SESSION 5 – DESTINATIONS AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Moderatore: Magnus Berglund

Speakers: Bill Forrester, Roberto Vitali, Ross Calladine, Giulia Marcon e Paolo Caligaris

The session "Destinations and Business Development" focused on the economic and cultural value of accessibility as a driver for innovation and competitiveness within the global tourism industry.

Moderated by **Magnus Berglund, Accessibility Ambassador and consultant for the Nordic Choice Hotels group**, the discussion gathered experts and practitioners who illustrated how accessibility can evolve from a social responsibility into a sustainable business strategy.

Ross Calladine, Accessibility and Inclusion Lead at VisitEngland, opened the session by presenting the United Kingdom's national framework for developing inclusive destinations. He outlined the "Purple Pound" research, showing that people with access requirements and their companions generate over £15 billion annually for the English economy. He emphasised accessibility as both a moral imperative and a strategic market opportunity, describing VisitEngland's six-pillar model — People, Place, Process, Product, Promotion, and Personnel — that guides destinations and businesses toward genuine inclusivity. Calladine highlighted the success of capacity-building programmes, toolkits, and local champions that are driving culture change across England's destinations.

Roberto Vitali, founder and CEO of Village for All, introduced Destination4All, an Italian initiative fostering public–private cooperation and long-term governance for accessible destinations. He stressed that accessibility is not about creating special offers for people with disabilities but about designing tourism experiences that can meet everyone's needs, turning accessibility into measurable social and economic value. He shared data from the Bibione case study, where continuous investment in accessibility increased international arrivals by 40% and overnight stays by 17%, strengthening brand reputation and local business engagement.

Bill Forrester, co-founder of TravAbility in Australia, illustrated the large-scale accessibility mapping projects conducted in Queensland and New South Wales ahead of the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. He described the audits of over 1,500 businesses and 47,000 km of accessible routes, advocating for a "progress, not

perfection" approach to encourage businesses to communicate what they offer rather than fearing criticism for what they lack.

Finally, **Paolo Caligaris, representing the Piemonte Region**, showcased regional best practises and initiatives such as Piemonte for All and the enhancement of accessible routes along the Via Francigena. He outlined regional funding programmes and governance models designed to integrate accessibility into tourism promotion, infrastructure, and training. The session concluded with a shared reflection on the need to overcome fear, bureaucracy and fragmented standards, replacing them with a culture of transparency, collaboration and investment in accessibility as a hallmark of quality and competitiveness for destinations worldwide.

Watch Session 5 on YouTube. (run time 1:27:48)