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The Futures of the Event Industry

Perspectives on Digitalization, Sustainability and Transportation

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Abstract

The events industry is evolving as sustainability and digitalization increasingly shape how events are designed, organized, and experienced. This report explores how these twin transitions unfold in the Swedish event industry and their influence on transport efficiency.

Using a mixed-methods approach, this study draws on interviews, field observations, document analyses, and survey data collected between 2021 and 2025 across a diverse range of events, including fairs, congresses, conferences, and sports events.

The findings show that digitalization is now a structurally embedded feature of the industry. Digital and hybrid formats expand accessibility, extend the temporal and spatial boundaries of events, and enable new forms of experience design, while reinforcing the unique value of physical co-presence for networking, informal interaction, and sensory engagement.

Sustainability has moved from a peripheral concern to a strategic priority, supported by certifications, circular material practices, and climate-smart catering, although its implementation varies across event types and actors. Transport efficiency emerges as both a challenge and an opportunity, highlighting the need to reconsider when physical travel is necessary and how events are organized in space and time. Overall, the report suggests that the future of the event industry lies not in replacing physical events but in integrating digitalization, sustainability, and transport efficiency in ways that balance environmental responsibility with the social and experiential value of events.

Chapter 1 – Setting the Scene

The event and meeting industries, such as festivals, conferences, exhibitions, and sporting events, are in a transition shaped by advancements in digitalization and a growing emphasis on sustainability (Getz, 2017; Raj & Griffin, 2024; Svensson & Radmann, 2023). Digital transformation has accelerated, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting the widespread adoption of new technologies such as virtual and augmented reality, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021). In parallel, the events industry is associated with considerable environmental impacts, including greenhouse gas emissions, high short-term resource consumption, and waste generation. These impacts, combined with rising societal expectations and regulatory pressures, have pushed the events industry toward sustainability transitions. The ongoing twin transition has led to the co-evolution and mutual reinforcement of sustainability and digital transformation in the events industry.

Digitalization has fostered broader inclusion, yet it also disrupts conventional event flows from the organization to the participant experience. Navigating these shifts is now a defining contribution to the industry. The event industry needs to develop thoughtful digital inclusion strategies aligned with human immersion to ensure that accessibility, diversity, and well-being remain central to the experience (Boyle et al., 2024; Zeng & Chen, 2025). Simultaneously, digital tools, such as smart mobile applications and real-time tracking systems, have become valuable for supporting crowd flow, logistics, and human mobility during larger events (Romanova, 2024). Sustainability is no longer a peripheral concern; it affects the planning and implementation of events. Organizers are increasingly prioritizing waste reduction, circular material use, and environmental stewardship (Karabag et al., 2026). Notably, digitalization can help strengthen these efforts by enabling more precise coordination, smarter resource use, and deeper engagement with sustainability goals (Dogan & Edwards, 2024).

Transport efficiency is an area where this integration is particularly necessary (Ceccon et al., 2024; Russo et al., 2020). Transport to and from events often represents the largest source of carbon emissions associated with an event. Here, digital tools offer significant potential, from optimizing attendee travel routes and promoting shared mobility to enabling high-quality hybrid or fully digital event formats that reduce the need for long-distance travel altogether (Karabag et al., 2020). In the Swedish context, where sustainability targets are ambitious and widely supported, such approaches can play a decisive role in reducing the climate impact on the event industry.

However, the transition toward a fully digital and sustainable event landscape remains challenging. Digitalization can create new barriers, particularly for communities with limited access to technology (Boyle et al., 2024) or impact the immersion of experiencing an event (Heinrich et al., 2025; Lei & Ngan, 2024). Moreover, realizing the full potential of digital tools requires overcoming sector-specific obstacles and fostering innovation that delivers both environmental and social value (Abdulghani & Winkler, 2023). This requires a more nuanced understanding of how the event industry interacts with and implements digitalization and sustainability measures.

Hence, this report contributes to the debate by exploring how digitalization, sustainability imperatives, and ambitions to make transport more efficient shape the future of the event industry. It provides a forward-looking approach and guidance on how stakeholders can work to realize the opportunities ahead as they implement digitalization, sustainability, and transport efficiency.

1.1 Information about the project and the use of the report

This report is based on the findings of the research project “The Future of the Event and Meeting Industry in a Transport-Efficient Society After COVID-19,” (grant number: 2020-024533) financed by the Swedish Energy Agency (Karabag et al., 2020). This project aims to explore how the Swedish event industry is evolving in response to the twin transitions of digitalization and sustainability, with particular attention to transport efficiency. This research is a collaboration between Linköping University and Södertörn University and will run from 2021 to 2026.

The project maintains an ongoing dialogue with parallel research initiatives and regularly presents preliminary results at academic conferences, expert seminars, and workshops, as well as in journal articles and book chapters. This engagement helped to validate the findings and situate them within a broader community of inquiries. The insights shared in this report are further supported by published and ongoing research papers and book chapters that emerged from the project.

This report is intended to serve as a resource for stakeholders across the event industry, including organizers, venues, fair managers, event sustainability managers, public authorities, and policymakers. By sharing current insights into how digitalization and sustainability trends are unfolding in practice, this report aims to support informed decision-making and strategic planning. It also seeks to contribute to broader discussions on how the events industry can transition toward a more transport-efficient and environmentally responsible future. The findings presented herein offer evidence-based reflections and illustrative examples that may inspire further experimentation and collaboration within this sector.

1.2 Empirics and methodology of this report

This report draws on a mixed-methods research design that combines interviews, field observations, video and written materials, documents, social media data, and survey responses to examine developments in digital, hybrid, and physical events. Data were collected between 2021 and 2025 at a diverse set of events and exhibitions, including the Eurovision Song Contest, Van Gogh Exhibition: Immersive Experience, Allt För Sjön, Göteborg Book Fair, and Midnattsloppet.

The primary empirical material consisted of 33 semi-structured interviews with industry actors, including executives, project leaders, event program specialists, entrepreneurs, and marketing professionals. The interviews focused on organizational experiences with digitalization, hybrid formats, and changing event practices. Most of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The study also included 11 shorter interviews conducted during the study visits, as well as observations from 17 visits to events, exhibitions, and fairs. These visits enabled the researchers to observe how digital and physical formats were implemented in practice and how visitors interacted with them. Observations were documented using memo-based field notes, which were

summarized following each visit. In addition, short interviews were conducted with five participants from sports, art, music, academia, and exhibitions to capture user perspectives on digitalization and sustainability in event experiences.

The study further examined publicly available video interviews, podcasts, and presentations related to selected events and immersive exhibitions, including material on large-scale mobile events, such as the Eurovision Song Contest, as well as on immersive exhibition formats. Social media discussions are reviewed to capture audience reactions and public perspectives on digital and immersive event experiences.

Survey data were collected from 192 visitors and exhibitors at exhibitions and fairs. The survey aimed to better understand the conditions shaping the Swedish event industry and examine visitor motivations and perceptions related to the three key dimensions addressed in this project: digitalization, transport efficiency, and sustainability initiatives. The survey responses were analyzed alongside the qualitative material to explore how digitalization is adapted and experienced by both event organizers and participants, and how environmental sustainability considerations are addressed across different event formats. Overall, these sources provide a broad empirical basis for examining the development, implementation, and experiences of digital and hybrid event formats across various types of events and exhibitions. The report uses this material to explore how digitalization, sustainability, and transport efficiency together influence ongoing changes in the event industry and to identify potential opportunities for future development.

1.3 The event industry: An overview

The event industry includes the planning, organization, and execution of planned gatherings designed to achieve specific social, cultural, economic, and political purposes (Roberts et al., 2022). These gatherings include, but are not limited to, conferences, congresses, trade fairs, exhibitions, festivals, corporate events, public celebrations, and sporting events (Dolasinski et al., 2021). The events industry operates at the intersection of several sectors, including transportation, tourism, hospitality, culture, and business services, and plays a significant role in facilitating knowledge exchange, cultural expression, place promotion, and economic activity.

Events are characterized by their temporality, as they occur within a defined timeframe, and by their reliance on the coordination of multiple actors, including event organizers, venues, suppliers, sponsors, public authorities, and participants. Owing to its project-based and networked nature, the industry depends on temporary organizational structures and collaborative value-creation processes, which distinguish it from industries characterized by permanent production systems. This temporality and multi-actor coordination also influence how innovation, digitalization, and sustainability practices are implemented and diffused within the sector.

1.3.1 Digitalization of the event industry

Digitalization refers to the use of digital technologies to support, enhance, or transform processes, interactions, and services. Digital tools offer benefits for operational efficiency and participant engagement (Romanova, 2024). Technologies such as apps, QR codes, automated registration systems, and streamlined event management reduce both costs and workload. Simultaneously, digital platforms enable the real-time collection and analysis of data, helping organizers learn and improve (Aktepe & Demirci, 2024). Digitalization can also create more personalized and engaging experiences for participants while broadening access to those who may otherwise be excluded owing to financial, geographical, or physical barriers.

Simultaneously, this digital transformation did not occur without tension. Questions regarding data privacy, digital exclusion, and the long-term value of online formats remain unanswered. Many organizers continue to grapple with maintaining the social and informal dimensions of events in virtual settings. There is also a broader societal balancing act at play: while many welcome the resumption of physical gatherings, these benefits must be weighed against the urgent need to reduce emissions and foster a transport-efficient society. Thus, hybrid solutions are likely to play a central role. These formats allow organizers to combine the best of both worlds, maintaining in-person interaction where it matters most while also offering flexible, low-impact alternatives.

1.3.2 Sustainability in the event industry

Sustainability in the event industry refers to integrating environmental, social, and economic considerations into the planning and execution of events to minimize negative impacts and create long-term value for stakeholders and host communities. Events are resource-intensive and temporary in nature, and often require significant material input, energy use, and logistical coordination within a limited timeframe. Consequently, they can generate considerable environmental impacts, particularly through transportation-related carbon emissions, energy consumption at venues, and large volumes of waste from food, packaging, and temporary infrastructure (Collins & Cooper, 2017; Collins et al., 2009; Mair et al., 2024). These impacts have led to increasing recognition of the need for lifecycle-oriented sustainability management in the event sector, including waste reduction, renewable energy use, sustainable procurement, and measures to reduce transport-related emissions. Such practices reflect a shift from viewing sustainability as an add-on toward integrating it as a core component of event planning and operations.

Beyond environmental considerations, sustainability in the event industry encompasses social dimensions, including stakeholder inclusion and community well-being (Fredline et al., 2006). Events can generate positive social outcomes, such as strengthening local identity, fostering cultural exchange, and supporting community engagement; however, they may also create negative effects, including the disruption of local residents and the unequal distribution of benefits (Moisescu et al., 2019). Therefore, sustainable event management emphasizes stakeholder engagement, particularly involving local communities, public authorities, and suppliers in planning and decision-making processes. Furthermore, events can serve as platforms to promote sustainability awareness and influence participant behavior, contributing to broader societal sustainability transitions by diffusing norms and practices related to environmental and social responsibility.

The economic dimension of sustainability focuses on ensuring the long-term viability and resilience of events, while supporting local and regional development. Sustainable event practices can generate economic benefits through improved resource efficiency, reduced operational costs (Karabag et al., 2026), and enhanced reputations among increasingly sustainable participants and sponsors (Wickham et

al., 2021). Technological innovation plays an important role in enabling sustainability in the event industry through digital tools for resource monitoring, smart energy management, and hybrid event formats that reduce the need for travel. Thus, sustainability in the event industry entails a transition across organizational practices, stakeholder relationships, and technological infrastructure. This transition reflects broader societal shifts toward sustainability and highlights the role of events not only as sources of environmental impact but also as potential arenas for innovation, learning, and the diffusion of sustainable practices.

1.3.3 The event industry in a transport-efficient society

The event industry has traditionally been built on physical gatherings with business models and capabilities that are deeply reliant on travel by air, rail, and road. However, as climate targets become increasingly ambitious, there is an urgent need to reduce transportation emissions (Chirieleison et al., 2020). In Sweden, transportation remains the largest emitter of carbon dioxide, making travel reduction a central strategy to achieve a sustainable energy system (Andersson, 2016). Therefore, substituting travel-intensive events with digital or hybrid alternatives is not only a matter of innovation but also a societal necessity. The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a stress test for this transition, dramatically reducing travel and compelling event organizers to rapidly adopt virtual platforms. Forced digitalization offers valuable lessons on how the industry can decouple its value creation from physical mobility.

While some event formats, such as academic conferences and internal business meetings, transitioned relatively smoothly to digital platforms, others, especially those built around social interaction, entertainment, and destination appeal, faced greater challenges.

Industry is increasingly adopting flexible and transport-efficient formats, including well-designed digital and hybrid alternatives. This shift requires not only technical capabilities but also new business models, stakeholder collaboration, and policy support. It also reflects a broader societal challenge: maintaining vital human and professional interactions while respecting long-term climate goals.

1.4 Outline of the report

The report is structured into four main sections. The first section sets the scene by introducing the project, outlining the methodology and empirical material, and providing an overview of the event industry with a particular focus on digitalization, sustainability, and transport efficiency. The second section presents the scope of the event industry in Sweden including discussions of different event segments such as fairs, conferences, sport events, entertainment and music events, and art events. The third section presents the empirical insights of the study, focusing on digital experience design, organizational aspects of digitalization and sustainability transitions, and transport efficiency. Finally, the fourth section discusses the future development of the event industry in Sweden, highlighting key findings, implications, and possible pathways forward.

Chapter 2 – The Swedish event industry: Scope and analytical approach

Sweden's event industry constitutes a heterogeneous yet increasingly significant part of the national economy, spanning commercial, cultural, sporting, and knowledge-based activities. Rather than a single, uniform sector, the event industry is best understood as a system of event categories that differ substantially in scale, frequency, organizational form, spatial concentration, and societal function. These differences shape how events generate value, how they are organized, and how they are affected by broader structural pressures such as the dual transition toward digitalization and sustainability.

The Swedish event industry includes, on the one hand, a small number of capital- and infrastructure-intensive formats that rely on large venues, professional organizations, and concentrated visitor flows. However, it is dominated by many smaller, recurring, and locally embedded events organized by microfirms, nonprofit organizations, associations, and volunteers. This duality is reflected in employment patterns characterized by project-based work, freelancing, and temporary contracts, as well as in the strong regional spread of events across metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas.

In recent years, the events industry has experienced significant disruptions and subsequent recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic. While the pandemic exposed structural vulnerabilities related to financial resilience, labor conditions, and dependence on physical co-presence, the post-pandemic period did not yield a uniform transition pathway. Instead, selective reconfiguration has intensified, with digitalization and sustainability emerging as central, cross-cutting pressures that affect event categories in different ways.

This report builds on this and adopts a categorical approach to the Swedish event industry. It focuses on a set of analytically distinct event categories: fairs and trade exhibitions; congresses and conferences; sports events; entertainment and music events; and art events. These categories are examined separately because they are

shaped by different organizational structures, digitalization pathways, and sustainability challenges. Table 1 provides an overview of the characteristics of each event category, which are discussed in detail below.

2.1 Fairs

The fair category encompasses business-to-busin1ess (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) trade fairs and exhibitions, industry expos, and marketplace events organized in specialized exhibition centers and large multipurpose venues. These events primarily serve commercial, industrial, and professional exchange functions, facilitating market access, supplier–buyer interaction, product demonstration, and sectoral coordination. The ecosystem typically includes fair organizers, venue operators, trade associations, destination organizations, municipal authorities, and a wide network of suppliers of logistics, stand construction, catering, and technical services.

In Sweden, the fair category is characterized by a relatively concentrated infrastructure combined with regional dispersion of event activity. A small number of large, integrated exhibition venues such as Svenska Mässan, Stockholmsmässan, and Malmömässan host the majority of high-volume national and international fairs, benefiting from transport accessibility, accommodation capacity, and proximity to corporate and institutional actors. Furthermore, several mid-sized and regional venues support specialized fairs aligned to local industries and regional economic profiles, contributing to geographic reach and sectoral diversity (Tillväxtverket, 2025). This position is fair as both a national meeting point for key industries and a regionally embedded platform for sector-specific exchanges.

Sweden's major exhibition venues attract approximately 4 million visitors per year, underscoring the continued importance of fairs and exhibitions as large-scale meeting platforms in the events industry (See for example, Need.se, 2025; Svenskamässan, 2025). A limited number of flagship fairs, such as the Göteborg Book Fair (Bokmässan) and Allt för sjön (Boat & Marine Fair), account for a substantial share of this activity, with several hundred thousand visits annually concentrated in a small set of nationally and internationally recognized events. Across these fairs, the number of exhibiting organizations is best understood in terms of order of magnitude rather than precise

counts, with several thousand exhibitors per year at the largest events alone. Although these figures are approximate and involve repeated participation across events, they illustrate the scale and concentration of the fairness category within the Swedish event landscape.

Fairs are highly logistics- and space-intensive, relying on large indoor venues, temporary installations, and the complex coordination of exhibitors, materials, and visitor flows. Event cycles are typically short and concentrated, with high peak intensities during setup, event days, and dismantling. While visitor volumes and exhibitor numbers can be substantial, fairs are less dependent on repeated participation by the same individual and are more oriented toward organizational and professional attendance.

Digitalization has become an increasingly important, though supportive rather than substitutive, feature of the fairs category. Digital tools are widely used in exhibitor registration, visitor management, matchmaking, lead generation, and data analytics, enabling targeted interactions before, during, and after physical events. Hybrid and virtual components are primarily applied to extend reach, support pre-event networking, and maintain post-event engagement rather than to replace the physical exhibition format. In this sense, digitalization enhances the coordination and efficiency of fairs while reinforcing the central role of face-to-face interaction in product demonstration and relationship building.

Sustainability pressures are particularly pronounced in the fair category owing to travel-intensive visitor patterns, material-heavy stand construction, and energy use in large venues. Temporary structures, short event cycles, and repeated buildup and dismantling processes create challenges related to waste, resource use, and emissions. Consequently, organizers and venue operators face growing pressure to adopt more resource-efficient practices, including reusable stand systems, improved logistics planning, and coordination with transport and accommodation providers. These pressures are reinforced by expectations from exhibitors, public authorities, and destination organizations, which position fairs as an important test case for sustainability-oriented innovation in large-scale indoor events.

2.2 Congress & conferences

The congress and conference category comprises national and international congresses, academic conferences, professional association meetings, and recurring rotating events typically organized by scientific societies, professional organizations, public authorities, and universities. The Congress is primarily knowledge-driven and purpose-oriented, with a strong emphasis on research exchange, professional development, governance, and networking, rather than direct commercial transactions. The ecosystem includes congresses and professional conference organizers (PCOs), convention bureaus, universities, venues, hotels, destination organizations, and a wide range of technical and service providers.

In Sweden, the congress market is characterized by recurring, rotating events that often return to the same destination at multiyear intervals. According to data from the Swedish Network of Convention Bureaus (SNCVB), 310 national congresses will be conducted in 2024 across its member destinations, generating approximately 110,000 guest nights. National congresses typically attract between 50 and 1,000 participants, are held mainly on weekdays, and last, on average, two to three days. Thematic profiles are dominated by medicine, science, professional and trade associations, and public-sector-related fields, reflecting Sweden's strong research base and institutional landscape (SNCVB, 2024).

International congresses constitute a smaller but strategically important segment. In 2024, Sweden will host 235 international congresses, placing it 14th globally according to the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) rankings. These events attracted more than 83,000 international participants and generated approximately 118,000 international guests. While spending estimates remain conservative, SNCVB calculations suggest that international congresses contributed at least SEK 415 million to direct tourism-related effects, with actual impacts likely higher due to longer stays and accompanying travel (SNCVB, 2024). Beyond short-term economic effects, international congresses have played a key role in strengthening Sweden's position as a knowledge-intensive and internationally connected destination.

The spatial organization of congress activities differs from that of fairs. While the metropolitan regions (Stockholm and Göteborg) remain dominant due to accessibility, accommodation capacity, and institutional density, congresses are more

geographically dispersed across Sweden. Medium-sized cities with strong universities and hospitals, such as Uppsala, Lund, Umeå, Örebro, and Linköping, host a substantial share of national and international congresses. This reflects the importance of local academic and professional hosts over venue size alone and highlights the role of congresses as instruments for regional knowledge development and place-based capability building.

2.3 Sport events

The sports events category encompasses a wide spectrum of organized competitive and participatory events, ranging from international championships and elite championships to mass-participation races and recurring club-based competitions. Sports events are characterized by high frequency, strong geographic dispersion, and deep integration into civil society, relying extensively on voluntary organizations, sports federations, and local clubs. As a result, sports events form a distributed event ecology rather than a clearly bounded market segment.

Sports events are commonly distinguished by scale, recurrence, and primary orientation (spectator- vs. participant-driven). Established typologies differentiate between mega-events and hallmark events (e.g., the Olympic Games and world championships), major single-sport championships, mass-participation events (such as marathons and open races), and small-scale or community-based competitions that take place regularly throughout the year (Gammon, 2014). While mega-events attract disproportionate attention in policy and media discourse, they represent only a very small share of total sports event activity.

In Sweden, the overall number of sporting events is substantial. Data from the Swedish Sports Confederation (RF) and SISU Idrottsutbildarna indicate that organized sports activities generate more than 100,000 competitions and arrange sporting events annually, the majority of which are local or regional and organized within the club system (RF, 2024a, 2024b). These events typically involve small numbers of spectators and modest use of resources individually, but collectively constitute the largest event category in terms of frequency and participation. In contrast, elite and international championships generate high media visibility, concentrated visitor flows, and short-term tourism effects.

The economic and tourism relevance of sporting events varies significantly according to event type. Major championships and international tournaments can generate substantial visitor spending and media exposure, particularly in winter sports and select team sports. At the same time, empirical research consistently shows that small- and medium-sized sporting events, including mass-participation races and recurring tournament events, often generate more stable and locally embedded economic effects than one-off mega-events due to lower infrastructure costs, repeated visitation, and stronger links to local organizations (Zourgani & Ait-Bihi, 2023). Therefore, port events combine high aggregate volume with uneven economic concentration.

Sports events are closely intertwined with sustainability challenges. Environmentally, this sector contributes to emissions primarily through participant and spectator travel, temporary infrastructure, and venue operations. At the same time, sporting events are increasingly affected by climate change, particularly those held outdoors. A comprehensive scoping review of international research identified heat stress, extreme weather, seasonal instability, and the declining climatic suitability of host locations as growing risks across all levels of organized sports (Orr et al., 2022). Winter sports events are particularly vulnerable to warmer winters and unreliable snow conditions, whereas summer sports events face increasing challenges related to heat and participant safety.

2.4 Entertainment and music events

The entertainment and music event category encompasses live music concerts, festivals, club events, and large-scale touring performances held in arenas, concert halls, clubs, temporary festival sites, and public spaces. This ecosystem includes promoters, venue operators, booking agents, artists, technical production companies, ticketing platforms, local authorities, and a wide range of service providers related to transportation, security, hospitality, and infrastructure. Compared to congresses and fairs, entertainment events are characterized by high volume, strong audience orientation, and temporal concentration, often involving evening and weekend formats and the intensive use of urban spaces.

In Sweden, entertainment and music events constitute one of the largest segments of the event industry in terms of frequency and attendance, with tens of thousands of events organized annually and millions of tickets sold (evenemangsverige.se, 2023, 2025). The sector is highly heterogeneous, ranging from small-club concerts and local festivals to international tours and large urban festivals. While a small number of major events account for a disproportionate share of ticket revenue and media attention, the sector as a whole is dominated by small- and medium-sized events, often organized by micro- and non-profit actors with high dependence on temporary labor and freelance work. In the Swedish context, this structural profile translates into a highly fragmented entertainment events sector characterized by labor precarity, strong regional variation, and significant dependence on municipal support, public policy frameworks, and temporary project-based funding.

Digitalization has become an increasingly embedded feature of the entertainment and music event category, though in forms that differ from those used by congresses. Research shows that digital technologies are now integral to ticketing, marketing, audience communication, and event coordination, shaping how music events are produced and circulated rather than replacing live performances themselves (Catarsi et al., 2024). During the COVID-19 pandemic, live-streaming and digitally mediated concerts expanded rapidly, demonstrating the sector's adaptive capacity. However, empirical studies have consistently shown that digital formats function primarily as complements to physical co-presence, extending reach, visibility, and engagement, rather than substituting for the live experience (Skandalis et al., 2024).

More experimental forms of digitalization, such as virtual concerts, immersive environments, and musical metaverse applications, have attracted growing attention but remain peripheral to the mainstream live music economy. While such initiatives illustrate new possibilities for artistic experimentation and audience interaction, they are currently limited by technical constraints, high energy demands, and unresolved issues related to governance, accessibility, and sustainability (Turchet, 2023). As a result, digitalization in music events is best understood as selective and layered, with routine digital infrastructure firmly embedded and more radical digital formats remaining exploratory.

Environmental sustainability is a central and increasingly contested issue in the entertainment and music event categories. A substantial body of research has demonstrated that live music events have significant environmental impacts primarily related to audience and artist travel, energy use, temporary infrastructure, and waste generation (Brennan, 2020). From an infrastructural perspective, live music depends on extensive material systems (e.g., transport networks, power supply, staging, and logistics) that are often taken for granted but are major sources of carbon emissions and ecological pressure.

However, research shows that sustainability practices are implemented unevenly across sectors. Large festivals and internationally visible events are more likely to adopt formal sustainability strategies, carbon measurement tools, and certification schemes, whereas smaller venues and grassroots organizers often lack the resources, time, and technical capacity to do so (Gohoungodji & Amara, 2024). Even when sustainability initiatives are adopted, tensions persist between environmental ambitions and the commercial and experiential logic of live music, including touring practices, audience expectations, and short event cycles (Brennan, 2020).

The urban context plays a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of musical events. Studies on live music ecologies show that urban venues and inner-city festivals face sustainability challenges distinct from those of large greenfield festivals, particularly regarding transport, noise, spatial congestion, and integration with everyday urban life (Van der Hoeven & Hitters, 2023). Although dense urban settings can reduce travel-related emissions through greater access to public transport, they also intensify conflicts among residents, event organizers, and city authorities, highlighting the need for coordinated governance and planning.

2.5 Art events

The art events category encompasses exhibitions, biennials, gallery-based events, museum programs, art fairs, and artist-led public events organized in museums, galleries, cultural institutions, temporary venues, and public spaces. The ecosystem includes public museums; private and non-profit galleries; artist collectives; curators; cultural foundations; municipalities; and a wide network of technical, logistical, and educational partners. In contrast to congresses and fairs, art events are typically

characterized by recurring exhibition cycles, longer durations, and strong integration with local cultural infrastructure rather than short, peak-based event formats.

In Sweden, art events form a structurally important but institutionally fragmented part of the events industry. Public museums and art galleries (konsthalls) constitute the backbone of the sector and are complemented by many smaller galleries, artist-run spaces, and temporary exhibitions. According to Konstnärernas Riksorganisation (KRO), the Swedish art sector is dominated by small organizations and sole proprietors with limited staffing but a high dependence on project-based funding and partnerships (KRO, 2023, 2025). Although art events rarely reach the visitor volume of large fairs or sporting events, they play a central role in urban cultural life, place identity, and long-term visitor attractiveness. Art events are characterized by project-based employment, high reliance on freelance artistic and technical labor, and a limited organizational scale. Therefore, their economic role is closely tied to municipal cultural funding, public institutions, and urban development strategies, rather than to ticket-driven revenue generation or large visitor flows.

Art events are increasingly shaped by digitalization, although in ways that differ from those of congresses and conferences. Rather than hybrid participation or remote attendance, digitalization has primarily taken the form of digital mediation, distribution, and market access. During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, museums, galleries, and artists have expanded their use to online exhibitions, streamed openings, social media programming, and digital archives. Simultaneously, digital platforms for the sale, rental, and streaming of art have grown rapidly, creating new event-adjacent formats that extend exhibitions beyond physical spaces and time (KOR, 2024). This has led to a dual structure in which physical exhibitions remain central to artistic experience and legitimacy, whereas digital platforms function as complementary channels for visibility, audience reach, and income generation.

Sustainability concerns are becoming increasingly salient within the art event category, although they are articulated differently from travel-intensive congresses. Environmental issues are closely linked to material usage, exhibition production, artwork transport, and energy-intensive museum operations. Several institutions have begun to address these challenges by reusing exhibition materials, extending exhibition cycles, reducing transportation, and increasing reliance on local collections.

At the same time, social sustainability plays a prominent role, with art events frequently framed around inclusion, accessibility, education, and community engagement. In particular, public museums increasingly justify exhibitions and programs in terms of long-term societal value rather than short-term visitor numbers (Göteborgs_konstmuseum, 2023).

transport-efficient formats, including well-designed digital and hybrid alternatives. This shift requires not only technical capabilities but also new business models, stakeholder collaboration, and policy support. It also reflects a broader societal challenge: maintaining vital human and professional interactions while respecting long-term climate goals.

2.6 Outline of the report

The report is structured into four main sections. The first section sets the scene by introducing the project, outlining the methodology and empirical material, and providing an overview of the event industry with a particular focus on digitalization, sustainability, and transport efficiency. The second section presents the scope of the event industry in Sweden including discussions of different event segments such as fairs, conferences, sport events, entertainment and music events, and art events. The third section presents the empirical insights of the study, focusing on digital experience design, organizational aspects of digitalization and sustainability transitions, and transport efficiency. Finally, the fourth section discusses the future development of the event industry in Sweden, highlighting key findings, implications, and possible pathways forward.

Chapter 3 – Empirical insights and reflections

This section presents key insights from qualitative and quantitative studies, organized around the main foci of the research project: digitalization and experience design; organizing for digitalization and sustainability transitions; and transport efficiency. These areas were selected because they represent central and interrelated dimensions shaping the current and future development of the event industry. Digitalization influences how events are designed, experienced, and managed, while sustainability transitions increasingly affect organizational practices, strategies, and stakeholder expectations. Transport efficiency was included as a key focus due to the significant role that mobility and travel play in the environmental impact and accessibility of events. Together, these themes allow us to explore how digitalization and sustainability transitions shape event experiences, practices, and transportation to and within the industry.

3.1 Digital experience design

The role of digitalization in the event industry has evolved significantly. What initially emerged as a temporary solution during the COVID-19 pandemic has become a central component of event design and experience. Digitalization has moved beyond simply delivering content technically and now reshapes how events are organized, delivered, experienced, and how participants interact. The analysis of the interview and survey data highlights several key developments.

Changing content and production logic: One of the most visible shifts is the production and delivery of event content. Interviewees described a transition from a traditional “theater-style” format to a more dynamic “TV-style” format. In digital and hybrid settings, participants are less willing to engage in long sessions, prompting organizers to redesign events into shorter, more dynamic segments. This shift has increased the expectations regarding production quality, including professional lighting, multiple camera angles, and high-quality audio. As a result, event content is

increasingly produced in ways that resemble media production, rather than traditional live presentations.

Digitalization has also enabled personalized and data-driven event experiences. In business-to-business settings, tools such as digital lead generation allow exhibitors to instantly capture participants' information, replacing traditional interactions like business card exchanges. Simultaneously, the roles of event professionals have evolved. Several interviewees described themselves not only as organizers but also as "meeting designers," using digital tools such as data analytics and three-dimensional visualizations to design experiences aligned with specific participant needs. It involves combining content, physical space, and digital interactions into a coherent, purposeful experience.

Importantly, these changes were not limited to digital events. They also influence physical formats. For example, sessions that last approximately 90 min are now often reduced to less than 60 min, while more time is allocated to networking and informal interactions. This reflects a broader rebalancing of event design, in which content delivery becomes more efficient and physical presence is increasingly associated with social and experiential value.

Temporal and spatial expansion of events: Digitalization has broadened their temporal and spatial boundaries. Traditionally, events are associated with a specific place and time, often lasting for a few days in a single location. Digital platforms allow events to expand beyond these limitations. Examples include digital content platforms such as "Bokmässan Play," where participants access talks, presentations, and discussions during and after the event. This creates a more flexible, on-demand experience, often described by interviewees as a "Netflix-like" model of content consumption. This also extends the experience beyond the initial event or year.

Digitalization also enables new spatial configurations. Instead of concentrating all participants in one location, events are increasingly organized in distributed formats in which multiple smaller gatherings are digitally connected. Similar approaches are visible in sports events, where participants can complete activities individually over extended periods while remaining connected through digital tracking and shared platforms. For instance, participants in races such as Lidingöloppet were able to

complete the course individually at their own pace, with GPS-based tracking used to record and verify the results. These developments suggest that events are no longer defined solely by a fixed time and place but are increasingly distributed across time and space.

Accessibility and expanded participation: Digitalization has significantly increased accessibility and expanded the potential audience for event experiences. Digital formats enable individuals who may otherwise face financial, geographical, or time-related constraints to participate. In some cases, digital formats even enable new forms of participation. For instance, virtual race formats allow individuals to participate in local environments, making event participation more inclusive for groups that may feel excluded from large-scale physical gatherings. This expansion also highlights an important distinction: while digitalization increases access to events, it does not necessarily provide the same type of experience as physical participation. This distinction becomes particularly visible when examining how the participants perceive the value of their digital and physical experiences.

Perceived value of digital and physical events: The survey results reinforced the qualitative findings, showing clear differences in how participants valued digital and physical event formats.

Digital events are valued primarily for their ability to support knowledge acquisition and information-oriented experiences. Respondents highlighted benefits such as increasing their understanding of specific topics and discovering new products or services. These strengths reflect the efficiency of digital formats in delivering structured content and in enabling access to information-rich experiences across a broad audience.

In contrast, digital events are consistently perceived as weaker in terms of social and experiential qualities. Respondents reported having limited experience in networking, meeting new people, and engaging in informal exchanges. These dimensions are central to many event experiences, but are difficult to reproduce in digital environments. Digital formats are also perceived less often as enjoyable or engaging.

Overall, the findings indicated a clear distinction between the different types of event experiences. While digital formats are effective in delivering content-driven

experiences, they are less capable of supporting the relational, social, and sensory experiences that characterize physical events. This pattern aligns closely with the interview data, in which participants emphasized the importance of informal interaction, atmosphere, and shared presence in shaping meaningful event experiences. Table 2 summarizes the key differences in how digital and physical event formats perform across the central experiential dimensions.

'Limits of digital event experiences: Building on the differences in perceived value outlined above, both the interview and survey findings highlight clear limitations of digital event experiences. Although digital platforms are effective at disseminating information and enabling access, they remain limited in their ability to reproduce the social and sensory dimensions that characterize many physical events.

Table 2. Differences between digital and physical events

Dimension	**Digital events**	**Physical events**
Content delivery	High efficiency; structured and scalable	Moderate; dependent on time and format
Knowledge acquisition	Strong	Strong
Discovering products/services	Strong	Very strong (incl. physical interaction)
Networking and new contacts	Limited	Strong
Social interaction	Low	Very strong
Enjoyment and engagement	Moderate to low	High
Sensory experience (e.g., atmosphere, food, physical presence)	Very limited	Very strong
Accessibility (geographical/time)	High	Limited
Flexibility (time and place)	High	Low

Interviewees consistently emphasized that key elements of event experiences, such as atmosphere, informal interaction, and sensory engagement, are difficult to replicate in digital environments. Aspects such as the presence of a crowd, spontaneous encounters, and multisensory experiences (e.g., food, sound, and physical surroundings) play a central role in how participants experience events, particularly in formats such as exhibitions, festivals, and large public gatherings.

One recurring theme concerns the importance of informal interactions. Many of the most valuable exchanges occur informally such as during breaks or spontaneous encounters. These forms of interaction are difficult to design and sustain in digital settings where communication tends to be more structured and task-oriented.

In digital and hybrid events, the technological infrastructure is the central component of the experience. Failures in streaming platforms, registration systems, and tracking technologies can rapidly undermine participant satisfaction. For example, in virtual sporting events, inaccuracies in GPS tracking or failures in mobile applications can lead to incorrect results, creating frustration among participants and potentially damaging the event's reputation. This highlights that technical reliability has become critical to event success as a physical venue and in logistics.

The survey data further reinforce these limitations by indicating relatively low engagement with fully digital formats during the pandemic. Despite the widespread shift toward online events, a clear majority of respondents (approximately 70%) reported not having participated in digital trade fairs. Only a minority attended one or more digital events during this period (Figure 1).

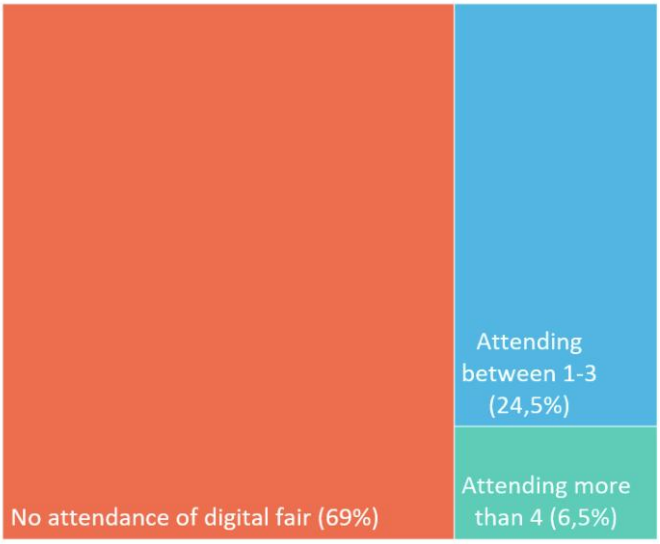

Figure 1. Attendance at digital fairs during the pandemic per year

Figure 1 illustrates this participation pattern, highlighting the limited engagement with digital trade fairs among the respondents.

These findings suggest that digital formats, while widely available, were not perceived by many respondents as sufficiently attractive or valuable to replace physical participation. In addition, interviewees highlighted the growing issue of "digital fatigue," in which the rapid increase in online meetings and webinars has reduced participants' willingness to engage with digital events over time. To summarize, these findings indicate that digitalization expands access to events but does not fully replicate the experiential qualities that make physical events valuable. This reinforces the view that digital and physical formats serve different roles rather than acting as direct substitutes.

3.2 Organizing for digitalization transition

While the previous section described how digitalization reshapes the design of event experiences, the empirical material also revealed that the transition toward digitalization in the events industry has unfolded gradually and often reactively. However, over time, industry actors have moved from improvised digital solutions toward more integrated and strategic uses of digital technologies.

To contextualize this transition, survey data provide insights into pre-pandemic participation patterns. As shown in Figure 2, trade fair attendance was relatively limited for a large proportion of respondents before COVID-19. While the majority reported attending between one and three fairs per year, a substantial proportion indicated no participation. This baseline highlights that engagement with physical fairs was uneven, even before the pandemic, providing important context for understanding subsequent changes in participation and the adoption of digital formats

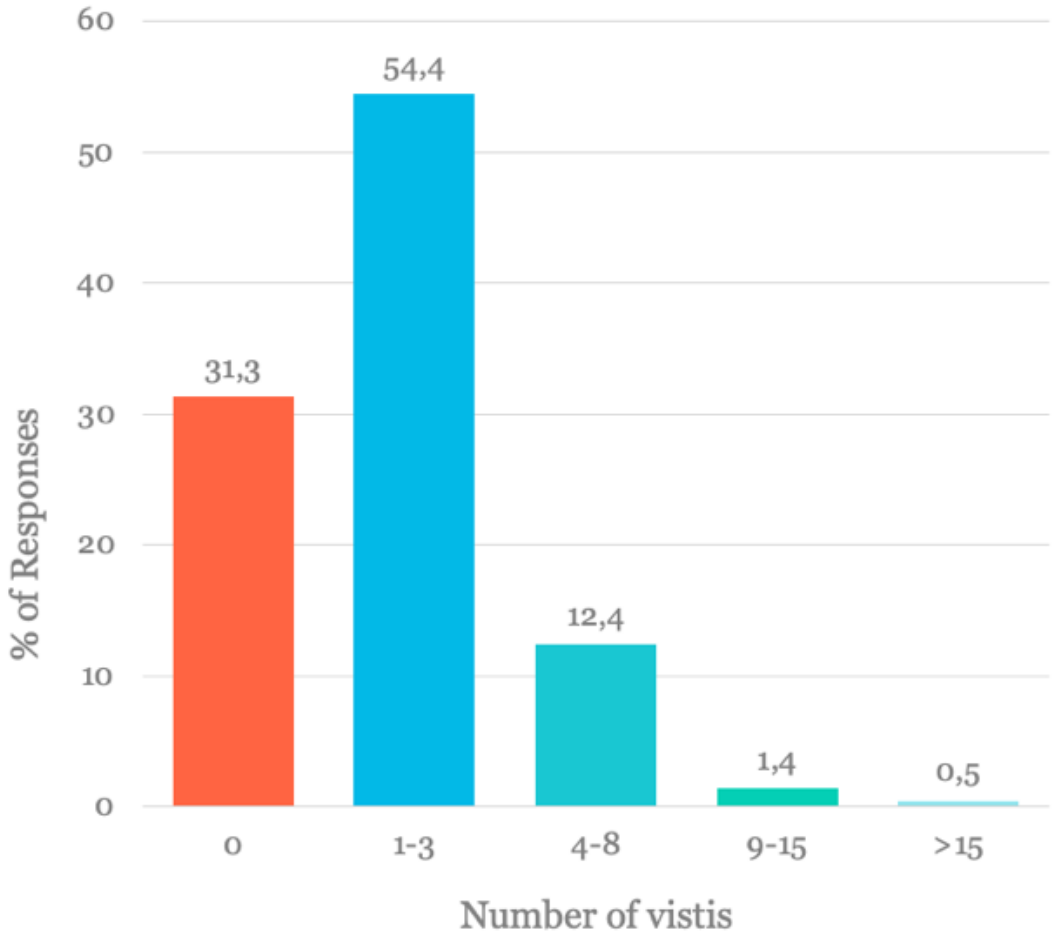

Figure 2. Average number of fair visits per year before the pandemic

Reactive digitalization: The initial phase of the transition can be characterized as reactive digitalization. When in-person meetings and large gatherings were restricted

during the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizers were forced to rapidly adopt digital platforms to maintain some level of activity. During this stage, collaboration with existing digital platforms and technology providers became essential, as these actors already possessed the technical infrastructure needed to host virtual meetings and conferences.

This disruption is also clearly reflected in the survey data. As shown in Figure 3, a substantial share of respondents reported visiting fewer fairs during the pandemic, while a large proportion reported no change in attendance. This pattern highlights both the immediate decline in physical participation and the uneven nature of this disruption across the different participant groups.

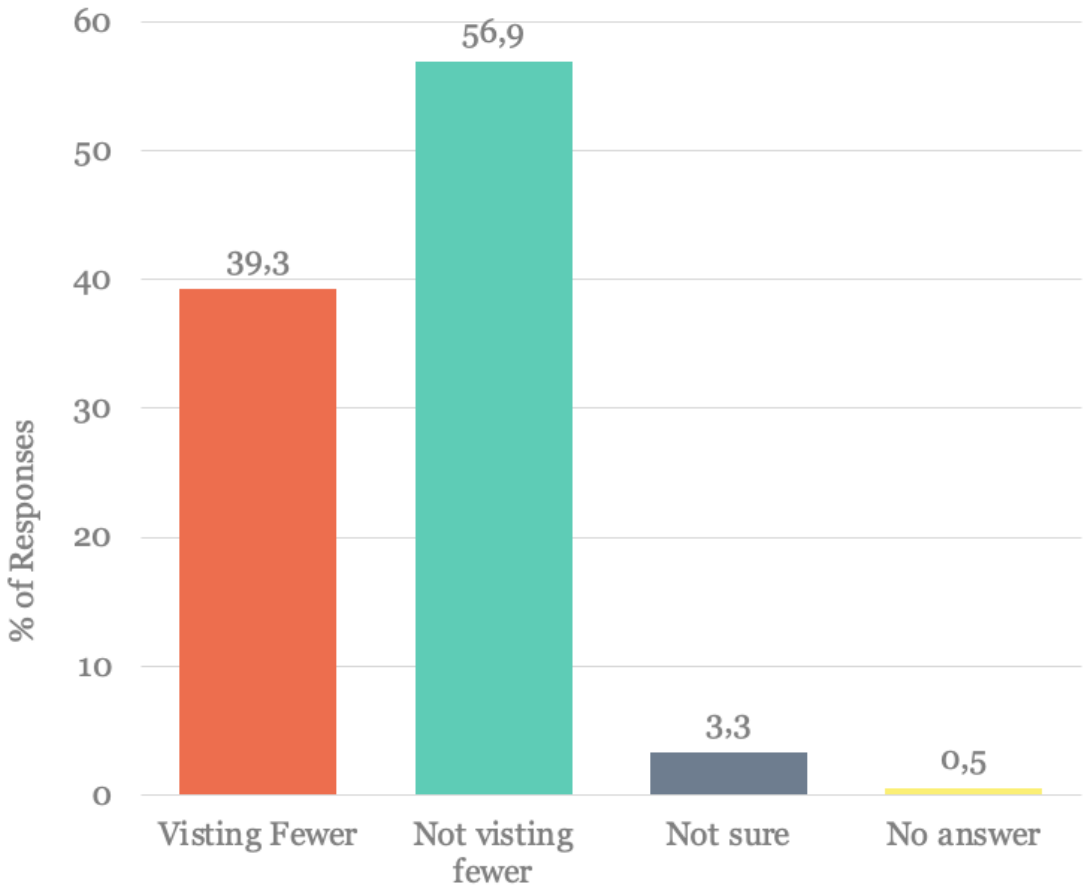

Figure 3. Change to fair visiting behavior during the pandemic (March 2020–February 2022

Many organizers have adapted to areas where market activity has shifted, collaborating with existing digital platforms to maintain interaction with participants. Although this phase was initially perceived as a short-term survival strategy, it contributed to the broader recognition that digital and hybrid formats could constitute a viable part of the future event landscape.

Experimentation and learning: Following this initial adjustment, many organizers entered a phase of trial and error. In the absence of established models, actors tested different methods of combining digital and physical elements to understand what worked in practice.

Examples include the development of fully digital competitions and activities such as virtual races that incorporate live broadcasting, digital medals, and digital race numbers. In other cases, hybrid formats allowed participants to complete activities in person but at different times or locations, reducing crowding while maintaining a sense of collective participation.

In the conference sector, experimentation also concerns the production and presentation of content, moving beyond simple recordings of physical events toward more elaborate digital formats that include interviews, behind-the-scenes materials, and interactive segments. These experiments functioned as important learning processes through which organizers gradually developed new routines and expectations for digital events.

Despite these developments, the transition has exposed several challenges related to organizational capabilities and mindsets. A recurring issue identified by interviewees was that many organizers lacked experience with digital technologies and therefore struggled to design user-friendly digital experiences.

In some cases, digital solutions became unnecessarily complex for participants; for instance, when users were required to connect to multiple digital platforms or applications to participate in an activity. Another common challenge is the tendency to replicate physical events in digital formats without adapting to their structure or pacing. Attempts to move long, multi-day meetings directly to online platforms often lead to participant fatigue and reduced engagement. These challenges highlight the need for new competencies within the industry, including skills related to moderating

digital discussions, managing online communication flows, and facilitating interactions through digital interfaces.

Strategic integration: As experience with digital formats has accumulated, some actors have begun to move toward a more strategic integration of digitalization within their overall event models. In this later stage, digital technologies are no longer used only as substitutes but also as integrated components of event design and delivery.

For example, several organizers have chosen to develop their own digital systems rather than relying exclusively on external platforms, enabling them to retain control over participant data and adapt digital functions to their specific needs. Digitalization is increasingly seen as an enabler for broader audiences. One interviewee described how an international conference could double the number of participants by offering a digital format, thus demonstrating how geographic barriers could be reduced through online participation.

Simultaneously, the industry is exploring new business models that take advantage of the temporal flexibility of digital platforms– for example, by distributing content over longer periods rather than concentrating on all activities within a few days.

From reactive response to strategic integration: Overall, the findings suggest that the digital transition in the event industry is an evolving process that shifts from reactive adaptation to strategic integration. Initial responses were characterized by urgency and improvisation, but ongoing experimentation and learning have gradually enabled actors to develop more structured and purposeful approaches to digitalization.

At the same time, the survey responses suggest that the future adoption of fully digital formats remains uncertain. As shown in Figure 4, a substantial share of respondents expressed limited interest in attending more digital trade fairs, whereas others reported more positive expectations. This indicates that, while digitalization has become more integrated into event organization, it is unlikely to fully replace physical formats, and future developments will likely involve continued combinations of digital and physical elements.

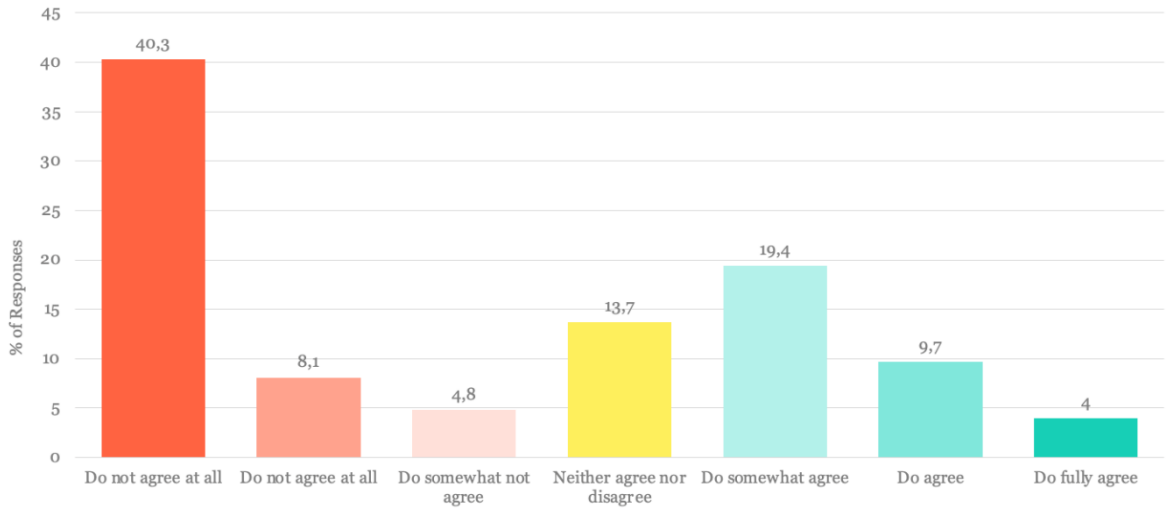

Figure 4. Intention to visit digital events in the future

The digital transformation process reflects the gradual accumulation of experience in which actors test, adjust, and refine digital practices over time. This process also highlights that digital transformation in the event sector is not only a technological change but also an organizational and cultural shift, requiring new competencies, business models, and ways of organizing event activities.

3.3 Organizing for sustainability transition

The empirical material indicates that the event industry is undergoing a gradual transition in how sustainability is understood and operationalized. Although sustainability was previously often treated as a peripheral issue, it is increasingly being integrated into strategic decision-making and long-term development. This transition involves a combination of formal frameworks, operational adjustments, and digital technologies to reduce environmental impact. Simultaneously, the findings suggest a broader shift in how the industry conceptualizes its role, moving from a focus on minimizing negative impacts to considering the wider societal effects that events can generate.

Strategic integration of sustainability: One critical aspect of this transition is embedding sustainability in organizational visions and governance structures. Among the 61 respondents who attended the fair as company representatives, respondents were asked whether their employers had a goal of increasing efforts to mitigate

environmental impacts. As shown in Figure 5, most respondents reported that their companies had established some form of environmental goal setting. Approximately 41% indicated that clear goals were in place, whereas only a small share (approximately 11.5%) reported no such ambitions.

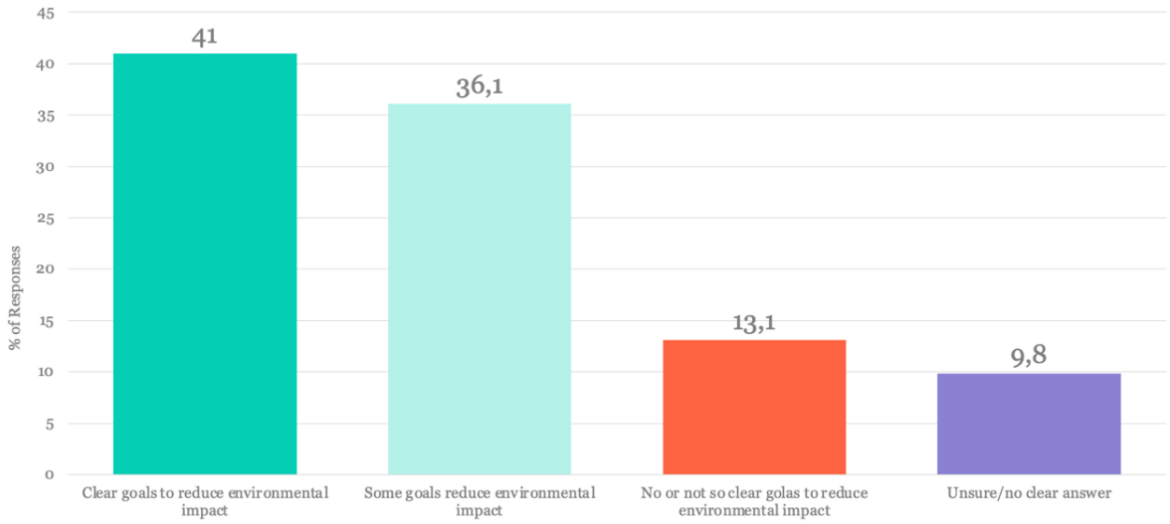

Figure 5. Visitors' own organization's sustainability goal setting

This suggests that sustainability is increasingly formalized within organizational strategies, even if the level of ambition varies across firms.

Several venues and event organizations have articulated ambitious long-term sustainability goals that position environmental performance as central to their identity and competitiveness. For example, some venues frame their development as the creation of sustainable meeting places. Formal certification systems have become an important mechanism for structuring and legitimizing sustainability work. International standards and ecolabelling schemes provide structured frameworks to guide decisions on energy use, water consumption, and waste management.

However, survey data indicate that the influence of sustainability on participation decisions remains limited. As illustrated in Figure 6, a substantial share of respondents reported that their company's sustainability work had little or no influence on the fairs they chose to attend. Only a small proportion of respondents strongly agreed that

sustainability considerations played a decisive role. This suggests a gap between organizational ambitions and behavioral outcomes in the market.

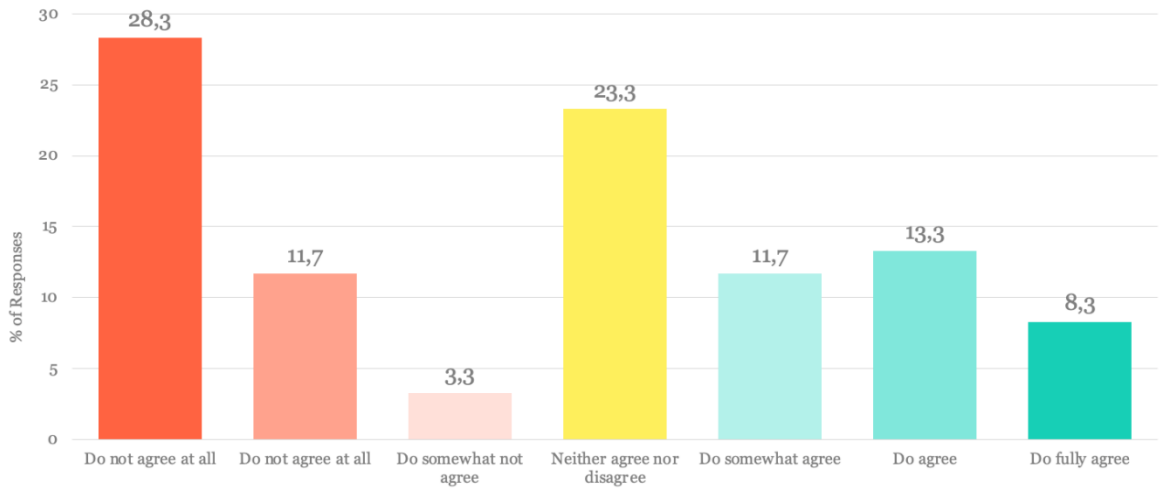

Figure 6. The impact of the organization's own sustainability goal on the fair participation

Operational adjustments and circular practices: Another key area of transition is the increasing emphasis on circularity in the material aspects of events. Traditionally, exhibitions and conferences have relied on significant volumes of temporary infrastructure, including stands and banners, that are often used only once. These findings indicate a growing effort to rethink these practices to reduce material consumption and transportation-related emissions.

One approach involves encouraging the on-site manufacturing of exhibition booths rather than transporting large structures across the country. This reduces logistical complexity and lowers transport-related emissions. Organizers and exhibitors are increasingly experimenting with recycled and reusable materials. Waste management systems are becoming more sophisticated, with venues implementing detailed sorting infrastructure and, in some cases, introducing environmental fees to cover the additional costs of recycling and sustainable waste management.

Sustainability in catering and consumption practices: Food and catering services are another area in which organizers perceive immediate opportunities for sustainability improvements. Food consumption at conferences and fairs generates significant

waste, and many venues have implemented measures to address it. Strategies include adjusting portion sizes, such as providing smaller plates to discourage excessive serving, and communicating information about food waste to participants to increase awareness. At the same time, menus are increasingly designed with environmental considerations in mind, including prioritizing locally produced ingredients, replacing bottled water with refillable stations, and exploring alternative protein sources. These initiatives reflect a broader shift toward what organizers describe as "climate-smart" catering practices that align food choices with environmental goals.

From operational efficiency to a broader societal impact, the findings suggest that the industry is beginning to adopt a broader perspective on sustainability that extends beyond operational efficiency. Convention bureaus and destination organizations are increasingly encouraging event organizers to consider the long-term societal effects of hosting such events. Rather than evaluating success solely by visitor numbers or hotel occupancy, this perspective emphasizes how events can contribute to positive outcomes for host destinations. Examples include attracting talent, strengthening local innovation ecosystems, and fostering collaborations between international experts and local communities. This shift reflects the growing recognition that events can play a role in regional development and knowledge exchange, thereby contributing to impacts that extend beyond immediate economic benefits.

Overall, the analysis indicates that sustainability in the events industry has evolved from a set of isolated operational measures to a more comprehensive strategic agenda. At the same time, the emerging focus on long-term effects suggests that sustainability is increasingly understood not only in terms of minimizing harm, but also in terms of how events can generate positive contributions to event destinations. This indicates that the sustainability transition is uneven, characterized by strong organizational ambitions, but exerts a more limited influence on participant behavior and market dynamics.

3.4 Transport efficiency

Our analysis shows that transport efficiency in the event industry is shaped by a central tension: the need for physical human interaction versus increasing pressure to reduce environmental and economic travel costs. Several key themes emerged across

the empirical material, including shifts in travel modes, the role of digitalization in reducing physically non-essential trips, infrastructure constraints, and the growing importance of logistics and coordination. Survey data complement these insights by providing an overview of the actual travel behavior among event participants.

Shifts in travel patterns and modal choices: A broader movement toward more responsible travel patterns is also recognizable in the events industry. Experts have noted that organizers and fair visitors are increasingly seeking alternatives to air travel, favoring rail and public transport over taxis or short-haul flights. This shift is especially evident among companies that report their carbon emissions and therefore seek quick, credible ways to reduce their footprints. Many describe trains as an increasingly attractive option, particularly because providers such as SJ offer direct connections between city centers, which is viewed as a key efficiency gain over air travel, where airports are typically located outside urban centers. However, group travel remains a recurring challenge. Although it is relatively simple to book flights for large groups, the Swedish rail system often lacks the flexibility required to accommodate such demands. Organizers described situations in which they had to charter entire trains or revert to air travel because rail options could not meet the logistical requirements.

Survey data support these observations. As shown in Figure 7, a large share of respondents relied on local and regional public transport (approximately 40%), while a similarly large proportion (approximately 36%) used cars for most of their journeys. Use of long-distance trains was limited, and only a small minority relied primarily on air travel. This suggests that, while more sustainable travel options are gaining traction, car dependency remains significant, highlighting ongoing structural constraints.

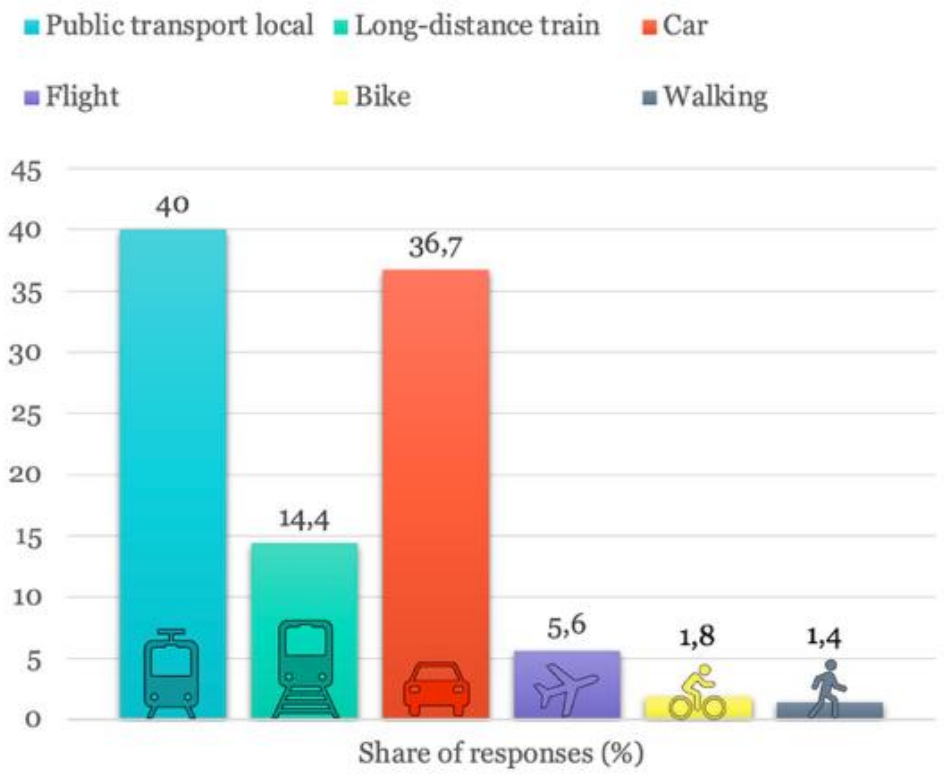

Figure 7. Overview of the transportation mode of the visitors

Travel distances and event geography: Survey data provide insights into both. As illustrated in Figure 8, most participants traveled relatively short distances, with approximately half reporting travel times of less than one hour and a substantial share traveling between one and three hours. This indicates that many events attract regional audiences, creating opportunities to reduce long-distance travel. At the same time, this suggests that long-distance transport, including rail and aviation, may become more important for events with stronger international or national reach.

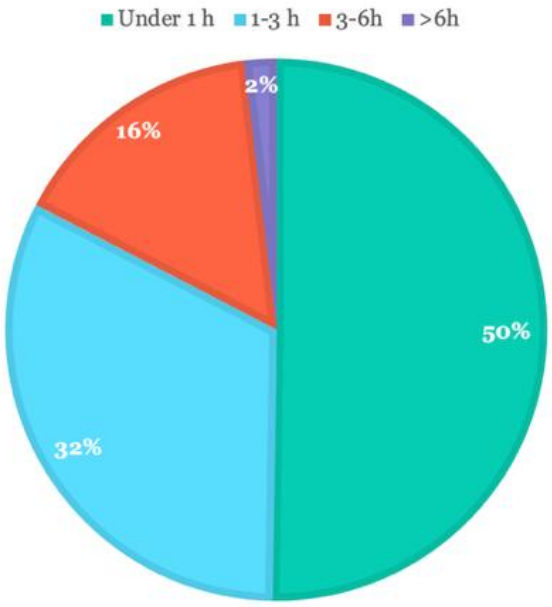

Figure 8. Overview of travel time to the visited fair

Infrastructure constraints and system limitations: Another strong theme concerns the physical limitations of the existing transport infrastructure, particularly during large events.

Experts have described how events with 8,000–10,000 participants can strain local public transport systems, such as Stockholms Länstrafik (SL) in Stockholm or Västtrafik in Gothenburg. When these systems cannot handle the flow safely or efficiently, the event's economic viability may be affected.

The rise of electric vehicles (EVs) is a growing challenge. Rural event destinations, such as Mora (Vasaloppet) or Motala (Vätternrundan), may lack the electrical capacity required to support large-scale EV charging, creating a new type of infrastructure bottleneck. Events such as Vasaloppet depend on extensive internal logistics, including bus systems that cover long distances. Experts have also pointed out the uncertain impacts of large volumes of private cars entering these areas.

Logistics, materials, and temporal coordination: Transport efficiency, in this context, extends beyond participant mobility to encompass the circulation of materials and the temporal coordination of events. The empirical results indicate a gradual shift in how exhibitors and organizers approach event logistics.

Instead of transporting large and resource-intensive stands over long distances, there is an increasing emphasis on lighter, modular, and reusable materials. This reflects both cost considerations and a growing awareness of the environmental impact of freight transport.

In parallel, event venues operate more strategically with scheduling. Several respondents described how large event centers manage their calendars almost as a "Tetris-like" configuration, combining events of different sizes and formats to ensure more efficient use of facilities, staff, and local transport systems over time.

Digitalization and reduction of physically non-essential travel: Digitalization has emerged as a central mechanism for improving transport efficiency by enabling a more critical assessment of when physical travel is necessary. Interviewees frequently referred to a shift away from trips with none or little physical added value. Travels such as flying between cities like Gothenburg, Umeå, and Stockholm to solely attend a short event, for example a two-hour meeting, are increasingly difficult to justify from both time use and sustainability perspectives. Instead, these interactions are often replaced by digital events, which allow organizations to maintain communication while significantly reducing travel-related emissions and resource use.

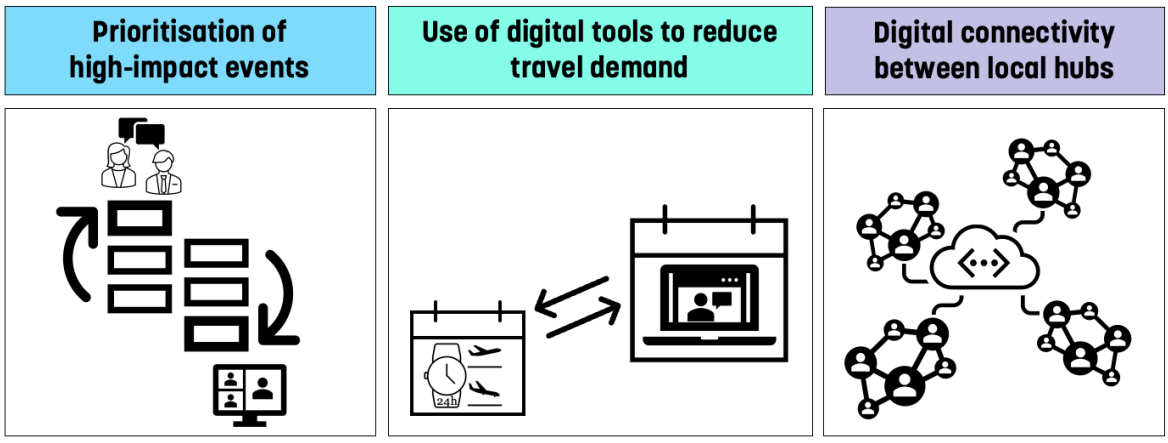

Figure 9. Reconfiguring events for transport efficiency

Reconfiguring event formats: Hubs and distributed models: The findings indicate that transport efficiency is not only about reducing travel but also about reorganizing how and where events take place. A recurring idea among respondents was the development of hybrid structures based on regional “hub” models. Rather than focusing on all participants at a single large-scale location, events can be distributed across multiple smaller, digitally interconnected sites. Such configurations make it possible to reduce long-distance travel while maintaining elements of physical interaction at the local level. This suggests a shift toward more spatially distributed event formats, in which digital infrastructure is used to balance the benefits of face-to-face engagement with the need for more resource-efficient mobility patterns. From reducing travel to prioritizing meaningful travel, finally, experts emphasized that transport efficiency should not be understood simply as reducing travel. Instead, the focus is increasingly on ensuring that people's travel is meaningful and justified. Participants became more selective and demanding, expecting events to offer high-quality interactions, particularly informal, spontaneous exchanges that digital formats struggle to replicate. From this perspective, a trip is considered efficient only when physical participation yields a meaningful return on the time, effort, and environmental costs invested.

Chapter 4 – Discussion of key findings

Section 3 shows that the event industry is not moving toward a single future, but is reshaped through several parallel transitions. Digitalization is becoming increasingly integrated into event design and organization, sustainability is gaining a more strategic role, and transport efficiency is becoming increasingly important in planning and justifying events. The findings also indicate that these changes were uneven. Different actors, event types, and organizational settings move at different speeds and face different constraints.

This section discusses the implications of these findings for the event industry's future. It begins with digitalization, turns to sustainability, and finally examines transport efficiency. Taken together, these themes point to an industry in which physical events remain important, but are increasingly reconfigured through new combinations of digital tools, sustainability practices, and more selective mobility.

4.1 Key findings

4.1.1 Digitalization as a complementary and integrated development

The findings in Sections 3.1 and 3.2 show that digitalization in the event industry is not replacing physical events, but is becoming an integrated and complementary part of how events are designed and organized. While digital formats were initially adopted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, they have become increasingly embedded in both event experiences and organizational practices (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021).

At the event experience level, the results indicated a clear distinction between digital and physical formats. Digital solutions are particularly effective in delivering content, increasing accessibility, and extending events across time and space. At the same time, physical events remain central for social and experiential aspects, such as networking, informal interaction, and sensory engagement. This helps explain why digital formats did not replace physical events after the pandemic but instead became part of more hybrid event models, a pattern also identified in previous research (Chen et al., 2025; Godovykh et al., 2022).

At the organizational level, the findings show that digitalization developed gradually rather than through a planned transformation. As described in Section 3.2, many actors moved from reactive adoption during the pandemic to experimentation with different formats and, in some cases, toward a more strategic integration of digital tools. This process reflects a form of organizational learning in which new practices, competencies, and business models develop over time. (Jung et al., 2024).

Overall, these findings suggest that digitalization should not be understood as a shift from physical to digital events but rather as a reconfiguration of how different formats are combined. For event organizers, the key challenge is not simply adopting digital technologies, but deciding how to use them to support different types of event experiences. In practice, this aligns with research indicating that hybrid formats extend rather than replace physical events.

4.1.2 Sustainability as an expanding but uneven transition

The findings in Section 3.3 show that sustainability in the event industry is evolving from a peripheral concern to a more central and strategic issue (see also, Karabag et al., 2026). Many organizations have developed clear sustainability goals and are increasingly integrating environmental considerations into their operations, supported by certifications, circular practices, and changes in areas such as materials and catering.

However, the results indicated that this transition remained uneven. Although sustainability is often emphasized at the strategic level, its influence on actual behavior and decision-making is limited. For example, the survey results show that sustainability considerations do not consistently shape participation decisions, suggesting a gap between organizational ambitions and market dynamics.

This unevenness can be partly explained by the nature of the events, which are temporary or project-based activities. Unlike permanent organizations, events are organized over short timeframes and involve multiple actors, making it more difficult to establish stable routines and long-term behavioral changes. Consequently, sustainability practices often remain situational rather than fully embedded across the industry, a pattern also noted in previous research (Cavallin Toscani et al., 2024).

Simultaneously, these findings indicate that our understanding of sustainability is expanding. In addition to reducing emissions, waste, and resource use, actors increasingly consider the broader societal impact of events, including their contributions to local development, knowledge exchange, and long-term value creation for host destinations. This aligns with research highlighting the role of events as platforms for broader societal contributions (Mair et al., 2024).

These findings suggest that sustainability in the event industry is moving toward a more comprehensive approach; however, the transition remains inconsistent. For event organizers and policymakers, achieving meaningful change requires not only setting goals and adopting standards but also engaging participants, aligning incentives, and developing more coordinated approaches across the event ecosystem.

4.1.3 Transport efficiency as a practical constraint and an organizing principle

The findings in Section 3.4 show that transport efficiency in the event industry is not only about reducing travel, but also about rethinking how mobility, logistics, and event organization are connected. Physical participation remains important because many events depend on face-to-face interactions, networking, and other forms of engagement that digital formats cannot fully reproduce. At the same time, rising environmental pressures and cost considerations make it necessary to question when travel is justified and how it can be organized more efficiently.

The empirical results indicated that current travel patterns are shaped by both opportunities and constraints. Survey data showed that many participants travel relatively short distances and often rely on local and regional public transport; however, car use remains substantial. This indicates an industry in which sustainable mobility options are possible in some contexts, whereas dependence on road-based travel continues in others. For many events, especially those with regional audiences, transport efficiency is closely tied to venue location, accessibility, and the strength of the surrounding transport networks.

Section 3.4 also shows that transport efficiency is limited by structural conditions that individual organizers cannot solve on their own. These include limited rail flexibility for group travel, pressure on local transport systems during large events, and emerging infrastructure gaps related to electric vehicle charging in rural

destinations. This suggests that transport efficiency is not simply a matter of asking participants to travel differently but rather of coordinating event planning with transport systems, local infrastructure, and destination-level conditions. This is consistent with previous research showing that sustainable transportation in the event sector depends on broader system coordination rather than isolated organizational measures (Chirieleison et al., 2020).

Another important finding is that transport efficiency increasingly affects the design and distribution of events. Digital meetings are frequently used to replace physically non-essential trips, whereas hybrid- and hub-based models open up opportunities to reduce long-distance travel without eliminating in-person interactions. In this sense, transport efficiency has become an organizing principle in the industry. This shapes decisions about where events are held, how calendars are coordinated, how materials are moved, and when in-person attendance provides sufficient value to justify a journey.

From an industrial perspective, this means that future event models are likely to place greater emphasis on selective, purposeful travel. For event organizers and public actors, transport efficiency must be considered early in event planning and should not be treated as a separate issue after key design decisions have been made.

4.2 Implications

The findings discussed above have practical implications for several actors in the event ecosystem, particularly event organizers, policymakers, public actors, venues, destinations, and platform providers. These implications relate not only to digitalization and sustainability but also to how transport efficiency is considered in event planning, infrastructure, and participation.

For event organizers: The results suggest a shift in how digitalization should be approached. Rather than investing in digital solutions as stand-alone substitutes for physical events, there is a need to develop capabilities to integrate digital and physical elements across the full event lifecycle. This places new demands on organizational competence, including the ability to design coherent hybrid formats, manage multiple modes of participation, and align content, interaction, and experience across channels. In this context, competitive advantage is likely to depend less on the adoption of

specific technologies and more on the capacity to orchestrate hybrid experiences in a purposeful and context-sensitive manner. This also means considering transport efficiency early when deciding on the event format, location, scheduling, and participation models, rather than treating mobility as a separate issue later in the planning process.

Simultaneously, the uneven level of digital maturity in the industry implies that not all organizers are equally positioned to respond to these demands. Smaller or resource-constrained actors may face increasing difficulties meeting expectations for hybrid accessibility and digital integration, particularly in the international context. This suggests a growing need for collaboration, shared solutions, or intermediary support structures to lower the threshold for participation in digital event formats. Shared technical support, common digital platforms, and joint solutions for sustainability and mobility may be particularly important for smaller actors.

For policymakers and public actors: These developments highlight the importance of enabling conditions rather than isolated interventions. As digital infrastructure and platforms become more central to the organization of events, questions of access, standardization, and market concentration become increasingly relevant. Policy can play a role in supporting open or interoperable solutions and ensuring that smaller actors are not excluded from emerging digital ecosystems. In this sense, digitalization is not only a matter of innovation but also of industrial structure and fair access.

These results suggest that reliance on voluntary initiatives may be insufficient to achieve broader sustainability transitions in the event sector. There is a need to move toward more coordinated approaches, potentially including standards, reporting requirements, and support for shared infrastructure (e.g., low-carbon transport solutions or circular material systems). Public actors, particularly at the city level, play key roles in aligning event strategies with transportation planning, climate goals, and destination development. This includes public transport capacity, rail access, venue connectivity, and the pressures that large events place on local mobility systems.

For venues, destinations, and platform providers, the implications concern their increasingly central role in enabling digital and sustainable transitions. Venues and destinations are not only service providers, but also coordinators of the flows of

people, materials, and information. Their ability to offer integrated solutions combining digital infrastructure, transport access, and sustainability practices is critical. These include visitor mobility, material logistics, scheduling efficiency, and coordination with local transport networks. Similarly, platform providers may gain influence because their systems shape how events are organized and accessed, raising questions about governance, data ownership, and dependency.

Overall, the findings point to a more interconnected and interdependent event ecosystem, in which responsibility for digitalization, sustainability, and transport efficiency is distributed among multiple actors. This suggests that future development will depend less on individual initiatives and more on the capacity to establish coordinated system-level approaches that align incentives, capabilities, and responsibilities across the event industry. In practice, this means the sector's future competitiveness depends on how well actors combine meaningful event experiences with environmental responsibility and more efficient mobility.

4.3 Pathways to the futures

The findings in Section 3 do not point to a single future for the events industry. Instead, they suggested several possible pathways shaped by how actors balance their experiences, sustainability, and mobility. The central issue is the relationship between physical presence and the value created by travel. Face-to-face interactions remain important for networking, trust-building, and knowledge exchange. Simultaneously, the environmental and economic costs associated with travel, especially air travel, are becoming increasingly difficult to justify. This implies that future event strategies are likely to involve more explicit choices regarding when travel is necessary, for whom, and for what purpose.

In this context, decision-making regarding participation and event design may increasingly revolve around which journeys create enough value to justify the time, cost, and emissions involved. Rather than assuming mobility as the default, actors may adopt more selective and purposeful approaches, reserving physical attendance for high-value interactions while supporting other forms of engagement digitally. Therefore, hybrid formats, distributed participation, and regionalization can be

understood as practical ways to balance accessibility, interaction, and environmental responsibility (Chirieleison et al., 2020).

Related development concerns the spatial and organizational configuration of events. Large, centralized, and resource-intensive formats may come under increasing pressure, particularly in light of climate constraints and the growing expectations of sustainability. In addition to these formats, modular and adaptable event models are also likely to become more common. These could include smaller recurring events, regionally distributed formats, and digitally interconnected hubs that allow participation across multiple locations. Such configurations may improve resilience and accessibility while also reducing the need for long-distance travel.

However, these developments do not imply that one model will replace others. Different event formats are likely to coexist, reflecting variations in the purpose, audience, and context. High-profile international events may persist, but are likely to face greater pressure to justify their value and demonstrate stronger mitigation efforts. In parallel, diversification of event formats may emerge, where value is created through different combinations of physical and digital interactions across time and space.

These findings also suggest that the events industry can serve as a testing ground for broader societal changes. Events provide bounded yet flexible settings in which new configurations of digitalization, sustainability practices, and mobility can be tested. Hybrid participation models, low-carbon logistics solutions, and alternative spatial formats can be tested in ways that are difficult to implement in permanent systems. In this sense, events can serve as practical arenas for learning in which new formats, logistics solutions, and participation models are explored, refined, and adopted more widely.

Overall, these pathways point to a future characterized by less than one disruptive shift compared to the ongoing adjustment. The industry is likely to evolve through incremental changes shaped by the need to balance presence and distance, scale and flexibility, efficiency, and experience. For actors across the sector, the central capability is making these trade-offs visible, deliberate, and workable in practice.

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Appendix A:

This publication in the POINTS report series has been peer reviewed by an external academic reviewer employed by an academic institution, with whom none of the authors of the report have been engaged in any formal collaborations during the writing process of this report. The external reviewers' protocol follows.

POINTS Review Template

1. Basic information	
Title of report:	The Futures of the Event Industry: Perspectives on Digitalization, Sustainability, and Transportation
Name of reviewer including title and position:	Özgün Imre, PhD Senior Lecturer in Organization and leadership
Affiliation:	Kristianstad University

2. Overall impression Please provide a brief overall assessment of the report (ca. 5–8 sentences), including its main contribution and clarity.
The report provides an overview of the transition that the event industry is undergoing due to pressures of digitalization and sustainability and takes the transportation related aspect of the industry as its central focus. A strength of the report is that it combines empirical material with broader industry reflections, allowing it to move beyond description toward more analytical discussion, which adds value as the report is not written for a single audience. The categorization of different event sectors provides a useful structure for understanding how these transitions affect actors differently across the industry. The report also shows that digitalization and sustainability are not linear or uniform processes, but rather uneven and evolving transitions shaped by organizational, technological, and infrastructural conditions.

Overall, the report provides a well grounded contribution to discussion of future development ofevent industry in Sweden.

3. Quality and clarity

Please comment briefly on the overall quality, the coherence of arguments, and use of evidence and sources (if applicable)

Overall the quality and clarity is good. As this is a report I will just lift some of the issues that triggered me a bit, with the understanding that I haven't reviewed it as a full academic journal submission. For me the report is strongest in the empirical and discussion sections, where findings are interpreted and connected to broader organizational and societal developments. A general remark is that some sections become quite descriptive and occasionally repetitive, especially regarding the complementary relationship between digital and physical events.

Introduction: overall works well. A section that details what the coming sections will present might be useful .

Some sentences do not hang together: P9: At the same time, they are interconnected within a shared event ecosystem and are subject to common policy and industry conditions.

Why would the audience of this report wonder about value creation logics? The table doesn't use that term, so why complicate the text?

Empirics: One possible improvement is that some themes and conclusions become somewhat repetitive across subsections, especially around the idea that digital and physical formats complement rather than replace one another. Can some of them be made more succinct? Having a digitalization title in sustainability section is also a bit off, as the reverse was not there. Does that mean a one sided relationship?

The mention of a two hour meeting at the transport related section doesn't hang well, as the issue is event per se, not necessarily planning of the event. The way it is posed is more like an internal 2 hour meeting at another city, which is hard to sell as an event per se.

Am not sure how to interpret fig 9. One issue is conceptual: low value is "low value" as there is a digital way to do it now, so they are not easily separated. Second, the drawings are hard to interpret/connect to the text as visual/metaphor…

If there is a low value travel title, what is the reason to have a meaningful travel title. Cant they be discussed together? At the findings section: One area that could be strengthened slightly is the distinction between findings directly supported by the empirical material and broader future-oriented reflections, as these sometimes blend together. In addition, some arguments repeat points made earlier in the report, particularly regarding hybrid formats and complementary digitalization, those can be identified and shortened.
4. Additional comments (optinal) Any further remarks:

5. Confirmations	
Reviewer confirmation: I, Özgün Imre, hereby confirmed that I have reviewed the report according to the received instructions.	
Confirmation of independence:	■ Yes ☐ No
Date and Place: 2026 – 05 – 14, Kristianstad	Signature: Özgün Imre
Affiliation:	Kristianstad University
Date of Review:	2026 05 14
Confirmation of independence:	■ Yes ☐ No
Editorial confirmation: The editorial team confirms that the submission has undergone an editorial assessment informed by the reviewer's evaluation.	
Editor's name: Viktor Werner	
Date and Place: 2026 – 06 – 28, Linköping	Signature: Viktor Werner