CONCLUSIONS
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MOUNTAIN AND SNOW TOURISM SUMMIT TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Held as part of the UN Year of Sustainable Mountains, the 11th World Congress on Snow and Mountain Tourism gathered over 400 participants from 23 countries in Andorra, with more than 200 participants who also joined online.

Organized bi-annually by UNWTO and the Government of Andorra for more than two decades, the 11th edition of the Congress hosted by the Parish of Canillo, focused on the recovery of tourism and on an approach to the future based on understanding the tourist’s needs while also preserving natural and cultural resources.

Also on the agenda was ensuring the well-being of mountain communities and addressing issues such as innovation, sustainability and digital transformation, particularly to improve the user experience and manage demand, in a context where sustainability – environmental, social and economic – is an increasingly important element for travellers.

Under the theme Mountainlikers: "A new approach to the future", promoting and growing gastronomy and wellness emerged as key priorities for the future of mountain tourism. And, for this reason, the next edition of the congress will include health and wellness tourism as a new central theme in addition to snow and mountain tourism.
Further recommendations from the Congress included the need to monitor tourism in mountains and its impact to better manage resources and waste produced, respecting destinations’ carrying capacity and empower mountain communities.

The Congress concluded with a shared commitment to centre innovation and promote investment in green infrastructure and low-impact travel experiences in mountain areas.

At its closing, Canillo, the host parish of this edition, passed the baton to Encamp, which will thus become the host parish of the 12th edition, which will take place in 2024.
Keynote on innovation and sustainability
By Damien Zisswiller, Directorate of Engineering and Development of Territories, Atout France

► If carbon neutrality is achieved, 75% of the ski areas can be conserved, with a minimum innovation of 42% of the surface.

► However, according to a European survey, 80% of visitors will keep the mountain as a tourist destination even if snowfall decreases. In a world that evolves so quickly, innovation is a great development tool.

► Today’s actions will only have an effect from 2050 and today’s techniques cannot meet tomorrow’s needs if carbon neutrality is not achieved. Sustainable development is today an imperative need, it is no longer a differentiating factor.

► Latest studies on the attractiveness of mountain destinations reveal that one of the 3 main obstacles for customers interested in mountain holidays is overtourism (in addition to price and accessibility). Customers are therefore looking for tranquility and connection to nature, as well as snow, landscape, pure air the mountain offers. We therefore see the need to preserve this setting while reconsidering the spatial and temporal limits of the practice field. We could therefore deduce that 2 concepts are opposed:

→ Sustainable development is an achievable goal in the sense that it converges towards the 3 aspects (social, economic and environmental) and can achieve an optimum;

→ The 3 aspects are opposed by nature. Sustainable development is then no longer an end in itself, but an approach allowing a contradictory analysis of a situation in order to make measured and informed choices. Unfortunately, it is still little implemented operationally. This is, for example, the ambition of the France Tourisme Observation platform currently being implemented by the Agency.
Setting up innovative projects remains a long and tedious undertaking. It comes up against a series of oppositions which oddly tend to consider that, even in a situation of extreme competition, it is preferable to copy the neighboring territory, rather than to differentiate oneself in order to benefit of a competitive advantage. In addition, there is a lack of marketing culture which translates into little consideration of the expectations of customers in the design of equipment. Finally, culturally, the leisure sector remains particularly compartmentalised, which leads in many cases the actors of the same sector of activity (leisure) to ignore each other, if not to oppose each other. However, in a world that is evolving at an increasing speed every day, innovation no longer really allows you to get ahead, it simply allows you not to fall behind.
High Level Panel on "Mountain destinations: between recovery and looking to the future"

Moderated by UNWTO’s Chief of Tourism Market Intelligence and Competitiveness, Sandra Carvao, a high-level panel on how mountain tourist destinations have quickly adapted to the new post-covid reality stressed the importance of creating a strong adequate governance that brings together different levels of government and the private sector, addressing climate change and invest in infrastructure.

With the participation of H.E. Mr. Jordi Torres Falcó, Minister of Tourism and Telecommunications of Andorra, H.E. Mr. Dauren Abayev, Minister of Culture and Sports of Kazakhstan, H.E. Mr. Simon Zajc, Secretary of State, Ministry of Economic Development and Technology of Slovenia, H.E. Mr. Fernando Valdés, Secretary of State for Tourism of Spain, H.E. Mrs. Sofia Zacharaki, Viceminister of Tourism of Greece and H.E. Mr. Massimo Garavaglia, Minister of Tourism of Italy (video message), interventions focused on managing seasonality of tourism in mountain areas, climate change and how to adapt to it, community engagement, as well as the conservation of nature and training as the great future challenges for the sector.
In addition, the importance of linking the community and the local population to mountain tourism has been highlighted in order to gain authenticity and offer a quality product to boost a country’s image and tourists’ perceptions.

The strengths of mountain tourism, which has gained relevance in tourism policies due to the development opportunities it offers to inland territories and the increased demand for natural environments and outdoor activities, have also been underlined.
Keynote on Understanding mountain Tourism through data

by Gerardo Calzada, Data & AI Manager, Andorra Telecom

► Smartphones have become the most widely used device for any online operation. The use of mobiles allows an important source at data level. Gerardo focused on big data and digital transformation as key tools in the new scenario.

► Those organizations that use information correctly, will manage to increase their efficiency and improve their competitiveness in a changing and aggressive environment.

► He explained how the data offered by smartphones allows having a photograph of the tourist and being able to segment it, and thus being able to anticipate with predictive models on what they will be interested in to adapt the offer.

► Andorra Telecom designed a model of 7 axis that can give concrete information on the tourists that visit Andorra that would enable more efficient decision making:
  → Temporality determines when the traveller comes to the country, at what time of the year or what part of the week.
  → Frequency determines how often he/she comes.
  → Action identifies what customers do with Andorra Telecom services. How many calls they make, where do they call? How much data they consume or if it is a user who directly turns off the data before crossing the border.
  → Origin answers to nationality or place of residence.
  → Location gives information on where the tourist moves and with whom.
  → The socioeconomic level provides information on the visitor’s spending potential.
  → And tastes and preferences tell us what the tourist wants or likes.
Thanks to the data collected, we can add value and improve the experience of visitors by finding what they are looking for, which allows us to be more efficient and guide us towards more sustainable tourism.
The digital transformation and the tourism of the future has been the axis on which the first session of the congress took place, dedicated to how big data, artificial intelligence and virtual reality have been allies to adapt to the new scenario, by showcasing tourism innovative technological solutions that contribute to sustainable development.

Focus was given to the role that digitalization should play. In this line, Christian Lunger, CEO of Motasdesign, commented that "digitization should not be the experience in itself, but should be designed to improve the tourist experience", by shifting the focus slightly from technology to people. Moderated by Natalia Bayona, UNWTO’s Director of Innovation, Education and Investments, others who joined him in the session were Marc Galabert, Secretary of State for Diversification, Economy and Innovation of the Government of Andorra, presenting on how Andorra is working on the intelligent use of data in the field of tourism in Andorra; Santiago Camps, CEO of Mabrian Technologies, who explained how a tool can help to convert Travel Data into Travel Intelligence to make better decisions; Helena González Ung, Manager of Special Projects and Digital Art at Necsum Trison, who gave examples of how technology can be used as one more layer that can be added to any space to turn it into a more experiential destination in
which to live memorable moments like never before, increasing the number of visitors, the time they spend in these destinations and their recurrence; and Marc Bigas, co-founder of Skitude, affirming that a fully digital experience should be 100% contactless and cashless, and there are innovative digital solutions that currently allow it.

UNWTO / FAO Report on Sustainable Mountain Tourism – Key Outcomes

Sandra Carvao, Chief of Tourism Market Intelligence and Competitiveness at UNWTO and Rosalaura Romeo, Project Coordinator at the FAO Mountain Partnership Secretariat jointly presented the key outcomes of the recently launched report Mountain tourism – Towards a more sustainable path, which was developed within the framework of the UN International Year of Sustainable Mountain Development.

Several case studies were also shared, some of which highlighted food tourism, nature-based tourism, innovation and digitalization, and governance models and policies, among others.
SESSION 2 – Gastronomy and sustainable consumption

Moderated by the Basque Culinary Center’s Coordinator of the Master’s Degree in Food Tourism, David Mora, the session presented gastronomy tourism and sustainable consumption as key elements of the tourism of the future that allows to consolidate the traditional dishes, identity and culture of a destination. The focus was on how the pandemic has changed consumption patterns. Tourists are now more environmentally conscious, which increases the demand for responsible destinations.

Several examples were given on sustainable consumption initiatives that serve as a tool for the local population to benefit from tourism development, especially in rural areas.

The session was enriched by the experience of Michele Rumiz, Director of the programme Slow Food Travel (Italy), Chef Jordi Grau, Restaurant Ibaya, Sport Hotel Hermitage and first Andorran Chef to achieve a Michelin star (Andorra) and Vee Bougani, CEO, Sustainable Food Movement (Greece).
Along these lines, Rumiz recalled that "sustainability is part of the definition of quality: if as a destination you are not committed to sustainability issues, it is more difficult to be considered today as a quality destination". He added that "gastronomic diversity must be defended as a potential asset for tourism, and this is why restaurants need to offer typical recipes and local products, but also that local farmers provide opportunities to enjoy unique gastronomic experiences".

Investment in sustainability is necessary to expand the tourist offer. From the gastronomic field, chefs can play a key role due to the importance they have gained in recent years to generate new trends. "We have a very important role in the projection of values, and we must know what we transmit, but in the end we must be aware that education in sustainability is a long-distance race", explained chef Jordi Grau.
SESSION 3: Innovative experiences

The session moderated by Céline Fortin, Regional Manager, Europe & Oceania of the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA), stressed the importance of mountain destinations to be creative in their offer of innovative experiences to increase the length of stay, ensure visitors can come all year around and reduce dependency to winter and snow tourism while addressing the demand for unique experiences and connection to nature. Several examples were shared.

Presented by Betim Budzaku, CEO of Andorra Turisme, Andorra is a great example of a destination going through diversification in product development, through events, thematic trails, gastronomy, spa and outstanding refuges, always with a strong focus on sustainability.

Huttopia has a very innovative concept as a comfortable family camping experience in hand-picked nature sites. Its CEO, Michel Durrieu, presented their fully integrated approach which means that not only do they operate the camps but also design and build them in remote locations where they get to experiment thanks to a permanent research & development lap, new designs and solutions to ensure sustainability and best resources management. The innovative experience is not only to stay in these unique sites but also the interaction between families and local immersion.
Pierre-François Adam, Innovation-Foresight and Entrepreneurship Manager at Cluster Montagne, presented this network based in the French Alps, which brings together the public and private sector monitoring the market in order to develop new solutions in terms of mobility, energy efficiency, decarbonation and circular economy. These innovations include immersive experiences to address the shifting demand of the market, or snowmobile 100% electric for example.

Mountain tourism had to face many challenges, which includes dealing with climate change and snow dependency. Innovation and keeping track of the trends in this ever-changing market is what will make the tourism actors pioneers, leading the way with a strong identity and attractiveness.
The last session of the Congress focused on climate change, sustainability and consumers’ growing environmental awareness, which forces the sector to adapt to new demands.

Along these lines, and as Leigh Barnes, Chief Customer Officer at Intrepid Travel, underlined, the pandemic has accentuated this trend: “consumers want to travel more sustainably, and we need to meet their expectations. We can’t have a healthy tourism industry if we don’t have a healthy planet”.

Under the moderation of Alessandra Priante, UNWTO’s Regional Director for Europe, the session also featured presentations by Marc Pons, Director in Andorra Investigation + Innovation; Domitien Détrie, Director General of the Pyrenees Agency; and Jeremy Smith, Co-founder of Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency.

SESSION 4: Consumers call for responsible tourism destinations
Energy efficiency, environmentally friendly construction or the use of natural materials have been the topics discussed in the session, in which examples of tourism initiatives immersed in sustainable development have also been presented. "Overcrowding, the loss of biodiversity, climate change, decarbonization, digitization and post-pandemic dynamics are challenges that require structural changes, both public and private", Pons pointed out. “Society is very aware, but the response level is low given the complexity of the solutions. For this reason, the different agents, citizens included, must work together”, he added.

For presentations, videos and photos: https://www.unwto.org/events/11th-world-congress-on-snow-and-mountain-tourism