

The First World Sports Tourism Congress: the Role of Sport for Tourism Recovery and its Contribution to the 2030 Agenda

Renowned experts and academics in sports tourism debated over two days on current and future trends in the sector and underlined the key role of sport for the development of a more sustainable and inclusive tourism.

Lloret de Mar, Spain, 26 November 2021 - *The first edition of the World Sports Tourism Congress (25-26 November, Lloret de Mar, Spain) focused on the unique capacity of the sector to promote sustainable and inclusive development, diversification and public-private partnership. The Congress was organized by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the Catalan Tourism Agency (ACT), an Affiliate Member of the UNWTO.*

At the opening ceremony, UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili declared that the holding of this Congress, with a strong in-person participation, is a clear message that the tourism sector is ready to welcome tourists again, and the recovery of sports tourism plays an important role.

Pololikashvili added: "An encouraging example is the gradual return of major sporting events, which is a major driver of the restart of tourism."

For his part, the Minister for Business and Labour of the Regional Government of Catalonia, Roger Torrent, stressed that "this Congress can give rise to ideas that allow progress towards a more responsible and sustainable tourism thanks to diversification, differentiation and de-seasonalization". In addition, he stated that tourism, and in particular sports tourism, can offer economic, employment and social opportunities that must be harnessed.

The congress was attended by 569 participants (368 in person and 201 virtual) from a total of 21 countries. The most immediate challenges were discussed throughout the first day, ranging from the impact of COVID-19 and current trends in tourism demand and in the tourism market, to trends in sports, innovation in major sporting events, diversity and inclusion, and public-private governance strategies.

Looking to the future, the second day focused on the digital transformation of the sector and the phenomenon of e-sports, the promotion of digital marketing, the environmental framework and new research in the sector.

One of the most innovative aspects that the Congress brought was the deployment of two hologram booths in the proceedings in order to have the participation of speakers who could not attend in person.

Work on Tourism and Sports is among the priorities of the UNWTO, especially in view of the necessary recovery of the sector in general.

The Congress featured more than 50 speakers--more than half of them in person--from Canada, Croatia, the United States, Spain, France, Wales, Italy and South Africa, among others.

Among the speakers were prominent figures with recognized experience in the sports and tourism sectors, representing entities that are also UNWTO Affiliate Members such as Lavonne Wittmann, President of Skai International; Sonto Mayise, General Director of Tourism Kwazulu-Natal; Luis Valente, Head of Partnerships and Information at the FC Oporto Museum; Paraskevi Patoulidou, President of Thessaloniki Tourism Organization; Kattia Juarez-Dubón, Director of the International Sustainability Commission of the International Motorcycling Federation (FIM), and Lisa Delpy Neirotti, professor at George Washington University.

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