

CONCLUSIONS REPORT

Spain Talks Los Angeles 2026

A Forum on Sustainable Tourism Leadership

Mark Taper Auditorium · Los Angeles Central Library

Los Angeles, California · June 23, 2026



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Introduction



Left to right: Félix Alcaraz, Tourism Counselor of Spain in Los Angeles; Manuel Parga, Director of Marketing, Sustainability and HR at the Spanish Olympic Committee; Paula Llobet, President of Visit Valencia and Tourism Councilor at Valencia City Council; Gerardo Fueyo, Consul General of Spain in Los Angeles.

On June 23, 2026, the Tourism Office of Spain in Los Angeles held a new edition of Spain Talks, the international forum launched by Turespaña to foster knowledge exchange and dialogue around the tourism industry's leading challenges and opportunities.

The event took place at the Mark Taper Auditorium of the Los Angeles Central Library and brought together nearly a hundred representatives from tourism destinations, public administrations, companies, specialized organizations, media outlets, and industry professionals from Spain and the United States.

Under the theme "A Forum on Sustainable Tourism Leadership," this edition of Spain Talks focused on social sustainability as an emerging dimension of responsible tourism. Through two panel discussions, a keynote address, and the presentation of the Spain Talks Awards, the forum

offered a space for reflection in which public administrations, businesses, and international experts shared experiences and initiatives aimed at building a more competitive, responsible tourism model prepared to meet the challenges ahead.

The Los Angeles edition reaffirmed Turespaña's commitment to promoting sustainable tourism understood from a comprehensive perspective: economic growth, social well-being, and heritage preservation.

Institutional Opening



Gerardo Fueyo, Consul General of Spain in Los Angeles, during his opening remarks.



Félix Alcaraz, Tourism Counselor of Spain in Los Angeles, presenting the forum.

The day was opened by Gerardo Fueyo, Consul General of Spain in Los Angeles, who welcomed attendees and stressed the importance of fostering spaces for dialogue that strengthen international cooperation and the exchange of experiences among key players in the tourism sector. In his remarks, he highlighted Spain's commitment to a tourism model based on sustainability, innovation, and collaboration among administrations, businesses, and civil society.

Félix Alcaraz, Tourism Counselor in Los Angeles, then took the floor to present the focus of this edition and explain the evolution of the concept of tourism sustainability. He noted that sustainability can no longer be understood solely from an environmental perspective, but must also incorporate accessibility, inclusion, diversity, residents' quality of life, and the creation of opportunities for local communities. This introduction set the throughline for the entire day.

Panel Discussion I

From Strategy to Action: Sustainable Destinations



Panel I. Left to right: Lauren Salisbury, Paula Llobet, Morgan Mingle, Christine E. Marez, and Patt Morrison (moderator).

The first panel discussion of Spain Talks 2026 addressed how tourism destinations can turn their sustainability commitments into public policies and concrete actions capable of delivering measurable results. Moderated by journalist Patt Morrison, a contributor to the Los Angeles Times, the session brought together Paula Llobet, President of Visit Valencia and Councilor for Tourism, Innovation and Investment Attraction at Valencia City Council; Morgan Mingle, Director of Sustainable Tourism at Park City Chamber & Visitors Bureau; Christine E. Marez, Senior Vice President of Sustainability and ESG, and of Aviation, Transportation and Infrastructure at Cumming Group, and President of USGBC California; and Lauren Salisbury, Vice President of Communications at Santa Monica Travel & Tourism.

The importance of data

As a starting point, Patt Morrison argued that sustainability can only be managed effectively when decisions are grounded in objective data and a rigorous assessment of their effects on residents, businesses, and visitors. She stressed the need to measure both the benefits and the costs of tourism activity, anticipate conflicts before they arise, and communicate the most complex decisions transparently, especially when they affect a destination's carrying capacity or require limiting certain activities. She also highlighted the importance of engaging visitors as part of the solution, making them aware of the positive impact they can generate through responsible behavior.

Valencia: from citizen to data

Representing Visit Valencia, Paula Llobet presented the model the city has developed to shift from a promotion-focused strategy toward comprehensive destination management. She explained that the main goal is to put citizens at the center of decision-making, understanding that the success of tourism must be measured both by its economic contribution and by its ability to improve the quality of life of those who live in the city.

To that end, she highlighted the role of the FOCUS Tourism Intelligence System and the Smart Destination Platform, tools that make it possible to analyze visitor flows and make evidence-based decisions to redistribute tourism activity, ease pressure on the most sensitive areas, and foster a balanced coexistence between residents and visitors. She also presented some of the measures introduced by the City Council to regulate short-term tourist rentals, strengthen inspections against illegal listings, and promote responsible visitor behavior.

Paula Llobet also explained that sustainability must translate into concrete actions such as responsible cruise ship management, promoting sustainable mobility, creating climate-comfortable itineraries, and actively protecting natural spaces such as the Albufera. She further highlighted Valencia's commitment to strengthening the local economy by promoting local gastronomy and territory-linked products, as well as its ongoing commitment to universal accessibility and to incorporating international sustainability indicators through UN Tourism's Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories.

Park City: planning in service of the environment

Morgan Mingle shared Park City's experience, where sustainability is a structural part of destination planning. She underscored the importance of reconciling tourism development with the conservation of the natural environment, fostering close collaboration among public

administrations, businesses, and the local community, and using strategic planning to ensure that tourism growth contributes to residents' well-being and preserves the resources that are the destination's greatest strength.

Infrastructure with ESG criteria

From the perspective of infrastructure planning and development, Christine E. Marez emphasized that environmental, social, and governance criteria must be built in from the earliest stages of any tourism project. She noted that sustainability can no longer be treated as a complementary element, but rather as a strategic factor shaping infrastructure design, resource management, and destinations' resilience to future challenges. She also advocated for public-private collaboration as a necessary condition for developing projects capable of generating long-term economic, social, and environmental benefits.

Santa Monica: sustainability as identity

Lauren Salisbury, for her part, explained how Santa Monica has made sustainability one of the destination's core identity elements. She noted that the city remains committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 and has pursued policies to promote more sustainable mobility through public transit, its metro network, and extensive electric vehicle infrastructure. She also highlighted the destination's commitment to resource efficiency, coastal protection, and measures to confidently host major international events such as the FIFA World Cup, the Super Bowl, and the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic Games.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The panel made clear that sustainability demands a new way of managing tourism destinations, grounded in strategic planning, data-driven decision-making, collaboration between public administrations and the private sector, and the active involvement of residents and visitors. Participants agreed that sustainability is not an isolated goal but an ongoing process of improvement that must integrate the economic, environmental, and especially social dimensions of tourism development to secure competitiveness and quality of life for present and future generations.

Keynote Address

The Power of Sport: The Legacy of the Olympic Games



Manuel Parga, Director of Marketing, Sustainability and HR at the Spanish Olympic Committee, delivering his keynote address at the Mark Taper Auditorium.

Manuel Parga, Director of Marketing, Sustainability and Human Resources at the Spanish Olympic Committee, delivered one of the day's standout addresses, offering a deep reflection on the role of major sporting events as drivers of transformation for tourism destinations.

His starting premise was clear: the legacy of a major sporting event does not begin with the opening ceremony nor end with the closing one. It must be planned from the moment a city submits its candidacy and must extend well beyond the event itself. Without that long-term vision, the benefits fade and the organizational effort fails to translate into lasting value for the territory.

Barcelona 1992: a model of urban transformation

Barcelona 1992 has become the leading international benchmark for Olympic legacy. The Games enabled an unprecedented urban transformation: reclaiming the waterfront, modernizing the city's infrastructure, and projecting it internationally in a way that would not have been possible without the Olympic catalyst. More than three decades later, Barcelona continues to build on that legacy as one of Europe's leading tourism and convention destinations.

London 2012: regeneration and social cohesion

London 2012 took a different approach: using the Games as a tool for urban regeneration in the east of the city, one of the areas with the highest rates of unemployment and social exclusion. The transformation of the Olympic Park and the Stratford area, together with investments in affordable housing, transport, and public spaces, left a lasting impact on a community that had historically been left behind by the British capital's economic development.

Los Angeles 2028: sustainability as a model

Los Angeles 2028 represents a paradigm shift in how major sporting events are organized. Unlike previous editions, Los Angeles does not need to build new infrastructure: it already has the stadiums, arenas, and facilities it needs. Its approach centers on reuse, resource optimization, and reducing environmental impact, shaping a model the International Olympic Committee wants to promote as a benchmark for future host cities.

Sport as a tool for sustainable tourism

One of the central messages of the keynote was the close relationship between sport, tourism, and sustainability. Parga argued that major sporting events can become genuine engines of development when they are part of a long-term strategy: they create jobs, attract investment, improve infrastructure, project the destination internationally, and strengthen residents' sense of belonging. But for that to happen, the legacy must be designed before the event, not after.

LESSONS APPLICABLE TO ANY DESTINATION

In closing, Manuel Parga stressed that the lessons drawn from the Olympic movement apply to any tourism destination, whether or not it hosts a major sporting event. Strategic planning, clear goal-setting, impact measurement, citizen engagement, and building a lasting legacy are principles that can be incorporated into tourism management anywhere. True success does not lie in staging the event, but in its capacity to generate a positive, sustainable impact that benefits future generations.

Panel Discussion II

Tourism with Impact: Communities, Inclusion and Social Impact



Panel II. Left to right: Pablo Scarpellini (moderator), Jessica Blotter, Miguel Carrasco, J. G. Díaz Montañés, and Aicard Guinovart.

The second panel discussion of Spain Talks 2026 focused on the social dimension of sustainability, examining how tourism can become a tool for generating well-being, strengthening local communities, and creating a lasting positive impact on destinations. Moderated by journalist Pablo Scarpellini, El Mundo's correspondent in Los Angeles, the session brought together J. G. Díaz Montañés, CEO of ARTIEM Hotels; Miguel Carrasco, Director of Tourism at Impulsa Igualdad – TUR4all and COO of TUR4all Travel; Jessica Blotter, Founder and CEO of Kind Traveler; and Aicard Guinovart, North America Director of the Catalan Tourist Board.

The conversation began from an idea shared by all participants: the success of tourism can no longer be measured solely by visitor numbers or economic impact, but also by the value it generates for the people, communities, and territories that host that activity. In this context, accessibility, inclusion, corporate responsibility, and the creation of shared benefits were identified as essential elements for moving toward a more balanced and resilient tourism model.

Accessibility as a quality standard

Miguel Carrasco emphasized that accessibility is one of the fundamental pillars of sustainable tourism and should be understood as a quality standard applicable to the entire industry, not as a product aimed exclusively at certain groups. He noted that many of the barriers faced by people with disabilities are not physical, but rather the result of a lack of reliable, accessible information during trip planning. He also highlighted the model developed in Spain through collaboration among public administrations, businesses, and specialized organizations, stressing that accessibility is not only a right but also an opportunity to expand markets, improve destinations' competitiveness, and offer a better experience to all travelers.

From sustainable tourism to regenerative tourism

Jessica Blotter presented Kind Traveler's experience as an example of how tourism can generate a direct positive impact on local communities. She advocated moving from the traditional concept of sustainable tourism toward a regenerative tourism model, in which the goal is not merely to minimize the negative impacts of tourism activity, but to leave destinations better off than before the visit. In this regard, she highlighted the importance of connecting travelers with local organizations and social and environmental projects that channel part of tourism's benefits toward initiatives with a tangible impact on the territory and its inhabitants.

Sustainability as corporate culture

From a business perspective, J. G. Díaz Montañés explained that sustainability must be fully integrated into organizations' culture and management model, no longer treated as a secondary matter or a mere regulatory obligation. He noted that managing with sustainability criteria means creating more value than is consumed, improving the environment in which the business operates, and always thinking about the legacy left to future generations.

He also argued that sustainability is not a luxury reserved for large companies, but a smarter, more efficient way of managing any organization, based on innovation, continuous improvement, resource optimization, and commitment to people. In this regard, he stressed that the real risk lies not in investing in sustainability, but in being left behind by a society and markets that increasingly consider it an essential requirement.

J. G. Díaz Montañés also reflected on the growing tourism pressure experienced by some destinations, noting that these tensions should not be read as a rejection of tourism, but as a call to evolve toward smarter, more participatory management models. In his view, destinations will only retain their social legitimacy if the benefits of tourism translate into visible improvements for citizens, strengthening public services, urban spaces, local culture, and residents' quality of life.

"The tourism that truly matters isn't the kind that attracts the most visitors, but the kind that leaves better places to live, better companies to work for, and better experiences to share."

J. G. Díaz Montañés, CEO of ARTIEM Hotels

Catalonia: spreading the benefit across the territory

Aicard Guinovart, for his part, presented the strategy developed by the Catalan Tourist Board to distribute the benefits of tourism activity more evenly across the territory. He explained that Catalonia works from a comprehensive destination-management perspective through specific plans for sustainability, low-emission mobility, energy efficiency, and carrying-capacity management, while also promoting rural tourism, the value of local products, and a stronger local business fabric.

As an example of this strategy, he highlighted the Grand Tour of Catalonia, a circular route designed to diversify tourism flows beyond Barcelona and encourage the discovery of other areas of the autonomous community through personalized itineraries and closer ties with local businesses and suppliers. He also presented the work of the Catalunya Convention Bureau, which promotes the concept of legacy in meetings tourism, driving initiatives so that congresses and events leave lasting benefits for host communities through social, environmental, educational, or knowledge-transfer projects.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The panel made clear that social sustainability is one of the main frontiers of evolution for contemporary tourism. Accessibility, inclusion, corporate responsibility, the involvement of local communities, and the creation of shared value were identified as essential conditions for building destinations that are more competitive, resilient, and prepared to meet future challenges. Participants agreed that tourism can only retain its social legitimacy if it generates tangible benefits both for those who visit destinations and for those who live and work in them.

Spain Talks Awards 2026

The 2026 edition included the presentation of the Spain Talks Awards, created to recognize individuals and organizations that help advance a more sustainable, responsible, and inclusive tourism model.



MEDIA AWARD

**Michel Schoenberger,
Destinations by JAXFAX**

Awarded to Michel Schoenberger, West Coast Editor of Destinations by JAXFAX, in recognition of his contribution to promoting Spain as a tourism destination among the U.S. market. He has brought the evolution of Spanish tourism to the trade audience, with particular attention to sustainability and innovation.



AMBASSADOR AWARD

Rose Montoya

Awarded to Rose Montoya, content creator and LGBTQ+ rights activist, for her commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion. The jury recognized her contribution to positioning Spain as an open, inclusive destination, with special mention of the Gay Games held in Valencia.



EXPERIENCE AWARD

Lisa Boyadjian, Trafalgar

Awarded to Trafalgar, represented by Lisa Boyadjian, in recognition of the Make Travel Matter Experiences program, which builds tangible benefits for people, heritage, and the environment into its itineraries, fostering a more balanced distribution of tourism's benefits.



BUSINESS AWARD

Dave Hoshin, Exoticca

Awarded to Exoticca, represented by Dave Hoshin, for integrating ESG criteria into its business strategy: sustainability policies, supplier certification, diversity and inclusion, and reduced environmental footprint.

Final Conclusions



Patt Morrison, Los Angeles Times journalist, delivering the forum's final conclusions.

The 2026 edition of Spain Talks revealed broad consensus around the need to move toward a more sustainable tourism model, understood from a comprehensive perspective that combines economic competitiveness, environmental protection, and the creation of value for people and communities.

Throughout the day, participants agreed that sustainability is no longer a concept tied solely to the environmental dimension, increasingly incorporating aspects related to governance, accessibility, inclusion, residents' quality of life, corporate responsibility, and tourism's social impact.

The discussions held during the two panels highlighted the importance of making data-driven decisions, planning tourism development with a long-term vision, and strengthening collaboration among public administrations, businesses, social organizations, and citizens. They also

underscored the need to move toward management models capable of distributing tourism's benefits more evenly and ensuring that local communities take an active part in that development.

Another message shared throughout the day was the growing relevance of social sustainability as a strategic element for the sector's future. Universal accessibility, inclusion, regenerative tourism, strengthening the local economic fabric, and creating shared value were identified as essential factors for building destinations that are more resilient and prepared to face the challenges of the coming decades.

Manuel Parga's keynote address reinforced this idea, showing that major international events generate a true legacy only when they are part of a development strategy designed to produce lasting benefits for the territory and its citizens. Likewise, the experiences presented by the different speakers demonstrated that sustainability requires leadership, planning, capacity for innovation, and close collaboration between the public and private sectors.

Closing Remarks by Patt Morrison

In her closing remarks, Patt Morrison emphasized the importance of keeping open spaces for dialogue such as Spain Talks, which allow destinations with different realities but shared challenges to exchange experiences. She also stressed that the future of tourism will depend on destinations' ability to listen to their communities, anticipate change, and build models that are more balanced, inclusive, and prepared to meet the expectations of residents and visitors alike.

With this new edition of Spain Talks, the Tourism Office of Spain in Los Angeles reaffirms Turespaña's commitment to promoting spaces for encounter that foster international knowledge exchange and help advance a more sustainable, inclusive, and responsible tourism model.

Spain Talks Los Angeles 2026 strengthened collaboration among institutions, businesses, and organizations from Spain and the United States, further establishing this forum as a leading platform for analyzing tourism's key challenges and sharing initiatives that generate a positive impact on destinations and the communities that make them up.



Group photo with speakers, award recipients, and organizers of Spain Talks in Los Angeles 2026.