

Webinar “Tourism Reimagined: AI, VR & Neurotourism for a Resilient Future”

26 March 2026, 15.00 – 17.00 CET

Webinar Summary





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Transition pathway for EU tourism

Introduction

Scope and objectives of the webinar



Target audience

National, regional and local authorities, DMOs, SMEs and larger companies, Industry Associations, Trade Unions, Chambers of Commerce, academia, and tourism professionals, technology providers, and other tourism ecosystem stakeholders interested in digital innovation and skills development.

Scope and objectives

This webinar examined the practical application of emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), and neuromarketing within the tourism ecosystem. It aimed to bridge the gap between awareness and actionable use by demonstrating how these tools can drive business transformation, support workforce upskilling and reskilling, and enhance ecosystem resilience.

Building on the results of EU-funded initiatives like EUROEMOTUR and the Spain-Canarias Living Lab, the session showcased real-life use cases from SMEs and DMOs that have integrated neurotourism technologies, such as eye tracking and emotion recognition, into their operations. Special attention was given to the role of living labs as platforms for collaboration, innovation scaling, and knowledge transfer across Europe.

Key objectives included exploring how evidence-based decision-support systems can generate measurable, operational impacts; identifying challenges and opportunities for transferring project outcomes; and highlighting how the European Commission can facilitate ecosystem-wide innovation and workforce transformation.

Agenda

15:00 – 15:10 **Welcome and introduction** *by moderator Sergio Moreno Gil*

15:10 – 15:50 **Session 1 “AI, VR and Behavioural Technologies in Action: Real Applications from the industry”**

- **Sonia Santana**, CEO of S Strategic Services
- **Dr Pasi Tuominen**, Researcher, project manager, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences
- **Federica Montaguti**, Senior Researcher, Ciset

15:50 – 16:30 **Session 2 “Integrating AI into Tourism Organisations: Skills, Structures and Strategic Adaptation”**

- **Iñigo García-Aranda**, General Manager, The Wise Dreams
- **Antonio López de Ávila**, Director of Innovation, Education and Investments at UN Tourism
- **Paulo Morgado**, Geographer and Geographic Information Scientist, Associate Professor, University of Lisbon

16:30 – 16:50 **Q&A session**

16:50 – 17:00 **Closing remarks and next steps**

- **Vangelis Panayotis**, Chair of the T4T Skills and Resilience Subgroup
 - **Elfa Kere**, Policy Officer – Tourism, DG MOVE
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Webinar "Tourism Reimagined: AI, VR & Neurotourism for a Resilient Future"

Speakers



Sonia Santana
CEO of S Strategic Services



Dr Pasi Tuominen
Researcher, project manager, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences



Federica Montaguti
Senior Researcher, Ciset



Iñigo García-Aranda
General Manager, The Wise Dreams

Transition pathway for EU tourism

Moderates



Sergio Moreno Gil
Director at TIDES
Founder, PI at EmotionLab
University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (ULPGC)



Antonio López de Ávila
Director of Innovation, Education and Investments at UN Tourism



Paulo Morgado
Geographer and Geographic Information Scientist, Associate Professor, University of Lisbon



Vangelis Panayotis
Chair of the T4T Skills/Resilience subgroup



Elfa Kere
Policy Officer – Tourism, DG MOVE

Webinar in numbers



320 Registrations



151 Participants

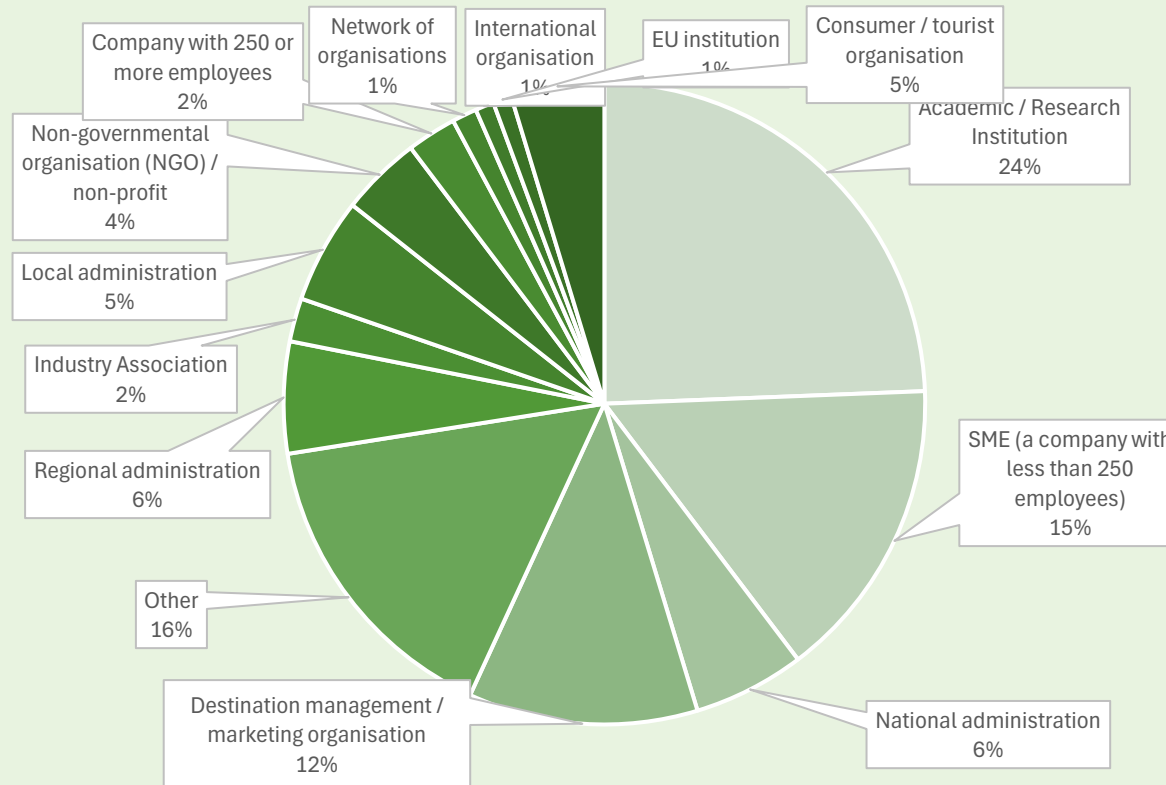


Participants from **24 EU MS** and **18 non-EU countries**



8 Speakers

Participants' Organisations



Results of the post-webinar survey



100% of the respondents were very satisfied/satisfied with the webinar.



100% of the respondents found that the webinar provided useful information.



87.5% of the respondents feel that they have obtained a better understanding and knowledge of the topic after attending.

Key discussion points (1/2)

Representatives from the **S Strategic Services, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Ciset, The Wise Dreams, UN Tourism and the University of Lisbon** discussed the following:

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Session 1: “AI, VR and Behavioural Technologies in Action: Real Applications from the industry”

- **Sonia Santana Cerpa from Emotour Lab** focused on applying neuroscience and neuro-marketing tools to tourism. She emphasized the importance of understanding tourists' emotional and subconscious decision-making, highlighting that traditional customer feedback only captures rational expressions, missing 95% of emotional influences. Sonia presented how Emotour Lab's innovative technologies—such as EEG, eye tracking, and immersive VR, measure real-time emotional and behavioral responses to optimize strategic decisions, enhance customer experiences, and reduce investment risks for companies and policymakers. She supported her points with successful case studies demonstrating significant improvements in SMEs' performance through neuro-tourism applications.
- **Pasi Tuominen from Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences** introduced "The Box," an immersive extended reality environment that operates without VR headsets, blending multi-sensory stimuli like spatial audio, visual mapping, and atmospheric controls to create engaging tourism experiences. He described its dual role in education and commercial promotion, involving students in creating interactive scripts and scenarios while supporting tourism businesses and NGOs worldwide. Pasi highlighted the technology's ability to enhance storytelling, engagement, and experiential marketing without replacing the human touch, providing a safe and flexible sandbox for innovation.
- **Federica Montaguti from Ciset** presented the practical application of neuromarketing and AI solutions to support tourism SMEs, particularly in Italy. She discussed how neuromarketing analysis of website user behavior enabled hotels to identify issues with visual attention on booking calls-to-action, leading to redesigned websites and a 41% increase in direct bookings. Federica also detailed using AI agents to help small, family-owned historic houses manage and generate compliant, brand-consistent digital content automatically. Her examples showcased how these technologies address common SME challenges, saving time and improving online presence.

Key discussion points (2/2)

Representatives from the **S Strategic Services, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Ciset, The Wise Dreams, UN Tourism and the University of Lisbon** discussed the following:


2


Session 2: “Integration AI into Tourism, Organisations: Skills, Structures and Strategic Adaptation”


- **Iñigo García-Aranda presented the Spain Living Lab initiative**, a large-scale project integrating over 300 traditional travel agencies with AI and immersive 3D technologies to transform the travel booking experience. He underlined travel agencies’ strategic importance as intermediaries in pushing digital innovation. Spain Living Lab blurs physical and digital boundaries, enabling travelers to virtually explore destinations in lifelike 3D environments assisted by AI agents that support travel consultants. Iñigo emphasized the project’s benefits, including higher sales conversion, better upselling, enhanced staff training, scalability, and improved market predictability, representing a paradigm shift in travel agency technology use.
- **Antonio López de Ávila from UNWTO** highlighted the critical role of digitalization and artificial intelligence in advancing sustainable, accessible, and smart tourism globally. He outlined UNWTO’s focus on governance, digital transformation, and education to support 166 member states in managing tourism’s economic, social, and environmental impacts. Antonio emphasized capacity building through the UNWTO Tourism Online Academy, which offers free courses worldwide to train millions entering the sector. He also detailed strategic AI initiatives, including global surveys, startup competitions, and guidelines, to help countries implement AI effectively for tourism innovation and competitiveness.
- **Paulo Morgado presented insights from the Emotional Cities project**, which employs wearable neurophysiological sensors combined with environmental data to capture real-time emotional responses to urban spaces. The project maps stress, relaxation, and engagement in cities like Lisbon by correlating biosignals with factors such as air quality, noise, and greenery. Paulo stressed that urban design directly impacts wellbeing, and small interventions like improved walkability or added greenery reduce stress and enhance visitor experiences. He advocated for data-driven, context-specific urban policies, recognizing that one-size-fits-all solutions fail to address the diverse emotional landscapes of city environments.


Conclusions and next steps


- 1 Neuroscience complements traditional data, shifting tourism strategy from assumptions to measurable perception and experience.



- 2 Immersive environments enhance tourism experiences by engaging multiple senses without replacing human interaction.



- 3 Controlled storytelling through AI agents allows SMEs and heritage sites to remain visible, accurate, and competitive.


- 4 Immersive storytelling increases conversion, upselling, productivity and workforce training efficiency.


- 5 Public institutions must lead AI governance to ensure trustworthy information, inclusion, and resilience.


- 6 Tourism experiences should be evaluated through emotional and neurophysiological evidence, not only behavioural proxies.


- 7 Europe has a responsibility to lead and support SMEs to adopt new technologies that improve productivity and competitiveness, to lead global tourism innovation.



Thank you!

The document has been prepared for the European Commission in the context of the project “Transition Pathway Stakeholder Support Platform: Implementation for Tourism Ecosystem” (the Project) in accordance with the signed contract No EISMEA/2022/OP/0018. This report reflects the views and results of the workshop discussion between the tourism stakeholders and do not necessarily represent the views of the European Commission. The action recommendations, however, do not necessarily represent the position or endorsement of all stakeholder groups nor the position of individual Member States or the European Commission.