SESSION 18 – EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN ACCESSIBLE TOURISM

Moderator: Emiliano Deferrari

Speakers: Francesco Felici, Elisabetta Schiavone, Nordbø Ingeborg

The session “Employment and Skills Development in Accessible Tourism” explored how education, professional roles, and research can foster a tourism industry that is both inclusive and competitive. Moderated by **Emiliano Deferrari, ENAT, Belgium**, the discussion highlighted the growing importance of integrating accessibility into workforce training, policy frameworks, and destination management.

Francesco Felici, Director General at the Italian Ministry of Tourism, presented the upcoming Tourism Profession Portal, a national platform aimed at redefining tourism careers through digital innovation, regulation, and education. The initiative, part of Italy’s 2023–2027 Tourism Strategic Plan, promotes a unified professional framework at the national level, introducing specialised certifications and continuous learning pathways. Felici emphasised that accessibility must become a foundational competence for all professionals—tourist guides, hospitality managers, and public officials alike—and invited participants to contribute educational proposals for inclusion within the portal. He argued that “tourism is for all,” calling for a culture of accessibility to be embedded from schools to universities.

Elisabetta Schiavone, architect and expert in inclusive safety and environmental design, introduced the concept of Inclusive Safety as a key dimension of accessibility. Her presentation highlighted that safety and accessibility are interconnected rights, requiring coordinated planning across transportation, accommodation, and cultural heritage sites. Schiavone outlined seven principles of inclusive safety, advocating a shift from “safety of places” to “safety of people.” She presented examples from Italian museums and heritage sites where emergency plans and training programmes now integrate accessibility measures such as tactile signage, accessible evacuation routes, and staff education. Her work demonstrates that inclusive safety must become part of the professional skillset of tourism operators.

Ingeborg Nordbø, from the University of South-Eastern Norway, presented research based on two national projects—Experiences for All and Access—analysing the customer

journey of travellers with disabilities. Using data from 349 respondents, the study identified persistent barriers throughout all stages of travel, from inspiration and planning to booking and post-trip feedback. Nordbø emphasised that accessibility is not a niche but a necessity, and that inclusive design benefits all visitors. She advocated for closer collaboration between academia, SMEs, and policymakers to apply research insights to real-world solutions.

The session concluded with a shared call to action: to establish professional figures such as Accessibility Managers across the tourism chain, ensure targeted training at every level, and promote a mindset where inclusion, safety, and competence are integral to quality tourism.

Watch Session 18 on YouTube. (run time 1:26:56)