

Report on the AI-NURECC PLUS Side-Event “THE BLUE ECONOMY IN THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN REGION: THE VALUE AND DEVELOPMENT OF NAUTICAL TOURISM”

In the framework of the AI-NURECC Plus Initiative, The Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce and the Chamber of Commerce of Brindisi, in collaboration with Assonautica Italiana, organised the AI-NURECC Plus Side-Event, on the themes of Blue Economy and Nautical Tourism, that was held on the 28th of September 2022 in hybrid modality, seeing the engagement of more than 150 participants.

The Blue Economy is embedded in, and dependent on, the natural environment. And while this makes it vulnerable to the problems of climate change and environmental decline, it also means it has enormous potential to transform our economy and play an important role in achieving the ambitions of the European Green Deal, as it is analysed in the most recent [European Blue Economy Report 2022](#).

EU Blue Economy includes all sectoral and cross-sectoral economic activities based on or related to the oceans, seas and coasts: Marine-based activities and Marine-related activities, among which **Coastal Tourism** is the most mature and growing industry in terms of gross value added (GVA) and employment. In 2018, 51.7% of the Union’s tourist accommodation facilities were located in coastal areas: this, therefore, highlights how coastal, maritime and nautical tourism is becoming increasingly important for the EU.

On the basis of the [Report on establishing an EU strategy for sustainable tourism \(2020/2038\(INI\)\)](#) drafted by the European Parliament, the European Commission is invited to finance and promote initiatives in favour of a new and more developed nautical tourism. As a follow-up to the [event organised in Split last October](#) on the preservation of the coasts, the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce in cooperation with [Brindisi Chambers of Commerce](#) and [Assonautica Italiana](#), organised this **AI-NURECC Plus Side event focusing on the value and possible developments of nautical tourism**.

Moderating the debate was Mr. **Mimmo Consales**, journalist, who gave the participants a background for the occasion that brought us together in Brindisi; the event organised under the umbrella of the AI-NURECC Plus initiative.

[AI-NURECC PLUS](#) is the network funded by the European Commission, DG Regio, which unites the main stakeholders of the European Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (so-called EUSAIR) Universities, Regions, Chambers of Commerce and Cities, promoting a bottom-up participatory approach between civil society and governance. It focuses in particular on the following sectors: **Sustainable Tourism, Cultural and Creative Industries, Blue Economy and Circular Economy and, as a transversal priority, youth**.

Brindisi’s event, in particular, intended to deepen the role of the Blue Economy at a European level with particular reference to our Adriatic-Ionian Area.

The meeting opened with greetings from the President of Split Chamber of Economy and of the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce, **Joze Tomaš**, who welcomed all the participants both online and onsite and introduced the speakers. He then stressed the importance of the occasion: *“As we all know, Blue Economy is a wide sector, which includes different categories of activities; with today’s event in particular, we want to focus on one of the most mature and growing industry in terms of gross value added (GVA) and employment: **Nautical Tourism**, by delineating its value and possible development models for its economic growth; and we are doing so under the umbrella of the AI-NURECC Plus Initiative. The AI-NURECC Plus initiative is making an important contribution to the development of the Adriatic-Ionian Area, most of all during this post-covid recovery time”*. In closing, the President thanked all the AI-NURECC Plus project partners for their commitment and wished all the participants a good and fruitful day of interventions that could hopefully allow us all to give a better response to the necessities of the Adriatic and Ionian Area.

The opening session continued with the intervention of Mr. **Antonio D’Amore**, Special Commissioner of the Brindisi Chamber of Commerce, who thanked once again all the representatives of the institutions such as the Brindisi Municipalities, the Port Authority and Unioncamere who were present at the Chamber of Commerce of Brindisi, and all the participants onsite and online for having taken the time to listen to an important discussion around a very actual matter that is blue economy and nautical tourism in particular. *“Blue Economy not only is part of the EUSAIR focus pillars, but it also creates great opportunities, in terms of economy development and job creation, and most of all it creates cultural contamination, that has always characterised the Adriatic Sea, and nowadays more than ever, also thanks to slow tourism and boating, is accelerating the process of European integration, that current events may happen to slow down”*.

Mr. **Giovanni Acampora**, President of Assonautica Italiana, then underlined the positive message sent by the gathering of many institution that collaborate to put blue economy at the centre of the public and private debate, as it is at the centre of the European Agenda. He stresses the urgency to reach a high level of sustainability when it comes to economy and environment, which are indissolubly linked to one another. He concluded by affirming that the occasion of this AI-NURECC Plus Side-Event gives all the participants the important opportunity to listen to frontline actors operating in the sector. All together those actors can make the difference and give concrete contributions to the dialogue related to blue growth.

Mr. **Stavros Kalognomos**, Executive Secretary of the Balkan and Black Sea Commission (BBSC), Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) - AI-NURECC PLUS Coordinator offered participants a general overview on the [AI-NURECC Plus Initiative](#), introducing the project partners and the main goals in the fields of sustainable tourism, cultural and creative industries and circular economy. He underlined the importance of networking and cooperation, which are at the heart of the Initiative and which put together public and private sector and civil society, to foster development in the area by encouraging the exchange of best practices. In particular, Nautical Tourism, protagonist of the event, has the ability to put together different sectors, and therefore needs to be the starting point to tackle the challenges arising with the pandemic.

PANEL 1: “The role of the Blue Economy in the European and in the Adriatic Ionian Region panorama” moderated by Ms. [Marija Raspopovic](#), Senior Advisor at Projects Department Chamber of Economy of Montenegro, saw the interventions of:

Ms. [Eleni Hatziyanni](#), Policy Officer Sea-basin Strategies, Maritime Regional Cooperation & Maritime Security at DG Mare, EU Commission

Ms. [Irene Tzouramani](#), Ministry of Rural Development and Food – Agriculture Economics Research Institute, EUSAIR Pillar 1 Blue Growth Coordinator (Greece) Mr. [Antonello Testa](#), Councillor with delegation to the Economy of the Sea of INFORMARE, Special Agency Frosinone Latina Chamber of Commerce, Blue Economy report in Italy (Italy)

Ms. **Matea Dorčić**, Head of the Administrative Department for Tourism and Maritime Affairs of the Split-Dalmatia County (Croatia)

Ms. **Danijela Lovrić**, Head of Tourism Association department of the Chamber of Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, project partner of INTERREG Adrion BLUEAIR project - Blue Growth Smart Adriatic Ionian S3 (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Mr. **Giovanni Lagioia**, University of Bari Aldo Moro, Director of the Second Master degree “Port City School - For the government of port cities” (Italy)

The moderator asked the speakers of the panel two questions each:

Ms. Eleni Hatziyanni, Policy Officer Sea-basin Strategies, Maritime Regional Cooperation & Maritime Security at DG Mare, EU Commission.

1. *The EU Blue Economy Report analyses the scope and size of the Blue Economy in the EU and aims at providing support to policymakers and stakeholders in the quest for a sustainable development of oceans, coastal resources and, most notably, to the development and implementation of policies and initiatives under the European Green Deal in line with the new approach for a sustainable Blue Economy. What would you say are the main highlights of this year’s report?*

Ms. **Hatziyanni** affirmed that in the Adriatic Ionian Area Blue Economy is indeed a significant part of the economical income, but it also contributes significantly to Europe’s Economy. **The Report highlights that the Blue Sector is a flourishing exploring ground to find solutions to climate change and take the green transition to the next level.** DG MARE together with DG REGIO have developed the new Thematic Smart Specialization Platform dedicated to sustainable Blue Economy, to provide a space for cooperation for stakeholders of the sectors. The report also provides an assessment of Covid-19 effects, which resulted to be significant; Coastal Tourism being the most affected sector. The potential of the whole Blue Economy Sector is nevertheless high. Innovation is to be sought in order to find sustainable solutions for growth. Finally the report is underlining once again the need for a joint action of all the actors and stakeholders.

2. *Preserving and increasing the natural capital of the seas and oceans is critical to ensure a continued delivery of valuable ecosystem services and for the EU to achieve the UN 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as underlined by the European Green Deal. What are some ways we can achieve the goals that have been set, and what do you consider instrumental for the transition towards a sustainable Blue Economy?*

The sustainable development goal is at the heart of the EU Agenda. A good environmental status has not yet been achieved and a lot of work is still to be done on many levels. The EU Green Deal aims at protecting biodiversity and ecosystems to ensure the sustainability also of the Blue Economy, among other sectors. It is a Priority of the European Union, which is setting a series of directives, to reach the goals of 2030; among these: [Marine Spatial Planning Directive](#) is the new approach for sustainability in the use of marine resources. Again, Smart Specialization Strategies are a key tool to support the transition to sustainability by the creation of partnerships and synergies among stakeholders and reinforcing the cooperation already in place through

programmes such as Horizon Europe, that accelerate the transition to sustainability with a view to the 2030 goals.

Ms. Irene Tzouramani, Ministry of Rural Development and Food – Agriculture Economics Research Institute, EUSAIR Pillar 1 Blue Growth Coordinator (Greece)

- 1 *The education and training needs emerging from the blue sustainable economy in the Adriatic and Ionian Region has been conceived as the first step towards coordinated actions linked consistently with the regional strategies for sharing and defining potential common training and education paths and joint initiatives to fill in gaps in professional profiles. What is your reflection on the blue-green upskilling and reskilling demand in the Adriatic and Ionian Region in order to be able to respond effectively to calls for digital and green transition?*

Ms. **Tzouramani** introduced the objective of Pillar 1 Blue Growth, which is that of driving innovative maritime and marine growth in the Adriatic Ionian Macroregion, by promoting sustainable economic growth, jobs creation and business opportunities in the sector. The Pillar coordinators faced many challenges, having to match EU policy objectives and national needs. Last year a Study was conducted, the "[Ideal EUSAIR Study](#)", to identify essential needs and opportunities to foster design and implementation of EUSAIR actions in the Adriatic Ionian Area, with the aim of also increasing networking and cluster capacity. An innovation Community to form alliances, to develop solutions to decarbonise the sector, sharing best practices and facilitating access to funds.

- 2 *What are the unique opportunities and potential for blue economic growth in our macroregion?*

Among the unique opportunities can surely be mentioned the [sustainable Blue Growth Strategy](#), the [EU Green Deal](#), the Digital Transformation, the [Farm to Fork Strategy](#) and many more. The policy choices of the EUSAIR Pillar 1 will bring sustainable development and smart innovation to the wide spectrum of economic activities in the sector. Joint effort is essential to win present and future challenges and boost collaboration between EUSAIR Countries.

Mr. Antonello Testa, Councillor with delegation to the Economy of the Sea of INFORMARE, Special Agency Frosinone Latina Chamber of Commerce, [Blue Economy report in Italy \(Italy\)](#)

1. *Recently, Italy was nominated as a guide country on EU policies in the Blue Economy and awarded the leadership of the European research program on the Blue Economy with a budget of almost 100 mil. Could you tell us more about the situation in the sector in Italy, as well as share some practices and advice on how we could do the same in the rest of the region?*

With its ca 8000 km of coastline, Italy is geographically an important hub of the Blue Economy, so it is essential to pursue this role. Precisely this prompted us 10 years ago as Chamber of Commerce, together with Unioncamere Nazionale and the [Guglielmo Tagliacarne Study Center](#), to start measuring the strength of the Blue Economy within the *Blue Economy report*

in Italy, which has become a reference point in the sector, being the only tool that analyses the economy of the sea, as a producer of wealth, incorporating the 7 supply chains: shipbuilding, maritime transport, fishing, coastal tourism with accommodation and catering, sports and recreational tourism, research and development, marine extractions. The Report therefore acts as a reference, providing important data indicating that in Italy the economy of the sea produces over 136 billion GVA, in part induced product, which corresponds to about 9.1% of the total national GVA. The sector showed a constant growth even during the stop caused by the pandemic, in contrast to other sectors, giving employment to about 900,000 employees. With its nearly 225,000 companies, it represents 3.7% of all Italian companies, with a high number of "youth businesses" over 21,000, and female businesses over 49,000. In this latest Report edition, two important indicators have been added, namely the weight of the sea economy on sustainability, with 49% of companies moving towards greener actions with concrete investments in raw materials, and it has been introduced the concept of "coastal area" and no longer the coastal municipality, as even inland areas (50% of their territory within a radius of 10 km from the sea) live off the economy of the sea. The Report therefore shows the need to move towards greener policies and the awareness of the need to network, in a non-competitive system, with an eye towards sustainable economic growth.

- 2. The private sector plays a crucial role in the blue economy sector and its growth. How can we engage businesses more in the activities that we implement and what are some of the first steps we ought to take?*

There must be a shared action plan; we must move towards more sustainable economic growth. We as a Chamber of Commerce have launched strategic actions: [Blue Forum Italia Network](#), a network of actors of the sea, with the aim of having a multiplicative, non-competitive effect, to exchange best practices, strategies and actions. The Forum has the ambitious dream of becoming an international network for the entire Mediterranean. The other action is the [Manifesto for sustainable economic growth](#), which is always enriched with new contents, with the aim of concretely acting on sustainable economic growth, starting from the signatories, the Forum participants. The sea touches various sectors, the most obvious one is the agri-food sector which is directly affected by the trend of the blue economy. Another important activity is the Summit on the economy of the sea, next edition is scheduled for 25, 26, 27 May in Gaeta; we hope for a great participation and useful contributions since it is an annual useful occasion to study new strategies. The Summit gave rise to the idea of implementing an "Academy of the sea", which can give companies the knowledge to make smart investments in the sector. Another action at the heart of the future debate is to put at the centre of the political agenda and public debate, the creation of a "Ministry of the sea"; we have seen from the numbers the strength of the sector and for a country like Italy it is necessary to have a governance with the ability to take greater advantage of the sea, responding to the ecological transition, to have from the sea everything we need and will need in the future.

Ms. Matea Dorčić, Head of the Administrative Department for Tourism and Maritime Affairs of the Split-Dalmatia County (Croatia)

- 1. Split-Dalmatia County is very active in terms of implementation of different projects that could definitely serve us as good practice examples. Could you tell us more about what is currently implemented in the county, particularly focusing on protection and valorization of coastal areas?*

Ms **Dorčić** informed the participants that Split Dalmatia County had to face many challenges related to the maritime domain and the management of the coastal area. So far they count 129

concessions and 38 of those are ports of special purpose. It is surely hard to match the needs of the private sector with the development of economy and tourism, while preserving the coast from exploitation. In 2019 Split Dalmatia County implemented a Project "[Pomorsko je dobro](#)" ('Maritime property is good'), started with a web page, then combined with an App, that gives the users the possibility to report devastative actions on the maritime area (also in an anonymous way). The information will be then sent to the right institution for inspections. This has effectively raised the number of punishments for devastative actions and subsequently the level of preservation of the marine ecosystem. A portal is also available, giving users all information about the activities and actions of the County. Three were the fundamental messages at the heart of the project: *Be informed, Educate yourself, Be active*. **Transparency is the Key word**; Split Dalmatia County is the 1st country to have made available to the general public all the data related to the concessions, harbours, what to do and not to do in order to preserve the ecosystems. The public knows all the actions that are being done and they can act if something does not seem right, by reporting to the right institutions.

2. *Nowadays, we are witnessing the rapid development of nautical tourism. What would in your opinion be the best ways we can ensure the protection of coastal areas and the sea and development of sustainable nautical tourism?*

Dalmatia County has more than 50 open ports for traffic under the management of the Port Authority of the County, but we saw that it still isn't enough. A Pilot Project has been implemented with the Maritime Faculty and the public institution for the preservation of nature in Split Dalmatia County for exploiting the huge potential of the area for anchoring; in order not to build more marinas. A document was made, called Anchorage Study, selecting 50 potential locations for boats to anchor without causing damage to the ecosystem. **It is possible to combine the blue and the green; exploiting without impacting negatively the environment.**

Ms. Danijela Lovrić, Head of Tourism Association department of the Chamber of Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, project partner of INTERREG Adrion BLUEAIR project - Blue Growth Smart Adriatic Ionian S3 (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

1. *BLUEAIR project aims at enhancing institutional capacities of ADRION territories in the definition of a common S3 policy on Blue Growth and guaranteeing the alignment of local initiatives with the EUSAIR strategy. Could you tell us a bit more about the project itself and how the project results can help us all in bringing the Blue Economy to a next level in all the countries of our region?*

The main goal of the [BLUEAIR project](#) is to encourage interregional cooperation in specific areas. It was submitted to the Third ADRION call for project proposals, on priority axis 1: Innovative and smart region, and its number one topic is the Smart specialisation strategy (S3) for blue growth, which has become a key concept in the regional development of the EU. It implies a quadruple spiral model, which sees the participation of four main actors in the innovation system: science, politics, industry and society. Of course, not all countries have the same initial position regarding the strategy of smart specialisation: S3 strategies are being implemented in Italy, Slovenia, Croatia and Greece; final consultations are being conducted in Montenegro; final priorities are being defined in Serbia; mapping has begun in Albania; the process has begun in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is clear the need to harmonise blue growth policies (maritime transport, energy connectivity, protection of the marine environment and promotion of sustainable tourism). The key objective of this project in fact is

strengthening the institutional capacities of ADRION countries and regions in defining a common approach towards the implementation of S3 blue growth policies at the macro-regional level and it will do so by organising events to educate about innovation policies of blue growth (events of mutual learning, exchange of good practices and workshops for public administration and actors of the quadruple spiral); developing tools to improve existing smart specialisation strategies (Guidelines for the improvement of BG S3), capitalization, organisation of blue growth weeks, transfer of BLUEAIR results to policy makers and companies based on ADRION, etc.

2. *You come from one of the non-EU countries that is aspiring to become an EU member state. How would you describe the situation in the tourism sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the activities the government is undertaking to ensure the sustainability and economic growth in this area?*

The draft Tourism Development Strategy in the FBiH 2021-2027 is now sent to the Parliament of the FBiH for adoption. With the professional support of the FBiH Chamber of Commerce and USAID Tourism, the strategy was designed as a driving force for the development of sustainable tourism, with a focus on increasing the number of tourist arrivals, stays and spending, increasing the percentage of tourism in GDP, creating new jobs and attracting direct foreign investments in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Special attention is paid to gender equality, and the inclusion of people with disabilities through employment and adaptation of tourist products. There are many conditions that precede the achievement of excellence in tourism. One of the steps closer to that is certainly the biggest digital promotional campaign that Bosnia and Herzegovina has ever had. The FBiH Chamber of Commerce is recognized as one of the best choices for promoting tourism and tourist destinations in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and as such is responsible for one of the biggest promotions of the tourist potential of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a digital campaign to improve and increase the attractiveness of FBiH as a recognizable tourist destination on the world's largest and most famous travel platform of its kind, on Trip Advisor. The FBiH Chamber of Commerce has committed to activate the Tactical Recovery Plan and implement the program "Improving and increasing the attractiveness of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a recognizable tourist destination", through a digital campaign with TripAdvisor that will focus on the promotion and sale of tourist products, experiences and activities in FBiH.

Mr. Giovanni Lagioia, University of Bari Aldo Moro, Director of the Second Master degree "Port City School - For the government of port cities" (Italy)

1. *As mentioned earlier, education plays an important role when it comes to Blue Economy. What is your perspective on this from the academic point of view, and what is your experience from the University when it comes to engagement of young people in the programs related to Blue Economy?*

The University of Bari implemented the Master degree "[Port City School - For the government of port cities](#)", devoted to the preparation of future workers, in a concrete educational process. Mr Lagioia affirmed that he is receiving positive feedback from students attending the course. Italy is a touristic reality, Puglia Region especially; so it goes without saying that young people of the area understand the importance of the Blue Economy. The University, on its part, is investing in many activities to enhance the learning process; among these, the implementation of a new Level 2 Master called "Innovation government and Sustainability", in which Blue Economy has a significant

role. To conclude, he affirmed that the University will continue to guide its students towards this direction.

- 2. It is often said or complained about the discrepancies between the curriculums and school programs and the need of the industry and the market when it comes to the labour force. What steps is your university taking in this direction and how do you ensure your programs are up to date with the growing needs of the Blue Economy sector?*

The University of Bari makes sure that its courses, bachelors, masters and other initiatives, are the result of a strong open discussion, in order to set the right list of subjects and contents for the learning programs. This led to the creation of a Level 2 master focusing on Touristic Activities “Design & Management of Cultural and Touristic systems” whose focus is a strong and consistent discussion with institutions and actors operating in the touristic sector. In order to enhance this cooperation, specific seminars have been introduced, called “Managerial Seminars” hosting managers, entrepreneurs, heads of institutions, and have them share with the students their experiences and the set of skills they are actually looking for in the new generations. To conclude, Mr Lagioia affirmed that the key action is to open our minds and implement all that emerged from this first panel and will emerge during the second panel, and put it into an effective action, proposing different approaches and solutions. That is the essence of what the University does with its students: inspiring them to open their minds to reach for new sustainable goals.

PANEL 2: “Coastal tourism: the added value and the development of nautical tourism” moderated by Ms. **Elena Magro**, Assonautica Italiana Head of Communications and Press Office, saw the interventions of:

Mr. [Francesco Di Filippo](#), Vicar Vice President Assonautica Italiana (Italy)

Ms. [Ivana Janković](#), Ministry of Economic Development and Tourism of Montenegro

Ms. [Klodiana Gorica](#), Professor University of Tirana, NCP of Horizon Europe for Albania for EIT (Albania)

Mr. [Bruno Santori](#), Vice President ASSONAT - National Association of Tourist Ports (Italy)

Mr. [Roberto Perocchio](#), President of ASSOMARINAS - Italian Association of Tourist Ports (Italy)

Mr. [Yorgos Stephanedes](#), University of Patras, Division of Environmental Engineering and Transportation, Project partner of Interreg Greece-Italy AI SMART-Adriatic Ionian Small Port Network Project.

Mr. Francesco Di Filippo, Vicar Vice President Assonautica Italiana (Italy)

- 1. The Italian Parliament invites the European Commission to put in place financing funds for touristic port structures and initiatives to encourage the creation of ports and nautical itineraries, for an ever greater development of nautical tourism. Assonautica Italiana is the promoter and implementation of a project to promote nautical tourism in Italy, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism and the Regions; what is it and what opportunities will it give to the sector?*

This promotional project is part of a national program of promotion through the creation of routes and nautical itineraries along the peninsula, passing through the touristic ports, to discover the historical, cultural, artistic, naturalistic and agri-food heritage of Italy. It is of

course in line with the needs expressed by the Italian parliament and with the 4th pillar of the EUSAIR, and the European strategy for coastal and maritime tourism. Its key point is to promote nautical tourism together with other, more traditional, touristic segments, by entering the touristic ports and exploring the territories of the hinterland. This leads to a complete change in the approach towards the nautical tourist and touristic infrastructures, that needs investments specifically devoted to those segments, in order to improve the quality, also in terms of sustainability, of touristic ports, at the same level of “open air” structures that already benefit from direct financing funds. It is necessary to give the actors of the sector the awareness of being an active part of the sector. Chambers of Commerce have the responsibility of putting together the public and private sector in order to create an integrated offer.

Ms. Ivana Janković, Ministry of Economic Development and Tourism of Montenegro

- 1. Montenegro is one of the Balkan countries that has developed exponentially in nautical tourism in recent years. Are there any projects of the Ministry of Economic Development and Tourism related to this sector?*

Montenegro has significant potential for the development of nautical tourism. The key point of Montenegro’s approach is to reach a high level of sustainability, which is something new for the country, since after Covid, the Country has seen the low performance of the touristic season 2020 and realised the necessity to work on sustainability, making Montenegro a destination for the whole year and not only during summer time. Nautical Tourism is a crucial point for the new touristic offer. During this year, Montenegro will work on a strategy particularly designed for nautical tourism, because the port of Montenegro is one of the major ports in the country bringing in new investments. The major project is a big space for mega yachts, with a floating dock. It is important to integrate it with the diverse touristic offer of the country as Mr. Di Filippo already mentioned. Smart Specialisation is the key strategy in Montenegro.

- 2. You follow the management of EU funds for the Ministry to strengthen innovation and competitiveness. Is there something also planned for coastal and nautical tourism?*

Of course Nautical Tourism is connected to economic activity, and tourism is the main economic activity of Montenegro. Innovation and sustainability need to be linked to the sector: one project from EU funds, in particular, aims at exploring possibilities to integrate and adapt the system of the country to the Blue Growth concept. Two key institutions: the [Institute for Marine Biology](#) and the [University of Kotor, Faculty for Marine Studies](#), are facilitating the new projects and approaches, and are guiding the country to the conclusion that it is really important to enhance infrastructures; Marinas for touristic purposes are well developed in Montenegro, but ports for fishing activities are not, and this causes a problem since the country can not supply fish for the tourists, importing the majority of it. Moreover, the sustainability capacity and awareness need to be developed; many young people wanting to work in the Blue sector find themselves obliged to go abroad to find better working conditions; hopefully with the New [EU Youth Guarantee program](#), Montenegro will have the occasion to create blue jobs for younger generations.

Ms. Klodiana Gorica, Professor University of Tirana, NCP of Horizon Europe for Albania for EIT (Albania)

1. *You dealt with sustainable tourism and, from what I read in Albania, you focus on the sustainability of this sector also through the use of digital technologies and, in general, in activities related to the blue economy, in improving training, increasing students' skills, and future professionals in the sector. Interventions that coastal and nautical tourism also need. Can you tell us if there are any experiences in Albania? You are involved in projects and initiatives to create sustainable tourism networks in Europe and the Balkans. Was there also talk of nautical tourism?*

Blue Economy is a well known concept, but it is not the case for Nautical Tourism. On the 27th of September it was World Tourism Day, but institutions, both private and public, are still asking themselves which are sustainable forms of tourism. Tourism is considered an instrument to enhance sustainable development. The recent discussion during the World Economy Forum of the WTO, Nautical Tourism is considered a very sustainable tourism product, especially for its indirect impact on other sectors, such as the cultural sector, since it is a good way to combine the sea resource with the enjoyment of cultural patrimonies. It is necessary to create and deliver cooperative actions to guide the Nautical tourism sector. Cooperation is essential; there is no literature on that sector, which is very specific, so it is urgent to understand the type of demand in order to answer with the right investments.

Mr. Bruno Santori, Vice President ASSONAT - National Association of Tourist Ports (Italy)

1. *The port is the entrance to the territory and the potential for expanding the tourist offer to the guests is enormous. Have you seen a change in this sense in the marinas in recent years or is there still a lot to do to put ports in synergy with institutions and companies?*

Marinas are a privileged access to the territory. Assonat represents hundreds of entrepreneurs who manage marinas making huge investments. Differently to what happens in Croatia, as mentioned by Ms. Dorcic, that “*what is not forbidden is allowed*”; in Italy “*what is not ruled is not allowed*”. In our Country there are a huge number of rules related to the management of Marinas: Regions, City Councils, Port Authorities, many entities work in the field and it is difficult to integrate all of these different realities, in order to let ports dialogue easily with the rest of the territory. In the last years, marinas have made many steps forward in terms of quantity and quality of their offer. In the last 20 years many investments have been made for the building of new marinas which are more integrated with the spaces around them. Of course there is still a lot to do, the Italian context is particular; marinas are almost totally managed by private owners; so the public sector is more oriented towards a controlling approach instead of a supporting one. It is necessary to set clear rules for the sector and recognise the role of nautical tourism and the sector in general. Data demonstrate that it is growing and investments should be dedicated to it.

2. *A common mobility project would be needed to allow the use of the territory by guests accessing from ports. What is the general situation of the ports?*

It is not easy to have a fruitful dialogue between public and private institutions, but some steps forward have been made in the past years. “An example of this difficult dialogue between the two realities is that in Chieti-Pescara and two adjacent cities, electric scooters are managed by the same company; so if I have to go from the first city to the last one, ideally, I can use the same scooter; but it actually doesn't work like that: I have to change scooter every time I pass the border of a city to enter in the following one”. The next step is to enhance this dialogue in order to provide the ultimate user with a complete experience, benefiting both of the port areas and the interland.

Mr. Roberto Perocchio, President of ASSOMARINAS - Italian Association of Tourist Ports (Italy)

1. *What is the quality level of our ports compared to abroad, also in terms of operators' training (the lack of knowledge of the English language for example) and what is still to do?*

Connected to what Mr Santori said, marinas are tourist destinations but firstly enterprises. At the end of the day, the quality level is related to the financial situation. [Assomarinas](#) is a member of [Confindustria Nautica](#) and we've been the first to qualify marinas with a dedicated law, but it is true that in the last 10 years many new marinas have been built in spite of the increase of concession fees from the government. Of course private enterprises running marinas faced many problems in recent years. The light at the end of the tunnel has started to get visible only in the last two years because the pandemic generated a new interest in local tourism, namely local coastal tourism. Italy has some of the most beautiful marinas, all over the country. We try to raise all the issues of the sector during an event we organise every 2 years: the [World Marina Conference with Confindustria Nautica and Icomia](#), the International Council of Marine Industry Associations, in order to keep high the motivation of the employees, without nevertheless ignoring the financial problems. The future is positive; in the next generation EU funds the Ministry of Tourism includes Marinas among the enterprises that will have benefits in terms of tax credit if they will make investments in energy efficiency.

2. *The future of touristic ports: what do operators in the sector expect from the government and, what will be the impact of the increase in the prices of raw materials?*

People in Italy recently rediscovered boating, but numbers are not yet encouraging. While it is true that the boating industry is blooming, nevertheless, during the last years of crises, an economic weakness spread through the country (Italy) and many boats have been cancelled from the national register. So, of course, there is concern on the national boating market, relating more to the international one. That's why many marinas are making efforts to host and receive the highest number of visitors possible.

Mr. Yorgos Stephanedes, University of Patras, Division of Environmental Engineering and Transportation, Project partner of Interreg Greece-Italy AI SMART-Adriatic Ionian Small Port Network Project.

1. *How can small marinas take advantage of technology to better participate in the Blue Economy and how can the participation of coastal areas in Nautical Tourism activities be supported?*

It is important to think in terms of smart cities and communities, with the focus on improving sustainability with support from the public sector and the citizens, benefiting from technology and achieving the operability of social intelligence. The topic of smart villages was introduced, which is a relatively new concept proposed by the European Parliament, for a top-down and bottom-up development of the movement of passengers to and from the villages. Of course there are needs in those kinds of villages; resilience being the most important quality they need to have. What we do is approach marinas as smart villages: the [AI SMART project](#) is actually a network that users can make use of to integrate different levels of offers. The main objective of the project is to facilitate the cooperation between the stakeholders in order to solve common problems, exchange of information and best practices.

To conclude, during this event, the most important message from the speakers is the urgency and necessity to create a network and to collaborate within ports and stakeholders, in order to provide the final user with the most efficient service possible.

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