SESSION 10 – EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Moderator: Themis Halvantzi-Stringer

Speakers: Ryan Smith, Marco van Leeuwen, Pierre Margot-Cattin, Francesca Carmagnola

The session “Education and Training” offered an in-depth exploration of how learning, research, and professional development can transform accessible tourism from a niche concern into a shared cultural and economic objective. Moderated by **Themis Halvantzi-Stringerof FEG, UK,** the discussion gathered international experts who presented diverse educational models aimed at embedding accessibility into policy, practise, and mindset.

Ryan Smith, founder of the Access Agency in Australia, presented a pioneering project commissioned by Parks Victoria to create a self-assessment manual for rangers managing national parks. The guide enables staff to evaluate accessibility standards through a universal design approach, using clear diagrams and checklists to assess everything from parking and signage to accommodation and recreational infrastructure. The project has not only improved park’s accessibility but also reshaped internal culture by training rangers to adopt a visitor-centred, inclusive perspective.

Marco van Leeuwen, from Breda University of Applied Sciences (Netherlands), described co-creative educational practises where tourism students collaborate directly with people with disabilities to design and test inclusive visitor experiences. Through projects in museums, theme parks, and urban environments, students gain empathy, practical insight, and professional competence. Van Leeuwen emphasised the pedagogical value of “compassionate design,” which bridges the gap between theory and lived experience.

Pierre Margot-Cattin, from the University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland, shared the findings of a national study assessing the lack of accessibility training among travel agents. His team developed an innovative checklist and training programme co-designed with people with physical, sensory, and intellectual disabilities, to guide agents in addressing customers’ diverse needs—from transportation and accommodation to communication and emergency planning. The initiative highlights the

structural challenges of integrating accessibility into the traditional business model of travel agencies, which often limits the time available to assist travellers with disabilities.

Finally, **Francesca Carmagnola, representing the ITS Academy for Tourism in Piedmont (Italy)**, presented Italy's first vocational higher education programme to formally include accessible tourism as a core module. Developed in partnership with CPD – Consulta per le Persone in Difficoltà, the programme combines classroom learning, company placements, and experiential workshops that immerse students in accessibility scenarios, such as navigating urban barriers or simulating reduced mobility. The curriculum integrates topics such as inclusive hospitality, accessible communication, and universal design principles applied to cultural, sports, and event management. Carmagnola underscored that training the next generation of professionals is essential to bridging the persistent gap between awareness and action.

The session concluded that accessibility education must become systemic, combining co-creation, interdisciplinary approaches, and lived experience to ensure that tourism professionals are prepared to build a sector that truly welcomes everyone.

Watch Session 10 on YouTube. (run time 1:33:23)