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## CONVENTION AND EXHIBITION INDUSTRY IN THE CONTEXT OF DIGITALIZATION TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS

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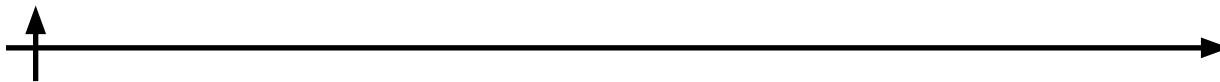
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**Abstract.** Currently, the convention and exhibition industry is at the stage of active development. Despite the events related to the impact of the pandemic on all fields of life and activity of society, new commercial and non-profit organizations continue to appear in the industry, whose activities are aimed at the development and implementation of projects of various formats, directions and levels. The purpose of the study is to identify trends and problems in the development of the congress and exhibition industry under the conditions of the digitalization of the economy. In the course of this research, a comparative characteristic and assessment of the state of the market of the congress and exhibition industry during the period of pre-covid restrictions was carried out, the dynamics of events in the market of congress and exhibition services is presented. As a result of the study, an analysis of the formats of project implementation and directions of activities for the period 2020-2021, a hierarchy of project implementation formats is presented. In addition, the study demonstrated the total number of events depending on the direction of their implementation as a percentage of all formats of implementation, the comparison by the average number of participants and the average cost of registration fees.

**Keywords:** digitalization, business model, congress and exhibition activity, exhibition activity, activity assessment, investment, investor, risk assessment

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## ПРОБЛЕМЫ РАЗВИТИЯ КОНГРЕССНО-ВЫСТАВОЧНОЙ ИНДУСТРИИ В УСЛОВИЯХ ЦИФРОВИЗАЦИИ ЭКОНОМИКИ

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**Аннотация.** В настоящее время конгрессно-выставочная индустрия находится на этапе активного развития. Несмотря на события, связанные с влиянием пандемии на все сферы жизни и деятельности общества, в отрасли продолжают появляться новые коммерческие и некоммерческие организации, деятельность которых направлена на развитие и реализацию проектов различного формата, направления и уровня. Целью исследования является выявление тенденций и проблем развития конгрессно-выставочной индустрии в условиях цифровизации экономики. В процессе исследования проведена сравнительная характеристика и оценка состояния рынка конгрессно-выставочной индустрии в период доковидных ограничений, представлена динамика мероприятий на рынке конгрессно-выставочных услуг. В результате исследования представлен анализ форматов реализации проектов и направлений мероприятий за период 2020–2021 гг., иерархия форматов реализации проектов. Помимо этого, в результате исследования продемонстрировано общее количество мероприятий в зависимости от направления их реализации в процентном соотношении ко всем форматам реализации, сравнение по среднему количеству участников и по средней стоимости регистрационных взносов.

**Ключевые слова:** цифровизация, бизнес-модель, конгрессно-выставочная деятельность, выставочная деятельность, оценка деятельности, инвестиции, инвестор, оценка риска

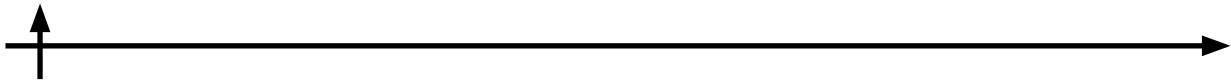
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### Introduction

Currently, the convention and exhibition industry is at the stage of active development. Despite the events related to the impact of the pandemic on all fields of life and activity of society, new commercial and non-profit organizations continue to appear in the industry, whose activities are aimed at the development and implementation of projects of various formats, directions and levels (international, regional, etc.).

Since economic processes are in constant and dynamic motion, the demand for services in the service sector is growing, and the possibility of attracting and implementing large and large-scale projects on the territory of the Russian Federation is becoming increasingly relevant. In this regard, many companies are beginning to engage in active processes of improving functionality and their activities (Sul, 2020). Many of the processes that are currently taking place in the hospitality industry are due to the current state of the market. On the one hand, it is impossible not to note the negative impact of the epidemiological situation on the activities of organizations. Some establishments lose their competitive positions due to their inability to adapt to modern operating conditions, however, there are also such firms that, in a difficult period, found an opportunity to improve internal processes, business models and, as a result, the functioning of their activities. These events allowed the companies to maintain a competitive advantage in the market and made them one of the most progressive and stable ones at this



stage of the development of the hospitality industry.

Despite the epidemic that has affected all aspects of the activities of enterprises, recently there has been an increase in interest on the part of international organizations and associations to carry out major international projects on the territory of Russia or with the participation of domestic specialists. This trend can be traced because the country has a great resource potential, and in the context of globalization and cultural integration, the emergence of new areas of the hospitality industry and the development of innovative tourist products, it is necessary to provide and expand opportunities in relation with the digital transformation of the economy for new and existing organizations operating in the congress and exhibition industry.

### **Materials and Methods**

In the course of this research, the material collected from several reports of the International Association of Congresses and Conferences compiled by specialists of the hospitality industry, scientific papers revealing and describing the methods and goals of building business processes in the congress and exhibition industry were analyzed.

Some of the works used in the study define the format of events as a way to restrict the freedom of project participants. The choice of the project format or process optimization measures depends on time, context and space (Bharadwaj, 2013). Other authors note that the formats of changes at the enterprise are directly related to the work of a large number of people who occupy various roles and positions at the enterprise (De Smet, 2018).

The work uses a large amount of information aimed at analyzing the topic. In addition, the work contains a set of methods that were used for the purpose of the most detailed study of all aspects of the subject matter. Among the methods, the following can be distinguished (Hankinson, 2005):

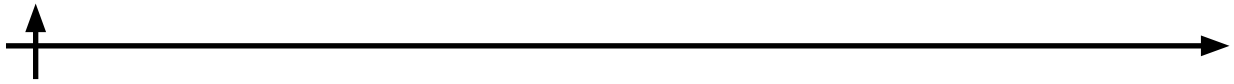
- Analysis and synthesis.
- Comparison.
- Classification.

### **Results and Discussion**

Despite all the recent events, the convention and exhibition industry continues to struggle for its place in the market. In order to describe all the processes taking place in the industry in the most detail, it is necessary to understand what the congress and exhibition market itself is, to assess its current state as well as to determine the trends of further development (Wong, 2019).

Membership in the International Association of Congresses and Conferences (ICCA) is very prestigious among the largest hospitality organizations. The Association was created to optimize the interaction of all subjects involved in the field, as well as to create a large-scale information field that allows participating countries to freely compete with each other, exchange ideas, goals, experience in preparing and implementing various events (Smagina, 2017).

One of the most important documents in the congress and exhibition industry is the annual report of the International Association of Congresses and Conferences on events that are organized all over the world, including Russia (Voronova, Liashchuk, Smirnova, Belokurova, 2019). This report also presents a ranking by the number of events held in each country and the largest cities. This rating allows you to determine the place of a particular state in the world ranking of the hospitality industry and choose further ways of development, as well as to trace the dynamics of the development of the industry in the world and a specific destination. Table 1 presents a comparative description and assessment of the current state of the market of the convention and exhibition industry in Russia and St. Petersburg (Kahveci, 2022).



**Table 1. Comparative characteristics and assessment of the state of the congress and exhibition industry market during the period of Pre-Covid restrictions**

2017	2018	2019
The number of events held in Russia Total number of countries – 41		
87 events (21st place among European countries)	83 events (22nd place among European countries)	117 events (20th place among European countries)
Number of events held in St. Petersburg Total number of cities – 200		
31 events (49th place among European countries)	19 events (80th place among European countries)	36 events (42nd place among European countries)

In addition, Figure 1 shows the dynamics of events in the market of congress and exhibition services held in Russia and Saint Petersburg between 2017 and 2019

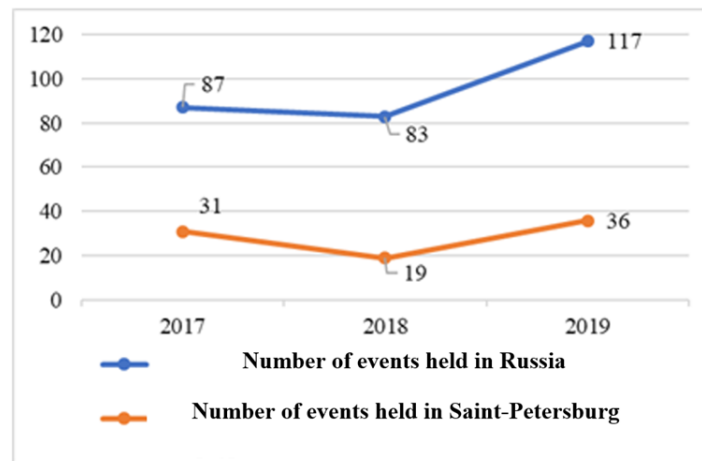
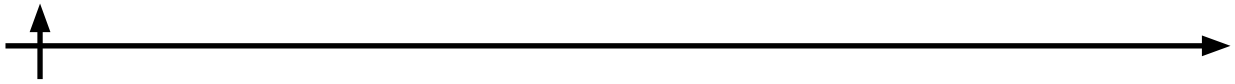


Fig. 1. Dynamics of events in the market of congress and exhibition services

Based on the graph, it can be seen that even despite the crises taking place in the world, the dynamics are generally positive. Of course, the chart cannot show constant growth or constant decline, since the market is very dynamic and depends on many factors. And such fluctuations just indicate its development and improvement. Russia's position in the ranking of countries is at an average level, but St. Petersburg is one of the most leading cities in Russia, along with Moscow, which allows us to judge the trend of increasing attractiveness of the market of congress and exhibition services in Russia (Serebryakova, Petrikov, 2018).

Exploring the market of congress and exhibition services in Russia and St. Petersburg by the number of events held, it is also necessary to trace the dynamics of participants attending congress and exhibition events. This factor is fundamental in the hospitality industry, since it is visitors and customers who form new market needs. A total of 64 countries were included and studied. Table 2 presents a comparative description of the state of the Russian congress and exhibition industry market by the number of event visitors between 2017 and 2019.



**Table 2. Comparative characteristics of the number of visitors to events in Saint-Petersburg and Russia**

2017	2018	2019
The number of visitors to events in Russia Total number of countries - 64		
Less than 20.000 participants (60th place)	22.947 participants of the event (43rd place)	28 152 participants (43rd place)
The number of visitors to events in St. Petersburg Total number of cities – 120		
Less than 10.000 (out of rating)	Less than 10.000 (out of rating)	10.249 participants (111 places)

Figure 2, on the other hand, visually presents this dynamic of visitors in the market of congress and exhibition services between 2017 and 2019 in Russia and Saint Petersburg.

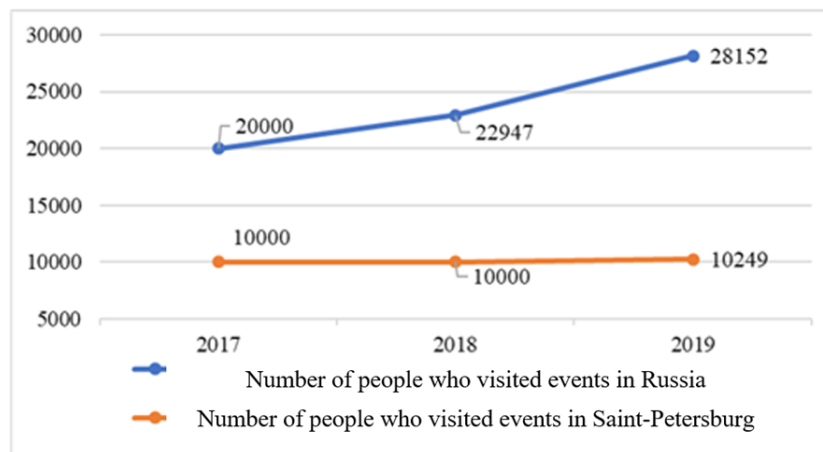
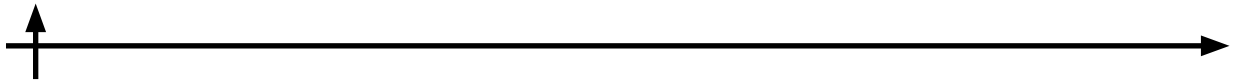


Fig. 2. Dynamics of visitors in the market of congress and exhibition services

The graph shows a positive trend in terms of growth in the number of visitors (both local and international). This is highly evident when comparing indicators for Russia (on average 2717 more people visited these events annually, meaning a 12.07% annual average increase). The trend is a positive factor that indicates an increase in public interest in events of various formats. However, conducting a more detailed study, it should be noted that in 2017 and 2018 St. Petersburg was out of the rating in terms of the number of visitors, this factor undoubtedly negatively affects the positioning of the city in the market of convention and exhibition services (Martin, 2003).

Comparing the indicators of 2017–2019, and also taking into account the fact that only 120 of the largest megacities in Europe participated in the rating, it can be noted that St. Petersburg accounts for a large share of participants in Russia (50.00%, 43.58% and 36.41% in 2017, 2018 and 2019, respectively) taking into account that in terms of the number of participants in 2019 it was even ahead of Moscow (Moscow took the 115th place in the ranking in 2019 lagging 4 places behind Saint Petersburg). The data coincide with the study given in Table 2 and reflect the growing attractiveness of the destination. Every year the indicators built up positive dynamics, allowing Saint-Petersburg to break out into the leaders of Russia in the market of congress and exhibition services (Expocenter, 2019).

For a more complete assessment of the market, it is necessary to consider the events that have taken place in Russia and all over the world in the last 2 years. Figure 3 shows data on 2020 events as a percentage (EXPOCLUB.ru, 2020). Speaking of 2020, it turned out to be one of the most difficult years for the congress and exhibition services market. According to the statistical data of the ICCA report, 8.5 thousand events were planned for 2020 around the world. More than 40% of all planned projects have



been cancelled. This was especially acute at the beginning of the year 2020.

### Assessment of convention and exhibition industry in 2020

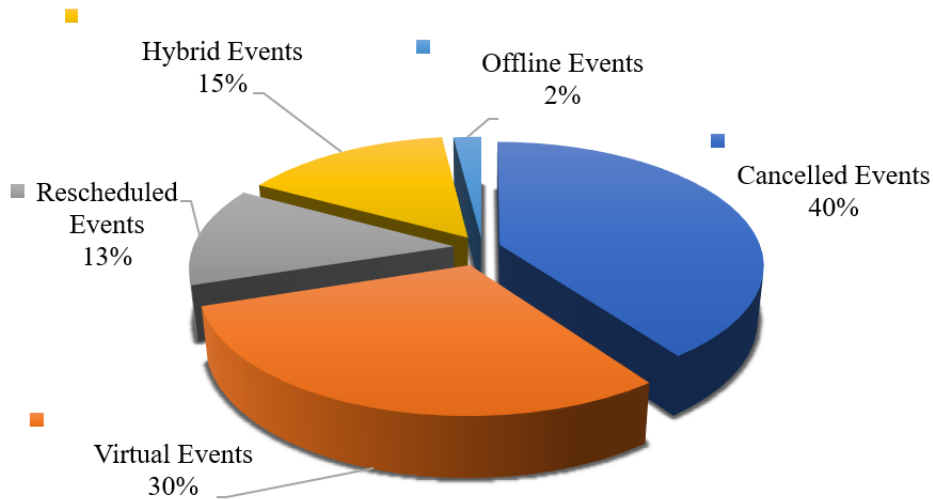


Fig. 3. Distribution of event forms based on 2020 events (Expocenter, 2020)

Over the past one and a half year, virtual events have gained popularity, their influence increased to 30% in 2020 (Expocenter, 2020). Previously, a small segment, which was used exclusively by large industry players, has now increased to a huge size. At present, it occupies the first place among all forms of events, and the trend of their development has shown an exceptionally positive dynamics, since this form of event organization is closely connected with the IT segment, which is now the most promising industry in all spheres of society. In other words, even negative external factors can serve as an incentive for the development and search for new ways of doing business (Levina, Ilyin et al., 2019).

The segment "Postponement of the event date" ran to about 13% of the total market. However, by the end of 2020, the share of postponed events decreased, which is undoubtedly a positive factor. This segment can also serve as a big problem for many players of the congress and exhibition market who carry out their activities in the segment of small and medium-sized businesses, since the vast majority of companies operate at the expense of borrowed funds. Each delay and rescheduling can trigger solvency problems of enterprises and hinders normal liquidity in the existing conditions.

Two percent of the total number of events were held in full-time format. The share of such projects is relatively smaller than the rest of the segments, which was a kind of "sore point" of the congress and exhibition industry throughout 2020. The drop in the number of face-to-face events is undoubtedly one of the main economic problems, which is expressed in the loss of all resources: financial, human, technical, etc. Many firms could not cope with these losses and left the market forever (e.g. "MAKO" Congress Management).

By the end of 2021, the hybrid form of organizing and holding events was the most developed (there was an increase to 15%). Since due to restrictions it was impossible to organize a full-time presence of people, so the use of a joint format of online and offline participation was decided on.

Thus, it is possible to identify the market trend towards an increase in virtual and hybrid forms of participation, which, first of all, are implemented through the tools necessary to ensure offline participation. Such tools are online platforms, CRM systems, video installations (cameras, applications, etc.), virtual and augmented reality systems (Romanova, 2014).

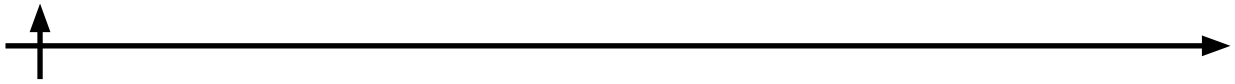


Figure 4 shows the hierarchy of event implementation formats.

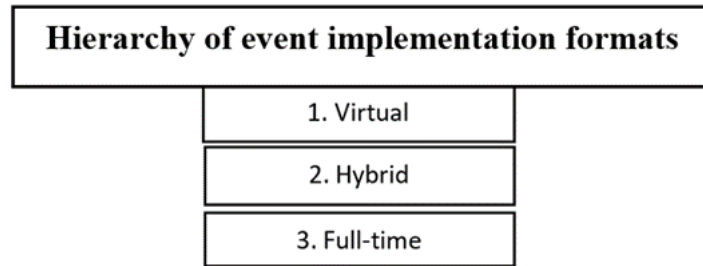


Fig. 4. Hierarchy of event implementation formats 2020-2021

Analyzing the market of congress and exhibition services, it is also necessary to identify the most popular destinations by the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021. The analysis includes the study of all options for the organization of events as well as all identified areas.

At the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021 around 50% of events on this topic were conducted in a virtual format (up by 20% points from 2020), 8% in a hybrid and only 3% in full-time format (Figure 5). These data clearly illustrate the trend of transition to the virtual space. Separately, it is necessary to highlight the fact that IT events are the format with the lowest share of postponement of the date (30%), as well as with the lowest cancellation rates (only 9%) (Official website of the Administration of St. Petersburg, 2021).

#### Distribution of events in terms of organizational form at the beginning of the year 2021

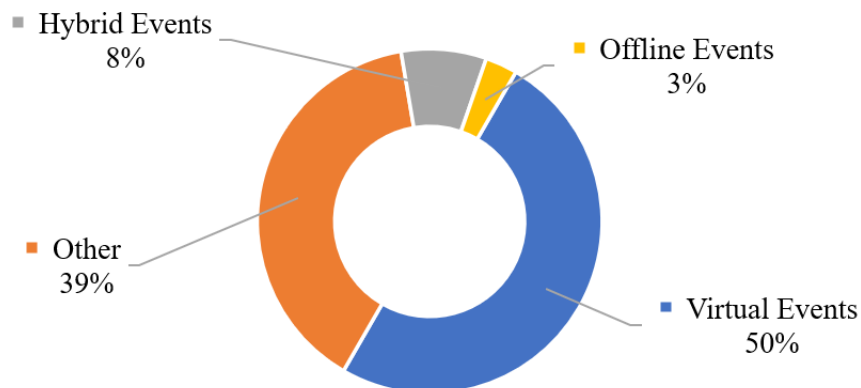
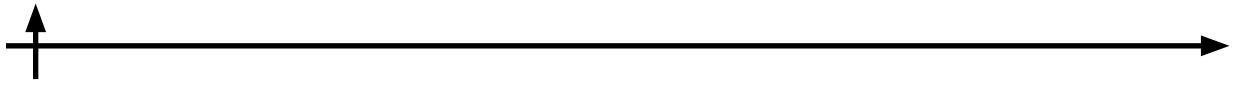


Fig. 5. Distribution of events by organizational form

The conducted research allows us to form the idea that the future of the congress and exhibition industry consists in the use of modern technical means, providing financial resources for all information components of the business and the availability of modern automated systems (including CRM systems). The emergence of these new formats for the implementation of events is undoubtedly a catalyst for the development of technologies for every company being present in the hospitality market. The economic effect of these events has also undergone some changes. The presence of virtual and hybrid meetings has a direct impact on the venue of events, the costs associated with transportation and living expenses. Prices for services and materials necessary for the normal operation of companies are also



changing (Perova, 2016).

With the help of virtual and hybrid formats, it is possible to increase the number of participants, organize as many international projects as possible without being tied to a specific place. At the same time, there are certain problems, such as the difference in time zones, poor communication on the global Internet, the lack of technical capabilities of the company as a whole.

In the 2020 statistical report from ICCA (2020), a study was conducted that combines all of the above observations. Based on the data and activity reports received from ICCA member countries and cities, it is possible to create schedules reflecting the real situation in the convention and exhibition industry.

The comparison reflects the difference between the face-to-face format and the virtual one, since the latter events occupy the first place in the hierarchy of formats for the implementation of events in 2020-2021. Figure 6 shows a comparison by the average number of participants. A 49.9% increase in the number of participants of virtual events could be traced by the beginning of 2021. The “number of participants” indicator is almost 2 times more than the data obtained for face-to-face formats of events, which is undoubtedly one of the criteria for the development of convention and exhibition industry as a whole.

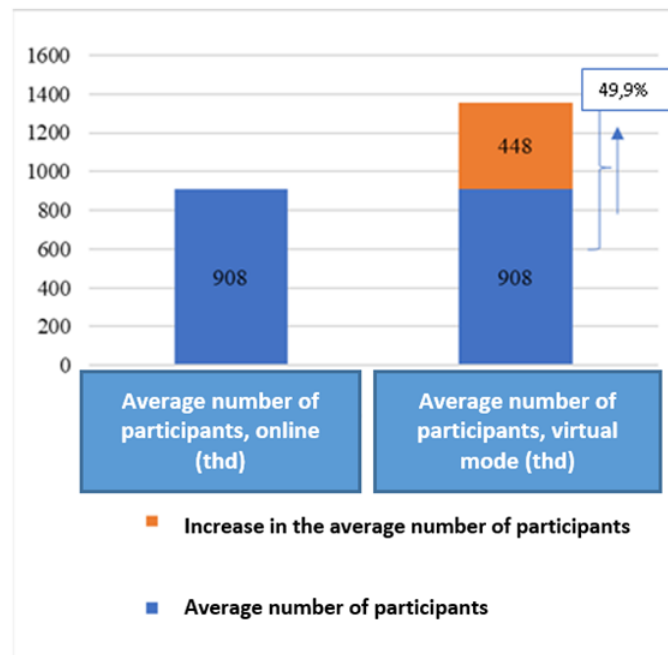
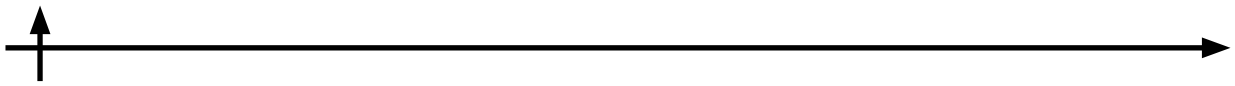


Fig. 6. Comparison by average number of participants

The epidemiological situation has largely affected all processes, on the one hand, negatively, but on the other hand, it has allowed to reveal new aspects and ways of development for the congress, exhibition, hotel and tourism segment.

It is also necessary to compare the dynamics of the average cost of services for participation in congress and exhibition events in 2020-2021. Figure 7 shows a comparison of the average cost of registration fees. Since the report data contains information on financial indicators in foreign currency (US dollars), the figure shows the transfer of the amount to the Russian ruble as of the beginning of 2021 (ICCA Annual Report, 2020).





### Reduction of average fee in the case of virtual mode in 2020 and 2021

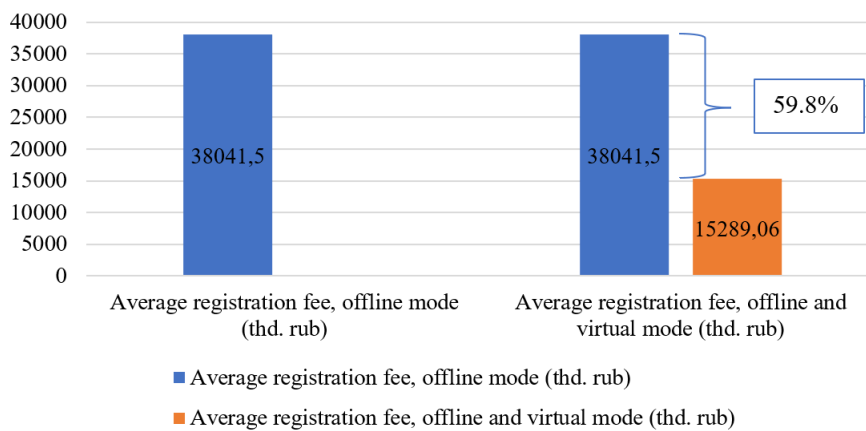


Fig. 7. Comparison by average cost of registration fees

The graph shows that the average cost of registration fees has decreased by almost 60%. This dynamic is due to the fact that virtual and hybrid formats are the most popular event formats nowadays. The cost of participation costs has decreased, since the so-called "hidden costs" are not included, such as the cost of booking, service fee for using the payment system not only on the Internet, but also at the venue of the event, living expenses, meals, human resources costs (costs of "manual" labor), etc.

These market fluctuations indicate its adaptation and adaptation to modern changing conditions and shows the capabilities and abilities of the congress and exhibition services market to withstand harsh conditions. The segment has completely changed, new opportunities and growth points have emerged for many companies, but there is one need that needs to be in the forefront – a person needs communication.

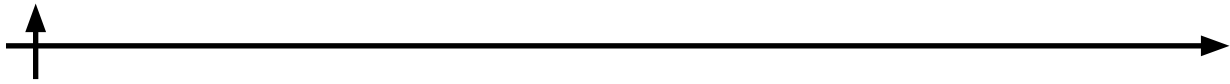
Realizing this, many players in the market have taken all possible ways to increase the time for the preparation and implementation of events, including through the introduction of subsidies to small and medium-sized businesses in order to retain players in the market. Right now, it is so important to have a reliable regulatory framework regulating business activities.

Unfortunately, Russia and St. Petersburg, in particular, do not have a sufficiently developed legislative framework in this area. The congress and exhibition services market has been working towards the development and implementation of a priority project for the development of the sector since January 31, 2018. The main goal is to increase tourist flows, especially business tourists who for the target group. This project is aimed at increasing the number of congress events held in St. Petersburg and accounted for by ICCA.

### Conclusions

Thus, based on all the data, the following trends in the development of the industry can be identified:

- Changing the format of the events held to hybrid and virtual.
- The use of IT technologies in the activities of companies.
- The growth of public interest in events of various formats.
- Increasing the number of events and entering new markets.
- Development of areas of implementation of projects related to medicine, science, education and the IT segment.
- Providing financial resources for all modern automated systems (including CRM systems).
- An increase in the average number of participants in congress and exhibition events.

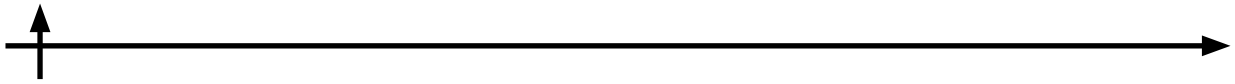


- Reduction of the average cost of registration fees.
- Development of the legislative framework in terms of preparation and implementation of measures.
- Development of the activities of congress and exhibition operators in order to increase their positions in the rating of the International Association ICCA.

The current market analysis, opportunities and threats, the emergence of new formats inevitably led to changes in interaction with customers, suppliers and competitors. Modern conditions dictate new rules of doing business, therefore, it is necessary to approach the study of the market and its assessment comprehensively, through the study of some economic and organizational characteristics of companies and enterprises.

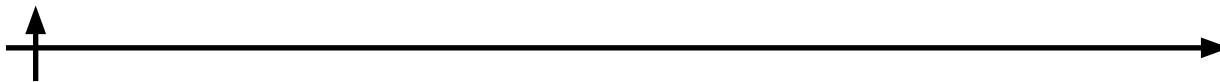
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