & al., 2020)

The first, the conative dimension refers to the idea that the more satisfying or memorable experiences were those where the attendees actively participated to the event and were truly involved. (Richards & al., 2020)

Concerning the affective dimension, it has attracted a lot of attention in the recent years because it is argued that it is the most important dimension of an experience. Indeed, emotional reactions to an event determine its memorability to a large extent which in turn will affect all the other dimensions. This is also related to the concept of "peak experience". (Richards & al., 2020) It is defined by the Collins dictionary as "a high point in life of someone during which the person feels ecstatic and more alive and whole than usual. ("Peak Experience", 2021) However that high point can be both positive and negative. (Richards & al., 2020) For example, the experience will be positive if it brings joy and amazement to the attendees, but it is going to be negative if an accident occurred during the event that left the spectators shocked or worried. Nonetheless, in both cases, the event differentiates itself from everyday life. (Richards & al., 2020)

The cognitive dimension for its part is mainly important in tourism which, as we previously stated, is closely related to the event industry. (Richards & al., 2020)

A fourth dimension has been added recently to the existing three dimensions, called Novelty. (Richards & al., 2020) It is defined as "something that is new and therefore interesting". ("Novelty", 2021) and is central to an event's the appeal to attendees. (Richards & al., 2020).

Even if the event organizer conceives the same event for all attendees, each attendee will leave the event with their own experience unique to himself/herself. (Berridge, 2007) Their individual experience is influenced by their proper needs and expectations but also as we said earlier, on the context within which the experience occurs and is delivered. (Richards & al.,

2020) It is impossible to predict with 100% accuracy the responses and behaviours at an event, but we can see repeated patterns of behaviour. An experienced event planner should be able to use practices and techniques that they have learned over their career to produce the expected responses. They will then be able to deliver an event that will more closely match its vision, mission, and objectives. (Brown, 2014)

## **2.4. The notion of risk at an event**

The notion of risk in event management appeared around the mid 90s as a response to event personnel working in an increasingly risk-averse environment. The industry was also subject to increasing regulations as it grew. (Brown, 2014) As a result there was a need for a formalized risk management procedure for events. Now, risk management is one of the key disciplines for the proper management of an event. (Tarlow, 2002) It is the understanding of this notion of risk that will allow us to create a link between the event industry and the pandemic.

Risk is defined by Silvers (2008) as “the unknown and the positive and negative outcomes that can be related to it”. It can concern people, property, finances, systems environment, and image. (Bladen & al., 2017) It can come in many forms such as violence, health and safety concerns or unique and unexpected weather events. (Tarlow, 2002)

The greatest crisis an event risk manager can face is the loss of life. Indeed, material goods can be replaced, but not the life of someone. The risks at an event are not limited to those that take place on site but also all those that can take place off-site and, by extension, could affect the event itself. They also encompass all the negative publicity that could come from these negative occurrences. (Tarlow, 2002)

Risks are thus closely related to the ideas of safety and security which are defined as follows. The first concerns a state or a place where you are safe and not in danger (“Safety”, 2021) while the second one refers to the protection of a person, a building, an organisation or a country against threats such as crime and attacks. (“Security”, 2021) For the attendees, safety and security issues are often interchangeable, however that lack of differentiation can have consequences. Indeed, the farther someone is from a crisis, the worse that crisis seems to last in an outsider’s memory. In addition to that, fear and rumours have greater consequences than what happened in reality. Lastly, people sometimes have a lack of knowledge in geography which means that if a crisis occurs in one small part of nation, it may affect the entire nation because people will automatically link them together. (Tarlow, 2002)

When they are not taken seriously enough, risk can not only affect the event but also other institutions and, as we saw above, the host location. Indeed, events are a form of tourism, thus when an accident happens, it can affect the destination as a whole. And the larger an event is, the larger the risks are and the more they can affect a location. Therefore, an event manager can not tolerate an environment perceived as unstable. (Tarlow, 2002)

This phenomenon is explained in Tarlow (2002) by the prism of symbolic interaction which explains that both the tourism and event industries are sensitive to image creation. Indeed, we saw earlier that events are part of the experience economy which means that the experience and memories an attendee keeps from an event is really important. Both industries sell memories and produce images. Thus, a crisis or the perception about an event crisis tend to be almost as devastating as the crisis itself for both the event and the host destination. (Tarlow, 2002)

It is interesting to know that it is always less expensive to manage a risk prior to the event than to deal with a crisis once that risk has been realised. Furthermore, guests expect a safe and secure environment. (Tarlow, 2002)

However, there is no unique theory of event risk management. The basic principle of an event risk manager's job is to keep substance from forming into the basis of a crisis and, if the crisis occurs, to contain as much as possible its secondary effects. To explain it in another way, a good risk manager is able to do a sensible assessment of potential hazards, take preventive actions to face them and contain them in case they occur anyway. It is a complicated task because the solutions to an event crisis are complex due to the complexity of each crisis. In addition to that, risks are also changeable and need to be reviewed constantly. (Tarlow, 2002)

The most commonly used practice is summed up by the letters APMC which stand for "Assess, Plan, Manage and Control" risks. It is an essential framework that helps an event risk manager to ensure they have addressed each and every risk factors. (Tarlow, 2002)

Last but not least, it is important to note that risks are not always harmful for event managers. Indeed, without risks, there is no competitive advantage. To explain it briefly, if an event manager is able to organize an event it is often because other professionals of the industry judged it as "too risky". (Tarlow, 2002)

## **2.4. Conclusion**

Thanks to all the concepts seen above, we have now a better understanding of the event industry and its management. We saw that the creation of an event is a complex mechanism which requires several steps based that generally evolve around the experience the event will procure to its attendees.

We also saw how important risk management was important to the smooth running of an event but, at the same time, the basic principles of the organisation of a successful event.

## **3. The use of technologies in the event industry**

In this part, we are going to see the place of technology in the industry and how it is already used or has been used in the past. We are also going to cover the place it might have in the future and tackle how the use of data can be beneficial for the professionals in the industry.

The use of technologies is not a new thing for event managers. It was first used in conferencing, which is a type of event, in 1961 when Braehler Company introduced its first single line system for conference communication. In 1976, 300 delegates of the United Nations were able to simultaneously communicate thanks to them. Then, in 1988, they introduced DIGIVOTE which allowed attendees to vote on proposals while being part of an online conference. (Boshnakova, Goldblatt & Lee, 2016)

Today, technologies are being used in different forms at event. (McVeigh Global Meeting and Events, n.d) They are now necessary to organize events because of the rapid growth of the industry, its complexity and its scale. It has made the life of the organizers easier and allowed them to work more efficiently. Indeed, the workload of event managers has been reduced thanks to technologies and allowed them to focus on other important aspects. (Mehrotra & Lobo, 2020)



The most common forms of technologies used in the event industry are the use of internet, social media, and livestream. (Mehrotra & Lobo, 2020)

In the last few years, social media has drastically changed the way in which event attendees communicate before, during and after events and meetings. (Boshnakova, Goldblatt & Lee, 2016) This means that the word-of-mouths travels faster than ever which can complicate the live of event organizers and event risk managers. They are almost unable to hide information from event goers. In addition to that, the access that society has to huge amount of information also leads to selective knowledge and ignorance. It means that we tend to choose what we want to know or not and, usually, we tend to be more focussed on what went wrong than what was a success. A failure can thus be devastating for the event and tourism industries. In addition to that, the perception people have about a crisis is often worse than the crisis itself. (Tarlow, 2002)

But there are also other forms of technology that are being used in the event industry. Some of them are explained briefly hereafter.

One of the forms it can take is an app specifically created for an event that contains a map of the event, its agenda, or even the biographies of the speakers in case of a conference. Such an app can allow attendees to only have access to relevant information depending on their profile. (McVeigh Global Meeting and Events, n.d) Such apps also allow organizers to interact with their attendees through their mobile phones. (Mehrotra & Lobo, 2020)

Mobile phones are also useful in conferences because they can facilitate Q&A sessions or give the ability to the attendees to vote for a topic that they would like to address during the event. A speaker can get a live feedback and can therefore adapt their presentation to the expectations and needs of its attendees. (Marom, 2020)

In some cases, events also use RFID which are chips that are incorporated into an object such as a wristband and that can then make it easier for an attendee to pay for his food for example thanks to a reader. It offers endless possibilities to the event organizer. (McVeigh Global Meeting and Events, n.d)

In business events, augmented reality is often used to showcase a product without the need to physically transport that product to the event. (McVeigh Global Meeting and Events, n.d) In the same register, projection mapping is the process by which diverse projectors are used together to create a magnificent visual display on a given surface (either in 2D or 3D). It is used to enhance the visual experience of attendees at an event. (Mehrotra & Lobo, 2020)

Lately, due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, the digitalisation of the culture has accelerated like never before. (Ess, 2021) As we are going to see later in this work, some event organizers were able to use advanced technologies and skill to build a virtual music festival from scratch. (McGlynn, 2020) Professionals of the industry are using the skills and techniques of video games to create a virtual world for their project. (Michiels, 2021)

As you can see, technologies can create great opportunities but also many new challenges for event planners, therefore they need to keep up to date. (Boshnakova, Goldblatt & Lee, 2016) Technologies are revolutionizing the individual experience of event attendees. (McVeigh Global Meeting and Events, n.d)

Their main advantages of embracing and making use of technology are that they make the work of the event planner easier and quicker. They are also cost-effective. For example, technology can allow the event planner to trace the costs of an event and also compare them

to previous similar events. Some technologies will also allow employees to communicate better with each other while organizing an event. Event professionals will get feedbacks from attendees more easily and, therefore, will be able to improve future events. It means that thanks to technologies, professionals are able to improve the planning of an event. That is mainly due to all the data collected through those technologies. (Mehrotra & Lobo, 2020)

These technologies also have downsides. They are often quite complicated to use and, therefore, can be off-putting to some event planners. They are also expensive, not only because of the capital investment needed to acquire them, but it is also costly to pay for additional employee training and formation for their employees on how to use them properly. Finally, as for almost every sector, technologies are slowly replacing the labour which leads to a growing unemployment. (Mehrotra & Lobo, 2020)

Even if technologies have inconveniences, they are now a part of the event management industry and they are here to stay. (Mehrotra & Lobo, 2020)

### **3.1. The use of data**

Data is everywhere around us, in every device we use. (Forsyth, 2016) It is defined as “information, especially facts or numbers collected to be examined, considered and used to help decision making”. Data is often stored in an electronic form and processed by a computer. (“Data”, 2021) Today data is collected from every possible fields that can be monitored digitally. (Mills, 2018) When they are all put together, they form what we call “big data” which are “very large sets of data that are produced by people using the internet and can only be stored, understood and used with the help of special tools and methods”. (“Big data”, 2021) The current volume of big data is enormous, and it keeps growing. (Mill, 2018)

In our daily lives, data is used by streaming platforms such as Spotify or Netflix to provide us with playlists and movies that correspond to our tastes. It prevents us from browsing for hours through millions of songs and shows by refining our options based on our activity. Big data is also helpful in enhancing our security, improving our online shopping experience and health services amongst other things. (Mills, 2018)

Data is not only useful in our private lives but also in our professional ones. (Forsyth, 2016) Indeed, organisations are under an increased pressure to do more with less. This is where data becomes useful. (TDConnect, 2018) They help organisation to understand the behaviour of customers and are also informative for making strategic decisions. Data can therefore be a handy tool to help businesses to be successful. (Forsyth, 2016) The event industry is no exception.

Following the growth of the event industry and the fact that it is increasingly recognized as a profession, a lot of quantitative and qualitative data has emerged and is available for analysis which can help an event organiser to engage with their audience in a more effective way and, therefore, improve the experience of the attendees of an event. (Brown, 2014)

As we are going to see further in this work, the use of data was amplified by the recent digitalisation of events due to the pandemic. Indeed, as the event have been happening online, organisers are now able to see, for example, who participated and who did not. There is more data than ever, everything is tracked. (Duchene, 2021) It is even easier to send a form to your attendees to collect data about their overall experience (Marom, 2021) or reach those who did

not take part to the event to understand why they did not see value in participating. (Duchene, 2021)

There was a time when events were highly manual, and event metrics were put together and analysed manually but nowadays event organizers have a huge amount of information available in just a few clicks. They can address and analyse things before they even happen. The more technologies are used at an event, the more data can be gathered for the event planner to improve their event because they can use event analytics to evaluate all aspects of the event. Successes and failures are high-lightened, and the event planner is able to see hidden trends or areas for improvement. (McVeigh Global Meeting and Events, n.d.) Data collection has become the most popular tool in decision making. Event managers should keep careful records. However, data is only as good as the way that it is formulated. Therefore, event managers should analyse data correctly and know which variable to analyse. (Tarlow, 2002)

The professionals use what is called practice-led research to refine their profession. It is defined as research that includes experimentation through the trialling of practices and techniques implemented at a variety of event. They are constantly tested and revised while working on actual events. Practice-led research is directed towards new knowledge that has operational significance for the practice. (Brown, 2014) We should note that data always reflects the past, never the future but, with it, we can assume that, under similar circumstances, a future incident of a similar nature may occur. (Tarlow, 2002)

However, it is important to know that too much or too little data can be harmful. There is no magic formula for knowing which facts are important for the event risk manager to transform into data. (Tarlow, 2002) One of the biggest challenges with data is to figure out the best way to process and analyse the data and make useful decisions and conclusion based on it. (Mills, 2018)

One of the fields of event management where data is really useful is in risk management. Indeed, as we said earlier, part of the risk manager's job is to ask the right questions to collect data on related topic. Event risk managers must make decisions based on past experiences and personal intuitions. (Tarlow, 2002) Big data is also influencing the near future. (Mille, 2018)

### **3.2. Conclusion**

We now saw how technologies and data found their place in the event industry. We were able to see the role that they have played until now and how they became an important element in events and event management. We also briefly explained how the pandemic pushed forward the use of technologies in the event industry. Their advantages and disadvantages were also discussed.

Some technologies, applications and programmes are making the life of the event manager easier and can help them improve their events in the future. However, they are often complicated to use and are quite expensive. Especially because event organisers also need to train their employees to use these programmes.

When it comes to data, we saw that data plays an important role in our lives and that data is everywhere around us. Data is also important for event managers because, thanks to it, they are able to perfect their event regularly based on the data collected from previous similar events. Event managers collect data from the feedbacks they receive from their attendees,

from the information they have about previous events, from what they gathered from the internet, but also from their personal experience. Put all together, event managers are able to provide an improved experience to their attendees.

## 4. Context

We are now going to explain the context in which this work was done. To do so, we are first going to explain briefly what the COVID-19 pandemic is and how it impacted our lives in general. We are then going to see how it has affected the event industry more specifically. Linked to that, we are going to see, thanks to a few examples, what has been done in the sector to compensate from the inability to gather at an event. In other words, we are going to identify the different ways that the professionals of the industry have found to remain active in these difficult times. We are also going to observe the difference in terms of subsidies made in Belgium between the North and the South of the country to help companies survive the pandemic. Lastly, we are going to introduce the company in which we did our internship and present its CEO.

### 4.1. The Pandemic

In order to properly answer to the research question, we also need to have an understanding of the ongoing pandemic. Where does it come from and how it has affected our society as a whole?

COVID-19 is an infectious disease detected for the first time at the end of 2019 in Wuhan, China and that led to a worldwide pandemic. It is part of a larger family of virus called coronavirus. It quickly became a threat to human life and to economies both nationally and globally. (Madray, 2020) It is characterized by a high variability in death rate across the world countries, mainly influenced by hospital stress which is defined by Bigiani and al. (2020) as the ratio between the number of infected cases and the total number of hospital beds.

In the early days of the pandemic, the World Health Organization stated that there was evidence of limited human-to-human transmission but quickly changed its mind. They released several statements for countries to prepare themselves for the spread of the virus and to take urgent and aggressive actions, but these statements were not exactly taken seriously. The spread of the virus was characterized as a pandemic in March 2020. (World Health Organization, 2020) At the beginning of April 2020, 206 countries had reported 885 344 cases of the diseases and 44 214 of them led to death. (Bigiani & al. 2020)

They also recognized that it would not only be a concern for human health but that it would also affect every sector. It caused an unprecedented educational disruption and, therefore, WHO partnered with the UNESCO and others to facilitate the transition and the new ways of learning. (World Health Organization, 2020)

The coronavirus pandemic is both a natural and socio political (or human) disaster. (Zenko and Kock, 2020) A disaster is defined as “a situation where an enterprise is confronted with sudden unpredictable catastrophic change over which it has little to no control”. (“Disaster”, 2021)

At the same time, the pandemic is also a crisis because it is a disruption that physically affects a system as a whole and threatens its basic assumptions. (Zenko and Kock, 2020) A crisis is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary (“Crisis, 2021) as “a situation that is extremely difficult or

dangerous, when there are many problems. In the end, the pandemic is a blend of several crisis and disaster typologies, and it is unique in scale. (Zenko and Kock, 2020)

It is not the first time our world has faced a pandemic but, due to today's hyper-globalized world, people have a higher mobility which increases the risk of rapid spread across the globe. (Bigiani & al. 2020)

#### ***4.1.1. The effect of the pandemic on the event industry***

Now that we have an understanding of the pandemic, we must consider how it is related to our research question and what exactly the link between them is. To do so, we defined earlier the notion of risk in relation to an event. In this part, we are thus going to explain how the pandemic constitutes a type of risk for an event.

As a brief reminder of what was said earlier, a risk is defined by Silvers (2008) as “the unknown and the positive and negative outcomes that can be related to it”. The pandemic thus represents a new kind of risk to consider when organizing an event. Indeed, as the virus is transmitted through small droplets from the nose or mouth and as events usually involve large numbers of people gathering in a specific locality, an event would be an ideal environment to quickly spread a virus. (Madray, 2020 and Bladen & al, 2017)

According to Correia & al. (in Madray, 2020), the effect of a pandemic on the economy depends on the severity of that pandemic, and how aggressively and the speed with which it was tackled. If actions were taken early enough, then a possible growth in the economy is possible during the post pandemic stage. However, if it was tackled too late then there are going to be disastrous effects. (Correia & al. in Madray, 2020)

As stated in the Portuguese Economic Journal (Correia, Rodrigues and Smeral, 2020), the worldwide tourism industry registered a decrease of 57% in March 2020 and was predicted to continue decreasing. This will also affect the event industry because, as we said earlier, the two industries are closely related with events considered as a significant tourist asset for the host destination which generate strong economic and social benefits by attracting visitors. (Soteriades and Dimou, 2011) Furthermore, as the event industry is a business based on people coming in together in huge numbers and celebrating an occasion, the industry is badly impacted by the crisis due to all the restrictions that have been imposed by governments concerning the gathering of people. (Madray, 2020)

Therefore, it is still too early to exactly determine the impact of COVID 19 on the global market and more specifically on the event industry because the pandemic is still ongoing. However, some numbers are already out. In August 2020, the industry registered a loss of about \$666 million since April due to the cancellations and the postponements of events. More that 85 million jobs are at stake. (Madray, 2020)

A pandemic can have all kind of effects on direct costs in terms of awareness and treatments, and long-term burdens in terms of loss of earnings or the loss of lives and indirect costs in terms of decline in GDP. (Qiu & al. in Madray, 2020)

In the case of the live music industry, the pandemic highlighted a broken system of refunding tickets in the sector. (Rothschild and al., 2020) Indeed, as soon as the events started to be cancelled in March 2020, organizers, promoters, and ticketing companies had to deal with the desire of attendees to receive a refund. That effect was further increased as it became clearer

that the industry would not be able to resume its activity in the near future. (Salkowitz, 2021) The professionals of the music industry had limited experience of refunding tickets on a large scale, so they had to adapt. (Rothschild and al., 2020) For example, Live Nation, one of the biggest ticketing companies in the world saw its 2020 revenue decreased of 84% compared to 2019. (Salkowitz, 2021)

Another problem for the live music industry has been that with the postponement of festivals, organisers have needed to constantly renegotiate the different artists' fees. This has been a complicated task for them as the situation has kept changing and organisers are never sure what they can offer artists. The financial losses of festivals are important and the help they have received was not always sufficient. They found themselves waiting for clearer perspectives and measures, but these do not seem to come. (Coljon, 2021)

As the tourism and event industry are closely related, it is important to know how badly the pandemic has impacted the image of certain destinations, especially those that were particularly impacted by high infection rates. The proportion to which a location was impacted by the virus might have altered its image and, therefore, impacted the perception people have had of its nightlife, tourism, events and crowds. (Zenker and Kock, 2020)

The different restrictions have also had a social impact on people. They are starting to fear to travel or to gather. When analysing the impact of the pandemic we must also consider the lives and employment that have been at stake. (Madray, 2020) A contagious disease can make local people less welcoming to foreigners. It is also mentioned in the article of the Tourism Management that pathogen threats like a virus can make people more alert and more likely to avoid crowds. (Zenko and Kock, 2020)

#### ***4.1.1.1. The subvention difference between Wallonia and Flanders***

During our research, we discovered that there was some kind of difference between the subventions received in Wallonia and Brussels and those received in Flanders to survive the crisis. We thought it was an interesting topic to cover so we are going to analyse how big this difference is.

As it was explained in the article in Le Soir (Belga, 2021), there is a significant difference between the help provided by the different regions in Belgium to the companies impacted by the crisis. Take the case of the catering services for example. When you compare the subsidies three caterers received in 2020 for the same period, there is a gap between the companies located in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels even though they have more or less the same turnover. Indeed, a caterer located in the North of our country received nearly 120 000€ while the one in Wallonia only received 13 000€ for the same period. (G. & M., 2021)

That difference between the regions is also noticeable when you consider the summer festivals in Belgium. The Flemish Government unlocked a guarantee fund of fifty million euros to help event organisers start preparing for the festival season. To that, they added ten million just to help them put sanitary measures in place. Indeed, Flanders ministers of tourism and entertainment said last February that every event that could take place in a safe manner will take place. (François, 2021) In Wallonia, companies do not have access to that guarantee fund and their government is not planning to provide one. However, actors from the North of the country find it important to point out that the guarantee fund will have to be reimbursed if the event takes place, even if it was not a success. (G. & M., 2021)

The difference between Flanders and the two other Belgian Region is explained by the fact that, in the North, they did not make any difference between the different actors of a sector (Belga, 2021) and the help is based on a company's size. (G. & M., 2021) Take the example of the HORECA industry. In Flanders, every actor that was impacted by the crisis and the seizure of the normal course of their activities can benefit from subsidies based on the size of their company and its turnover whereas in Wallonia the government made a difference between the different kind of actors in the sector. Therefore, not all companies in the South of the country can benefit from subsidies. This is the case of producers and distributors in the HORECA sector for example. (Belga, 2021)

All those differences create a distortion of the competition between the South and the North of the country. (Belga, 2021) The actors of the sector do not understand why they are paying taxes and their VAT to the Federal State of Belgium but are dependent on the regions for their subsidies. (G. & M., 2021)

Fortunately, some changes were introduced lately in Brussels and Wallonia to cover that gap that was created between the three regions over the last year. (G. & M., 2021) Let's hope it is going to be sufficient to rebalance the inequality.

#### **4.1.2. Online events**

Because of the pandemic, the normal course of business of the event industry has gone through some changes and a lot of them went online. This is why in this part we are going to present a few examples of what have been done since the beginning of the pandemic to compensate for the events that couldn't take place.

The pandemic has seen an increase in virtual events (Madray, 2020) Indeed, the last year accelerated a move in the digital sphere for the event industry from a year to only a few months. It is not only the event industry that had to adapt to the situation, but the digital sphere also had to change to keep up with our needs as attendees looked for an authentic experience in a virtual world. (Marom, 2021)

In the case of conferences and exhibitions, online events often take the form of webinars with slides and the voice of the speaker or a compilation of exhibition flyers and website links. (Lee, 2021) Other examples of how technologies have been used in these times of pandemic are described below.

New technologies will not replace the real-life experience, but they could give a foretaste of events and therefore, make customers want to go the events in person once the situation has changed and at the same time also affect the seasonality of some destinations. (Sainaghi, Mauri, Ivanov and d'Angella, 2018) Indeed, as we said earlier, events and tourism are closely related and offer great returns for the host destination. (Soteriades and Dimou, 2011)

One way to promote a destination is by the use of virtual reality headsets that can immerse people in a whole other environment and, therefore, allow an event manager to showcase their event beforehand, or for tourist to see their future holiday location before they go there. It was used, for example, by the organizers of Coachella in the United States. They created a virtual reality app that allowed the future attendees to have a 360-degree view of what previous festivals had looked like. (McVeigh Global Meeting and Events, n.d)

Online events present a certain number of advantages:

- Low costs: Online events costs considerably less than conventional ones
- Modern advertising techniques: The pandemic forced companies to focus on social media and what they could offer to them in terms of advertising. They had to strengthen their positions on these.
- Global presence: More than anywhere else, borders barriers are removed online. People can gather virtually and go through this crisis together
- Increased personalization: During big events, due to the presence of many people and the large area it takes place at, personalisation is often lost. But with online events, the possibilities are endless. It is event possible to personalise the experience for every attendee.

(Madray, 2020)

According to a survey from PCMA (Professional Convention Management Association), some professionals in the event industry are also using the time created by the pandemic to improve their skills. They mainly focus on the technologies and online platforms they could use to perform their job. (Madray, 2020)

But no matter how good companies are adapting and using technologies such as live chat, webinars and online event, it will not replace the revenue generated by big events. (Madray, 2020) Indeed, some companies do not believe in online events and do not get the same kind of return on investment. (Haynes, 2020)

We are now going to present several events where their organisers have been creative during the pandemic.

#### **4.1.2.1. Fashion week 2020**

The Fashion Week of 2020 is one of the many examples of how technology has been used during these pandemic times. First, we need to briefly explain what Fashion week is.

The Fashion week is basically the moment when the top designers and luxury houses of the industry show their upcoming collections in runway shows and presentations. (Hoo, 2015) It is part of what we call the Fashion month, and it takes place in different big cities usually around February and September. Each week of the month is held in a different city. These are New York, London, Milan and Paris. Other cities can also hold a Fashion Week but these four are the most famous ones. (Benakki, 2020)

As you must have guessed, the different Fashion Weeks usually involve the gathering of professionals of the industry, as well as celebrities and journalists as well as a lot of travelling to those different cities. (Hoo, 2015) However, this year, to avoid the gathering of people during the pandemic, some of the shows of the Fashion Week 2020 have been organised online. (Browchuk, 2020)

Even if everything went well for a lot of them, designers felt that the sensorial dimension was missing during the online shows. At the same time the digitalization of such events also offers great opportunities to event planners in the sense that they can be more creative than ever as you are completely free. (Browchuk, 2020) According to McDowell (McDowell, 2020), it was a chance to demonstrate what you can do with digital and virtual format; the point is not to copy paste exactly what you would do in real life but more to exit those boundaries and come up with something different.



#### **4.1.2.2. Live Stream Concerts**

Concerts have in recent years become the main source of income for artists and their managers as the revenue generated by the sales of their album disappeared with the emergence of online platforms such as Spotify. (Peckham, 2020) Unfortunately since the beginning of the pandemic, an unprecedented number of live music events have been either cancelled or postponed. There are thousands of them worldwide. (Rothschild and al., 2020) Indeed, social distancing and self-quarantine make performing live music and attending shows impossible. (Frank, 2020) In March 2020, some experts estimated that the loss of the music industry would amount to a loss of up to five billion of dollars. A month later, that estimation was increased to almost nine billion of dollars if the situation were to not improve for the rest of the year, and we all know it did not. Thousands of employees were laid off in 2020 and will not get a job back in the industry any time soon because the situation does not seem to change. (Rothschild and al., 2020)

The live music industry was one the first industries to close at the beginning of the pandemic and will probably be one of the last one to reopen because, at the time of writing, no one knows when or even if concerts and tours will be able to resume. (Rothschild and al., 2020) Even if fans find that has been difficult to have their favourite concert postponed or cancelled, it has been even more difficult for the artists as their tours are their main source of revenue. (Frank, 2020)

As for every type of event, a lot of concerts have been brought online to compensate for the absence of live shows and the pandemic pushed the professionals of the music industry to experiment with virtual concerts. (Peckham, 2020) It was important to find solutions as music while in isolation never felt more necessary, as everyone knows. (Frank, 2020)

In Belgium, for example, a Belgian company recently reproduced a virtual version of the "Ancienne Belgique, a concert venue in Brussels. It is called "Nouvelle Belgique". The virtual venue is like a video game. Once you bought your entry pass, you can pick an avatar and personalise it. Attendees can make that avatar dance, run, or even fly during the performance of the artist. It is almost like attending a real show. (Michiels, 2021) It wasn't the first time that artists have performed shows in video games but was usually in an existing game rather than in one that was only created for that purpose. In 2008, U2 performed in a game called "Second Life" and, more recently, DJ Marshmello and the rap artist Travis Scott performed in Fortnite. (Ess, 2021)

The first virtual concert took place on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April 2021 and was performed by the Brussels rap artist Zwangere Guy. He also had an avatar in his image. (Michiels, 2021) He and his musicians were wearing motion capture suits and their avatars were thus reproducing their exact movements. That kind of infrastructure is used in order to reproduce the conditions of a real concert and to avoid the audience having the sensation of doing a zoom call. (Ess, 2021)

One advantage of such performances is that there can be an unlimited number of attendees. (Michiels, 2021) The attendees were also able to request a particular song from the artist thanks to the chat box incorporated in the game. It made the show more interactive. Last but not least, the technologies used for those kinds of performance offers even more creative opportunities than live shows. (Ess, 2021) The Ancienne Belgique still hope to keep that form of performance once real concerts will be able to resume. (Michiels, 2021)

But the concert of the Ancienne Belgique wasn't the first experience in its kind in the country. Indeed, last summer, due to the cancellation of the festival and the impossibility of in live concerts, the organisers of Tomorrowland created an interactive virtual world called "Papillonem" for the Tomorrowland Around the World Festival. It gathered more than sixty artists that were performing brand new sets in front of a green screen in different locations around the world. Attendees were able to go around that virtual world and its different stages by clicking around. (McGlynn, 2020) In addition to the artists performance, they also put in place different talks and panels with well-known people of the entertainment industry as well as games and workshops. (Belga News, 2020) For the summer 2020 edition, they sold normal ticket to the event but also what they call "re-live tickets" to give the opportunity to people to re-live the different performances once the event ended. (McGlynn, 2020) They also sold merchandise and party packages to complete their offer. (Barrionuevo, 2020)

Artists do not always perform concert as such, they also produced at spontaneous short, live performances on platforms such as Instagram and YouTube. The incentive often came from artists that were also stuck at home and wanted to make that time more enjoyable for their fans. They distract them from the reality for an hour or so. That kind of casual show was also a fun way to discover your favourite artist from another perspective. It was a kind of immersion in the artists' real life and offered an emotional connection with the fans. Some artists like Miley Cyrus even hosted live sessions on their social media just to interact with their fans and share their feelings about the situation or give them life hacks in general. (Frank, 2020)

An example of an event that is in-between the casual shows and the professional live stream concert is the series of Instagram Live that was launched by the US artists Timbaland and Swizz Beat. That series is called Verzuz and it is a battle of different well-known artists. Some of the biggest names of Rap, R&B and Hip Hop came to play their legendary tunes. Fans that followed the live streams argued about the potential winner of the battle while watching it. (Gaffney, 2021) The well-known DJ Diplo also came up with a series of live shows on Twitch, another streaming platform. It is called "The Corona World Tour" and different DJs came to play their sets in it. (Frank, 2020)

Even if casual shows are great, organised live stream concerts which are replicas of real ones convey the feeling that the artists are more legitimate as people are buying their tickets and, therefore, creating some financial compensation for the performers. (Frank, 2020)

As everyone is stuck at home, artists are able to give it a try at live stream concerts. Even if their online performance is not amazing, fans will undoubtedly forgive them because it will always be better than nothing at all. (Peckham, 2020) Even if online shows, whether professional or casual ones, will never replace the feeling of attending a show in person, they are still helping to keep the public arts alive while we are in lockdown. (Frank, 2020)

Even Live Nation, one of the biggest actors in the live music industry, adapted its website to promote the upcoming list of virtual concerts. (Peckham, 2020)

However, not all concerts were organised online. Some of the big actors of the industry had to come up with other things to do with their venues but also think of ways to retain customers or generate much needed capital. Some of them offered incentives and goodwill actions to their customers to compensate for the postponed or cancelled events instead of refunds. For example, in the USA some concert venues organised online farmer markets where people could purchase goods produced locally. Customers were also offered the opportunity to buy

goods for those in need. Such actions benefited the community as a whole. (Rothschild and al., 2020)

As we saw earlier in this work, the pandemic also has also highlighted that in the live music industry the system of refunds was broken. Indeed, big corporations in the sector were usually quite resistant to the idea of refunding a ticket when an event is cancelled. Nonetheless, ticket refund policies became clearer and more visible as the virus gained in importance. They were exercised as never before. Obviously, refunds for cancelled events were more important than those for postponed ones which could be expected to take place at a later date. Furthermore, some companies offered alternative advantages to their customers to compensate for the absence of a refund. (Rothschild and al., 2020) According to the CEO of Live Nation, 83% of the fans are still holding tickets for postponed events and did not choose to get a refund. (Salkowitz, 2021)

Because of this sudden focus on reimbursement policies, some big actors of the industry received bad press and their reputations were impacted because they did not offer any refund which was judged as unfair by many people. (Rothschild and al., 2020)

A question still persists: Will live stream concerts remain once large-in person gatherings are permitted again?

From the point of view of their attendees, they will always be a solution for unvaccinated people to attend their favourite artist performance while staying in the comfort of their home. Furthermore, the live stream concerts guarantee a front-row seat to its viewers. (Gaffney, 2021)

From the artists' perspective, the survival of live stream concerts in a post-pandemic time will depend on how "big" the artist is. Indeed, for middle tier artists, live stream concerts are an opportunity to engage with fans that are geographically dispersed. They also generate income and, thus, might become an important part of their business portfolio even after concerts are authorized again. In contrast, live stream concerts will not really make financial sense for bigger international artists that are generally able to perform in arenas and stadium. (Peckham, 2020) Virtual concerts also offer another kind of experience both to the artists and the attendees. They are a mix of known emotions and new sensations. (Ess, 2021)

Professionals are still exploring the possibilities of those kind of performances, whether it is by hosting elaborate concerts or by giving spontaneous casual performances on their social media. (Frank, 2020) The public health crisis has definitely been an accelerator for the digitalisation of the culture. (Ess, 2021)

In the case of Tomorrowland, they plan on keeping a virtual version of the event even once live events are re-instated. (McGlynn, 2020) They especially plan on having a winter edition of the festival that would supplement the summer one in the future, for New Year Eve for example. Their investment in the 2020 digital festival might become an annual event that they plan to improve as well. (Barrionuevo, 2020) They believe it will give the opportunity to access the event to people who would not normally be able to attend it. (McGlynn, 2020) The organisers of the event believe that digital events are going to exist in parallel to live ones. For them, as for many, it is just another kind of experience. An improvement that they are planning is to provide the ability for attendees to interact more with each other. (Barrionuevo, 2020)

#### **4.1.2.3. Charity Events**

Charities were not spared by the pandemic. Indeed, different charities were forced to organize their fundraisers on online platforms. Such as the case for example for the American Lung Association or the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. (Hayne, 2020)

Instead of their traditional annual trip to Israel, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee organized an Israel virtual trip through an hour long tour each weekday evening led by a travel guide based in Israel. (Haynes, 2020)

As for many other types of event, charities reported that online gatherings do not bring in as much money as in person events. (Haynes, 2020) Many exhibitions have been disappointed with their return on investment online and also felt that they had missed opportunities to find new clients. (Lee, 2021) It is indeed more difficult to convince new advocates to participate in an online event. Not to mention that it is also more complicated to create links with them this way. (Haynes, 2020) They are missing the live interactions they are usually able to have during in-person events. (Lee, 2021 and Haynes, 2020) They are not the only stakeholders that have been frustrated, as attendees were also frustrated by the missed opportunities to interact with peers. (Lee, 2021)

#### **4.1.2.4. Sport events**

Obviously, as sport events usually involve thousands of attendees gathering as spectators, and without even including the athletes, the industry was also impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Massive sport events were either cancelled or postponed. That was, for example, the case of the Olympics of Tokyo or even the Tennis Tournament of Wimbledon. (Westmattelmann & al., 2020).

Even though staying active is important for the general physical and mental health of everyone, and though sports are the main source of revenue for professional athlete, sport is also a threat for everyone. Indeed, it was proven that the spread of the virus is more severe during physical activity and, in addition to that, it also has been proven that sport events often favour the spread of infectious diseases globally as they bring together people from all over the world. (Westmattelmann & al., 2020)

The pandemic created opportunities for a new kind of applications offering the possibility to its users to engage in physical activities and to interact with each other while embedded in a virtual world. Take the example of SWIFT, an app that allows its users to connect their bike to an app and use a smart trainer. Their physical performance is transferred through sensors to an avatar. Users are then able to either train with their friends or even compete in well-known races while being active from their own homes. The app helps its user to escape the difficult situation we are currently in by interacting with each other in a virtual place while also doing sports. (Westmattelmann & al., 2020)

That application was not only used by private individuals. It has also been used by professional athletes in the Tour de France 2020 last July. In fact, according to the investigation made by the European Journal of Information Systems (Westmattelmann & al., 2020), such applications are suitable for conducting realistic and serious competitions during the current pandemic and also during future ones. It has been proven that performances in virtual races resemble real

performances and that the physical skills needed to perform both virtual and live races are comparable.

A downside of virtual races is that there is a fear of data manipulation by competitors. Athletes are also concerned that some factors of performance might be inaccurate in such an application. (Westmattelmann & al., 2020)

Such applications might become crucial in the future to help decrease the spread of current and other viruses by allowing people to practise physical activity whilst remaining home. (Westmattelmann & al., 2020)

Furthermore, virtual professional sport events might also complement real competitions beyond the pandemic era. By becoming part of our lives, it will allow athletes to avoid unnecessary travel to events where they are generally in contact with a lot of persons. That in turn will help reduce the propagation of future viruses. Virtual races will also prevent financial losses in case a race is cancelled. In addition to that, virtual competition can also provide additional data about athletes' performance to them and their coaches. Even the spectators of the competition would be able to see those information. In a normal race they would not have access to such data. It also offers great opportunities to organise virtual events with fans before competition. (Westmattelmann & al., 2020)

Only a few questions remain about the virtual competitions, should virtual sports become an entirely separate discipline from the traditional ones with its own characteristics or should it resemble the traditional sport as closely as possible? Should it have its own independent institutions responsible for its regulations or should it be part of existing sport federations? (Westmattelmann & al., 2020)

#### **4.1.2.5. Corporate events**

Obviously, the digitalisation of events also benefited corporate ones. The pandemic offered an opportunity to rethink conferences and unlocked exciting possibilities for corporations. With digital seminars, attendees can be more engaged and challenged, they have more chances to grow and learn. Indeed, it is easier to make them connect with the speaker. (Marom, 2020)

Thanks to the technologies available, the CEOs and key leaders of the world are now able to present themselves and their ideas worldwide through holoportation at a fraction of the cost of traveling abroad. (Marom, 2021)

However, the attendance rate for corporate online events highly depends on whether the event is open to the public or exclusive. Corporations tend to have a higher participation rate for closed events, especially if attendees had to pay for it. (Duchene, 2021)

## **4.2. Project 12 and its CEO**

In this part we are going to introduce the company on which our research question is based as well as present its CEO. Project 12 is the chosen company because it is where we did our internship. This is interesting because it will give us an understanding of the CEO's point of view about the industry and his background as an event organizer. We will also briefly introduce you to Kastar, another company he possesses that is also related to the event industry.

Project 12 was founded in 2013 by Mr. Sven Cautaeerts, a self-driven entrepreneur, and his wife, Eline Somers. Mr. Cautaeerts built his passion for the event sector way before he started working in it professionally. It is thus relevant to know his story to better understand why he created this company and how he arrived there. (Cautaeerts, 2021)

He started his adventure with event management as a student, by organizing students' parties on his campus. By doing so, he realized that he loved it and decided to stop studying law to reorientate himself towards communication studies with a specialization in event management at VUB, Brussels. His parties were a huge success and he managed to book some well-known artists such as Mark With A K, a well-known Belgian DJ. At the same time, he also had multiple student jobs that allowed him to work directly at events whether it was in catering, building the stages or placing cables, Sven Cautaeerts did it all. (Cautaeerts, 2021)

Once he graduated, he started working in an event agency. He worked in the project management department and took care of the budgets, site investigations and coordination amongst other things. There, he also learned to organize commercial fares and to present them to potential customers. (Cautaeerts, 2021)

At some point, in 2013 more precisely, he decided he wanted to start working for himself. That decision added another competence to his skills, he had to find his own clients and, therefore, take care of the account management part of business. This is how Project 12 was born. (Cautaeerts, 2021)

Project 12 is a business with two different sides. On the one hand, they play a role similar to an event agency specialized mainly in corporate events. For example, they organize team building activities or even incentives in another country. Businesses are attracted to come to Project 12 instead of a bigger agency because they are cheaper or because they want someone that will take care of everything. On the other hand, Sven Cautaeerts works as a freelance for some agencies that ask him to pitch an idea for an event in a sort of competition with other freelancers. If he wins, he gets to organize the event for that agency and is then paid for the days he works to organize it. (Cautaeerts, 2021)

These two aspects of business create a sort of competition with the other agencies. Indeed, by creating events for companies, he competes with other agencies that tend to do the same or even the agencies that hire him as a freelance. It was thus important for him to clearly specify that his customers were small businesses and not big companies. He had to reassure the agencies for which he works as a freelance that he would not steal their customers. Often, these small businesses can not afford the services of bigger agencies. (Cautaeerts, 2021)

For one aspect or the other, his activities are often focused on B2B activities, which means that he mainly organizes events for businesses, even as a freelance. According to him, it is easier and less risky. Indeed, to organize B2B events, companies come to him with a budget on which he takes a margin afterwards. All the costs are supported by those businesses, he does not have to invest any money from his pocket, and he does not have to bear the risks of a failure in terms of participation. (Cautaeerts, 2021)

But his true interest is still on B2C events such as festivals. Unfortunately, to organize such event you often have to invest yourself in it. You will never have a company, or someone coming to you and ask you to organize a music festival for a certain amount. It is thus also a lot riskier to organize B2C events in case they are not successful enough. It is a bit like speculating, you never know whether your idea is going to work, you must risk it. (Cautaeerts,

2021) This is something that Tarlow (2002) agreed on. Indeed, we saw that without that risk taken, there is no competitive advantage.

When talking about the event industry, Sven Cautaerts feels that there are two sides to the business. On the one hand there is the organization of the event and on the other hand there is the production of the event. A project manager will organize an event like an agency would by preparing the budget, imagining the concept, taking care of the marketing, etc. Then there is the production manager who is under the project manager and who will take care of all the practical aspects. He is going to take care of the staff, the assembly and dismantling of the stages or even the toilets that need to be put at the event. (Cautaerts, 2021)

In his career, he has done both and liked doing both. Indeed, Sven Cautaerts describes himself as someone who is versatile. He prides himself on being able to do almost everything and being specialized in nothing. As opposed to what other specialists from the industry would recommend him, he decided not to choose any specialty. He wanted to keep working on all aspects of the sector. However, he admits that the pure creative aspect of event management is not his strong suit but if you give him a concept or an idea for an event, he will be able to build it from scratch. He is very good at all the whole logistical side of the business, in organization and management. (Cautaerts, 2021)

Thanks to the network he built over the years, he is always able to find someone to help him reach his goals. He will not do everything by himself, but he is capable of finding the right people to help him do it. (Cautaerts, 2021)

Another strong suits of his, is the fact that he has experience in almost every aspects of the industry. As we said earlier in this work, he was once a steward, a caterer or part of a security team. Those experiences allowed him to build a strong knowledge and understanding of the sector that helps him a lot in his work. (Cautaerts, 2021)

For him, the most important skill you need to have in order to work in the event industry is that you need to be thorough. It is important to think every detail in advance to be prepared for every situation. You should consider everything, even the number of toilet rolls supplied with the toilet rental or where the water comes from. (Cautaerts, 2021)

Compared to the theoretical information we covered earlier; this skill is closely related to risk management. Indeed, a very important detail you need to carefully think of is the evacuation plan for the venue you are using for your event. The owner of the venue will for sure have one, but you need to have access to it and, more importantly, you need to be able to put it into action if an emergency appears. (Cautaerts, 2021)

Being fully prepared for every situation is crucial according both to the theory we have seen and to the CEO of Project 12. Indeed, it is only by preparing every possible scenario that you will be able to act efficiently in case something occurs.

Mr. Cautaerts describes this process as doing what he calls “Monkey Business”. It is a method that allows you to be well-prepared for an event. To implement it, you need to imagine yourself in the shoes of a participant and retrace every step he would take to attend your event. All details should be considered, from the moment he leaves his place to go to the event until the moment he would go back home. It includes the routes he will take to arrive, the way he will get into the event, what he is going to eat, and drink and all the other things related to his experience at the event. Keep in mind that before an event occurs, you can not really do more than planning for it, but you should have prepared all the possible scenarios. The “Monkey

Business” exercise is therefore important, and you should present it to a small group of people that will, hopefully, think of something that you may have forgotten to include. (Cautaerts, 2021)

When it comes to programs and technologies, even though a lot of them exist on the market to help event organizers to plan an event, Mr. Cautaerts does not use any of them except from Excel. He feels like you can do everything you want with it. It can help you create checklists so that nothing is forgotten, but it also allows you to manage your budget properly. The only other program he uses is one that is able to help him manage his different e-mail addresses. Indeed, when you have different businesses like he does, it is important to manage all of your incoming emails. It is especially important because in addition to his, he is often copied-in on emails that his co-workers are sending and receiving. He also keeps everything he needs on Drive. It is reliable as long as you organize your Drive well and it gives access to everyone to everything they need while participating in the organization of an event. (Cautaerts, 2021)

In his opinion, one of the most difficult parts of his work as an event manager is the limited knowledge of the customers. Even if they think they have some knowledge in the event industry, it will always be less than the knowledge of a professional. Unfortunately, before the pandemic, a lot of unprofessional people were promoting themselves as event organizers. It meant, amongst other things, that customers would come to Project 12 with disproportionate desires based on what they found on the internet. They would expect some services for a very low price because they found something similar on some website. But, very often, what they found was not proportionate with the budget of their event or was of very poor quality. (Cautaerts, 2021)

In addition to that, clients tend to change their minds very often and this even a few hours before the beginning of the event. But as Mr. Cautaerts said himself, it is part of the job of the event manager to prepare for this type of unexpected decision. Once again it shows the importance of the preparedness necessary to organize an event properly. (Cautaerts, 2021)

The last difficulties for Mr. Cautaerts, is the difficulty of selling your services to clients. Indeed, linked to the people promoting themselves as event managers, is the fact that they are often cheaper even though they do not have any network or true experience in the industry. They just call themselves private event managers because they have a few props at home and know someone with a clown costume. It is thus hard to compete with them on some events because they are obviously cheaper, and Project 12 needs to find ways to justify their range of price. That difficulty is enhanced by the fact that it is not possible to digitalized everything nor show the quality of your services on paper. It is thus difficult for him to justify his price range. (Cautaerts, 2021)

#### **4.2.1. Kastar**

Kastar is another business owned by Sven Cautaerts. Through that company, he helps event’s organizers by providing the necessary staff or even volunteers for their festivals or other events. They are often recruited amongst Belgian student associations and scout groups. In a nutshell, their working contracts are mainly with students and young people. They provided staff for events such as Dour or Tomorrowland amongst many others. (Cautaerts, 2021)

The activity of Kastar obviously had to stop during the pandemic as no events were organized. However, Mr. Cautaerts hopes he will be able soon enough to resume its activity in that area. (Cautaerts, 2021)



### **4.3. Conclusion**

We now saw how the pandemic of COVID-19 constitute a risk for event manager. We explained where it started and the basic principle of a pandemic. We were able to outline the extent to which the coronavirus has impacted the industry but also how it might have long-lasting effects on it.

We also took some time to identify how different players of the sector reinvented and adapted themselves to the situation. Many of them moved their events to an online platform and other found new ways to use their venues for example. The use of technologies and the internet presented a lot of advantages both for the organisers and the spectators. The main positive aspect of online events is that they offer greater creative opportunities for an event. But, as for many things, they also have downsides. The main one being that there is sometimes the lack of social interaction between attendees.

Lastly, we presented Project 12. We developed how it was created by Mr. Cautaerts and how he arrived there. We also covered what was his point of view on technologies and, more importantly, how he perceived the job of event organiser. Generally, the theory and his opinion coincided. The main difference was the place of technologies in his work. Indeed, Mr. Cautaerts does not really use advanced programmes to help in his daily job, he only uses basic ones. He also highlighted the difficulty he regularly faces in justifying his tariffs because of the impossibility of demonstrating the quality of his work on paper. Thanks to what Mr. Cautaerts told us, we were also able to confirm that the experience of the customers is at the centre of attention of an event manager. This is why it is important for them to be versatile.

## **5. The evolution of the situation**

Since we started this work, the situation has changed globally. We are starting to see some improvements for the event industry. We saw how badly the event industry was impacted by the pandemic and how creative some professionals have been to compensate for their loss. Nevertheless, we now want to analyse what are the perspectives in terms of a return to normal. Indeed, the end of the pandemic and the beginning of a return to normalcy are beginning to be possible. In some parts of the world, small concerts with socially distanced audiences are gradually returning. (Gaffney, 2021) This is why in this part we are going to analyse how the situation has evolved in different location, how they are considering a return of in-person events and what are the perspectives in Belgium in all of that.

In this part, the point of view of different experts about the future of digital events will also be considered. We will also look at their recommendations for an optimal use of them in the future.

### **5.1. The future of in-person events**

At the moment we still have no idea when big events will be back. (Salkowitz, 2021) But, according to some recent studies, both attendees, planners and organizers seem to be eager to go back to events in real life. It is something that we took for granted before the pandemic. (Duchene, 2021) Professionals of the industry also believe that fans are waiting to run back to an event as soon as possible. At the same time, authorities are trying to raise awareness that vaccines alone will not be enough for a return to normal life right away. Completely opposite

to that, there is also the fear that some people might be traumatized by the year we just spent and, therefore, might not be that excited by the coming back of live events. (Salkowitz, 2021)

On the one hand, some say that the only reason why online events were so successful was because we had no choice. In person events will always be more successful than digital ones for the simple fact that human beings are social creatures that need face-to-face experiences. But on the other hand, organizers should also keep in mind the fact that everyone will have different levels of comfort when the industry resumes its activity. Some might not mind being a room full of people but others might prefer to attend an event from the comfort of their home. (Duchene, 2021)

Nevertheless, the CEO of Live Nation, Michael Rapino said that the supply-demand of the concert business remains strong despite the uncertainty of the situation. Indeed, there are already twice as much touring artists planned for 2022 than any other year and there remains availability in venues to welcome those additional performers. That matter is also confirmed by the fact that even if the stock prices of companies in the live music industry decreased last year due to the pandemic, patient investors are betting again on the future of the industry which has resulted in a climb in stock price. (Salkowitz, 2021) It is one piece of evidence that people are optimists concerning the future of the industry. Another proof is the evidence that 83% of Live Nation customers kept their tickets for the postponed concerts because they would rather wait for their event than have their money back. (Salkowitz, 2021)

When it comes to corporate events, some industry experts believe that the first type of event to return in person will be trade shows because they did not work well in the virtual world. Effective exchanges between product creators and customers are too important. The same goes for high-end incentives as no salesperson wants to lose the privilege of traveling to their prospect's location. (Duchene, 2021)

Organizers should also consider the possibility that events might not be as profitable as before in the near future because of the economic effects of the pandemic caused. Indeed, the later could last a few years according to some estimations. Organizers might therefore have to revise their usual premium price to adapt to the financial capabilities of their attendees. (Salkowitz, 2021)

Now that the situation is slowly evolving around the world, organizers must start thinking about the kind of experience they would like to offer next to their attendees. (Duchene, 2021) Would they like to offer exclusively in-person or online events? Or would they like to offer a hybrid version of them?

Whether you are an event professional or someone who uses or participates in events, you can expect them to be different in a post-COVID world. People will also probably need a period of adaptation when going back to an event. We have spent so much time trying to avoid one-another that we might need some time to get used to being back in a crowd. Organizers will therefore have to rethink their events to make the experience more comfortable for the attendees. (Salkowitz, 2021)

Organizers will probably have to put more sanitation and prevention plan in place that comply with updates in the regulations. Obviously, hand sanitizing stations are a given as it became part of our daily lives to clean our hands throughout the day at regular intervals. Organizers will have to invest to guarantee the safety of the attendees and their health. They will also have to communicate properly to their audience the measures they are going to take in order to reassure them. (Salkowitz, 2021)

### **5.1.1. In-Person Concert Test in Spain**

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of March, the concert of the band Love of Lesbians took place at the Paulau Sant Jordi sporting arena in Barcelona. Five thousand people attended the event. (Hidalgo, 2021) It was the first spectator event to be held in Europe this year. (Euronews, 2021) It was part of a pilot study conducted by a research team from a local hospital. The attendees only had to wear masks to the concert, there was no social distancing imposed by the organisers. (Hidalgo, 2021) They distributed FFP2 masks at the entry of the event. (Gazengel, 2021) They wanted to show that concerts were possible despite the pandemic. (Belga, 2021)

In addition to the masks, the attendees had to either present the negative results of a PCR test taken maximum eight hours before or they could also take an antigen test on the site before the show. (Hidalgo, 2021) Despite the weird conditions in which the concert was organised, attendees were aware of their incredible luck to be one of the first ones to be part of such an event. It constitutes a hope for the future of the industry. (Gazengel, 2021)

Two weeks after the event, all the attendees had to take another PCR test. (Belga, 2020) Out of the five thousand attendees, only six tested positive and only two of them possibly contracted the virus whilst at the event. (Hidalgo, 2021) Indeed, researchers are not entirely sure that they got infected at the event, it is only a possibility. (Euronews, 2021) The remaining four people were infected in other circumstances in between the concert and the moment they took the test. Due to that low rate of infection, it was concluded that a concert with five thousand people is not considered as a superspreading event. (Hidalgo, 2021) Superspreading events are defined as “social event or other, usually large, gathering of people that results in, or is likely to result in, a significant spreading of a highly active contagion, as during a pandemic”. (“Superspreading event”, 2021) To arrive at this conclusion, the doctors participating in the study compared the contagion rate of the event with the coronavirus incidence rate among the general population of Barcelona which was nearly double. (Hidalgo, 2021) They even added in their conclusion that a live music performance in a covered area with the correct measures and ventilation was a safe activity. According to them, that experiment was proof that event organizers can offer attendees a safe space with optimized ventilation, testing and masks. (Euronews, 2021)

The concert was not the first event organised in the city by the research team. Last December they did a similar test with five hundred people attending a concert and another control group of five hundred people that did not take part in the event. The point was to compare the contamination rate between the two groups. (Gazengel, 2021) Two weeks later, all the participants in the concert got tested negative. (Euronews, 2021) However, the scientists noted two positive cases in the control group. (Gazengel, 2021)

Following that event, Angela Ponsa, the minister for culture in the Catalan Region, stated that cooperation between the cultural, health and institutional fields were the three essential factors for the success in such clinical trials. (Euronews, 2021) The team of researchers added that there were three main characteristics for the safety of everyone. According to them, it is necessary that every attendee show a negative (antigen) test result prior to the event, that they wear a FFP2 mask and that there is a good control of the air ventilation system during the event. (Gazengel, 2021)

Scientists admit that there are some limits to such test events. They are not sure on whether they should include vaccinated people in the study or not. The reason behind that hesitation is

that, even though they might have a low viral charge, they can still spread the virus. Another difficulty is the fact that installing a testing zone in venues is quite an investment. Therefore, they are not sure smaller venues will be able to carry out those tests, they might be out of reach for them. (Hidalgo, 2021) Indeed, organisers fear that the sold tickets will not always be sufficient to cover the costs involved in organising an event in a safe manner. (Gazengel, 2021) They also fear that it might be difficult to thoroughly verify the results of everyone and, even further, to provide them exact results. (Hidalgo, 2021) In a nutshell, even though they might have found some scientific solutions to help the event sector, they still need to find a way to ensure the economic security of the industry. (Gazengel, 2021)

Another positive aspect of such events is that, for once, directors of clubs and festivals, yet generally in competition, joined forces to prove that their activities can be safe if the correct measures are in place. (Gazengel, 2021)

### ***5.1.2. Different test events in Liverpool***

Lately, the city of Liverpool organised several kinds of events to evaluate the efficiency of crowd safety and what impact easing COVID-19 measures would have on it. These events are part of the UK government's Events Research Program (ERP). The program was built to anticipate the effects of a full lifting of the restrictions later this year by verifying the efficiency of ventilation and testing. As with probably everyone in the world, they want to get back to a normal situation as quickly as possible. (Hirst, 2021)

The city's director of Public Health believes that they have the knowledge and infrastructures to deliver the project safely because the city was already part of a mass testing trial last November during which residents were offered regular coronavirus tests. The city's inhabitants also showed that they were able to take control of the situation in case of an outbreak of contamination last July. The Liverpool's director of culture, Claire McColgan, for her part, believes that it is safer to go to those events than going grocery shopping. She also stated that it is important for the city to help their event sector get back up because it represents half their economy and plays a major role in the success of the city. (Hirst, 2021)

For one of the test events, four hundred people gathered for the start of "The Good Business Festival", a corporate event held at the ACC Liverpool. The attendees did not have to wear a mask, nor did they have to respect some kind social distancing. They just had to be tested before and after the event. (Hirst, 2021)

Another trial they did was a night club event at the Bramley-Moore Docks warehouse. (Hirst, 2021) It was a two-day event that started on April 30<sup>th</sup> and that welcomed six thousand people. It was the first-time people were able to go clubbing since the beginning of the pandemic. (BBC News, 2021) Again, the attendees did not have to wear a mask and there was no social distancing required. (Hirst, 2021) Attendees were just asked to present a negative COVID test result at their arrival. They should have taken the test within the 24 hours preceding the event at a local testing centre. (BBC News, 2021) Yousef Zaher, the organiser of the event, said that behind the door of the venue people would return to an "old school" normality. (Hirst, 2021) Participants were also asked to take another test five days after the event to properly monitor any contagion. (BBC News, 2021)

This particular event had a meaningful role for scientists. They wanted to evaluate if crowd mixing and dancing indoors increased transmission or not. They also desired to see if people were still able to enjoy themselves in such conditions because it felt like an important factor for

these events to be sustainable. Lastly, the role of the testing centre was also evaluated in relation to a possible return of big events. (BBC News, 2021)

The city also organised an outdoor gig at the beginning of May with five thousand attendees at Sefton Park. As for the other events, they did not have to wear a mask or respect social distancing. (BBC News, 2021) They obviously also had to present a recent negative PCR test to attend the concert and had to take another test five days later. During the concert, they diffused messages on big screens to ask people to be kind to one another by giving space to the people that needed it and that it was alright to wear a mask if they wanted to. Nevertheless, nobody really did it. People were so happy to be out, they spent the night singing the songs of the band together while pressed up against each other like nothing ever happened. (Pidd, 2021)

The point of this last event was to evaluate the spread of the virus in the hope that festivals could go ahead this summer. Researchers that observed the event noted that the crowd seemed excited to be able to be in a crowd with no restrictions. (Pidd, 2021)

### ***5.1.3. Petition against a mass event in the Netherlands***

In the Netherlands, a petition against an event called the 538 Oranjedag went viral when it got over 350 thousand signatures. (Darroch, 2021) The event in question was supposed to welcome ten thousand of people in Breda. The petition was started by a team of doctors at a nearby hospital. They judged the event as unwise in the current situation but also disrespectful to patients and their families waiting for care, as well as to the overloaded medical staff in general. (Belga, 2021) Doctors were also worried that it would create a surge in the number of hospital admissions. They also stated that the money needed to organise the event should instead be used to accelerate the vaccination in the country. (Darroch, 2021)

However, the Fiedlap experimental concert was defended by the government. Indeed, they felt that it would help them understand how they can minimize the spreading of the virus this summer if social distancing rules happen to be relaxed. It would help them to learn how to get out of the crisis safely. (Darroch, 2021)

In the end, the permit for the festival was denied by the Mayor of Breda due to public pressure. Authorities feared that there would be too many protests in front of the event from both pro-event people and their opponents. (NL Times, 2021) The event was under too much criticism. In addition to the complaint of the medical staff, some professionals of the Horeca sector criticized the festival because they felt like it was unfair to organise such an event while their establishments were still shut down. (Darroch, 2021)

Last February, other test events were organised in the country under different conditions. They were judged as safer because people were seated and in a calm environment compared to the expected ambience of a festival such as 538 Oranjedag. (Belga, 2021)

However, considering the fact that one million people had tried to get a ticket, we can say that they were keen on the idea of going. In the end, the participants were selected randomly. (Belga, 2021)

In other parts of the country, some Dutch experts said that it was possible to organise events outdoors under strict conditions. They came to this conclusion after three football matches were organised as trials in the Netherlands. For each game, there were about five thousand supporters. According to the Dutch experts, masks are a necessity when the stadium is at 70%

of its capacity even if attendees are seated. However, when the stadium is only half full, masks are only needed when people are moving around. These recommendations are only valid in the current epidemiological situation. They also think that tests are also needed before and after the event. (Belga, 2021)

Following these trials, the Dutch researchers established a total of 17 recommendations concerning behaviour of attendees, triage, tracing, personal protection, risk groups, quick tests and risk model. The project was supported by different minister of the country. (Belga, 2021)

#### ***5.1.4. The Belgian's plan for summer 2021***

Following the test event in Barcelona and Liverpool, Belgium is now considering having similar test events in the country in the hope that it will facilitate the reopening of the cultural sector. (Belga, 2021) The procedures for test events are therefore at the centre of political discussion. As for every other country, Belgium intends for events to be organised in strict conditions to check the efficiency of sanitary measures. If the results are favourable, it could result in the authorization of larger events later this year. (Copp and al., 2021) Up until now, the Belgian government has continued postponing the start of such test procedures while observing how similar tests have gone for other countries. (Biermé, 2021)

They now plan to organise about thirty events of various scales in May and June. The measures for each of them might vary as well. (Belga, 2021) For some of these will be ones where attendees will remain seated while others will have standing crowds, some will be organised inside and others outside. The point is to be as realistic as possible. The government declared that the competent ministers had to establish a framework, a calendar and elaborate a clear step-by-step plan for experimental events. (Biermé, 2021) Depending on the latter point, each event will be assigned to an "epidemiological footprint". (Belga, 2021)

These tests events will be organised to give perspective to the sector of culture, event and sport and should start from the 26<sup>th</sup> of April. (Biermé, 2021) However, the government warned that these events will only happen if the rate of contaminations decreases and if we fulfil our vaccination plan according to schedule. (Belga, 2021) If these events happen, they should allow the Belgian government to have a clearer vision of what is possible this summer. (Biermé, 2021)

To be more precise, a plan to lift restrictions on culture in Belgium has been publicly approved by the three ministers of culture even though there is no certainty that it will be approved by the consultation committee (Codeco). It consists of five steps. The first one is the only one that is certain at the moment. It was agreed that on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May, no matter what the epidemiological situation is, indoor events with a maximum of one hundred attendees and outdoor events with two hundred people maximum will be authorized. In both cases, attendees will have to wear a mask and respect social distancing. (Lallemand, 2021)

In the meantime, a performance in Brussels served as a first test event at the end of April. (Belga, 2021) Indeed, the artistic director of the Royal Flemish Theatre opened the doors of its venue for a hundred people a night to start but hopes he will be welcoming more people soon enough. (Makereel, 2021) That decision was supported by the mayor of Brussels, Philippe Close, after the city ran a few tests on the air circulation of the venue. (Walker, 2021) A strict procedure was put in place for the occasion. The attendees were tested the day of the representation in a tent built specifically for this purpose. They then waited about twenty minutes to get their results and if the test was negative, they could attend the performance.



They received a surgical mask at the entry of the venue that they had to wear during the performance. If the test was positive, this person needed to go back home and to go into quarantine. They also had to warn their doctor to take another PCR test to confirm the result. For those who participated in a representation, they had to take a PCR test seven days after their attendance. In order to run those test events, they also installed a system was also installed to control the quality of the air in the venue as it has been done in other countries. (Makereel, 2021)

The government hopes through this experience to establish clearly all the risks of contagion in similar places and ease the discussion about the future of the cultural sector. The Belgian government however wants to remind the population that the test event at the KVS was just a test and that it is only the start of the experiment, it does not mean a return to normal just yet. It will take time to make the different tests properly and to obtain their results. The priority is still on vaccination. (Makereel, 2021)

To reach approval of the other steps to lift restrictions on culture approved by the ministers, several strict conditions will have to be fulfilled. They mainly concern the contamination rate and the progress of immunisation of Belgian citizens. Even if those other steps offer bright perspectives, the conditions to reach them are highly demanding. (Lallemand, 2021)

Even if the performance at the KVS theatre went well, organizers are also aware that that it is not accessible for everyone to have that kind of event because of the costs involved and other logistical or legal issues. According to the artistic director of the theatre, the most expensive aspect is to hire the medical staff for testing the attendees before the event. He also admits that they were only able to finance it because they have subsidies from Flanders and the city of Brussels. (Makereel, 2021)

The Wallonia-Brussels Federation is also ready to organize six test performances. (Belga, 2021) Each of these should take place in each of the provinces of Wallonia and Brussels. As stated earlier, they should all have different sizes and be organised in different conditions. For example, the co-creator of the Franco de Spa has been ready for a few months now with an outdoor concert that he wants to present as a test event. (Biermé, 2021)

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of May, 220 attendees are going to take part in the concert of the band Ykons in the small theatre of Spa. It represents half of the theatre's capacity. Attendees will have to wear masks and respect social distancing. As for the KVS events, a quick system of testing will also be put in place. Attendees will have to take three tests in total for that event; a preventive test a few days before, another test on the day of the event and last one seven days after the representation. (Lallemand, 2021)

Concerning the famous Belgian festivals, some of them already cancelled their 2021 edition while others are still hoping they will be able to hold it. Even if they are able to host it, there is still the issue of the festivals being financially profitable. For many, they will not be able to cover their costs unless they sell at least 70% of their tickets if not all of them. (Coljon, 2021)

Many organizers are realistic and know that they will not be able to host their festival this year. One of the reasons being they are aware they will never be authorized to welcome ten thousand people a day because not enough people will be vaccinated. (Coljon, 2021)

Some of them are therefore trying to offer some alternatives to their attendees to compensate for the lack of festivals. For example, the festival La Semo will be doing something similar to last year. It is going to be called Explorarium and will consist of different performances in

Wallonia and Brussels. Each of them will welcome a seated audience of 250 people outdoor. It is aimed at discovering artists and places. (Coljon, 2021)

## **5.2. The future of online events**

As we saw earlier, digital events were quite useful during those difficult times and the organizers of the different types of event were quite resourceful to come up with ideas to propose to their audiences. But what is the future of those virtual event and how can they be used once in-person events are authorized again?

Experts believe that once the world reopens, live events will come back to life rapidly but that does not mean that digital ones will disappear. (Marom, 2021) According to Marco Giberti (Duchene, 2020), we will have a mix of face-to-face and virtual experiences. We are going to see hybrid events as well as a new generation of in-person ones.

Technologies and digital events offer great advantages for an event. At in-person events, you would not imagine that attendees would jump in and interrupt a speaker during a conference, or a fan would request a song from their favourite artist during a concert. But, as we saw earlier in this work, online events offer those kinds of possibilities thanks to the chatbox, Q&As and breakout rooms. They offer a voice to every attendee but also give them the possibilities to connect with each other. (Marom, 2021) Virtual events have changed the way organizations engage with their audience forever. Indeed, corporations will now be expected to host additional virtual or hybrid events in between their usual annual gathering. They will have to be more personalized for their attendees. By having a hybrid annual party, businesses will be able to also welcome their employees from abroad in addition to the local ones. (Duchene, 2021)

The digitalisation of events creates new opportunities for a whole new sector in the industry. If a company or event organizer has the means, they can benefit from the services of specialized professionals to create a first-class online event. (Marom, 2021) Indeed, the person responsible for the production of more engaging virtual events such as a guided tour or an online live performance need to be more of a producer than an event planner. (Duchene, 2021)

However, the concept of experience is still important even for virtual events. (Duchene, 2021) Indeed, as a reminder, one of the best ways to be successful in the industry is to be conscientious about your attendees' experience at your event. (Marom, 2021) As for in-person events, organizers will have to think of everything from pre to post event as well as during it. They will have to consider the impact it will leaves on their attendees. (Duchene, 2021)

If organizers want to keep a digital aspect to their event, they need to anticipate the fact that some people might be virtually exhausted, especially after the year we have just spent. They need to find ways to be more impactful and capture the attention of the audience. (Marom, 2021)

Organizers will also have to highlight in their marketing preceding the event what are going to be the benefits the attendees will gain by joining the community participating at the event. They will have to create an emotional link with them or even a professional bond for corporate events. (Duchene, 2021)

Virtual events also enable organizers to offer to each of their attendees' different kinds of experiences within one event. (Duchene, 2021)



Another advantage of the digitalisation of events is that it allows organisers to keep track and monitor their event and the data gained from it. As we saw earlier in this work, it allows them to collect information about the overall experience of their attendees by sending forms to them. (Marom, 2021) In addition to that, they also have a better view on who attended the event and who did not. Organizers can therefore reach to the people that did not log into the event to understand why they did not see value in it. It allows them to have an even better understanding of their expectations and needs for next time. (Duchene, 2021)

### **5.3 Hybrid events**

We have mentioned the idea of hybrid events several times now, so it seemed appropriate to explain a bit more what it consists of.

A hybrid event does not only mean broadcasting the face-to-face event. It also means creating an online experience that is worth it and offering exclusive content for the online audience. Indeed, we saw earlier that everyone might not feel comfortable going back to an in-person event right away due to the year that we have just spent. (Duchene, 2021) Therefore, it is going to be important to keep providing a virtual experience whenever possible, for those who prefer it. (Salkowitz, 2021) Hybrid events might be the solution for the people who are more careful. But at the same time, organizers should still want to give the desire to the online audience to participate to the real event next time. It is a matter of balance. (Duchene, 2021)

Lastly, as we stated several times before, we should expect to see a lot of hybrid events in the future. Even the organisers of Tomorrowland predict it. (Barrionuevo, 2020)

### **5.4. Conclusion**

Since we started this work, the situation has changed globally. An increasing number of test events are organised in the hope to slowly get back to normal life. In addition to that, the vaccination plan of the different countries is also progressing which offers bright prospects to the world. At the time of writing things are still changing and moving towards a return to normal. Researchers and authorities are working tirelessly to make things happen.

Generally, the different governments are pleased to see that progress is being made. However, some are more cautious than others. The differences are seen in the conditions in which the tests events are organised. Some of them would rather start with seated events where everyone still must wear a mask while other aims higher by organising concerts where wearing a mask is not compulsory.

As for many topics in life, there are those in favour and those against the return of events in person. Some are just afraid of being back in a crowded place but for others it is different. As we have seen, some medical workers in the Netherlands are reluctant for mass event to take place because they think it is disrespectful to them.

We can say that the opinion about the return of in-person events depend highly on the conditions in which they are organised. It is however worth noting that all the test events held so far were successful and have not resulted in breakouts of the virus.

It was also clear to us that online events will not disappear in the near future. They have offered great opportunities to the event industry and some will continue to use them to propose another

kind of experience to their attendees. They will also still be useful for a while for people who are more fearful of going back in crowded places.

Lastly, many believe that hybrid events will be the new norm, at least for a few years. They are a great way to provide different experiences to attendees and to offer solutions to everyone's situation.

## 6. Conclusion of the theoretical information

In a nutshell this part was made to have a better understanding of the event industry, where it comes from and what place it has in our lives. We also wanted to describe the context in which this work was done and the link between it and the industry.

We started by giving a brief overview of the history of the industry. Thanks to that, we understood that events play a major role in our lives and that they have been a huge part of it for as long as we can remember. We saw how it evolved with time and how it became more accessible to everyone.

After that, we gave all the definitions relevant to our theme that helped us to understand the event industry and its management. The main points being that a good event is one that is focused on the experience it provides for its attendees and that a good risk management is also important to the smooth running of an event.

We also described the place of technologies in the sector and how they are used to help event organisers in their work. We also saw how data influences our lives and how it can be helpful in the industry.

We then moved to the context in which this work was written. To do so, we had to explain the basic principle of a pandemic and how the COVID-19 had impacted our lives globally. Indeed, in addition to the health issues it created, it has also had a huge economical and sociological impact on our society. We obviously focused a bit more on the consequences it had on the event industry and how it highlighted some problems in the industry, especially when it comes to the system for refunds. The economic losses engendered by the pandemic are enormous for the industry. However, the crisis also pushed further the use of internet, technologies and social media by organisers and artists. We described many cases in which they reinvented and adapted themselves to the situation, focusing mainly on the progress made for online events. We discovered that they offer great creative opportunities. Opinions however differ when it comes to the interaction they offer. Some think they lack social interaction while others believe that online events offer greater opportunities.

In that part we also presented Project 12 and its CEO, Mr. Sven Cautauts. We explained his point of view about the different topics covered earlier in this work and how he perceived the event industry as well as his point of view on what it takes to be a good event organiser.

Lastly, as we approached the end of this work, we noticed that the situation had started to change worldwide since we began writing. Therefore, we decided to analyse the progress made in different countries of Europe. We saw that in-person test events began in several countries and were generally quite successful thanks to the collaboration of governments and researchers. Some countries organised small-scale events, while others aimed directly at bigger ones. The prospects of a return to a normal life is in sight even though some precautions still need to be taken.

Regardless of the country, the sanitary measures that recur everywhere are the obligation to do a test (PCR or antigenic) before the event and about a week after at least to control the spread, the presence of hydroalcoholic gel, and a good ventilation system to monitor the circulation of the air in the venue. In the end, many believe that hybrid events will be the new norm because they are a great alternative to please a maximum number of attendees.

## Part II: Methodology

In this part of the thesis, we are going to describe the methodology used to answer our research question:

**“What impact has the pandemic had on the event industry, and more specifically on Project 12?”**

Thanks to our research and the presentation of the company, we were able to establish our hypothesis:

**“As with everyone in the industry, Project 12 had to stop completely its normal course of business during the pandemic but was able to overcome the crisis by re-orientating itself to other types of activities.”**

In the first part of this thesis, we have analysed the different theoretical concepts that helped us, first, to have a better understanding of the event industry as a whole. We established its history and its characteristics. Then, we explained briefly the pandemic and how it was related to the event industry thanks to the concept of risk management at an event. Related to this, we then discussed the effects of the pandemic on the industry and what has been done since its beginning to counterbalance its effects. This information allowed us to establish a framework for our research. Indeed, we judged that, in order to properly answer our research question, it was necessary to fully explain the industry, the pandemic and the links between them. This required some documentary research combining different kinds of sources:

- **Books:** To develop most of the concepts we mentioned in the first part of the thesis, we read academic books about the event industry and its management that helped us understand them. Some of them were accessed online and for others we used hard copies
- **Scientific articles:** As with books, scientific articles were useful to understand the industry and the current situation. They were found on Cairn.info, the ICHEC library, Google Scholar, Proquest as well as on the online library of the University of Hertfordshire
- **Press and blog articles:** These articles were useful to gather some information about how the event industry is living through the pandemic and innovating to provide some experiences for their customers. Indeed, as it has only been a year since the beginning of the pandemic, there are only a few scientific articles about the matter. Seeing that the information on those kinds of platform is not entirely reliable, we are going to cross-reference them as much as possible to extract the most accurate information. We also used press and blog articles to describe how the situation has evolved since the beginning of this work
- **Internal documents:** Internal documents of Project 12 were necessary to collect information about the company
- **Interviews:** We did a total of three interviews with professionals of the industry, each specialized in a different field, to get their points of view about the situation and to see how they were impacted
- **Online survey:** We posted a survey on social media to have an idea on how the pandemic impacted the public opinion of the event industry

We also presented the company, Project 12 and its history. All the information mentioned to present the company was sources from both internal documents but also the qualitative interview that we did with the CEO of Project 12, Sven Cauttaerts. This interview is presented below.

Lastly, we also described how the situation has evolved since we started to write this work. We described how governments and scientists are working together to bring the situation back to normal. Up until now, the results of the different test events are quite promising.

## **1. Tools that were used**

In order to be as complete as possible, we decided to use two types of tool. As stated earlier, we first did three interviews with professionals from the event industry, each one of them being specialised in a different field. Then, we also proceeded to an online survey to get the point of view of the general public about the event industry and how they perceive its future.

### **1.1. Interviews**

First, as we mentioned earlier, we did a qualitative interview with Sven Cauttaerts, the CEO of Project 12. Through this interview, we wanted to gain knowledge, amongst other things, about the general history of Project 12, how it was created, its objectives and how it was affected by the pandemic. We also wanted to know the perception of Mr. Cauttaerts about the event industry and its future. The purpose was to get as much information as possible on the company but also about his opinion of all the theoretical aspects we discussed in the first part of this thesis.

Most of the information concerning Project 12 and the other activities of Mr. Cauttaerts before the pandemic can be found earlier in this work. The rest of the information collected during the interview concerns the future of Project 12 and how Mr. Cauttaerts regard the future of the industry. What he told us is discussed later in this work.

To be more complete, we also interviewed two other professionals from the industry that are briefly introduced hereafter. We thought it would be useful to have other points of view on how the crisis had been, how it impacted their businesses and how they see the future to compare it with what Mr. Cauttaerts told us. To be thorough, we globally asked them the same questions except for those that were specific to their company.

One professional from the industry that we interviewed is Hervé van Wassenhove, the CFO of JML Concept, a company specialized in the catering of events. They define themselves as high-end and organize both corporate and private events equally.

The last professional that we interviewed is Alexis de Halleux, the manager of the company de Halleux s.a. specialized in the rental of high-ends tents for all kinds of events and the sale of golf carts. They mainly deal with B2C events.

What is really interesting here is that all three companies differentiate themselves in the kind of services they offer to their customers. One is more focussed on corporate events, another is specialized in high quality services and, more particularly, in catering and the last is more focused on the rental of tents. Their perception of the impact of the pandemic on their company is therefore different somehow.

TABLE 1: INTERVIEWS REALIZED TO COLLECT DATA

Person interviewed	Company	Position	Type of interview	Date
Sven Cautaerts	Project 12	CEO	Google Meet	March 17 <sup>th</sup> , 2021
Hervé van Wasenhove	JML Concept	CFO	Phone Call	April 7 <sup>th</sup> , 2021
Alexis de Halleux	de Halleux s.a.	Manager	Phone Call	April 12 <sup>th</sup> , 2021

## 1.2. Survey

We also did a quantitative survey in order to have the point of view of the customers of the event industry. That survey was posted on social media. It aimed at collecting data on the point of view of as many people as we could. We collected over 200 responses from people of all ages.

To have a proper view on them, we thought it would be useful to know their age, if they ever attended an event and what type of event they attended. In order to better understand their perception of the future of the industry and if they would go back to events or not, we also thought it would be interesting to know if, during the pandemic, they respected the restrictions imposed by our government.

The survey was built on expectations we had from what we learned during the realization of the first part of this work. It allowed us to come up with a sub-question and a sub-hypothesis for our work based on what we thought would be the point of view of event goers:

**“What does the future of the event industry look like in the mind of event goers?”**

And our hypothesis for that sub-question is:

**“Despite the pandemic circumstances and the prolonged absence of events, people are in general eager to go back to an event”**

## 1.3. Limits of the collected data

In the next part of this work, we are going to analyse the collected data gathered both during the different interviews and our online survey. When analysing them, we need to keep in mind that there are some limits to how we are going to interpret the collected data.

For the interviews made with the three professionals from the industry, as we said earlier, it was great to have different points of view from people having different specialties in the sector. However, their opinions and how they lived the pandemic is still quite personal and might not be shared with all the other professionals. Their answers to the different questions therefore remain subjective.

The same goes for our online survey. Even though we managed to get answers from 220 people, it is only a sample of the population and the collected data might not represent the general opinion of the whole population. The scope of analysis is accordingly limited.

Concerning our survey, it is also important to know that it was realised in French and not in English. This is due to the fact that it is our mother tongue and therefore, the mother tongue of most of the people we know. We knew that we would get more answers if we posted our survey in French than if we posted it in English.

A last limit is the time frame. At the time of this writing, we still do not know when the event sector will be able to resume its activity and neither do the population. All the assumptions that will be made are purely theoretical and we have no proof that it is actually what will happen in the future. Furthermore, things are constantly changing, and it is thus a challenge to include all the latest updates to our work. Particularly because, as the summer approaches, all the sanitary measures are changing once again in Europe. The interviews and the online survey were thus made before the situation changed and evolved towards brighter perspectives. This justifies the fact that some data analysed hereafter seem outdated already.

## Part III: Analysis of the collected data

In this part, we are going to analyse the information gathered during our multiple interviews with professionals from the industry as well as the data collected through our online survey.

As we stated earlier, the analysis of the interviews will allow us to compare the points of view of different kinds of professionals from the industry, each specialized in a different field. We are going to start with the interview of Mr. Cautaeerts as it was his company in which we did our internship and then we are going to analyse the interviews of Mr. de Halleux and Mr. van Wassenhove. These analyses will allow us to see if they experienced the pandemic in the same way, how they survived the pandemic and how they see the future of the industry.

Then, the analysis of our online survey will allow us to determine how the general public sees the industry and its future. The objective here is to compare their points of view with those of the professionals but also to see how their vision was impacted by the pandemic.

### 1. Analysis of the interviews

#### 1.1. The impact of the pandemic on their businesses

##### 1.1.1. Project 12

In this part we are going to focus on what happened to the activities of Project 12 since the pandemic started and how Mr. Cautaeerts experienced it.

As you probably guessed, the normal course of business of Project 12 completely stopped when the pandemic started. However, Mr. Cautaeerts consider that this crisis has had a positive impact on both his business and the industry as a whole. (Cautaeerts, 2021)

Project 12 only had to cancel four events due to the pandemic. However, their loss was greater in terms of events that did not occur. By that, we are referring to events that usually occur every year and to which the company usually takes part but couldn't this year due the current crisis. They were not booked yet because they generally happen starting from May or June until the end of October. (Cautaeerts, 2021)

We can all agree to say that the pandemic was hard on everyone and every sector but, to quote Mr. Cautaeerts, you should never waste a good crisis. Even though his normal course of activity in the event sector had to stop, he was able to diversify its activity and reinvent himself. Indeed, as we are going to see right after, he launched several new projects during the pandemic. He said that, if the pandemic did not happen, he would have never done it. He would have kept doing the same things. (Cautaeerts, 2021)

According to his point of view, the pandemic was a great excuse to try something new or to dare doing something you never had the courage to do before. Only the pandemic offered time and space for new ideas and projects to emerge. (Cautaeerts, 2021)



#### ***1.1.1.1. Breezy Sports Masks & E-Commerce***

When the normal course of his activity stopped due to the pandemic, Mr. Cautaeerts, the CEO of Project 12, saw a great opportunity for diversifying. Breezy Sports Masks was the first project he launched. (Cautaeerts, 2021)

To respond to the growing fear of the virus, he developed with his team the Breezy Sports Mask. A mouth mask that can now be found in all Decathlon stores in Belgium and the Netherlands. Various accessories are available, and the masks can be found in different sizes and colours. (Cautaeerts, 2021)

The sales of masks allowed them to gained experience in e-commerce and contacts which they expanded in the following months by launching another twelve products on the market. They spotted the products on the Chinese market and distributed them through a private label on the Benelux market. In order to do so, they used existing marketplaces such as Amazon, Bol and Cdiscount. (Cautaeerts, 2021)

#### ***1.1.1.2. Belgian Bartender School***

At some point during the pandemic, Mr. Cautaeerts and two other entrepreneurs realized they had a common interest in the Art of making cocktails, also called “mixology” and that they all took a course at the European Bartender School. EBS is an international organization that aims to offer courses and masterclasses related to the world of bartending. To attend one of their programs, you can choose amongst different schools located all over the world. The Belgian version is going to open its door this summer thanks to Sven Cautaeerts and his two friends and colleagues. (Cautaeerts, 2021)

They saw an opportunity because there was no Belgian location for these classes even though they consider Belgium as one of the most interesting places when it comes to spirits, beers, wine and gastronomy and, of course, music, art and culture in general. They decided to contact the European Bartender School and, five months later, the Belgian Bartender School was founded. (Cautaeerts, 2021)

The new school will be located in Mechelen, close enough to Brussels but also other big cities of our beautiful country such as Antwerp. As the other locations of the European Bartender School, they will offer several four weeks programs throughout the year to people coming from all over the world. (Cautaeerts, 2021)

Even though he had had the idea for a while now, the pandemic gave to Sven Cautaeerts the opportunity and the time to embark on this project. The complete stop in the event sector allowed him to develop that business activity. (Cautaeerts, 2021)

That new business remains in a world that he knows. Indeed, the organisation of the four weeks programs and all the activities and excursions related to it is a form of event management. (Cautaeerts, 2021)

But that is not all. In addition to the bartending courses they will be giving, the Belgian Bartender School also aims at becoming the go-to entity for all that is related to the Art of making Cocktails in Belgium. They want to be a one stop shop for professionals, locals, tourists, companies and anyone with a passion for cocktails. They want to support this form of Art in Belgium and promote it as much as they can. (Cautaeerts, 2021)

#### **1.1.1.3. Sofa Buddy**

Sofa Buddy is one of the latest projects of Sven Cautaerts. After spotting a promising product on an American crowdfunding site, he seized an opportunity and decided to develop a better brand inspired from it.

To achieve this project, he worked tightly with a Chinese manufacturer and Sofa Buddy is now a trademark in Belgium and China. Together, they developed an improved product and searched for the most optimal version of it.

They are going to sell that product on the Benelux market first and they hope that they will be able to distribute it all over Europe after. Mr. Cautaerts will use his knowledge of e-commerce that he gained from the sale of the Breezy Sports Masks. (Cautaerts, 2021)

#### **1.1.1.4. A Change in the Activities of Project 12**

Even if, as we stated earlier, Sven Cautaerts is really passionate by B2C events, Project 12 is going to go through a change of focus. Event management is still going to be one of the activities of the company, but it will also become a product management agency. (Cautaerts, 2021)

As we saw earlier in this work, Mr. Cautaerts saw an opportunity from the pandemic. He developed and distributed several products. This allowed his company to generate a turnover of more than 500 000€ which represents an increase of 93% compared to the previous year. It gave him and his team enough space to develop their experience on a long-term plan. (Cautaerts, 2021)

For this reason, they decided to expand their strategy from the classical B2C marketplaces to B2B as well and they are aiming at retailing their products to countries outside the Benelux. Project 12 will now be more focused on its e-commerce track. They want to promote and sell their different products and brands on a larger scale on the European Market. (Cautaerts, 2021)

But that is not all. They will also help other businesses to bring their products on new markets. For example, they are going to help local traders to sell their products on e-commerce channels thanks to the experience they gained during the pandemic. They will also be able to help companies develop a product from A to Z thanks to their strong network of suppliers, consultants, advisory boards, freelancers and, more importantly, their soon to be strong team of strategists and e-commerce managers. (Cautaerts, 2021)

#### **1.1.2. JML Concept**

The second interview we did was with Mr. Hervé van Wassenhove, the CFO of JML Concept. The activities of that company were briefly introduced earlier in this work, but we are going to give a bit more details here about what they do.

The company specializes in the catering of events. Their activity is split 50-50 between private and corporate events. They are a Belgian company but 10 to 15% of their turnover is from international activities. On average, they organize 1000 events per year. (van Wassenhove, 2021)

As Mr. Hervé van Wassenhove told us during the interview, they differentiate themselves from their competitors by the high quality of their services. They qualify themselves as high-end. Even if they are specialized in catering, they are able to organise an event from the beginning to the end. They also have a lot of equipment which they store in a warehouse. They create tailor made events for each of their customers. (van Wassenhove, 2021)

For them, in order to succeed in this industry, you need to be flexible in terms of time and on how you react to your customers' expectations. Indeed, by working in the event industry, you will often have to work at night and during weekends to assist to the events you organized. But you also have to be flexible so that you can adapt to your clients' needs and desires properly. It is quite common that a client will change his mind at the last minute. You need to be concise and able to listen to what they want. Working in this industry also means that you have a certain mastery of the psychological aspects of business that allows you to correctly analyse the clients' needs. (van Wassenhove, 2021)

They use some software, and they are even currently developing new software along with other caterers. However, as Mr. Hervé van Wassenhove told us, it is dangerous to automate everything because every event is tailor made. Furthermore, as he said so well, not everything that is important can be put on paper. In the case of catering, two companies can offer the exact same menu to the customer for two completely different budgets. The difference in budget will be created by the quality of the food used, the quality of the training given to employees, the timing of the event or even the way the products are cooked. But the client will not see that, he will only see the budget. This is also why the reputation of a company is important, as it might guide the choice of the customer to the company with the most experience and/or the better service quality. This aspect is, of course, applicable to all aspects of the industry. (van Wassenhove, 2021)

As said in Mehrotra and Lobo (2020), technologies can make the work of organisers easier, quicker and more cost effective but here we can see that not everything can be digitalized or shown on paper.

Generally speaking, Mr. Hervé van Wassenhove qualified the industry as the one that gathers all the possible issues. It is a live service that often occurs one time; they will not redo the same event the next day. They have one chance in succeeding and they can not miss it. One of the biggest challenges is always the fact that customers tend to change their mind often and that, as it is a live occurrence, there are often unforeseen events. Another challenge is to properly manage your staff, there is a lot of administrative work required to organise an event and it is not an easy task. (van Wassenhove, 2021)

When it comes to the impact the pandemic has had on their activities, Mr. Hervé van Wassenhove confided to us that they lost 95% of their turnover in overall. In addition to that, they also have significant fixed costs which amount approximately to 10% of their turnover. They still manage to produce some revenue by delivering catered meals for online events or for people that order dinner for all the members of their family that they will share online. They also offer take-away meals. But these kinds of activities do not compensate for the losses caused by the pandemic. (van Wassenhove, 2021)

Together with the financial difficulties, he also admits that it is hard to keep employees motivated online. Furthermore, a lot of workers of the industry are switching to another profession in order to face the difficulties caused by the pandemic. (van Wassenhove, 2021)

### 1.1.3. de Halleux s.a.

The last call we had with a professional was with Mr. de Halleux, one of the partner of de Halleux s.a.. That company is specialized in the rental of high-end tents for events and also the rental and the sale of golf carts. They are mainly focused on B2C activities and their customers are wealthy people. They also take care of some B2B events such as the Bank of Luxembourg's annual party or some charity events for Saint Luc. (de Halleux, 2021)

De Halleux s.a. was founded in 1989 by Anne-Michèle de Halleux and her husband, Jean-Luc de Halleux. They started the business from scratch with only two tents that they set up themselves at the time. (Trends-Tendances, 2017)

As the building site of one of their tents is quite large and takes time, they usually do 30 to 50 events a year. In their structure, to meet the needs of the customer, you can find a kitchen, a terrasse, a dancefloor or any other type of function. Their tents can be from 150 to 1000 square meters and have a wooden floor that is adapted to the area where they are built. (Trends-Tendances, 2017) Mr. Alexis de Halleux also admits that they only do that many events because it is important for them to be present from A to Z at each event. (de Halleux, 2021)

Even though he worked for his aunt and uncle as a student (Trends-Tendances, 2017), Mr. de Halleux did not start his career in the event industry. He first worked in an import-export company and saw that the market for the golf carts wasn't really exploited in Belgium. He decided to start importing them from China in order to rent them locally. He gained customers thanks to the network of his aunt and uncle. Later, he joined the family business as an independent and incorporated the golf carts' rental into the offer of the company. He had the objective of taking over the family business later in his life, which he did in 2016 with Benjamin de Sauvage as equal partners. (de Halleux, 2021)

When the two partners took over the business, they invested in a 25 years old business that already had a strong reputation and all the things that came with it. (Trends-Tendances, 2017) They also invested in an experienced business and they had to live up to the name that was built over the years. (de Halleux, 2021)

They qualify as a high-end business because they take care of the design, assembly, construction and dismantling of each of their tents. They have the knowhow and are very versatile. They are present from the beginning until the end of each event and accompany the client without delegating. They do not advertise their services and are known only by word of mouth. As we said right before, de Halleux s.a. has a strong reputation in the industry. (de Halleux, 2021)

For Mr. de Halleux, in order to work in the event sector, you have to be open to others, be commercially minded, be resourceful and also have creative mind. He told us that the people that are struggling on the market are the people who lack the creative side, they are event coordinators, not organizers. (de Halleux, 2021)

As they are extremely devoted to their customers in de Halleux s.a., their biggest challenge is to combine their private life with their working one, especially during the high season between April and November. They have unusual working hours, but Mr. de Halleux confided that he liked it like that. He also noted that, as for probably every business, personnel management was challenging as well. (de Halleux, 2021)

Considering the fact that the pandemic started around the time of year when they start to organize a lot of weddings, they had a lot of planned events that were first postponed but, unfortunately, a lot of them were then cancelled with time because people got discouraged. (de Halleux, 2021)

However, when the lockdown was announced they reacted pretty fast by sending emails to hospitals in order to offer them tents to welcome people and manage the flow of people. They started with Saint Elizabeth Hospital by conceiving a tailor-made tent with heating and ventilation systems and as well as consultation space amongst other things. They did the same kind of thing for other hospitals in the country. Today, Saint-Peter's Hospital still rent one of their tents on a monthly basis. (de Halleux, 2021)

This is not the only thing they did to survive the pandemic. Thanks to their knowledge in carpentry and construction, they embarked into the development of an interior finish in the construction and home design. (de Halleux, 2021)

The combination of these activities allowed them to cover a part of their fixed costs which are usually pretty high. Indeed, in order to survive, they approximately need thirty to forty thousand of Euros. Furthermore, the sale of golf carts exploded during the pandemic which also helped them to survive. (de Halleux, 2021)

Furthermore, Mr. de Halleux thinks that without the pandemic they would have never gotten into interior design but, in the end, that side business will allow them to stay active during the off-season period. Indeed, as we said earlier, the peak of the season for their usual business takes place between April and November but with that additional service offer, they have a new type of customer who will require their services even during winter. Usually, they need to keep money aside in order to cover their fixed costs during the off-peak season but now they will have a higher revenue. (de Halleux, 2021)

## **1.2. Their perception on the future of the event industry**

Concerning the future of the event industry, Mr. Cautaerts thinks that the end of 2021 and, more specifically, the beginning of 2022 are going to be amazing times for the event industry. He is certain that if a new music festival is launched in 2022, it is going to be a hit, even if it is on a small budget. All you need is a good line-up, some basic knowledge in marketing and in your customers' preferences. (Cautaerts, 2021) Mr. de Halleux shared that opinion by saying that we will first see a lot of small events with maximum 150 people. He believes that bigger events will take more time to come back. (de Halleux, 2021)

As we said before, he thinks that the market of the event industry before the pandemic was full of small events that were badly managed and organized. But thanks to the crisis, they would have now disappeared from the market and leave some space for better events. The pandemic acted as a sort of reset button on the industry, offering it a fresh new start. (Cautaerts, 2021) Nationally however, Mr. van Wassenhove stated that the future of the event industry will also highly depend on the subsidies given nationally to companies. Indeed, as we saw earlier in this work, while the Flemish region puts its priority in helping big companies to support their losses, the Walloon region prioritise small businesses. That difference between the two regions disadvantages sizable Walloon companies such as JML Concept that do not receive a lot of subsidies to cover their fixed costs. In the long run, that difference is going to affect them. (van Wassenhove, 2021)

As we stated earlier, Mr. Cautaerts is really passionate by B2C events, but you need money and time to organize such events. He thinks that 2022 is going to be a good period for him to launch his few new ideas of festivals on the market, but first, he needs to finalize the different projects he started during the pandemic that we mentioned earlier in this thesis. If he did not launch Sofa Buddy in 2021, he would have launched an event this year. Unfortunately, he also thought that the sector would be able to resume its activity as from April but, as we all know, that was not the case. (Cautaerts, 2021)

Even though we do not really have the end of this pandemic in sight currently, he believes that when this crisis is finally over, we will relive the 1920s. Before the pandemic, we used to arrive late at a party or festival but in the future, we are going to get there as soon as possible to enjoy the most of it. Furthermore, he thinks there is going to be fewer events but better quality and bigger ones. (Cautaerts, 2021) Once again, Mr. de Halleux agreed on that. He stated that he believes we are going to see a lot of small events for the simple reason that people are going to be eager to go back to one and to party with their friends. He is thus also confident when it comes to the future of the rental of his tents and golf carts because people will be needing structures like this to hold their events. (de Halleux, 2021)

For Mr. van Wassenhove, a difference must be made between corporate events and private ones. According to him, private events will restart faster than corporate ones. For the latter, JML Concept knows they will not have to organise one before 2022. This is due both to the fact that they take more time to organise and that, by taking into account the current situation, a lot of companies do not feel legitimate celebrating something while they had to let go of people. Nonetheless, he does not foresee gatherings of more than a thousand people for two or three years. (van Wassenhove, 2021)

Concerning online events that, as we saw earlier, were highly used during the pandemic, he thinks that it was a good way to adapt your business to the situation. He did not really take part at any online events nor did they organize one, but he still thought that it was a good way to reinvent yourself. (Cautaerts, 2021)

He also said that it is now part of the norm and, even though online events would have never worked before, that we will keep seeing online events once the situation returns to normal. To be more precise, he believes that we will see a lot more of hybrid events. For example, a festival such as Tomorrowland is going to sell its regular tickets as usual, but they are also going to offer online tickets thanks to which it will be possible to stream the event from different points of view such as the DJ scene or the middle of the crowd for instance. (Cautaerts, 2021)

For corporate events, every single employee will be able to attend the latest company celebration from their home through a streaming service and to toast from their sofa to the speech of their CEO, even though they couldn't attend the event in person due to a lack of seating spaces for example. It thus also a great opportunity for e-commerce. Indeed, a company will even be able to deliver a cocktail box, a dinner or even branded items and goodies to their employees' home to improve their experience and give them a feeling of belonging. (Cautaerts, 2021)

In a nutshell, the pandemic added new kind of services to the panel of event organizers. It created a demand for events that you could attend from your own home. It will probably never replace the experience of attending an event in person, but it does not mean that it will not interest anyone. Indeed, sometimes people can not attend an event because it is sold out or far from home but, thanks to the soon to be hybrid version of events, organizers will be able to

provide a solution to their consumers who are usually left out. Soon, you will be able to order a “Tomorrowland Box” and experience a bit of the festival’s experience at home with your friends. Online events will thus remain in existence and complete the traditional ones. (Cautaerts, 2021) Even the organisers of Tomorrowland admitted that online performances will co-exist with the live ones in the future. (Barrionuevo, 2020)

Mr. Cautaerts thinks that it is a great opportunity for professionals to increase their revenue by offering such alternative. It will indeed require some upstream investment from companies but, in the end, it would be beneficial. It will also, in his words, offer opportunities for small businesses to specialize in those kinds of services and platforms so that they can then help event agencies to provide hybrid events to their customers. (Cautaerts, 2021)

Personally, he does not think he will start to organize online events, he feels like it is more something a TV production company will be good at and more helpful because they have the knowledge necessary to broadcast an event. It is more the work of a television director than it is the one of an event professional. (Cautaerts, 2021)

However, if a client ever asks Project 12 to organize a hybrid event, Mr. Cautaerts will find someone to help him do it, he will manage the event for the client, but he will let a television director take care of all the aspects related to broadcasting it online. (Cautaerts, 2021)

Last but not least, Mr. Cautaerts would be prepared to take steps to be able to resume his activities as an event organizer such as a direction of movement or placing the chairs a bit further apart at a corporate event. (Cautaerts, 2021) Furthermore, as we saw earlier, pathogen threats such as COVID-19 can make people more alert and more likely to avoid crowded situations. (Zenko and Kock, 2020) That point of view is shared by both Mr. de Halleux and Mr. van Wassenhove.

In de Halleux s.a., they are willing to respect any restrictions that could be imposed. They already had to follow some strict guidelines for their events in the past. Indeed, last September, they were able to organize two weddings with about 250 guests while respecting the different measures put in place by the authorities. They installed a disinfection area; they respected the number of people allowed per square meter and both events were a success. The only downside was that people couldn’t dance but they nonetheless accustomed themselves to the situation and still enjoyed the weddings. (de Halleux, 2021)

The same goes for JML Concept. Indeed, they were also able to briefly resume their activities last July by following strict protocols. That quickly came to an end at the end of the month due to another change in the sanitary measures taken by the government. Nevertheless, they know that they will have to follow strict protocols as well if their activities are to resume again. (van Wassenhove, 2021)

However, Mr. Cautaerts insists on the fact that those steps should not affect the overall experience of its customers. To give an example, he can not imagine a music festival or a concert where everyone should remain seated without being able to drink; that is too extreme for him. (Cautaerts, 2021)

Prices for an event should also not increase disproportionately to compensate a limited number of seating spaces caused by preventive measures. He feels like it would impact the experience of the event attendees. (Cautaerts, 2021) Indeed, as we saw earlier in this work, event organisers should adapt their prices to the financial capabilities of their attendees. The pandemic had an economic impact on the world in general that could last a few years and,

therefore, event manager should accept that their event might not be as profitable as before. At least until the world recovers from the pandemic. (Salkowitz, 2021)

Mr. Cautaerts also believes that some habits we created during the pandemic will stick around when we go back to events. We will probably no longer leave our glasses or plates lying around, we will be more cautious with our belongings and our hygiene. For him, everyone will be more aware from now on, even in our daily lives, we will never go to work with a small cold or taking a supermarket cart without cleaning it. The pandemic has changed our approach to hygiene and given us good habits, but it will also bring back single use containers and glasses for obvious hygiene reasons, which is bad for the environment. (Cautaerts, 2021)

Nevertheless, as probably a lot of people have done, Mr. Cautaerts wonders what will become of events such as raves or concerts. Will people still go and stand in the middle of hundreds if not thousands of people they do not know? He does not know and can not really predict it. (Cautaerts, 2021)

### **1.3. Conclusion**

Through our different interviews, we realized that the activities of the different companies were indeed impacted by the pandemic. The normal course of their business came to a complete stop since March 2020 even if, for example, de Halleux s.a. organized a few events last summer. Generally, the loss they all encountered was mainly due to events that did not occur rather than cancellations. This is explained by the fact that their activities had to stop right before the high season, when nothing had really been booked.

However, for Mr. Cautaerts and Mr. de Halleux, the crisis allowed them to reinvent themselves and find new opportunities elsewhere. Indeed, as we saw earlier, Mr. Cautaerts engaged in several other activities he became passionate about and Mr. de Halleux developed a side business which they will each keep doing even after everything is back to normal. JML Concept wasn't so good at reinventing itself. Even though they kept offering a catering service for private customers, it wasn't sufficient to cover their fixed costs.

Through the different interviews, we were once again able to confirm the important place of the concept of experience at an event. All three professionals highlighted the fact that you need to be as versatile as possible in this industry in order to adapt to your customers' needs which, in the end, will improve their experience.

When it comes to the future of the event industry, the three professionals believe that once it is authorized, everything will go back to normal rather quickly. Mr. de Halleux and Mr. Cautaerts both think that we will see a lot of small events popping up from everywhere and that they will be successful because people are eager to go back to an event. Mr. van Wassenhove added that we will first see private events coming back before corporate ones. He explained that by the fact that corporations do not feel legitimate in organizing events when they have had to lay off employees because of the crisis. They also generally agree on the fact that online events have a bright future next to traditional ones.

We also discovered the impact that the difference in subsidies between the North and the South of the country has had on some businesses. It is something that was noted by Mr. van Wassenhove, probably because he has not been able to diversify as much as the other professionals and has thus experienced it more strongly.

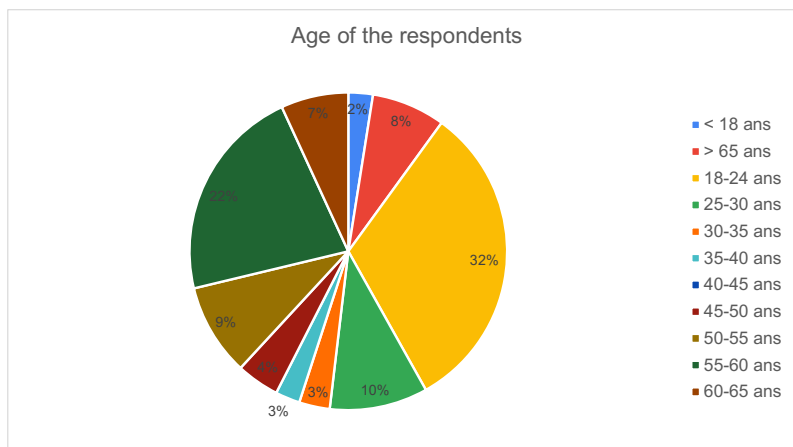


Last but not least, they are all ready to take precautionary measures in order to resume their normal course of business. However, these measures should not compromise the overall experience of the customers.

## 2. Analysis of the online survey

Now that we presented the collected data of our three interviews and, more specifically, what happened to their businesses since the beginning of the pandemic as well as how they see the future of the industry, we are going to analyse the collected data of our online survey. Just to remind you, this survey was posted on our social media in order to collect as many views as possible from all age groups.

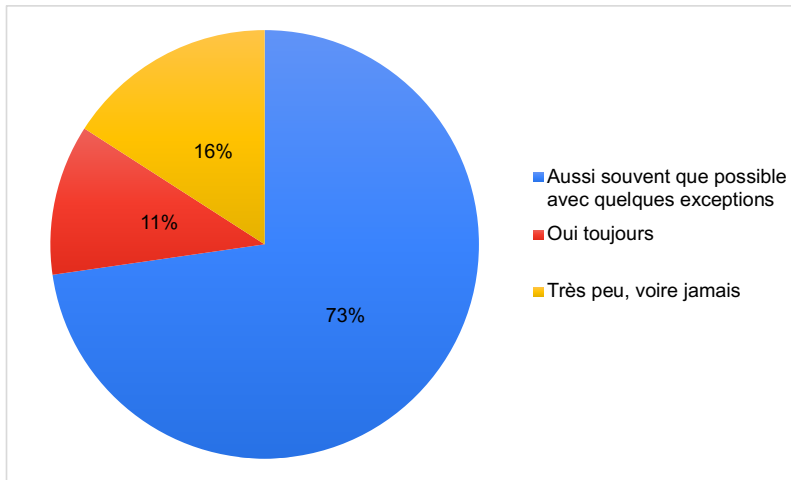
Having people from all kinds of age was important because we believe that the vision people have from the event industry and, more specifically, its future may vary based on that group.



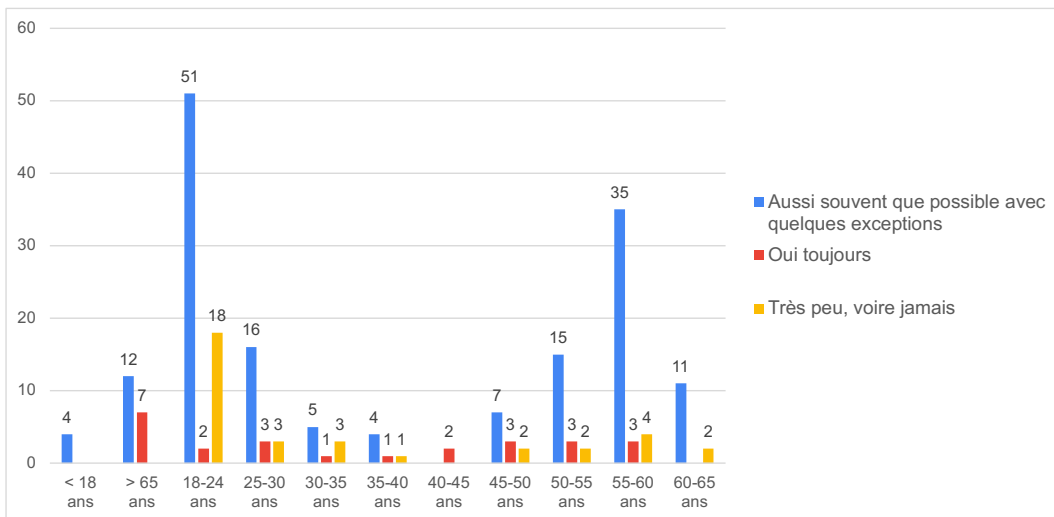
**FIGURE 1: AGE OF THE RESPONDENTS**

As you can see from the above graph, people from all age groups responded to our online survey. In the 220 people that answered our questions, 32% of them were between 18- and 24-year-old. This is normal because we are part of that group and, therefore, most of our contacts on social media are from that age too. The second biggest group is composed of people aged from 55 to 60 years old. Only 2 people aged between 40 and 45 years old responded to the survey. This accounts for a bit less than 1% of the total amount of respondents which is why we can not picture them on the graph. By looking at the graph, we can roughly say that we got a lot of answers from people aged from 30 years old and under as well as from people aged from 50 and older. The huge response from those two completely different generations is going to be interesting for our analysis. In between those two “big” groups, we got less reactions, but it will still be interesting to see how they perceive the situation. Moreover, we got the impression that people aged from 30 to 50 years old have globally the same kind of life.

When building our survey, we thought it would be useful to know how much people were respecting the governmental restrictions linked to the pandemic since it started last year. We also wanted to know whether their compliance with the measures varied with their age. We thought that their consent to the restrictions might influence their perception of the future of the industry.



**FIGURE 2: GENERAL COMPLIANCE WITH THE MEASURES**

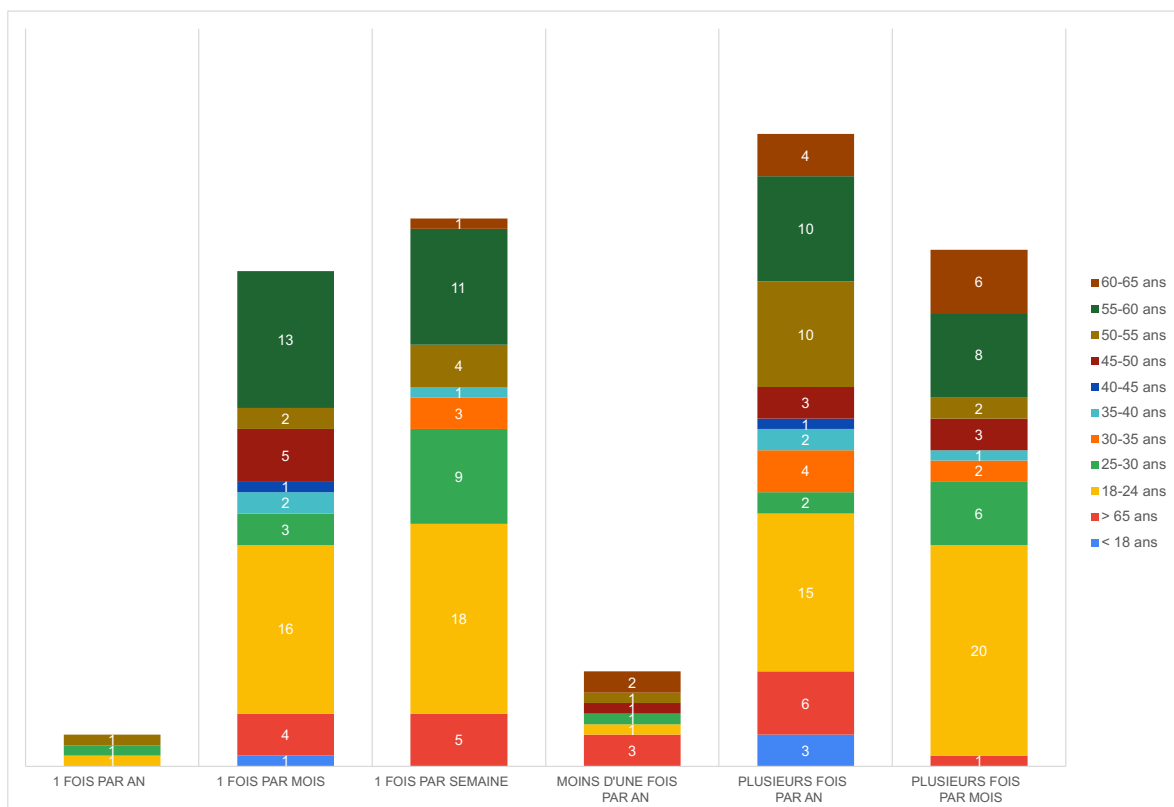


**FIGURE 3: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE AGE OF THE POPULATION AND THEIR COMPLIANCE WITH THE MEASURES**

The above graphs show us that, no matter their age, people tend to generally respect the measures as much as they can with some exceptions. We also realised that only 11% of people were fully compliant with the restrictions and only 16% did not respect it at all. And no matter their age, for each age group, there is only up to 3 people that are following strictly the restrictions, with the exception of the people older than 65 years old.

By looking at the figure 3, we can also see that it is the young people of 18 to 24 years old that tend to comply the least with the restrictions. This can be due to the fact that they are the people that are the less threaten by the virus.

However, we can state that the general trend is clearly to do the best you can to respect the measures but with a tendency to bend the rules on some occasions, no matter the age of the people.



**FIGURE 4: FREQUENCY OF PARTICIPATION IN EVENTS ACCORDING TO AGE**

To carry out our analysis, we also thought it would be useful to know how frequently people used to go to events before the pandemic. This is represented in the figure 4 just here above.

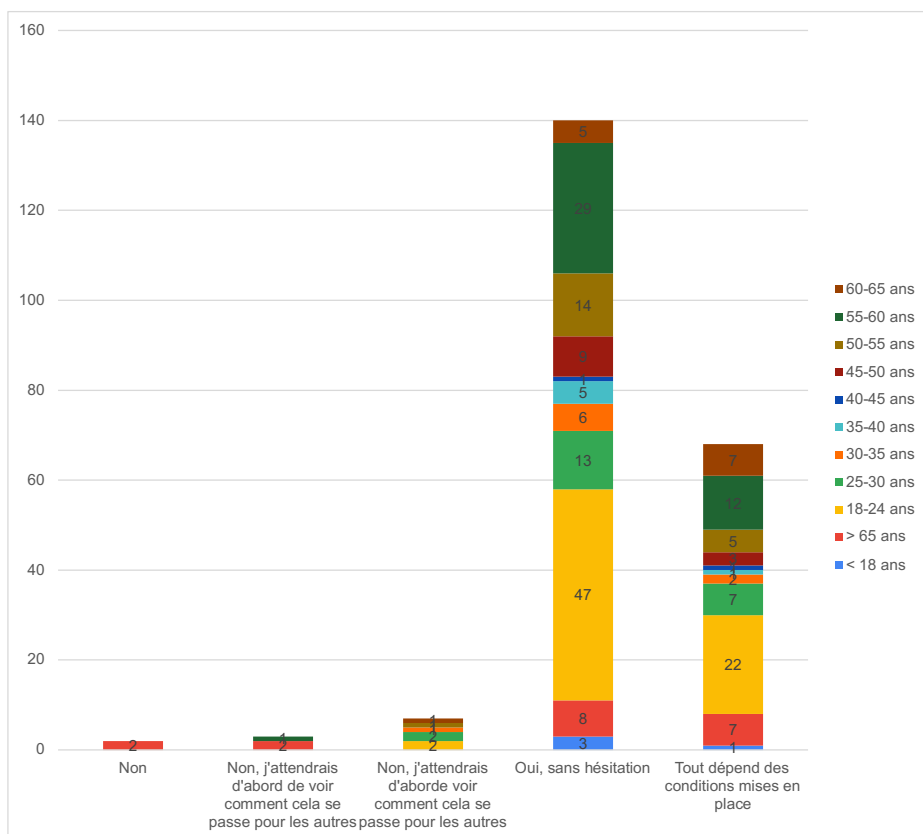
Usually, people tend to go to events more than one time per year. We did not observe any kind of correlation between the frequency of participation at an event and the age of people. This means that whether people are young or further in their life, they tend to go as frequently to events.

We also asked people what kind of events they used to go to before the pandemic, and we got all kinds of answers from all the age groups. They used to go to private, public and corporate or professional events. The fact that we asked such a general question that encompasses all kinds of events can justify the fact that people went so often to events.

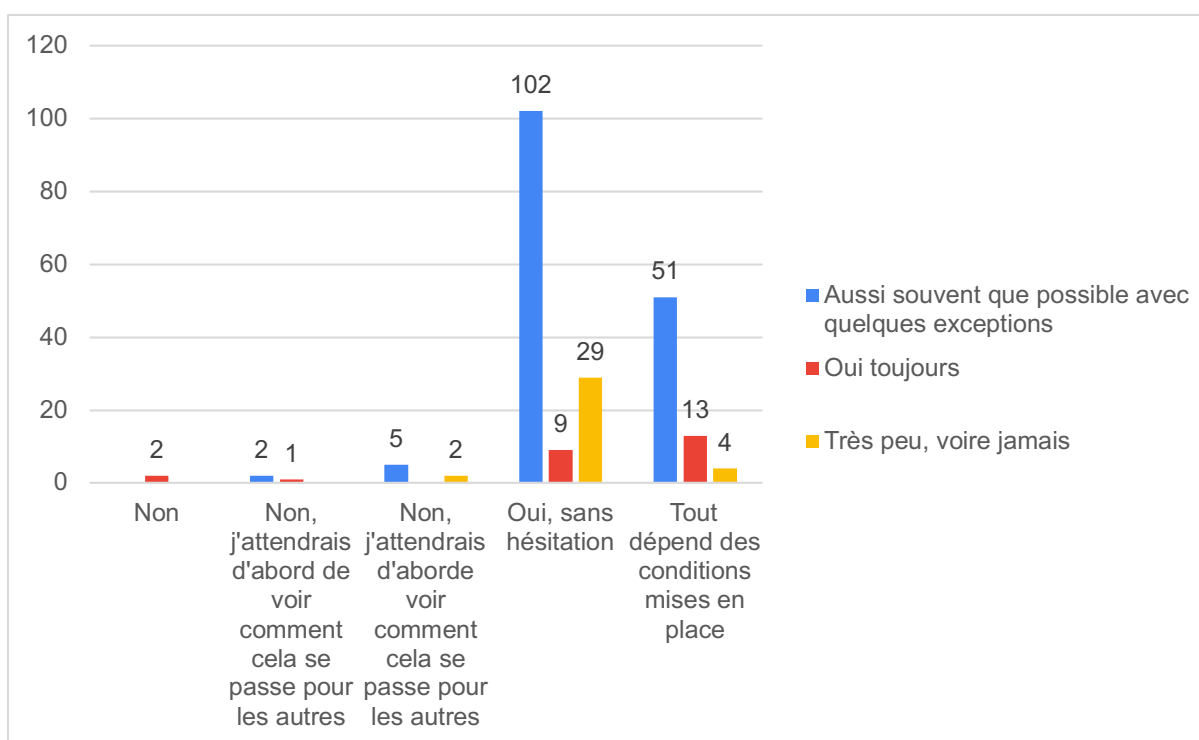
Private events such as weddings, religious celebrations and family dinners are the kind of events that people are the more likely to attend. Then, there are the music concerts that are closely followed by plays and musicals. More than half of the respondents also already went to a sporting event, a community event, a commercial convention and a professional event. Charitable events are the least successful even though 67 respondents had gone to one, which amounts to more than a quarter of the answers we collected. The details of the kinds of event that they attended can be found in the Appendix 2.

These are also the events that they are the more eager to go back to. (See Appendix 2)

The next two graphs are interesting when their analysis is combined together. The first graph shows the likelihood of people going back to an event if the government allowed it, in relation to their age, while the other graph shows the likelihood of them going back, in relation to how much they respected the sanitary measures imposed by the governments.



**FIGURE 5: LIKELIHOOD OF PEOPLE GOING BACK TO AN EVENT BY AGE**



**FIGURE 6: LIKELIHOOD OF PEOPLE GOING BACK TO AN EVENT IN FUNCTION OF THEIR COMPLIANCE WITH THE SANITARY MEASURES DURING THE PANDEMIC**

With the first graph, we can see that the majority of the respondents would go back to an event without hesitation. Another big proportion of people would go back if they judged that the measures put in place were secure enough to guarantee their safety. To put it simply, it looks like people are still eager to go back to events even though some of them will be more careful.

Obviously, people that were the least compliant with the restrictions usually tended to respond that they would go back without hesitation. However, we can see that even those people that were complying strongly with the sanitary measures would be generally eager to go back to an event. In their case, most of them would pay attention to the measures put in place by the organizers.

This observation is even more interesting when compared to what Mr. Cautauts told us during his interview. As you might recall, he believes that, when the government will allow the event industry to resume its activity, we will see an era similar to the 1920's with people wanting to go back to parties more than ever and a general feeling of excitement. We also saw that Mr. de Halleux shared that point of view. Moreover, Mr. Cautauts also told us that the pandemic would have changed our habits in a better way by giving us back the routine of cleaning our hands more frequently and being more careful with our belongings at an event.

It is also interesting to note that amongst the respondents aged between 55 and 60 years old, 29 out of 42 will go back to an event without hesitation. We think it is quite interesting when we know that in terms of percentage, it is the same proportion as from the age group of 18 to 25 years old. For that group age, 47 people out of 71 answered that they would return to an event without hesitation. It stands for 66% of that group compared to 69% for the others.

By analysing the two graphs together, we can see that two people that would not go back to an event once the government allowed it are people that respected strictly the measures during the pandemic, and we can even see that these two are aged of more than 65 years old.

Only a few people would wait to see how it goes for the other before going back and there is no real difference in terms of age for the people that choose that answer.

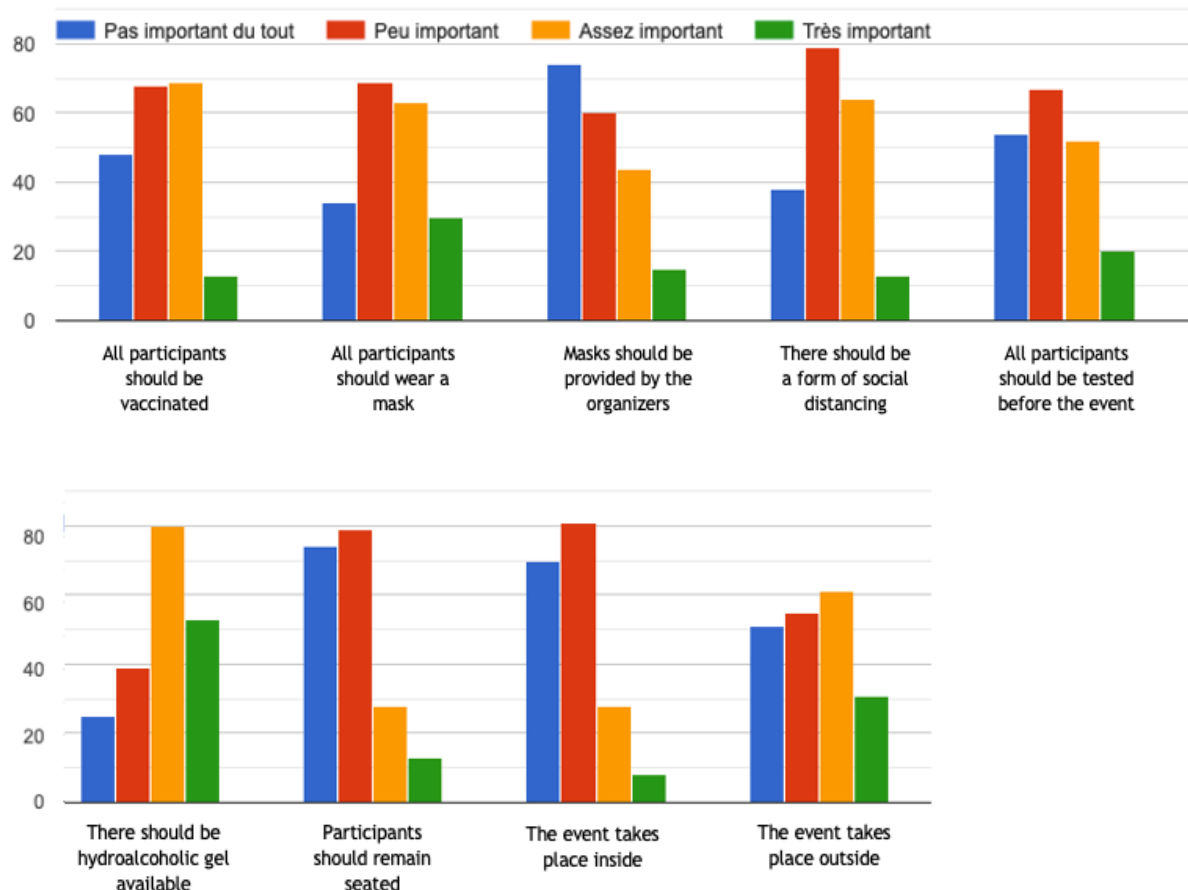
The eagerness of people to go back to an event can be linked to the memories they have from the events that they attended before the pandemic. As we saw in the first part of this work, there is a huge emphasis on the experience created at events for its attendees and how it is important they have great memories of their experience in order for them to go back or to recommend the event to their friends.

This is why we thought it was important for us to ask the surveyed persons what kind of memories they had from past experiences. Almost all of them said that going to an event brought them a sentiment of joy and happiness. They also linked their past experiences with excitement and amazement. These feelings often linked to the fact they had the occasion to share these experiences with friends and family. Only a small portion of the respondents gave negative sentiments, like fear, as an answer. The details of their answers can be found in Appendix 2.

Obviously, to qualify this analysis, we had to ask our respondents what would discourage them to go back to an event. This question was mainly intended for people who answered that they would not return to an event and those who would wait to see how it goes for others.

Generally, the reasons they gave us are mainly linked to their safety and security. As a reminder, the first is defined as "a state or a place where you are safe and not in danger or at risk" ("Safety", 2021) while the second is defined as "the protection of a person, building,

organization or country against threats such as crime, attacks". ("Security", 2021) Indeed, people tend to be reluctant to the idea of returning to an event mainly because they fear the virus or any other virus. They also have a lack of confidence in the security put in place. In addition to that, there is a fear of being back into a crowded place. That aspect was confirmed by Zenko and Kock (2020) that stated that pathogen threats such as a pandemic can make people more alert and more reluctant to be in a crowded space. Some of the respondents also pointed out a lack of time and interest for the idea of going back to an event. More details about this can be found in Appendix 2.



**FIGURE 7: IMPORTANCE OF MEASURES**

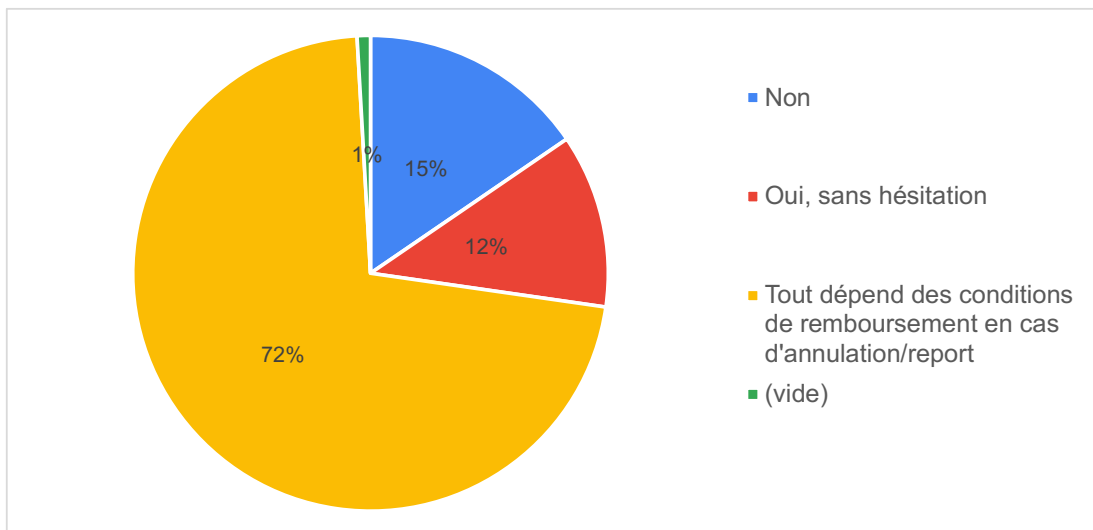
We also asked what could be the measures that could be put in place and that, on the contrary, would reassure the respondents and encourage them to go back to an event. We therefore asked them how important these measures seemed to be to them.

A measure that seemed to be quite important or really important to a majority of people was the availability of hydroalcoholic gel all around the venue. That trend was confirmed by the article by Salkowitz (2021) who stated that we should indeed expect to see a lot more of hand-sanitizers in the future. It was also quite important to the respondents that the attendees wear a mask, but they do not really care if it is the event organizer that provides them. There is a preference for events that take place outside rather than inside and people do not really care much if the attendees must remain seated or not.

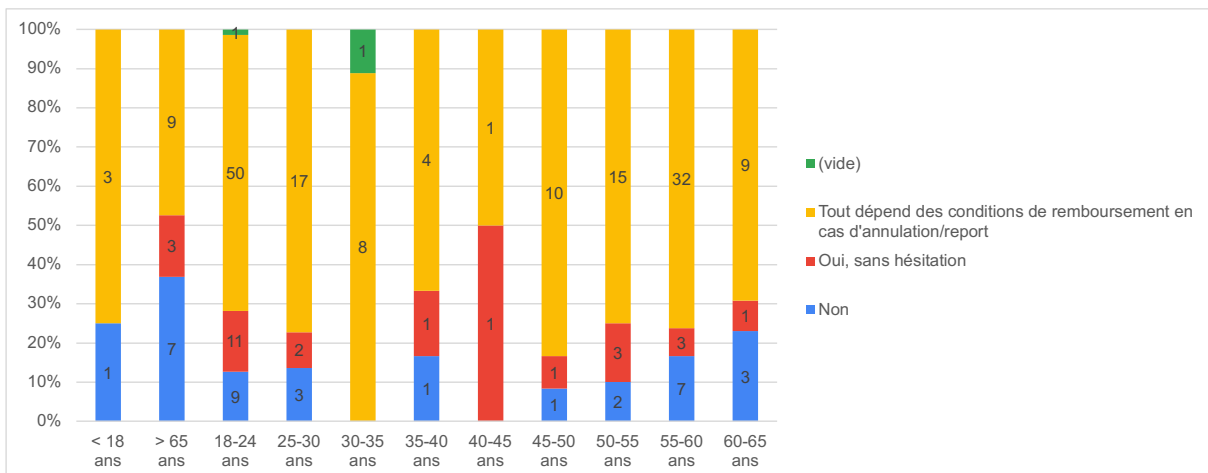
When asked whether all attendees should be vaccinated it appears to be quite important for a large part of them and not really important to the same amount of people. It was not important at all for 48 people and, on the contrary, really important for only 13 people.

The general opinion is rather divided when it comes to the idea of testing every attendee before the event. They mainly answered that it was not important at all, not really important and quite important. Only 20 people thought that it is really important to them. This fact is interesting especially now that we know that it is a measure that seems to be put in place for every test event happening at the moment. The population do not seem to care if attendees are tested before an event while the government and scientists feel like it is crucial. We could explain that difference by the fact that the testing of attendees is only done to control the spread of the virus in the context of events and that, once real events come back, we will not do it anymore.

In our survey, we also wondered if people would be willing to invest in a festival or in other type of event tickets even though the current situation is uncertain, and they are unable to know if it will take place or not. We are going to compare their answers with their age to see if it has had an influence on their answers. You can see what people generally responded in the graph hereafter and, just under it you can see how those results are shared in function of the age of the respondents.



**FIGURE 8: WILLINGNESS OF THE RESPONDENTS TO SPEND FOR AN UNCERTAIN EVENT NOW**



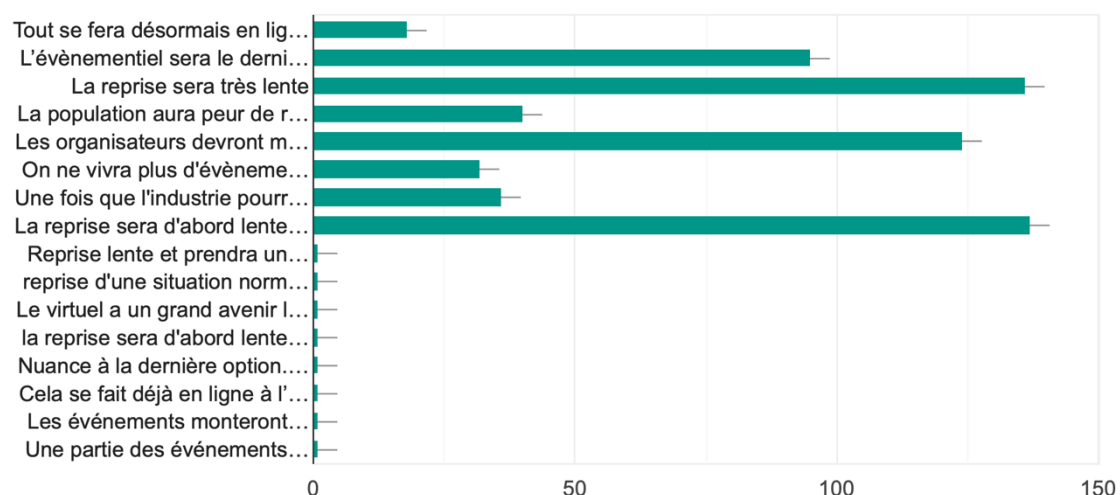
**FIGURE 9: WILLINGNESS TO SPEND FOR AN EVENT IN FUNCTION OF THE AGE OF THE RESPONDENTS**

In the graph we can see that for all age groups they would be willing to invest in an event ticket now if the reimbursement clauses in case of postponement or cancellation suit them. When you put all their answers together, it amounts for 72% of the responds. The remaining percentage is more or less equally shared between the fact that participants would invest without hesitation and the fact that they would not spend their money now for an event they do not know is happening or not.

The willingness to spend for an event was also analysed in a study in the MEIEA Journal made in the USA. They found out that over 80% of their respondents were more likely to spend for an event if the refund policies guaranteed them a full refund in case of cancellation. In addition to that, 70% added that they were also more likely to buy a ticket if they knew they could exchange it for another event or receive credit to be used in the future. (Rothschild and al., 2020) Good refund policies might be a criterion to make sure the event industry keeps being successful once it will be able to resume its activities, especially the live music part of it.

As you can see from the figure 9, it was only in the age group 30 to 35 years old that nobody answered they would not spend now. Indeed, all of them except for one answered that their choice depended on the reimbursement conditions. Furthermore, we saw earlier how the pandemic highlighted the broken system of refunds in the music industry. We believe that the conditions in case of cancellation or postponement are going to play a huge part in the future of the industry.

From these two graphs, we can again say that people are still eager when thinking about the idea of going back to an event.



**FIGURE 10: RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE FUTURE OF THE INDUSTRY**

A last question we asked to our respondents was how they see the future of the event industry. We offered them several choices of answer and they could select multiple ones. We also left them the possibilities to give us other answers we did not think of. The exact details of their answers can be found in Appendix 2 but a few of them are analysed hereafter.



Most of the respondents think that the activity of the industry will resume very slowly at first but will be back to normal after a few months. They also believe that a lot of different measures will have to be put in place for the industry to resume its activity. But, referring back to when we asked them if they would go back to an event, it seemed rather important to around 65 of them to have some kind of measures put in place.

People also tend to think that the sector will be the last one to resume its activity. Only 18 people believe that events will only take place online from now on. It is also interesting to see that there are almost as many people that think that everything will be back to normal as soon as the sector reopens as there are people that think that we will not see massive events such as Tomorrowland in the next five years. There are also roughly the same amount of people that assume that people will be too scared to go back to an event.

One thing that struck us, was the fact that one person told us that they believe the event organizer will raise their prices to compensate for the interruption of their activities for long months. This fact is counterbalanced both by what Mr. Cautauts told us and the theory. Indeed, we saw that event managers were advised to adapt their prices to the financial capabilities of their attendees that were also impacted by the pandemic. (Salkowitz, 2021)

## **2.1. Conclusion**

At the beginning of this analysis, we observed two major groups amongst our respondents: the people aged 30 years old and under, as well as people aged from 50 years old and above. We thought that their answers will vary in function of the group their group. Surprisingly enough, it wasn't really the case. Indeed, we did not note any significant difference between the answers of the two groups throughout our survey.

For example, no matter their age, people tended to respect the government restrictions as much as they could with some exception. The only significant difference for that question was that there were more people who respected it strictly in the older group and conversely, there were proportionately more people that did not respect it at all in the younger group.

Except from the slight difference we just showed you, for all the other questions we did not see any significant difference in the answers of the respondents in function of their age.

The respondents seemed eager to go back to an event even for the people who strongly respected the restrictions imposed by the government. Obviously, even if they are keen to go back, they still have some apprehension and most of them expect to see some kinds of measures taken by the organizers.

As we saw earlier in this work, the pandemic highlighted the historical problems of refund policies in the live music industry and changed them in an often-positive ways. From the results of both our survey and the one made in the USA, it seems that keep offering partial refund policies might reassure the customers after the pandemic when purchasing tickets for an event. They realized that we live in an uncertain world and their favourite artist might have to cancel its tour due to unpredictable reasons. (Rothschild and al., 2020)

When it comes to the future of the industry, they generally think that the sector will be the last one to resume its activity and that the recovery will be slow and cautious. However, attendees do not seem to believe more than that in the future of online events and tend more to expect a complete return to normal.

### 3. Conclusion

When comparing the results of the collected data from both our interviews and our online survey, we are able to come up with some interesting correlations as well as some differences.

The professionals we interviewed believe that as soon as it is allowed, their activities are going to be back to normal rather quickly and that people are eager to be able to go back to an event. This information was confirmed by our survey. Indeed, most of the respondents answered they would go back to an event without any hesitation. However, they tended to believe in a slow recovery of events.

As we stated earlier, people are expecting some kind of precautionary measures to be taken by organisers when they go back to an event. They seemed to share that point of view with the professionals which told us that they were willing to take those measures. However, we think it is important to temper their opinion. Indeed, Mr. de Halleux for example, told us that he would agree to organize events where everyone would remain seated but, on the other hand, Mr. Cautaeerts told us that he can not imagine participating to such an event, especially if it is a concert or a festival. Obviously, the difference is explained by the fact that the two professionals do not really deal with the same kind of events. Both for the professionals and the respondents, the most important precautionary measure would be the availability of hydroalcoholic gel. We also confirmed that fact thanks to the theory.

In his interview, Mr. Cautaeerts told us that he did not think the event sector would go completely online but that we would instead see a hybrid form of event. This was confirmed by the fact that only 18 respondents out of 220 believed that, in the future, we will only see online events.

Last but not least, most of the respondents believed we will see a slow recovery of the event industry. When it comes to corporate events, it is a point of view that the professionals are sharing but when it comes to private events, their opinions tend to differ. Both Mr. de Halleux and Mr. Cautaeerts believe that we will see a lot of small events popping up as soon as it is authorized. In some ways, it means that we will have slow recovery because it will only be small events with 200 people or so. Still, in other ways, they also believe that we will see a lot of those and, thus, that the industry will restart rather quickly as soon as the authorities allow it. In one case or the other, people seem eager to go back to an event.

## General Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was mainly to analyse the impact of the pandemic COVID-19 on the event industry and more specifically on Project 12, a company in the sector. Our main research question was therefore the following:

**“What impact has the pandemic had on the event industry, and more specifically on Project 12?”**

To answer that research question, we started by defining the different topics and concepts related to it. We started by briefly explaining the place of events in our lives and its history. Then we defined the theoretical aspects of events and its management. We were able to conclude that the conception of an event evolves around the idea of the attendees' experience and that a proper risk management plan is important to the smooth running of an event. We also explained how technologies and data became important in the industry. More importantly, we explained the overall context in which this work was written. The pandemic and its consequences on the event industry were explained. We were also able to give a few examples on how professionals of the sector adapted themselves to the situation by re-orientating their activities or diversifying it. In that part, we also presented Project 12 and its history. Lastly, we analysed how the situation has evolved in the meantime. This constituted the basis of our main hypothesis, which is the following:

**“As with everyone in the industry, Project 12 had to stop completely its normal course of business during the pandemic but was able to overcome the crisis by re-orientating itself to other types of activities.”**

To confirm our hypothesis, we decided to do several interviews with different professionals of the industry, each specialized in a different field. The first one was done with Mr. Sven Cautaerts, the CEO of Project 12. The second one was made with Mr. Hervé van Wassenhove, the CFO of JML Concept, a catering company. And, lastly, we interviewed Mr. Alexis de Halleux, the manager of de Halleux s.a., a company specialized in the rental of high-end tents for events and the rental and sale of golf carts. Through these interviews we wanted to see if they all experienced the crisis in the same way or not and, more specifically, if Project 12 was part of the norm.

When writing this hypothesis, we thought that even though Mr. Cautaerts was indeed going to re-orientate himself towards other kinds of business activities but we believe that his main focus would remain on the organisation and management of event. However, we discovered that he planned on changing his business activity almost completely. We were quite surprised to see that he did not try organizing online events as most of the professionals of the industry have done. He wants now to focus more on e-commerce, a new passion that he developed during the pandemic.

Nonetheless, we think that this hypothesis can be affirmed. Indeed, even if Mr. Cautaerts chose another path than the one we imagined, he was still able to overcome the crisis by re-orienting himself to other types of activities. He proved to us that in addition to being useful in the event industry, versatility can also allow you to overcome a crisis on a bigger scale.

Thanks to our interviews, we were also able to conclude that it is not possible for everyone to adapt their activities to the crisis. Indeed, we saw that Project 12 and de Halleux s.a. were able to use their competences and knowledge in other fields that event at their advantages. Mr.

Cautaerts is a versatile entrepreneur that only saw opportunities in the crisis and seized it perfectly by developing several other kinds of activities. For de Halleux s.a., they used their knowledge in carpentry to develop a new business activity to add to their portfolio. In the meantime, JML Concept was not as successful in the idea of diversifying their activities and re-orientating themselves. They suffered a lot from the crisis. That aspect was also enhanced by the difference in terms of subsidies between the North and the South of the country that we studied.

But as we wrote this work, we also wanted to see if the attendees' views about events had changed since the pandemic happened. This is why we came up with a sub-question which is the following:

**“What does the future of the event industry look like in the mind of event goers?”**

We based that sub-question on our findings made in the first part of this work. Indeed, when undertaking our research, we realised the importance of the concept of experience but also how a negative experience could affect and damage the views of the attendees and other people at an event. We also detailed how the pandemic comprises a risk for the event managers. So, we wondered whether, after a year of lockdowns, social distancing and bans of assembly, people would still be willing to return to an event. We wanted to know if they were going to be apprehensive being back in a crowded place or if nothing had changed in their minds. Based on our findings, we came up with the following sub-hypothesis:

**“Despite the pandemic circumstances and the prolonged absence of events, people are generally eager to go back to an event.”**

Our hypothesis was supported by an online survey that we posted on social media. Through that survey, we asked different kinds of questions that allowed us to get a better understanding of the views of event attendees. By analysing the data we were able to conclude, that, no matter their age, the respondents seemed quite excited by the idea of a return of events. Even those respondents that told us they respected the government restrictions strongly appeared to be eager to go back to an event.

During the interviews mentioned earlier, the perception of the future of the event industry by its professionals was also analysed. Indeed, the three of them believe that once it is authorized, things will return to normal rather quickly. To quote Mr. Cautaerts, he believes that we will see a return of the 1920s and Mr. de Halleux believes we will see a lot of small events pop up just to keep up with the demand of the attendees. They also all believe that these events will be successful because people are eager to go back to one.

This sub-hypothesis is also confirmed by the research we made on the evolution of the situation since we started to write this work. Indeed, we discovered that different test events were organised in several countries in Europe. For all test events that we covered, attendees seemed eager and happy to be there. As for what we discovered in our survey, the conditions in which these events are organised seems to be quite important, especially in the mind of authorities and scientists. Although opinions differ as to the ideal conditions, these events seem to remain successful and attractive in the eye of attendees. In addition to that, the professionals of the industry are generally willing to take these precautionary measures if it means they can resume their activity.

Both from the data collected from the interviews and our research, we can add that online events will have a future in the industry even after a return to normal. As we saw, they offer

infinite creative possibilities to event managers but also a solution for the people that are more reluctant to being back in a crowded space. With online events, organisers might also be able to increase their revenue by expanding their offer with this new type of event. The respondents of our survey, however, are not that convinced about the future of online events.

As a personal conclusion, we think that everyone should be inspired by the versatility shown by Mr. Cautaerts. He demonstrated perfectly how a crisis can be used at your advantage if you dare to take some risks. In his case, it paid off. However, we are conscious that reinventing yourself is more complicated in some fields of the industry. Finally, from everything we have studied and based on our personal convictions, we sincerely believe that events will be return to normal sooner than we imagined. From our point of view, human beings are social beings and needs to have social interactions in real life with others.

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