SESSION 9 – ACCESSIBLE TOURISM BUSINESS

Moderator: Tatiana Alemán Selva

Speakers: Xun Ji, Dimitrios Buhalis, José António Bourdain , Neha Arora

The session "Accessible Tourism Business" brought together international experts and entrepreneurs to discuss how accessibility can be embedded in tourism design, management and innovation to create more inclusive destinations worldwide.

Moderated by **Tatiana Alemán Selva, Project Manager, ILUNION Accessibility Consulting, Spain,** the debate provided a global overview of successful business models linking accessibility with sustainability, technology, and human rights.

Xun Ji, founder of Rare & Roll Accessibility, China, presented the country's growing movement for disability inclusion and the development of accessibility guides for more than 30 museums. She described the "Museums for All" initiative, launched alongside China's 2023 Barrier-Free Environment Law, which leverages technology and public–private cooperation to improve physical and digital access in cultural spaces. She emphasised the role of community engagement, women's empowerment, and collaboration with institutions such as UNESCO in shaping a more inclusive tourism ecosystem.

José António Bourdain, President of the National Association of Long-Term Care, Portugal, illustrated the Portuguese model of accessible tourism grounded in social innovation and public policy. He showcased initiatives like Accessible Beaches, which has made more than 400 barrier-free beaches equipped with amphibious chairs and trained staff, as well as specialised transport and accommodation services. His organisation has served thousands of clients, including prominent figures such as Stephen Hawking, proving that accessibility is both viable and profitable.

Neha Arora, founder of Planet Abled, India, shared her decade-long experience in transforming inclusive tourism into a global movement. Drawing from her personal story and professional expertise, she emphasised the importance of "inclusive design" as a methodology that integrates all types of disabilities, including invisible ones, and promotes accessible communication, digital inclusion, and staff training. Arora urged destinations to adopt measurable standards, develop feedback loops, and treat accessibility as part of sustainability and innovation rather than charity.

Finally, **Professor Dimitrios Buhalis, Director of the eTourism Research Centre at Bournemouth University**, reflected on how digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and data-driven strategies can enhance competitiveness and inclusion in tourism. He advocated for a holistic approach where technology connects people, destinations, and services through smart, personalised, and context-aware networks.

The session concluded with a shared call for collaboration among governments, academia and businesses to turn accessibility into a mainstream dimension of global tourism, ensuring that travel is a universal right supported by innovation, empathy, and sound governance.

Watch Session 9 on YouTube. (run time 1:33:53)