# PLENARY SESSION – AI AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES FOR ACCESSIBLE TOURISM

**Moderator:** Dimitrios Buhalis

**Speakers:** Roberto Scano, Mirko Lalli, Olaf Schlieper, Selvakumar Ramachandran

The plenary session "AI and New Technologies for Accessible Tourism" explored how artificial intelligence, data analytics, and immersive technologies are transforming the accessibility landscape in tourism.

Moderated by **Professor Dimitrios Buhalis, Director of the eTourism Research Centre at Bournemouth University**, the discussion connected academic, business, and institutional perspectives on innovation, inclusion, and digital ethics.

**Mirko Lalli, founder of The Data Appeal Company**, presented an overview of how AI can simplify travel planning and make destinations more accessible. He illustrated practical examples of generative AI tools that design personalised itineraries based on accessibility needs and user preferences, emphasising that data accuracy and transparency are the real challenges. He called on destinations and businesses to continuously update accessibility information to ensure that technology delivers reliable and inclusive results.

**Olaf Schlieper, Innovation Manager at the German National Tourist Board**, showcased Germany's UNESCO World Heritage Mixed Reality App, an immersive tool that allows users to explore heritage sites through virtual reality. The application, designed with accessibility in mind, adapts to user height, includes audio descriptions, colour contrast options, and features for neurodivergent individuals, offering a model for inclusive digital innovation.

**Roberto Scano, accessibility standards expert and member of European and international accessibility working groups,** focused on the regulatory framework shaping accessible technology. He explained the importance of harmonised standards such as EN 301549, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), and the European Accessibility Act, which ensure interoperability, usability, and equal access across digital systems and tourism services. Scano stressed that innovation must not compromise accessibility, noting that new technologies must integrate tactile interfaces, audio support, and human-centred design to avoid digital exclusion.

Finally, **Selvakumar Ramachandran, CEO of Kerckhoffs Ltd., UK and Senior Researcher affiliated with ENAT,** presented a pioneering project using 360° videos and virtual reality to create immersive tourism experiences for people with disabilities and neurodivergent children. His platform enables travellers to preview destinations, supports accessible trip planning, and fosters community-based content creation.

The session concluded with a shared understanding that AI and emerging technologies should empower—not replace—human connection, ensuring that accessibility becomes an intrinsic dimension of smart and responsible tourism development worldwide.

Watch this Plenary Session on YouTube. (run time 1:22:36)