PLENARY SESSION – BEYOND DESTINATIONS: ACCESSIBILITY AS THE FOUNDATION OF THE TOURISM EXPERIENCE

Moderator: Marcella Gaspardone

Speakers: Inmaculada Placencia- Porrero, Alessandra Priante and Anna Grazia Laura

Moderated by **Marcella Gaspardone (Manager of Turismo Torino e Provincia, Italy)**, the plenary session "Beyond Destinations: Accessibility as the Foundation of the Tourism Experience" explored accessibility as a systemic element of tourism development rather than a separate niche.

Inmaculada Placencia-Porrero, Senior Expert at the European Commission opened the discussion by presenting the framework of the European Accessibility Act and its relevance for the tourism ecosystem. She explained how the legislation promotes equal access to products and services, covering areas such as transport, e-commerce, financial services, and built environments, and how it aligns with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Her contribution underlined the importance of consistent standards, cross-sectoral implementation, and training to ensure that accessibility is integrated into every stage of tourism design and management.

Alessandra Priante, President of the Italian National Tourist Board (ENIT), expanded on the concept of accessibility as a universal value rather than a disability issue, linking inclusion to communication, awareness, and cultural change. Drawing on her international experience, she highlighted best practises from Madrid and the Gulf States and reflected on Italy's progress toward becoming a more inclusive destination. Priante also noted the growing role of digital transformation and artificial intelligence as enablers of accessible and intelligent tourism.

Finally, **Anna Grazia Laura, President of the European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT),** presented global research findings showing that travellers with accessibility needs still face major barriers—particularly inconsistent information, inaccessible transport, and lack of adequate accommodation. She emphasised the need for investment in infrastructure, qualified professional training, and cooperation among governments, private operators, and civil society.

The session concluded with a call for collective action, international alignment of standards, and sustained dialogue between regions and institutions to turn accessibility

into a shared driver of social inclusion, innovation, and economic growth across the tourism value chain.

Watch this Plenary Session on YouTube. (run time 1:11:15)