

# EUROPEAN HEALTH TOURISM INDUSTRY SUMMIT

## THE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN HEALTH TOURISM- WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Thank you very much and good afternoon.

Thanks to the HTI for inviting us to EHTTA to participate in this summit. Greetings to all attendees and especially to our guests at this table, speakers talking about the current situation of the future of sustainable European health tourism.

Let me also greet Emma González, the director of Termatalia, the most important international thermalism fair in the world in which we organize from Ourense. In 2020 it will be held in Entre Ríos, in Argentina.

It is an honor to address you in my capacity as President of the EHTTA, after my election at the General Assembly of the Association held in Spa last month.

It is always an great opportunity to be in the capital of Europe appearing in an act like this where we always emphasize the importance of networking. And I also say it in my capacity as President of Partenalia, the European association of provincial governments, whose headquarters are a few metres from where we are.

It also gives me an opportunity to talk about hot springs presiding over the provincial government of Ourense, a territory with an unequaled thermal potential, a strategic axis of our development that will experience an important historical moment with the arrival of the high speed train in 2021 - Santo Xacobeo year - placing us at 2 hours and 11 minutes from Madrid.

In March of this year, at the headquarters of the Committee of the Regions, before the electoral call, we issued a statement highlighting the role of the historic thermal cities of Europe, the "World Water Day". Of course linking it to health and wellness tourism, establishing ourselves as authorized voices in a sector of the future in which we must prioritise.

Hundreds of traditional spa towns are located all over Europe, from the North to the South and from the East to the West, representing a European phenomenon that was globally copied, with numerous examples in North and South America, Africa and New Zealand, to name just a few...

These towns are also an instrument for equilibrium in Europe. On one hand, since they have a valuable role for fostering socio-economic development, improving the quality of life for inhabitants, and developing a sustainable model of tourism based on the use of natural resources (natural mineral and healing waters, geo-thermal resources , etc.). Besides this, and this is particularly important for Ourense, my province, but also for many other territories in Europe, thermal towns can play a key role in the demographic challenge.

Thermal towns are places for creativity (music, fine arts, science, architecture and landscape design), which is an important factor for Europeanization. Historic thermal towns were traditionally places for political discussion and, as the "Cafes of Europe" demonstrate that they were at the forefront of the emerging vision of the future of Europe.

Today, a research project, in which EHTTA is involved, aims to analyze for the first time the extent of all the physical and cultural values and attributes of European spa towns. The result will be of particular use in detecting the potential for regeneration and economic development in small and remote settlements where economic conditions are hard. This project has a powerful potential and we need the support of the European institutions to achieve it.

I would like to highlight that the management of historical thermal towns is related to the management of natural, cultural and intangible resources. The origin of these towns is related to the natural phenomena of mineral and thermal waters and great potential exists to develop carbon neutral actions, as well as initiatives to contribute to a better quality of life of all of our citizens, since thermal towns are often located in the most rural areas of inner Europe, which, in many cases is often forgotten Europe. Despite this we aim to develop actions related to the development of a new sustainable model of European tourism linked to nature, natural remedies, wellness and cultural activities.

For all of the above, we ask all political forces in the future Parliament and the new European Commission to pay attention to the historic thermal towns, as they promote crucial objectives for Europe:

- Stopping depopulation of rural areas and sustaining inner Europe
- Supporting the hidden potential and the opportunities for development
- Contributing to a healthy way of life for existing communities
- And to the development of European tourism based on a shared cultural heritage.

Thermal towns are central to the history of Europe and that they can continue to make a significant contribution to its future.

The criteria that contribute to forming the European thermal identity have to do with the quality and quantity of the mineral-medicinal waters of the thermal sites, together with the architectural heritage. Of course to the undoubted health benefits that derives from thermal treatments. Of course the spas are areas of relaxation, well-being and health with the corresponding cures, with the success and number of users so important that, on many occasions, it enables the connection by train of the most important European thermal towns. It is in this scenario that sustainability also plays a proverbial role, as a criterion for the fundamental future.

The priority channels to project this sustainable sector in foreign markets are the existence of networks such as those we represent and the organization of events like this, but mainly with media impact and professional participation such as fairs, where I highlight Termatalia internationally, a brand that has managed to gain prestige and recognition in Europe and Latin America. Among my plans for the future at EHTTA, we plan to make the leap to North America, specifically in Saratoga Springs to make visible the work of the association and draw up new alliances that benefit the sector and the population.

In this scenario the strength of Termatalia will also take advantage of it's being because it has been able to create a network of ambassadors on the planet that is the best asset for the sustainability of the event and continue consolidating itself as a showcase for the sector. In this dynamic we cannot forget institutional cooperation and public-private collaboration.

Let me refer to one of the challenges of European thermalism. It has to do with its prominence in the demographic challenge. As rural revitalizers, creators of wealth and employment. The thermal villages of Spain have already made an action plan that affects this value of thermal baths thanks to the Government of the Nation. As a factor of cohesion and backbone of the territory, as a generator of opportunities with a leading role in areas that require this momentum. The solution to many questions is in the thermal water.

In this strategy, from the government I preside, and for this mandate, we will launch the International Observatory of the Rural Environment in collaboration with the University of Vigo. Its roadmap has been marked at the Ourense Rural Summit where more than 130 experts in rural areas of various nationalities participated. We have approved the Declaration of Santo Estevo where we claim a EUROPEAN RURAL AGENDA, a document that I have already shared with the European Confederation of Intermediate Local Powers, representing 1167 provinces in Europe, held in Toulouse last week. In this strategy for the demographic challenge, to enhance the value of the rural environment, the thermal baths has an obvious role to play in this.

Thank you very much for your attention and I will be attentive to all your contributions, participating in the subsequent debate. I'm at your disposal, should you have any questions.