



**2<sup>nd</sup>  
SPAIN'S  
SUSTAINABILITY DAY**  
The Spanish Tourist Office in London

17 April 2024

The Conduit Club, London

## EVENT REPORT

#SpainSustainabilityDay  
@Spain\_inUK

### Sponsors



The aim of Spain's Sustainability Day was to address the **ongoing challenges of tourism and sustainability** and give insight on the **future of ethical tourism in Spain and further afield**. Discussions encompassed **social, cultural, economic, and environmental sustainability**.

The dual language conference, moderated by Richard Hammond, director of Green Traveller Productions, included speakers from across Spain and the UK's travel and transportation industries with panel sessions on the circular economy, biodiversity and accessibility.

### **Welcome from Manuel Butler, UK Director of the Spanish Tourist Office.**

Manuel officially opened the event, outlining the special relationship between the United Kingdom and Spain and the objective of creating dialogue between the two countries to transfer knowledge in the field of travel and sustainability. Manuel outlined Spain's tourism ambitions of season extension; with peak season visits dropping 1% year-on-year from 45% to 44%, and geographical diversification, with Spain's Northern regions driving a larger tourism share in 2023 (up 23% year-on-year).



The event was organised by the Spanish Tourist Office in London and sponsored by **Visit Benidorm** (Region of Valencia), and the Balearic Island of **Mallorca**. Representatives from both gave short presentations: Leire Bilbao, director of Visit Benidorm, outlined the city's 18% reduction in water-usage over the last 25 years, despite a 40% population growth, whilst Susana Sciacovelli, director of tourism (demand and hospitality) at Mallorca Council, showcased the island's responsible tourism pledge and roadmap towards transformation.

### **Panel 1: Circular Economy**

Moderator:

Richard Hammond, Executive Producer, Green Traveller Productions

Panellists:

Gabriel Llobera Ramis, Marketing & Communications Manager, Garden Hotels

Nadine Pinto, Global Sustainability Manager, The Travel Corporation (TTC)

Carol Rose, Head of Sustainability, ABTA

Coralía Pino, Head of Sustainability, ITH (Instituto Tecnológico Hotelero)

Nadine Pinto described how the circular economy plays a part in many of the **11 sustainability goals that TTC has identified for its five year sustainability strategy**, including **reducing food waste, securing local and organic items, reducing and eliminating single use plastic**, as well as introducing circular economy principles within its trips for travellers to experience. She said that "Overall the tourism industry has a long way to go when it comes to circular economy".



Carol Rose explained that her background was from fashion and textiles sector and that she hoped that lessons learnt from that industry can be adopted by the travel and tourism industry. She said that the circular economy had to be incorporated into the fashion industry because of the huge amount of waste

products to landfill, which pollute the atmosphere – she cited that **over 1 billion garments (92 million tonnes) of wasted textiles end up in landfill every year**, and she said she thought that some of that will include textile waste from the hotel industry.

*“Now is the right time for the travel industry to discuss the circular economy because there has been an upward trajectory of growth since the pandemic and it’s time to address the mindset around circularity, employing disruptive thinking to our own ways of doing things.”*

*Carol Rose, Head of Sustainability, ABTA*

Carol said that the whole circular economy is about **keeping products in use for longer**, and **divert excessive waste from landfill**, “providing more of a service than a product”. However, she said that she thinks it’s going to be **a challenge for the travel industry to adopt the circular economy because the tourism is not a physically tangible product**, but she thinks it is not insurmountable as in the industry in used to overcoming challenges. She suggests that the first area to tackle is on **re-educating** the whole ecosystem, including the planning of hotels, infrastructure, trips, food



procurement, and the procurement of other tangible assets, such as furniture, linen, paper. Carol said that the best way to do this is to identify which aspects of the tourism ecosystem where the principles of the circular economy can best be applied. She pointed out that while isn’t any current legislation on circularity in the UK to help guide this approach, there is currently the *Packaging and Plastic Tax*, which applies a fee to packaging per metric tonne that is produced or imported in the UK. She added that while this is not directly addressing circularity, it is “at the backend” in that it helps close the loop on plastic products.

Carol said that while change will come about by organisations upskilling on this area, but she added that will be a challenge as there is already a lot for the industry to deal with, such as **ESG and Scope 3 reporting** (i.e. those emissions that aren’t directly related to your organisation or operations but is within a sphere of your influence, such as your supply chain), which, although “a minefield” does include the opportunity to discuss circularity.

Nadine Pinto gave a flavour of some of the initiatives on the circular economy that individual brands within TTC have incorporated, including: across TTC Tour Brands (Trafalgar, Insight Vacations, and Contiki) **ceasing to give out branded merchandise to travellers**, which has saved over 300 tonnes of carbon emissions, which she explained goes towards its Scope 3 emissions and its net zero ambitions; she said “by simply by not purchasing, you can have phenomenal effects”. Red Carnation Hotels have partnered with Belu to replace plastic water bottles in rooms with glass bottles, and in addition they donate excess profits to WaterAid, contributing £300,000. She also referred to many initiatives to reduce food waste, including kitchen gardens and composting to turning food scraps into recipes and food stocks. Nadine said that this has brought about several benefits to the business, including **cost savings that arise from investing in a business “where you don’t have to constantly replenish”**, reducing the amount of waste that has to be transported to landfill (as well as the costs associated with creating landfill), but also, it’s a great opportunity for **employee engagement**.



Gabriel Llobera said his company has an ongoing saying that “**Sustainability is an attitude, Circularity is the medium through which to achieve it**”; he showed how his company is incorporating three key principles of circularity into its operations: first, to **focus on what matters** – he said it’s easy to be bombarded by case studies of circularity, and be overwhelmed by so many initiatives that bigger companies are able to do, so his first step is to understand what they should prioritise – what is important for his stakeholders and what is important for the destination; second, he said they don’t pay attention to global initiatives but instead focus on **how to get things done locally (“like our grandparents used to”)**; and thirdly, to **start specific actions, while maintaining the guest experience** – such as on purchasing prime quality, local, organic purchases, and waste management – they employ an sophisticated **AI technological tools for waste separation and reduction**, taking organic waste from its kitchens and vegetable waste from its gardens and produce 105 tonnes of compost in its own biomass treatment plant, and then subsequently “close the loop by exchanging the compost with local agricultures for the same local product that we sell in our bio corners”.



Coralia Pino said that sustainability has been a focus at ITH since 2016 and that it applies to all levels, global and local, as well as environmental, social, and economic. She said that 2008 crisis made many hotels take energy efficiency very seriously for cost reasons. Likewise, the pandemic of 2020 forced hotels (from small hotels to large chains) to look into sustainability due to rising costs. Coralie pointed out that secondary and tertiary costs such as food and drink must be taken into account as well as the consumption of food and energy. She reminded the audience that **food and energy expenditure are the second and third largest of all hotel operations** – therefore circular economy is absolutely key, both for business and the environment.

Coralia said that the transition to circular economy is difficult, it requires significant investment in both time and money, and it is complicated, but it is possible. She said Garden Hotels is a good example of this and there are many establishments in Spain, both large and small, that have enacted successful initiatives.

Gabriel Llobera then explained about the **Law of Circularity in the Balearic Islands**, which sets out requirements for individual businesses to submit circularity plans on an annual basis, including **Key Performance Indicators on circularity**, as well as setting limits on importing foreign goods and purchasing a minimum number of local products. Gabriel said that in the Waste Law of 2019, new requirements were introduced for the first time regarding the provision of single-use plastics.

Nadine said that TTC have been looking into all the various legislation in the US, UK and Europe regarding circularity – “it’s a global thing that we’re going to have to deal with” – so that “we’re not caught on the backfoot of that”, investigating what are the policies and processes that they as a tour operator need to have in place so that its supply chain – the SMEs – can also comply.

Carol Rose suggested that rather than introducing new legislation for circularity, it would be more efficient current **frameworks to expand and include circularity issues** within them “as modules for engagement, setting KPIs and for measuring”, which is something Carol said has happened in the

fashion industry, particularly regarding the longevity of garments. She explained that there are two reasons why people buy clothing, firstly because we need it, and secondly because we have an emotional attachment to it. And people no longer use an item of clothing either because it breaks down because something stops working, such as a button or a zip or simply because we fall out of love for that item of clothing, so the industry has adopted various mechanisms for prolonging the longevity of clothing, focussing on the manufacturing stage by seeking alternatives to polyester (a fossil fuel derivative) and addressing the ability for clothing to be re-used and recycled (such as the ‘vintage clothing’ sector) as well as encouraging customers to cherish their clothing through messaging such as ‘love your clothes’. Carol said she could see this being introduced in the travel industry – perhaps ‘love your hotel’ or ‘love your destination’, or even at the level of ‘love your furniture’.

The panel agreed that the communication of circularity should be embedded within key sustainable tourism messaging. Nadine said at TTC they take this one step further, by including sustainability into their overall value add messaging, for example the message they give to guests is that simply choosing to travel with TTC they can be assured that they have **embedded sustainability into its decision making**. She cited the example of the recent Venice over tourism tax, where many customers were asking what they needed to do about it, and where TTC was able to reassure them that by booking with them, it had already been taken care of.

Just as when customers ask whether the company has ensured there will be enough water filling stations for the to fill up their water bottles, they can say that yes we’ve taken care of that too along with other aspects of sustainability. Nadine added that this is true too at the luxury end, and that “Sustainability doesn’t mean we’re sacrificing any luxury”. She cited the example of the Belu water bottles in Red Carnation Hotels, as it’s a luxury to have a glass water bottle over a plastic bottle, but it’s also a more sustainable option.

Finally, in response to a question from the audience (question asked by Tom Power, CEO Pura Aventura), the panel considered when best for circularity to be placed in the customer journey, and whether this should be at the point of sale or post purchase. Coralia said that “Generally, other factors such as price and location play more of a role in purchase” and the panel agreed that this was one of the key challenges – that is an evolving issue but that currently it was generally easier to **embed the messaging across multiple channels throughout the customer journey**. Carol pointed out that there is often a ‘**say do**’ gap whereby customers do-good intentions aren’t necessarily followed up by action consistent with those intentions, but she felt that messaging can be reinforced particularly in hotels engaging customers around the storytelling of the circular economy.

Nadine gave an example of where **sustainability is embedded with the customer experience** on a trip introduced last year at one of river cruise brands known as a ‘**progressive dinners**’ through the back of house, where customers are given a glass of champagne in the laundry room and are taught about the efforts to reduce water consumption, followed by an appetiser in the engine room where the captain will talk about the challenges of water levels due to climate change, and finally they end the tour in the kitchen where the chefs talk about their **AI food waste management systems** – the aim is to show guests behind the scenes what they wouldn’t ordinarily get to see, and Nadine says it has been really well received by its customers.

## Keynote speaker: Nejc Jus, Head of Research, World Travel and Tourism Council *How to steer sustainable growth by monitoring carbon and social footprints*

Nejc introduced his talk by highlighting the WTTC's latest impact data includes the **carbon and social footprint of tourism**.

Firstly, he reported that WTTC's 2023 global indicator put the sector's worth at **9.9 trillion USD and 1.63 trillion visitor spend**. Forecasting ahead over the next ten years, the **WTTC expects tourism to represent 11.4% of the global economy and 12.2% of all jobs (450 million globally)**, but he emphasised that producing WTTC's data is no longer solely about growth, it has to be sustainable, balancing **"planet, people and communities"**, so WTTC now includes environmental and social reporting of 185 countries, aligning its indicators with the Sustainable Development Goals. Environmental indicators include greenhouse gas emissions, Scopes 1, 2 and 3, international transport, water levels, energy use and air pollution, while social indicators are segmented by age, wage and gender profiles.



The data for environmental reporting indicates that in 2019 when tourism was at its peak, **the tourism sector contributed 8.1% to global greenhouse gas emissions** with transport accounting for the largest part of these emissions so he said that we all need a multi-faceted approach towards decarbonization. Nejc said that while the tourism sector grew on average by 4.3% each year over the last decade, its contribution to GHG emissions grew at a slower rate (2.5%).

However, Nejc pointed out that while tourism's contribution to GHG emissions was therefore decreasing, as tourism is growing, **"we need to start seeing the reduction in absolute emissions"**, which Nejc said did occur in 15 countries, including Slovenia, Germany and some of the Nordic countries and that lessons can be learnt from these countries.

The data also provided figures of carbon emissions per sector: transport was the largest contributor, utilities and agricultura, were the second and third contributors, which Nejc said demonstrated that **we need a multi-sector approach to reach net zero goals by 2050**, including the use of sustainable aviation fuels, green electricity and more sustainable food production.

Regarding the data for social reporting, Nejc pointed out the tourism is an employer for all different skills sets for all different backgrounds, providing opportunities for woman and youths, particularly from areas with high unemployment rates.

Nejc also Drew attention to WTTC's recent work with Accenture to provide a **road map to net zero**, providing a remote verification process that has so far verified over 2,500 hotels across 73 countries, as well as its work with Oliver Wineman on the impact of mandatory reporting in the tourism sector. Furthermore, Nejc Drew attention to the wealth of reports on WTTC's website, including reports on single-use plastic, nature positivity, water and destination stewardship.

## Panel 2: *Biodiversity – Impacts and Interventions*

Moderator:

Richard Hammond, Executive Producer, Green Traveller Productions

Panellists:

Terry Brown, Destinations Programme Manager, The Travel Foundation, Dylan Walker, Wildlife Tourism Expert, Wildlife Heritage Areas, Blanca Pérez Sauquillo, SG Marketing, Turespaña, José Mari Olano, Councillor for Large Projects, Valencia Green Capital, Zina Bencheikh, Managing Director, Intrepid

In summary, this panel session discussed how tourism is critical in terms of **connectivity** and **education**. The panelists discussed the **value of engaging community in wildlife tourism** and **creating respectful bonds between wildlife and visitors**.



Terry Brown began the session introducing the work by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which is based in Malaga. It's the Secretariat for the MEET Network (**Mediterranean Experiences of Eco Tourism**), including DestiMed and DestiMed Plus funding schemes – which is supported by the Travel Foundation – a network of protected areas that are collaborating to **engage communities locally through nature conservation** while simultaneously attracting visitors, through high-quality multi day experiences. He said the MEET Network has also developed some innovative tools to manage those impacts. The challenge these protected areas face is that the Mediterranean Coast is heavily urbanised (over 50%), which causes pressure on resources, as well as a lack of funding for conservation, and a lack of value put on nature of the protected areas by nearby local communities. The Travel Foundation has recently worked to translate the work that has been done by the MEET Network into an online course that's available online for free, including information on how to establish an ecotourism experience, now to bring it to market, information on governance in the form of '**local ecotourism clusters**', and now to monitor and measure its impact.



Zena added that Intrepid is now selling some of the MEET experiences (in Greece and Croatia) as a genuine **alternative to the typical sun, sea and sand products in the Mediterranean**. She said that they're an authentic 'true to Intrepid' values that doesn't harm or add to the problems of the destination and instead actually contribute to **regeneration** and help contribute to **raising awareness of how travel can be a force for good**. She said that IUCN has brought an expertise that Intrepid just doesn't have, and that the collaboration has helped Intrepid help bring the experiences to the market.

Blanca pointed out that Spain was in fact one of the first countries in Europe to regulate a protected area (establishing its first national park in 1916) and that the current national law regulating national parks is an excellent example not only of how regulation of these sensitive areas should be carried out but also it's a great example of a **public-private cooperation** with all the stakeholders – the national

park, the destination and the service providers – working together to facilitate better services for tourists in a way that’s beneficial for the protected areas.

Zina emphasised just how important the local community was in this regard. She pointed to examples of protected areas in Africa where much of the work that is done on conservation of nature is dependent on tourism and she thinks there is an interesting opportunity in this regard in Europe. She referred to a recent trip organised by Intrepid to visit the Black Mambas – the **first all-female anti-poaching unit in South Africa** and said **these kinds of immersive trips are forging the link between tourism and nature conservation**. She said that in the Kruger the wildlife protection has been so successful that there is now such an abundance of wildlife that the local authorities are looking to more wildlife to new areas and are buying land from local communities for the animals to be moved to – so the local communities are playing an important role in the protection of biodiversity.



Dylan Walker explained that his Wildlife Heritage Areas (WHA) are a community-driven initiative and part of the criteria is that they bring in more local people into the projects, particularly looking outside of the typical players, such as tourism providers, charities and NGOs already involved in nature conservation, and consider other organisations, such as community groups, school groups, and “other people in society who we need to connect to nature”. He said that he considers tourism is absolutely critical in this element:



*“In many ways nature is like a book, it’s hard to relate to it, unless you have someone there to teach you, to open the pages and energise you and read you the story of what you’re looking at, and that’s where tourism is incredibly powerful.”*

Dylan Walker, Wildlife Heritage Areas

Dylan pointed out how important cultural connection is to wildlife. He cited the whale-watching industry – a US \$2.1 billion industry worldwide – there are now over 20 annual whale festivals around the worldwide (all are outside Europe) – annual events that are bringing local people and tourists together, “opening that book”, often linking to other cultural events, such as wine-tasting. He said that **“where we see this deep cultural connection and link to nature, we see long-term sustainability and proper nature conservation initiatives that have long term benefits for wildlife”**.

Dylan then moved on to discuss **animal welfare**. He said tourism, like every industry, “needs to evolve with the times and move with the science”. He said the values of **World Animal Protection** and **World Cetacean Alliance** (with whom WHA works) align with his own personal values which is that “we need to see nature in the wild” as that’s where we get to learn about them, that’s where we most inspired and learn about local communities, and that’s where we get to invest in nature, and he thinks that the travelling public are increasingly buying in to that. He said that WHA are all about encouraging this “culture shift”.



The panel discussion then moved on from discussing the rural context of biodiversity conservation to the **urban environment**. José Marí Olano provided an overview of some of the key factors that led to Valencia becoming European Green Capital, including that involving local communities was essential to nature conservation, just as it is in the rural context, as we heard earlier in the panel, and how cities can adapt their tourism proposition and urban planning to benefit both residents and visitors. One example he cited is the Turia park, one of the largest urban parks in Spain which has been created in a dried riverbed that also runs through the city. Zina Bencheikh echoed this sentiment, saying that the because Valencia had become such a vibrant city to live in, meant it has become a very attractive city to visit, and Intrepid has now set up its head office in Spain in Valencia where can “be in a big city but feel very local”.

Blanca then referred to the work that Turespaña has done with suppliers, citing that the recovery plan for tourism was based on two pillars: Sustainability and Digitalisation. Part of the Sustainability pillar, she explained, was to help destinations build a more sustainable offer, and she then highlighted the work done particularly with regard to two initiatives regarding protected areas: ‘**Wildlife Spain**’ and ‘**Ecological and Scientific Tourism**’, so that tourists can learn more about how the scientific community is studying and protecting wildlife, including endemic species, such as the Imperial Eagle and Black Vulture. Blanca added that sustainability is a horizontal topic, one that is being introduced across all spheres of work at Turespaña, and she referred to the work it has done with several publishers to disseminate sustainable tourism in Spain, including the Telegraph, National Geographic, Lonely Planet and Wanderlust Media.

Blanca emphasised that the communication was particularly focussed on the notion of the ‘**conscious traveller**’ whereby sustainability doesn’t just cover environmental issues but also addresses the social context, whereby travellers mingle with the community such that that becomes part of their experience.

Finally, Zina referred back to the question raised in the first panel about where in the customer journey should you mention sustainability. She said that at Intrepid it’s about providing this information to customers through all aspects of communication.

*“It’s about doing the right thing and educating our customers. We need to start somewhere – it is not solely on the customer; they don’t always know the right choice until we offer it. It is on us.”*  
Zina Bencheikh, Managing Director, Intrepid

### Panel 3: *Accessibility and Inclusivity*

Moderator:

Richard Hammond, Executive Producer, Green Traveller Productions

Panellists:

Angus Drummond, CEO, Limitless Travel, Alberto Gutiérrez Alberca, Traffic and Mobility Delegate, Valladolid, Miguel Carrasco, Director of Tourism, Impulsa Igualdad, Susan Deer, Director of Industry Relations, ABTA

The panel opened with an inspiring welcome from Spain’s ‘Spain for All’ ambassador Ade Adepitan who has lived, worked and travelled throughout Spain.

Quoting the World Health Organisation figures, Adepitan highlighted how 1.3 billion people worldwide (or 16% of the global population) have some kind of disability. He said, “whilst not all of these people want or



have the means to travel to Spain, even if we're only talking about a small percentage, this is still a vast number of people that should be given the opportunity to enjoy what millions of non-disabled people enjoy every year, the beauty of taking a holiday."

Ade emphasised that "as a disabled community, we should not be seen as a burden, we should be treated with the same respect as all paying customers.

*"When you're dealing with a person with a disability, do not make assumptions about what they can and can't do, ask them what they need and listen to them, listen to hear not to challenge, and always have a can-do attitude."*

Ade Adepitan, Spain's 'Spain for All' ambassador and special guest

Angus Drummond talked very eloquently about his own lived travel experiences. In line with Ade's comments, he reminds us that people with disabilities are the same as other consumers, whilst yes, they may need an adapted bathroom, they also want a great travel experience, a great bar – essentially the same as every other consumer.



Alberto Gutiérrez talked about the progress being made within urban transportation, and the need for digital accessibility. He described how Valladolid has been working to improve its already extensive network of bus links and has implemented new cycling facilities within the city. The city has been working to install more lifts on transport networks to make more areas accessible and has increased the number of accessible public parking spots. The city also works with private companies to improve these aspects.

He cited a number of initiatives that had been implemented:

- More than 30% of bus stops are also being renovated to feature speakers for visually impaired travellers.
- Ticket prices across Valladolid are heavily discounted for disabled travellers (with discounts of 60%), with prices starting at 20 cents.
- The bus stops that are most commonly used by tourists not only have information about different routes through the city but also of the most popular sites.
- It is a historic city so, whilst improving accessibility, it has also taken caution to make sure that buildings are being preserved, and is now one of the most accessible cities in Spain.

With regard to digital accessibility, he said the following have been implemented:

- The tourism website of Valladolid has been updated to be more accessible and easy to use.
- The city is reintroducing the option to pay with money (rather than contactless), so that people are able to choose their more preferred methods of payment.
- The city is working at public events and with private event companies to ensure that there are a set number of tickets/ spaces for disabled travellers.
- The city is working to make sure that disabled travellers are able to easily plan their journey from door to door.

Both Miguel Carrasco and Susan Deer stressed the importance information and transparency – with Susan Deer saying "**if we don't know, we don't go**". Remember that!

## Keynote speaker: Charlie Cotton, Founder, Ecollective Carbon

Charlie said he wanted to tell a **story of action over carbon**. He said that we can still take steps to reduce emissions and that we need to aim to reduce them by 50% by 2030 to keep the global temperature rise in check and prevent further a temperature rise that could be anything from two to four degrees, which he said would be disastrous for the planet.

Charlie said that given the impending deadline (2030 is only 67 months away), and that we don't have the luxury of time, his motto was that we need **'progress rather than perfection'**.

He then provided a breakdown of a nominal holiday flying from London to Barcelona: the majority of the carbon footprint came from the flight including the airport transfers, but he also made the point that everything to do with the holiday has a carbon footprint, including the travelling around from A to B, the hotels, the food that is eaten, activities, and even the use of local guides. He then demonstrated how he could reduce the carbon footprint of that holiday to Barcelona by 80%, by make a few adjustments to the holiday, such as going with an airline with a more fuel efficient fleet or taking the train, using electric taxis for transfers within the city, eating vegetarian food helps, but so too would, choosing less steak, instead have more pork and chicken, and choosing less carbon intensive activities, such as quad biking or jet skiing, instead using electric quad bikes or human powered adventures, such as hiking, cycling and paddleboarding.



Charlie advised companies and organisations to find out what their number is for carbon and he suggested looking at their total carbon footprint over the year and dividing by one aspect of the business that you want to grow the most each year; for tour operators this may be the numbers of customers, for hoteliers it may be the number of room nights, so that the figure would reflect the average carbon footprint per room per night, or a destination may want an increase in the number of revenue, so the number would be the average carbon footprint per pound of revenue.

Charlie concluded with a call to action, urging the audience to **take ownership of your company's carbon footprint** and to **"get obsessed with your one number"** to understand how carbon efficient your business is so that you can start to look at ways to reduce it, year on year.

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In conclusion, Manuel Butler, director of the Spanish Tourist Office (UK) said:

"Thank you to everyone who has played a part in this important event. We were delighted to touch on so many important topics within our sector and hear from so many experts in the field. It really is a fantastic opportunity to share important learnings from across the sector with a specific focus on these two major travel destinations"

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### Event Photos

A selection of the event's photo can be found here:

<https://socialnewsroom.spain.info/spain-sustainability-day-image-gallery-2024/>