

Adapting Under Pressure: Exploring Dynamic Capabilities in the Post-COVID MICE Sector in Hungary

Vanda Horváth, Judit Zsuzsanna Galambos

Budapest University of Economics and Business

<https://doi.org/10.15170/MM.2025.59.04.05>

AIMS OF THE PAPER

This research examines the digital transformation of the Hungarian MICE sector's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent digital transformation. The primary aim is to contribute to the evolving discourse on how the pandemic accelerated digitalisation in MICE tourism industries and to examine how actors in the Hungarian MICE industry recognised changing customer needs during the COVID-19 pandemic related to digital solutions as well as how successfully they adopted and integrated these solutions.

METHODOLOGY

We investigate the Hungarian – and particularly the Budapest – MICE sector's digitalisation using the “Dynamic Capabilities Framework” (DCF) to gain insights into how Hungarian event and venue service providers are responding to the challenges posed by the pandemic and to understand their perceptions of the sector's digitalisation trends. The research methodology employed is a qualitative, semi-structured thematic analysis of expert interviews.

MOST IMPORTANT RESULTS

The study revealed that the MICE sector in Hungary performed well in recognising and meeting changing customer needs during the pandemic, which is a capability labelled as sensing, but was less capable in gaining market positions, expanding service portfolio, i.e., the MICE sector underperformed in the area of seizing, as well as in terms of creating a long-term organisational transformation. Barriers to development have been identified including a lack of infrastructural background, financial resources and burdens in management mindset and decision-making. The expected outcome is an overview of the market situation of the players, an analysis of development trends and perceptions of competitiveness, aiming to provide a comprehensive picture for decision-makers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the research on the Dynamic Capabilities of the MICE sector may contribute to supporting policymakers in building policy and strategy, such as event and destination management companies or tourism agencies. Results on consumer attitude can enhance the local and regional competitiveness of venue providers, conference centres, exhibition venues, and technical background companies.

Kulcsszavak: visitor economy, exhibitions and trade fairs, digitalisation, trade promotion, COVID–19, pandemic

JEL Codes: L83, L86, M31

INTRODUCTION

The Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) industry has a significant impact on global and national economies. It contributes to economic growth, creates workplaces, facilitates export and trade development, and enhances urban competitiveness with a focus on sustainability (UNWTO 2011). Although the sector has been vulnerable to exogenous shocks over the past two decades of the 21st century, it has proven its ability to bounce back after the 2008 financial crisis and even the 2020 COVID–19 pandemic. It served as a profound stress test for the global trade and value chain system, exposing the vulnerabilities of interconnected markets and revealing deep asymmetries in the capacity of organisations to absorb shocks (Ivanov 2020). Among the hardest-hit domains was the MICE sector (UFI 2020). While some firms suspended operations or faced rapid decline, others demonstrated remarkable agility, adapting their business models to accommodate remote engagement, digital content delivery, and hybrid interaction formats (Li et al. 2022). Digitalisation proved to be a key determinant of organisational resilience. Firms that were able to repurpose, extend, or innovate their digital capabilities not only maintained client relationships, but also built their digital business strategy, secured new value streams, and even gained a competitive advantage (Bharadwaj et al. 2013; OECD 2020a). In this context, digitalisation should not be interpreted merely as the adoption of technology, but as a strategic transformation, enabling firms to reconfigure routines, structures, and offerings in response to environmental volatility (Bharadwaj et al. 2013). The Dynamic Capabilities Framework provides a compelling lens for interpreting how organisations sense changes, seize opportunities, and transform operations under uncertainty (Teece & Pisano 1994).

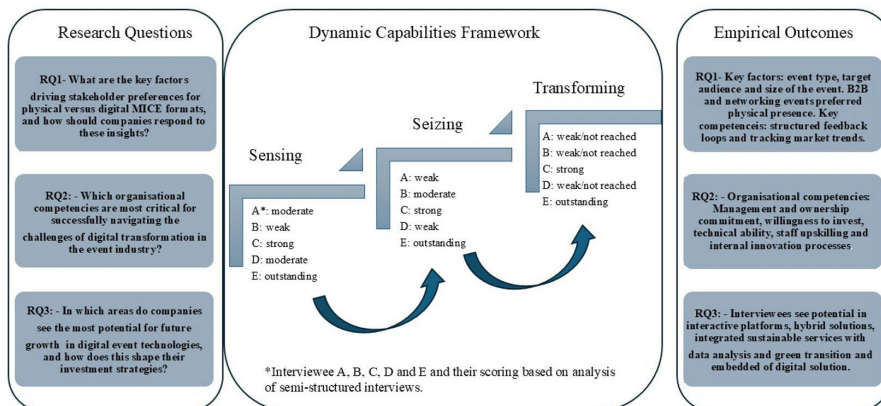
Despite the growing literature on pandemic-related business adaptations, a notable research gap remains regarding how more minor or peripheral national MICE sectors responded. Much of the discourse centred around large, global players or Western European markets (UFI 2020; 2021; 2022), while Central and Eastern Europe remains underrepresented (Skoko et al. 2022). The Hungarian MICE industry is heavily reliant on Budapest's status as a regional hub, being the largest venue provider for conferences, fairs and business events in Hungary. Yet, Hungary's case offers a unique vantage point for studying how medium-sized actors with constrained resources navigated the pandemic and what role digitalisation played in this journey (Töröcsik et al. 2020; Raffay 2020).

The paper seeks to explore the post-pandemic digital trajectories of actors within the Hungarian MICE ecosystem. Through semi-structured expert interviews with key stakeholders – event organisers, venue operators, and technical support providers – this study seeks to explore:

- How organisations experienced and responded to the digital shift during the pandemic;
- To what extent digitalisation has become embedded in their strategic thinking;
- Moreover, how they perceive their current competitive positioning in a transforming regional landscape.

By adopting a qualitative thematic analysis, the article contributes to a more refined understanding of how Dynamic Capabilities manifest in service-oriented sectors during a period of intense disruption. As demonstrated in the research flowchart, the DCF has been used to evaluate the performance of the interviewees across the three dimensions of the framework, also providing a numerical scoring scale for their achievements. Research questions have been answered by concluding the DCF dimension scoring.

Chart 1. Visual Framework of the Research Process



Source: compiled by the authors

The paper first presents the theoretical background and the MICE sector's digitalisation, then the methodology and application of the DFC, followed by the interview findings and, finally, conclusions and future research directions.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The tourism sector has demonstrated a historical resilience, recovering from global wars and financial crises, and adapting to new technological solutions while contributing to globalisation (Abdal & Ferreira 2021). The 2008–2009 financial crisis damaged the tourism sector through a decline in demand and a change in consumer spending. Lee and Goldblatt (2012) found that the decline in revenues from event and festival tourism fell due to shifting preferences and a reduction in sponsorship ("Shawn" Lee & Goldblatt 2012). UNWTO's 2011 report highlights that the MICE sector experienced a more substantial decline than other tourism segments. From the 2008 financial crisis until the COVID–19 outbreak, world trade, including trade in services continued to grow (WTO 2024), driven partly by digitalisation, which accelerated the international flow of information, data, financial assets, and services (Bharadwaj et al. 2013).

With the global outbreak of the pandemic, due to the social distancing measures, most exhibition organisers had to immediately cancel or postpone business events. During the first two waves of the epidemic, exhibition events were almost entirely suspended (UFI 2020), followed by a gradual resumption in 2022 and a revenue increase in 2023. According to ICCA (2020), 44% of meetings were postponed and a further 14% cancelled in 2020. This figure dropped to 31% in 2021, indicating a

gradual recovery (ICCA 2021). The proportion of meetings held in hybrid or virtual formats doubled year-over-year, rising from 31% in 2020 to over 60% in 2021, illustrating the sector's accelerated digital adaptation (ICCA 2022). Meetings Outlook, provided by Meetings Professional International (MPI), reported the same shift in 2020 from live attendance to virtual: in 2020, 87% of respondents projected growth in virtual attendance, and by early 2021, virtual formats had become the dominant mode of event delivery (MPI 2020). By Spring 2023, a strong rebound in face-to-face events was observed, with 83% of respondents anticipating favourable in-person attendance, and 38% reporting a return to pre-pandemic business levels, signalling a partial rebalancing toward hybrid and live formats (MPI 2023). This bounce-back resulted not only from lifting restrictions but also from newly integrated digital services in event formats.

The digital transformation of the MICE industry has accelerated rapidly over the past two decades, reaching a significant turning point during the COVID–19 pandemic. In the early 2000s, digital tools began to shape event delivery, with exhibitors and organisers turning to internet-based marketing, social media, and digital advertising to attract visitors and increase engagement (Vitali et al. 2022). Technologies such as facial recognition and behavioural analytics enable event organisers to track visitor flow, optimise venue layouts, and enhance on-site safety measures. These innovations were further complemented by virtual trade shows and digital matchmaking platforms, which were already offering technical solutions even before the global health crisis, however, market acceptance was limited.

As Vitali et al. (2022) summarise, since the early 2000s, in the first phase, the spread of the Internet and online marketing tools has brought innovations to the exhibition market. The emergence of social media has further expanded the possibilities for reaching the target audience, especially in pre-event and post-event marketing, to attract visitors (Vitali et al. 2022). By the end of the 2010s, digital supplementary services (such as matchmaking and online partner search databases, online meeting platforms, online conferences, seminars, virtual showrooms, and live streaming) for exhibitions and fairs had become widely available.

Kiss & Michalkó (2020) highlighted the connection between tourism and security. Security-related changes have become increasingly important among the trends in the tourism environment that have had a significant impact on it, even before the pandemic. "Security is seen as an essential element of the tourism offer and/or a prerequisite for tourism." (Kiss & Michalkó 2020, 129.).

Although providers continuously developed digital tools, these were still supplementary, while in-person engagement e.g., face-to-face networking and negotiation, remained the core value (Li et al. 2022; Zhang et al. 2023). The outbreak of the pandemic immediately shifted this balance. The urgent need to maintain business continuity in a restricted environment led to the adoption of virtual platforms and hybrid event formats, replacing in-person business contacts for more than a year. As a result, the use of smart technology in business events has significantly increased, supporting the widespread adoption and popularity of virtual formats (Boros & Keller 2023).

In summary, attitudes and consumer preferences regarding digital tools have changed rapidly during and after the pandemic. These have transformed from optional, value-adding features into integral components of the MICE industry's strategic mindset and operational infrastructure. Smaller economies with weaker infrastructure faced greater challenges than developed regions with swift adaptation resources (Skoko et al. 2022). The ability to recognise the need for change and successfully meet the challenges of turbulent times has become significant in business competition.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Based on theoretical literature and data analysis, exploratory-type key research questions have been collected to define key themes of qualitative semi-structured expert interviews:

- What are the key factors driving stakeholder preferences for physical versus digital MICE

formats, and how should companies respond to these insights?

- Which organisational competencies are most critical for successfully navigating the challenges of digital transformation in the event industry?
- In which areas do companies see the most potential for future growth in digital event technologies, and how does this shape their investment strategies?

The choice of interviewee was based on market share and company relevance, involving key stakeholders of the market segment. These participants represent central actors across government, venue operations, and service provision. Due to time and resource constraints, the limited sample size reduces the generalisability of findings. Another limitation arises from the retrospective nature of data collection. Cognitive psychology and memory research indicate that recalling detailed data and information can lead to distortions (Müggenburg 2021). Interviews were conducted between November 2024 and January 2025 during which many events and impressions related to the peak pandemic years of 2020–2022. The time distance may cause recall bias, as interviewees unintentionally reconstruct or reinterpret past decisions in light of later outcomes, with a "forgetting rate" (Assaad et al. 2018). A further limitation is the qualitative method's reliance on the authors' subjective interpretation, especially in semi-structured interviews.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK: DYNAMIC CAPABILITIES

The Dynamic Capabilities Framework (DCF), developed by David J. Teece (1994) is a theoretical framework that helps analyse and describe how firms adapt, innovate, and remain competitive in an increasingly Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) environment (Taskan et al. 2022). As defined by Teece et al. (1997), dynamic capabilities mean the firm's ability "to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments" (Teece et al. 1997, 516.). The framework comprises three capabilities. In the MICE industry's pandemic situation, sensing means recognising the challenges of lockdown, identifying new client expectations for hybrid events, technological trends in virtual platforms, and shifts in travel behaviour. Seizing refers to pivoting to online conferences, integrating digital matchmaking tools, and creating entirely virtual exhibition environments, including investments in

digital infrastructure, organisational training, and new service portfolios. Finally, transforming as a capability encompasses the formalisation of digital strategies, the appointment of digital managers, and the development of services not directly tied to physical events, such as on-demand content, hybrid platforms, and online networking ecosystems.

The framework's relevance to the post-COVID MICE industry lies in its ability to explain not only how organisations survived the crisis but also how they built resilience and innovated in the face of disruption.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS METHODS

The exploratory research questions required an inductive, multi-step research design grounded in industry data and recent academic literature. We employed a purposive, convenience sampling approach to represent a wide range of stakeholders in the Hungarian exhibition sector and, in some cases, we applied snowball techniques when experts recommended additional interviewees. The semi-structured interviews mapped how Hungarian MICE actors have responded to digitalisation challenges triggered by the pandemic. We questioned representatives of five key industry stakeholders about their experiences with and strategies for digitalisation.

The interviewees represent diverse institutional and corporate backgrounds:

- *Interviewee A* is the Head of MICE business development of a medium-sized Hungarian company operating under the umbrella of the Hungarian state tourism administration.
- *Interviewee B* is the Director of Marketing and Sales for one of Hungary's leading conference venues, affiliated with a major international hotel chain and serving as a key venue for large-scale domestic and international MICE events.
- *Interviewee C* is the Deputy CEO of a key national organisation involved in Hungary's export promotion and international market representation efforts, responsible for event coordination and participation in trade fairs.
- *Interviewee D* is the Director of Sales and Events for Hungary's largest exhibition venue, which hosts several domestic and international trade fairs, conferences, and corporate events. The organisation is a key pillar of Hungary's MICE infrastructure and works closely with stakeholders from both the private and public sectors.

- *Interviewee E* is the CEO of a venue service provider specialising in technical infrastructure for conferences and business events. The company is a strategic partner of one of the largest conference centres in Budapest, supplying audiovisual and event technology solutions.

The selected interviewees cover a broad spectrum of event organisation and venue provision, sales and marketing, as well as technical services. The interviews followed a semi-structured technique, where added oral information is valuable for insights and latent motivations, but has not been included in the coding and evaluation of the interviews. The interview guide was developed based on the DCF to ensure that the responses comprehensively covered the three core organisational capabilities (Sensing, Seizing, and Transforming). Semi-structured interviews were recorded in online Microsoft Teams meetings. An automatic transcript has been generated of the conversations, which has been manually cleaned and corrected based on the voice recordings. An inductive manual coding has been followed, with the first step identifying themes and patterns in the cleaned transcripts. The patterns and themes have been coded according to their relevance to the three pillars of DCF.

FINDINGS

Sensing

In the DFC, the sensing pillar examines how effectively an organisation identifies technological, market, or societal changes in its environment. During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, client expectations and service formats underwent rapid changes, and the interviews revealed that Hungarian MICE stakeholders exhibited varying levels of sensing capability.

Interviewee A acknowledged that clear trends emerged from the market feedback. They detected shifting client needs: openness to hybrid events and digital flexibility is no longer a novelty but an expectation. (Table 1) Individual experiences, client meetings, and unofficial feedback often form the basis for insights.

This contrast between understanding and implementation was echoed in the experiences of Interviewee D. The representative acknowledged the shift to digital forms, especially since the start of the pandemic. (Table 1) The venue recognised the dual needs of its customers: a strong preference for personal contact and a desire for digital flexibility. As a result, they decided to develop a permanent digital event platform.

Interviewee C extended the conversation to promotional events, emphasising the growing importance of digital presence even for smaller partners. (Table 1) Within the company, sensing develops from both internal experience and partner feedback. They recognise that client expectations have moved beyond traditional in-person solutions, and digital components are now expected even in promotional activities.

Interviewee B shared that the firm was responsive to the challenges of organising events during the pandemic. Client demands shifted rapidly, driven by a growing interest in online and hybrid solutions. (Table 1) The venue adapted to meet the

needs of foreign clients, but due to technical and organisational limitations, these developments largely relied on external collaborations. Corporate and financial limitations prevented deeper responses, even though sensing was functional.

In a more dynamic reflection, Interviewee E spoke about a company that closely monitored the post-pandemic wave of interest in hybrid events. In terms of sensing capability, the company recognised that demand extends beyond simple media to include complex, interactive virtual platforms where exhibitors, attendees, and speakers can digitally connect. (Table 1) To sense in this context meant identifying both decreasing trends and current needs.

Table 1. Key responses to the sensing-related questions and corresponding quotes

SENSING	Key response	Quote
Interviewee A	Able to detect shifting client needs.	<i>“What we receive as feedback is that clients expect at least a digital component to the event. They don’t necessarily want to forgo physical presence, but having the option is important to them.”</i> <i>“There is no unified, central database or system where we can see what kind of events are in demand. Many things happen on an ad hoc basis.”</i>
Interviewee B	Corporate and financial limitations prevented the response. Client demands shifted quickly.	<i>“Event planners increasingly ask for digital support for venues, but investment backgrounds and property management limitations rarely allow for rapid development.”</i> <i>“Many clients at first asked about the potential of streaming or remote participation during the pandemic. We made to work with partner companies to solve this, but our infrastructure was unable to support it.”</i>
Interviewee C	Developing not only from internal experience but also from partner feedback.	<i>“Our partners, especially smaller food industry companies, often don’t know how to communicate digitally. But we also see that those who started using tools like online product showcases or QR-code flyers received much better feedback.”</i>
Interviewee D	Recognized the dual needs of its customers: a strong preference for personal contact and a desire for digital flexibility.	<i>“Many said they had tried digital solutions, but for them, business and relationship building works best in person.”</i> <i>“We only explored hybrid formats when it made the most sense, so we didn’t push the digital direction too far.”</i> <i>“Buyers didn’t find the online-only experience satisfying.”</i>
Interviewee E	Recognized that demand goes beyond simple media to include complex, interactive virtual platforms.	<i>“That part had a big boom for about a year, and then it disappeared, but the streaming part... more or less lasted until the end of 2023.”</i>

Source: compiled by the authors

In summary, actors in the Hungarian MICE sector detected shifting client expectations, particularly growing demand for digital and hybrid formats. While some relied mainly on informal sensing or trend mapping, others applied more systematic, partner-driven methods. Limitations in infrastructure and data systems constrained deeper strategic sensing, especially in public and resource-bound institutions.

Seizing

The second pillar, seizing, measures how effectively an organisation exploits identified opportunities by transforming its resources, services, or business models. Market changes become a competitive advantage only if the organisation can respond through structural and/or technological transformation.

Table 2. Key responses to the seizing-related questions and corresponding quotes

SEIZING	Key response	Quote
Interviewee A	Seizing indirectly - by strengthening coordination and knowledge-sharing functions rather than making direct investments.	<i>"We tried to compile support materials to help stakeholders navigate the new situation, but we did not develop specific services."</i>
Interviewee B	Although they acknowledged and managed the changes, their capacity to absorb them was partly dependent on external sources.	<i>"We knew it was needed, but as a property manager we can't integrate all the technology ourselves. We had the flexibility, but it's not the same as a dedicated development path." "We didn't have our own streaming equipment, but we were able to recommend a partner who could quickly solve it. It worked, but it didn't become a permanent service."</i>
Interviewee C	The taking was achieved through both internal development and customer-side knowledge transfer.	<i>"We had to teach our smaller partners how to present a product digitally. It was challenging at first, but the feedback was positive."</i>
Interviewee D	The experience led the organisation to avoid deeper investment in digital services.	<i>"We had some trial versions with online programs and events, but the feedback showed that they could not replace in-person presence. That is why we did not continue them in a permanent format."</i>
Interviewee E	Capture was mainly achieved through operational responses: acting quickly, integrating new tools and recruiting new staff.	<i>"...we had to invest in cameras, studio equipment to be able to work on these platforms..." "...at the end of the pandemic, we did not create such a department, we just used the existing and available equipment."</i>

Source: compiled by the authors

Project-based responses were evident in Interviewee A' account, where the organisation took a supportive role during the pandemic. They developed guides for event organisers and service providers on how to run hybrid events. (Table 2) They implemented indirect seizing by strengthening coordination and knowledgesharing rather than making direct investments.

Interviewee B described a more hands-on, yet externally reliant approach. The pandemic increased demand for hybrid and online solutions, which management addressed through external partnerships. (Table 2) This "external seizing" meant that the organisation met changing customer needs via partners, while long-term investments were constrained by budgetary and infrastructure limits, leaving their capacity to absorb change partly dependent on external sources.

Interviewee C stood out for adopting a more integrative and proactive approach. During the pandemic, they introduced various digital tools, including an online partner search platform, product catalogues to promote Hungarian food products worldwide, QR-based catalogues, and virtual stands. (Table 2) The "taking" was achieved through both internal development and customer-side knowledge transfer, and several solutions were retained after the pandemic, evolving into sustainable innovation.

Interviewee E provided a further example of technologically driven adaptation. Their ability to seize was primarily manifested in technical investments and staff training, including cameras, streaming devices, and infrastructure for a stable internet connection to support fully online events, complemented by internal training and the creation of new IT-intensive roles. However, the firm did not establish a separate development department or a dedicated digital department; capturing was mainly achieved through operational responses. (Table 2)

Interviewee D also reflected on earlier limited experiments. During the pandemic, they experimented with digital event formats, adapting to and responding to their their customers' wishes, but these efforts did not yield the expected results. (Table 2) The experience led the organisation to avoid deeper investment in digital services; however, their grasp was limited and risk-averse, and they recognised the opportunity. They tested it, but the negative feedback prompted the company to decide that further steps and larger investments were not necessary.

From the interviews, the seizing capability manifested on several levels: experimenting with technical tools, introducing new service formats, establishing collaborations with external partners, and, in some cases, initiating organisational mindset shifts. However, the responses also made it clear that these steps rarely evolved into comprehensive

strategic transformations and were more often interpreted as ad hoc, project-based responses.

Transforming

The third pillar of the Framework, transforming, reflects long-term organisational adaptation and learning. Interviewee A's organisation, for example, did not undergo internal restructuring but continued to rely on personal networks and direct communication, while recognising that digital changes require long-term, systemic responses. (Table 3) This suggests that industry-wide development and learning are hindered by the lack of agreed-upon frameworks, systems and feedback mechanisms.

A different set of limitations emerged in Interviewee B's account. At this venue, the ability to transform was primarily hindered by infrastructure and ownership constraints. (Table 3) The centre did not have a dedicated digital innovation development or long-term technology strategy. This response is typical of an organisation that recognises the need for change but is unable to initiate a more profound transformation for the company due to internal constraints. In contrast, Interviewee C presented a positive example of partial transformation. Some

of the digital tools introduced during the pandemic were integrated into daily operations (Table 3), long-term learning processes were launched for partners and employees, providing training in the use of digital tools, which have increasingly become part of the firm's service philosophy. Interviewee D illustrated a more cautious and selective approach. Digital customer expectations and experiments with them during the pandemic have not been fully integrated into today's operations. (Table 3) The decision, from a strategic perspective, shows that even though the organisation was prepared for long-term digital diversification, customer needs expected this in a shorter term.

A more fluid and organically evolving transformation emerged in Interviewee E's case. Although the company did not undergo a major organisational restructuring, there were significant changes in staff, equipment, mindset, and approach. Sustainability and green operations also appeared as key future transformation directions from the customers' perspective. (Table 3) This cyclical adaptation created dual pressure: building both digital and interpersonal competencies, indicating a change not only in technology but also in operating philosophy.

Table 3. Key responses to the transforming-related questions and corresponding quotes

TRANSFORMING	Key response	Quote
Interviewee A	Awareness of the need for digital transformation, with focus on personal contact and personal information sharing.	<i>"There is a lack of shared data management practices that would allow everyone to know what is happening at events. There are no standardized tracking processes, so it is difficult to learn at an industry level."</i>
Interviewee B	Transforming hindered by infrastructure and ownership constraints.	<i>"We cannot completely transform our operations because so much is fixed – the building design, the technology procurement and the operational structures."</i>
Interviewee C	Partial digital transformation, digital tools introduced during the pandemic were not only retained but also integrated into daily operations.	<i>"Online presentations, digital publications and QR-based information sharing are now part of our standard services – not only because of the pandemic, but also because they have proven to be effective in the long term."</i>
Interviewee D	Returning tendency in digital transformation, digital customer solutions during the pandemic have not been fully integrated into today's operations.	<i>"Most of our events are B2B in nature, where personal contact is key. Online formats could not replace this, so we did not continue them."</i>
Interviewee E	Transformational capacity refers to a strong capacity for long-term organisational and operational adaptation and international expansion.	<i>"...we needed people who spoke English." "We had to educate ourselves, while also buying the necessary tools..." "We had to educate ourselves, while also buying the necessary tools..." "Everyone wants to go green. Now they ask for data on equipment consumption and carbon footprint."</i>

Source: compiled by the authors

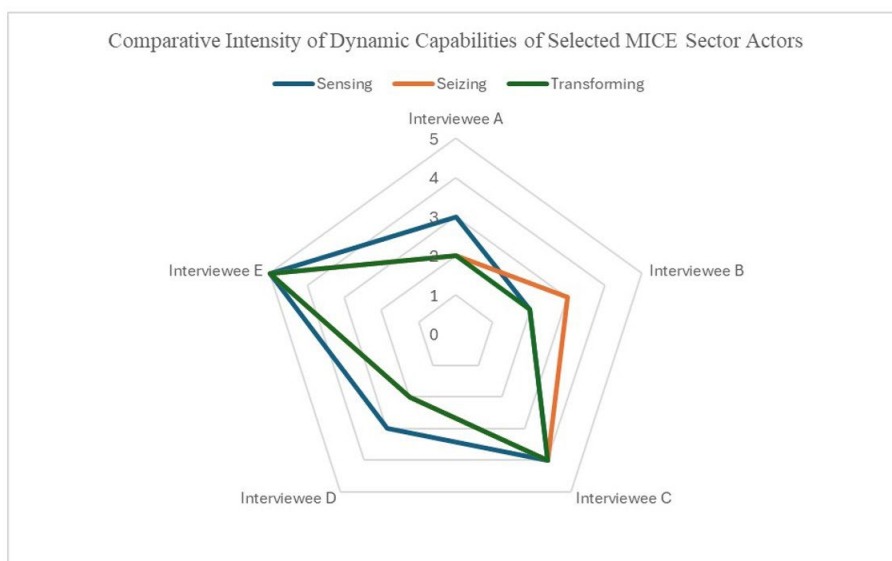
The transformation pillar reveals varied organisational responses to long-term digital adaptation. Some organisations integrated digital tools and initiated internal training, while others faced infrastructural constraints, a lack of strategic direction, or limited systemic support. In several cases, transformation emerged organically rather than through planned restructuring,

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research examined the Hungarian MICE sector's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent digital transformation, contributing

to the evolving discourse on pandemic-accelerated digitalisation, and addressing the research gap regarding Hungarian MICE actors. Thematic patterns were grouped according to the Sensing, Seizing, and Transforming dimensions of DCF and evaluated on a five-point Likertscale from minimal to outstanding performance. Results are visualised in a radar chart to demonstrate the achievements and performance of interviewees in the three different dimensions. Based on the thematic indicators, Interviewee B has been evaluated as weak (2), interviewees A and D as moderate (3) while Interviewee 4 proved strong (4) and Interviewee 5 outstanding (5) at sensing capability.

Chart 2. Comparative Intensity of Dynamic Capabilities of Selected MICE Sector Actors



Source: compiled by the authors

Performance across the three pillars of the DCF reveals interrelated patterns: respondents who performed well in the areas of sensing and seizing were more likely to succeed in transformation. The key factors driving stakeholder preferences between physical and digital formats include event type and size, number of participants, duration, and audience profile. Events focused on building business partnership and networking have showed a strong tendency to return to in-person formats, with digital components used mainly as complementary services. Limitations in the development of potential physical infrastructure frequently impede digital transformation, whereas strategic leadership commitment, constant tracking of market trends, and rapid responses to client needs support stronger

transformation capabilities. Despite the relatively small sample size, the findings suggest that strong sensing positively influences both seizing and transforming capacities.

Leadership commitment was found to promote transforming capabilities. Organisations that successfully demonstrated transformation combined managerial recognition of digitalisation with investment readiness, workforce upskilling, and stronger internal innovation processes, while those with weaker competencies performed less well.

Looking ahead, interviewees identified significant opportunities in interactive platforms, hybrid solutions, the implementation of carbon footprint measurement methodologies and green transition initiatives. Although the Hungarian MICE

sector faces persistent challenges and disadvantages in physical infrastructure, its strategic approach to digital transformation broadly aligns with the trends.

Future research will focus on the quantitatively measuring consumer preferences regarding digital tools and services in the Hungarian MICE sector. A questionnaire-based study is planned to complement the qualitative analysis and provide an overview of consumption patterns, expectations, and market preferences of businesspeople and professionals participating in MICE events.

Evaluating these responses will show whether industry actors adopt a reactive or a proactive approach, and to what extent they can invest in new services. Findings from the mixed-method research on dynamic capabilities may support policy and strategy building, while results on consumer attitudes can enhance local and regional competitiveness. Overall, the sector's future resilience and competitiveness could depend on the implementation of digital technologies and the strategic integration of digital tools into organisational routines.

REFERENCES

- Abdal, A., & Ferreira, D. M. (2021), "Deglobalization, globalization, and the pandemic current impasses of the capitalist world-economy", *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 27(1), 202–230. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jwsr.2021.1028>
- Assaad, R., Krafft, C., & Yassin, S. (2018), "Comparing retrospective and panel data collection methods to assess labor market dynamics", *IZA Journal of Development and Migration*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40176-018-0125-7>
- Bharadwaj, A., El Sawy, O. A., Pavlou, P. A., & Venkatraman, N. (2013), "Digital business strategy: Toward a next generation of insights", *MIS Quarterly: Management Information Systems*, 37(2), 471–482. <https://doi.org/10.25300/MISQ/2013/37.2.3>
- Boros, K., Keller, K. (2023), "The effects of virtual business events on attitudes and behavioural intentions of Generation Z", *Marketing & Menedzsment*, 57(3), 27–35. doi:10.15170/MM.2023.57.03.03
- ICCA (2021), *ICCA Ranking Report 2021*. www.iccaworld.Org/News/Post/Icca-Ranking-Report-Sheds-Light-on-Industrys-Adaptability-and-Progress-in-2021/ (last accessed 15-11-2025)
- ICCA (2022), *ICCA Ranking Report 2022*. www.iccaworld.org/Global-Industry-News/Post/Public-Abstract-2022-Icca-Business-Analytics (last accessed 15-11-2025)
- Ivanov, D. (2020), "Predicting the impacts of epidemic outbreaks on global supply chains: A simulation-based analysis on the coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19/SARS-CoV2) case", *Transportation Research Part E: Logistics and Transportation Review*, 136. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tre.2020.101922>
- Kiss, K., & Michalkó, G. (2020), „A turizmus- és biztonságmarketing”, in: Michalkó G. (szerk.): *Turizmusbiztonság*, Budapest, Dialóg Campus, 2020, 129–140.
- Li, T., Ye, Q., & Chen, Q. (2022), "Research on the transformation from international exhibition to "cloud" exhibition in the post COVID-19 era: A case study of China International Fair for Investment & Trade", *PLoS ONE*, 17(4 April). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0267455>
- Meetings Professional International (2020), *Meetings Outlook Summer*, 2020. <https://www.mpi.org/docs/default-source/meetings-outlook/meetings-outlook-summer-2020.pdf> (last accessed 15-11-2025)
- Meetings Professional International (2023), *Meetings Outlook Summer 2023*. <https://www.mpi.org/docs/default-source/meetings-outlook/meetings-outlook-summer-2023.pdf> (last accessed 15-11-2025)
- Müggenburg, H. (2021), "Beyond the limits of memory? The reliability of retrospective data in travel research", *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice*, 145, 302–318. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.TRA.2021.01.010>
- OECD (2020a), *Digital Transformation in the Age of COVID-19 Building Resilience and Bridging Divides Digital Economy Outlook 2020 Supplement*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1787/bb167041-en>.
- OECD (2020b), *OECD. (2020). Coronavirus (COVID-19): SME Policy Responses*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/bb167041-en>
- Raffay, Z. (2020), „A COVID-19 járvány hatása a turisták fogyasztói magatartásának változására, in: Ercsey Ida (szerk.): *Marketing a digitalizáció korában* (Az Egyesület a Marketing Oktatásért és Kutatásért XXVI. országos konferenciájának előadásai), Győr, Széchenyi István Egyetem, 2020, 347–356.
- "Shawn" Lee, S., & Goldblatt, J. (2012), "The current and future impacts of the 2007-2009 economic recession on the festival and event industry", *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*, 3(2), 137–148. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17582951211229690>

- Skoko, B., Tomšić, D., & Hlača, A. (2022), "Transformation of the Business Event Industry during the Pandemic: the Case of the Exhibition Industry in Croatia", *Journal of Governance and Regulation*, 11(3), 79–94. <https://doi.org/10.22495/jgrv11i3art8>
- Taskan, B., Junça-Silva, A., & Caetano, A. (2022), "Clarifying the conceptual map of VUCA: a systematic review", *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 30(7), 196–217. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-02-2022-3136>
- Teece, D. J., & Pisano, G. (1994), "The dynamic capabilities of firms: An introduction", *Industrial and Corporate Change*, 3(3), 537–556. <https://doi.org/10.1093/icc/3.3.537-a>
- Teece, D. J., Pisano, G., & Shuen, A. (1997), "Dynamic capabilities and strategic management", *Strategic Management Journal*, 18(7), 509–533. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-0266\(199708\)18:7<509::AID-SMJ882>3.0.CO;2-Z](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-0266(199708)18:7<509::AID-SMJ882>3.0.CO;2-Z)
- Töröcsik, M., Lányi, B., Csapó, J., & Jakópánecz, E. (2020), *Fogyasztásváltozás a Covid-19 járvány első hullámában – Szekunder kutatási eredmények*, Pécsi Tudományegyetem Közgazdaságtudományi Kar Marketing és Turizmus Intézet, Pécs, 2020.
- UFI The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry (2020), UFI Global Exhibition 25th edition. www.ufi.org/research (last accessed 15-11-2025)
- UNWTO, (2011), Economic Crisis, international tourism decline and its impact on the poor. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08ac040f0b652dd0008a0/UNWTO_29Nov11.pdf (last accessed 15-11-2025)
- Vitali, V., Bazzani, C., Gimigliano, A., Cristani, M., Begalli, D., & Menegaz, G. (2022), "Trade show visitors and key technological trends: from a literature review to a conceptual framework", *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, 37(13), 142–166. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-10-2021-0461>
- Zhang, R. R., Abd Rahman, A., Abdul Aziz, Y., & Sidek, S. (2023), "Unpacking technological and interpersonal interaction on value co-creation and outcomes in trade show: A dyadic examining view", *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 55, 334–343. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2023.05.007>