SESSION 15 – KEY TECHNOLOGIES FOR ACCESSIBLE TOURISM

Moderator: Simon April

Speakers: Eyra Abraham, Anne Dionisi-Fung, Filip Verstraete, Paul Kalcher

The session “Key Technologies for Accessible Tourism” explored the transformative role of emerging technologies in breaking barriers and fostering autonomy for travellers with disabilities. Moderated by **Simon April, Co- President of the 3rd World Summit on Accessible Tourism**, the discussion gathered innovators and entrepreneurs whose work bridges accessibility, artificial intelligence, and inclusive design.

Eyra Abraham, founder of Lisnen (Canada), opened the session with a powerful reflection on her personal experience as a Deaf entrepreneur and the global challenge of auditory-centred communication. She presented Lisnen, an AI-powered mobile app that acts as a “hearing companion” by detecting and classifying environmental sounds —such as alarms, sirens, or door knocks— and converting them into visual and vibrational alerts. The app, compatible with smartphones and smartwatches, leverages localised sound data to adapt to different building codes and sound environments worldwide. Abraham emphasised that the lack of accessible datasets perpetuates bias in AI systems and called for greater inclusion of disability-centred data in technological development.

Anne Dionisi-Fung, representing My Easy Access (France), showcased a collaborative pilot project launched in Marseille to enhance mobility and tourism accessibility through digital tools. The project combines a website, a printed accessibility map, and a mobile app that provide verified information on accessible routes, public transport, accommodations, and services. Developed in partnership with Tourisme et Handicap and supported by the Michelin Foundation, the initiative was co-created with 30 beta testers with physical disabilities and local institutions. Dionisi-Fung stressed the importance of co-design, continuous data validation, and user empowerment in ensuring both accuracy and sustainability. The long-term goal is to extend the model to other types of disabilities and replicate it in additional cities.

Filip Verstraete, from Deaf Flanders (Belgium), presented an overview of “deaf-friendly tourism,” highlighting communication accessibility as the most significant gap in current tourism offerings. He underscored the need for information and services in national and

international sign languages, training for hospitality staff, and partnerships with Deaf organisations. His examples included apps that offer sign language video guides for museums, deaf-led guided tours, and accessible communication technologies such as video kiosks and captioned displays. Verstraete argued that accessibility for Deaf travellers is not only a technological issue but a cultural one, rooted in visibility, language, and representation.

Finally, **Paul Kalcher, founder of Ontrack (Austria)**, presented a pioneering navigation app for blind and visually impaired users, designed to provide safe, independent, and intuitive urban mobility. The app integrates GPS with triangulation data from nearby devices to improve precision and offers audio-based guidance with customisable feedback levels. Users can select “safe route” options prioritising tactile pavements, fewer crossings, and accessible public transport stops. Kalcher emphasised that the app was co-designed with blind users and aims to balance innovation with empathy.

The session concluded that technology must be inclusive by design, built from the lived experiences of users, and guided by ethical data practises. From AI-powered hearing assistance to accessible navigation and co-created mapping tools, these innovators are demonstrating that technology, when shaped by diversity, can truly redefine the future of accessible tourism.

We lost the footage for this session, but you can watch the rest on YouTube.