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Koper (Slovenia)**



# **Sustainability: Challenging mindsets through heritage interpretation**

**Conference proceedings**

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**Sustainability: Challenging mindsets**  
**through heritage interpretation**

**Proceedings**

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Interpret Europe's Conference 2024, **Sustainability: Challenging mindsets through heritage interpretation**, #iecon24, was held in Koper, Slovenia, on 21-24 March 2024. It was organised with our partner, The University of Primorska Faculty of Humanities and UNESCO Chair for Interpretation and Education for Enhancing Integrated Heritage Approaches.

There is hardly any layer in society that is not concerned by the serious situation that we are currently facing. Most politics still advocate for more, albeit sustainable, growth, assuming that any other solution is unrealistic. Others suspect that an economic mindset, driven by the pursuit of maximal profit and intensified competition, lies at the heart of the crises. They believe that more radical shifts in our way of life are needed. But, at the same time, those policy makers who promise to avoid significant changes appear to gain popularity. Similarly, many people generally agree on the urgency for humanity to abandon unsustainable ways of life – but nevertheless carry on with their own unsustainable activities.

One root cause of this discrepancy between the general appreciation of sustainability and concrete behaviour may be found in the persistence of mindsets: The interrelated, deeply ingrained habits, beliefs, attitudes and implicit value priorities we have acquired in life can exert an often unconscious but powerful influence on our decisions and judgements. As the media shower us with worrying news, it seems we are losing our compass.

This conference was designed to find out how museums, monuments, parks and other heritage sites can help people to interpret heritage in a way that challenges mindsets and makes them more mindful towards our common future.

Heritage interpretation can encourage and empower people to:

- explore how past mindsets shaped people's relationships with their social and natural environment, and how these resonate with contemporary issues
- ask questions that challenge one's own mindsets, including deeply ingrained habits, beliefs, attitudes and implicit value priorities
- take meaningful personal development in one's own hands and consider possibilities for transition towards a sustainable lifestyle.

The conference brought together more than 120 professionals from 26 countries across four continents (Europe, South and North America, Asia). The programme included 37 varied presentations and workshops including taster workshops from IE's training programme. Four keynote addresses provided an inspiring introduction to each of the days. Attendees were also able to enjoy a choice of six study visits over two days, to some stunning sites in Slovenia, Croatia and Italy, all of which

further explored the essence of heritage interpretation. People were invited to take a slot in the market of ideas to raise awareness of any issues close to them or to network for project collaboration across Europe. Last but not least, a wonderful convivial final dinner, of which the highlight was an entertaining raffle to raise funds to support scholarships for attendance to future IE conferences.

Thanks to our keynote speakers:

- Opening address by Špela Spanžel, Director-General, Cultural Heritage Directorate, Ministry of Culture (Slovenia)
- David Uzzell, University of Surrey (UK) – How we make heritage meaningful in ways that speak to the existential crises we face
- Sujeong Lee, UNESCO WHIPIC (South Korea) – Heritage interpretation as a meaning-making process
- Lluís Bonet, University of Barcelona (Spain) – CHARTER – European Cultural Heritage Skills Alliance

The following participants submitted full papers to be published in these proceedings:

Darko Babic (Croatia)

Aleksandra Drinic (Bosnia & Herzegovina)

Veronica Kupkova (Czech Republic)

Kristyna Pinkrova (Czech Republic)

Ladislav Ptáček (Czech Republic)

Philipp P. Thapa (Germany)

The abstracts of the other presentations and workshops are included after the full papers.

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Thanks to our organising partners and patrons.



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## Welcome address

### Helena Vičič, IE Managing Director (Slovenia)

Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed guests, and fellow interpreters, it is a pleasure to welcome you to Koper, to Slovenia.

For this year's conference we decided to explore the ultimate frontiers of what heritage interpretation can do for environmental and social sustainability and, most importantly 'how'.

There are some guiding principles to seek inspiration in: the UN Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and for Global Citizenship (EGC) programmes, and the Stormy Times report by the European Commission are only some of them. However, there seems to be little guidance for interpretation as a narrow although potentially powerful niche.

The following questions seem relevant for this conference:

1. Why should heritage interpretation challenge mindsets?
2. What does challenging mindsets mean?
3. How can we do it?

So, to the first question: **Why should heritage interpretation challenge mindsets?**

For decades, interpreters have agreed that a challenge in interpretation helps: to raise interest, to enhance learning and to make experiences more engaging and fun. However, contemporary challenges urge all sectors to rethink their aims and means. The heritage sector is expected to either mobilise its resources or to remain obsolete.

The second question: **What does challenging mindsets mean?**

Mindsets are interrelated, deeply ingrained habits, beliefs, attitudes and implicit value priorities we have acquired in life that can exert an often unconscious but powerful influence on our decisions and judgements. Although mindsets appear a tough apple to bite into, great care and caution and responsibility is necessary. Can we recognise manipulation and one-mindedness, perhaps even in our own work? Do we know how to approach the persisting nature of mindsets? We should look around the fence and learn from other disciplines.

Here we get to the last question: **How can we do it?**

At IE we believe that we are on a good path to something. Together with UNESCO, we are exploring opportunities and strengths of the so-called Value-based heritage interpretation (VBHI). There are good reasons to believe that by facilitating exchange among visitors and locals, enabling a whole experience - including emotional and social aspects - renegotiating narratives and rethinking our value system together with people, the methods are on our side. Interpreters know how to connect heritage phenomena to something very personal and relevant while providing experiences that excite and upset thoughts and emotions, that provoke discussion and invite various perspectives on display. At the same

time, let the experience lead to a critical reflection and to good feelings about one's own actions and commitments.

This year, together with UNESCO, we are starting with a two-year-long cascade training model for regions within the 'Learning landscapes' initiative. In the first step of this journey, we will equip interpretive agents with skills for engaging communities into a search for those stories and themes in their heritage that can help everyone involved grow and develop towards sustainability mindsets. We should be able to report the first results at our next IE conference.

Heritage is a result of the meaning making process about nature, culture and past events. It is being constantly re-negotiated. Involving the public in this process might slow down the exhibition planning, but it can help accelerate the transition of our society into a thinking, empathic and responsible one.

To sum up all these questions: Are we in any way responsible for helping people find meaning and direction in this complex world? And if yes, are we ready to provide challenges that reach beyond learning about facts and past times?

How challenging are these thoughts for us? Challenges come when we are ready for them.

I hope that by the end of this conference we all become enthusiastic about our own abilities and shared ideas about this new calling.

# Keynotes

## Opening address

### Špela Spanžel (Slovenia)

Špela Spanžel is the Director-General, Cultural Heritage Directorate in the Ministry of Culture, Slovenia. She is an art historian, curator, policy expert and a member of several expert groups and steering committees within UNESCO, and the Council of Europe. She led the nomination of the works of the architect Jože Plečnik in Ljubljana, recognised as an example of human-centred urban design and inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in July 2021.

#### **The urgent need to change our approach from passive protection to active adaptation**

It is an honour to address you on behalf of the Ministry of Culture at this international conference on heritage interpretation. A conference which, by its very title, already indicates the strong social, environmental, educational, emotional and aesthetic dimensions of heritage, and which aims to change established mindsets and beliefs.

It also incorporates a temporal dimension, regularly mentioned alongside cultural heritage, linking the past with the present and laying the foundations for the future. The concept of sustainability in the title also challenges this definition. Finally, if we add physical space, we can confirm that Koper is a very suitable venue for such reflections and exchanges!

At the Cultural Heritage Directorate of our Ministry, we like to say that heritage is all around us and a part of us: it is recognisable in our built and natural environment, echoes in place names

and connects us to important historical figures. Heritage is the stories that live on in dialects and are passed down from generation to generation, it is embedded in the distinctive dishes and customs that bind communities together, and it underpins the handicrafts that inspire modern design. It is part of family outings and attracts travellers, has therapeutic effects, contributes to one's well-being and builds local economies – in short, it permeates our contemporary way of life in urban neighbourhoods and in the countryside.

In other words, regardless of how it is recognised and defined by experts, it is inextricably linked to the people who live with their heritage, (re)create it, identify with it, and thus give it meaning. It is linked to society, which collectively and in its own time embraces its heritage, values it, and sometimes rejects it when it does not recognise its value, or unwisely exploits it for its own interests. As we are reminded time and again, including by natural disasters, heritage is part of the environment and nature, and a reflection of human (co)existence on the planet.

In preparing my speech, I initially intended to show the range of activities that have occupied us in the Directorate over the last two years and to link the different strands that the conference programme takes up, I could not really distinguish between my mission as the head of the Directorate and that of a heritage expert. I associate both with a fundamental approach to work – that of professional ethics, which requires us to conduct our professional activities in an open, impartial, objective and accountable manner, avoiding conflict of interest.



If we add to this the principles of curiosity and doubt, the joy of new knowledge and openness to change, and affection for the field in which we work, we have an excellent basis for working with individuals, groups and communities who are the active part of the integrated conservation of cultural heritage as the broadest concept of heritage protection, safeguarding, revitalisation, presentation and communication ... By working together we expand the boundaries of the field, we look beyond the heritage categories and question new definitions – in short, the limits of the self-evident, the declared and the determined.

For this reason, I would like to thank Interpret Europe and the UNESCO Chair for this conference, which deepens our cooperation. In 2022, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention, we co-organised a regional course on interpretive planning at World Heritage Properties in Europe, developed by the UNESCO Regional Office in Venice and Interpret Europe, aimed at practitioners with a professional role in the management of World Heritage properties. There was also the international symposium 'Twentieth Century World Heritage' with a focus on challenges and experiences in the management and impact assessment of architecture.

The two events were linked by the year dedicated to the renowned architect Jože Plečnik, shortly after his works in Ljubljana were inscribed on the World Heritage List as "Human Centred Urban Design". I believe that this conference will provide an impetus for a better understanding of heritage interpretation as a discipline with its principles, practices and processes, explore its contribution to value-based conservation and the role of interpretation planners. There is certainly still much to learn, share and initiate!

I feel inspired by WHIPIC's definition of heritage interpretation (presented by Sujeong Lee) as "a meaning-making process through communication, participation and experience". It not only invites communities to take an active role but promotes connections between people and heritage places. In our daily practice, whether in policy making, setting strategic steps or implementing financial support measures, we still find it hard to break away from the categorisation of heritage as immovable buildings or movable objects, cared for by relevant institutions and competent experts. The gaps within the sector are incomprehensibly deep, we are regularly annoyed by the 'arts and culture' syntax that excludes heritage as a fixed category that belongs to the past.

But we also have ourselves to blame – heritage presentation and education do go far beyond the familiar research and protection methods adopted by subject matter experts. Cultural conventions that introduced the concept of the heritage community, strategic objectives that identified communication as an essential tool for dissemination and promotion, the recent ICOM definition of museums ... they all provide a sufficient framework for different actors and set standards for action.

In recent years, intangible cultural heritage has proven to be the more productive and vibrant part of cultural heritage and is hence promoted by UNESCO as living heritage. We are working hard to support the bearers and practitioners and to link intangible cultural heritage to fields such as the environment, agriculture and health.

I have had the honour of leading projects on Slovenian beekeeping, Lipizzan horse breeding traditions and midwifery – and the knowledge, skills and practices, their transmission within the communities, are often explained through objects or places associated with intangible cultural heritage without major misunderstandings. Perhaps there are lessons to

be learned– intangible heritage has tangible results and does not exist without community. It also gives us a rather straightforward introduction to issues of sustainability, which is my second point.

The mobilisation of knowledge and skills within formal, non-formal and informal education is at the heart of the European Cultural Heritage Skills Alliance (presented by Mr. Lluís Bonet). Almost 50 partners from 14 European countries, including the Slovenian national heritage agency, are identifying gaps and needs in education and training to create new professional opportunities and enable non-specialists to make a valuable contribution. The underlying theme is, of course, the Green Transition with all forms and activities that make us contest our unsustainable lifestyle and use of natural resources – and the issue at stake is that of heritage as a positive factor of change.

In my opinion, sustainability is not so much about the future as it is fundamentally linked with the present. It says more about us than about the achievements of past eras; it is a concept that aims to provide an answer to the global existential challenges of our time, such as social inequality and the climate crisis.

The summer storms and massive floods have shown how important cultural heritage is to communities, how ill-prepared we are for recurring events that affect all types of cultural heritage, especially when most of the damage caused is not to significant heritage buildings but to public cultural infrastructure that is important to people.

We know how urgent it is to change our approach from passive protection to active adaptation and beyond – to building so-called resilient societies. Specifically, we negotiated for months to include cultural heritage in the special law on post-flood reconstruction and

development. We have managed to include several measures in the national scheme, including storage facilities for museum objects and archival material to ensure the safe storage of movable cultural heritage for public institutions providing public services. We hope to be able to realise several regional storage facilities by 2028, thereby proving that cultural heritage infrastructure is an important part of reconstruction and recovery in the affected areas.

I fear that I wanted to say too much in one speech. Often, we experts are trapped in a language full of acronyms and jargon, other times we put forward concepts that, because they are often repeated at the level of decision-makers, are in fact empty signifiers. Sometimes we talk about the same thing but use different technical terms and do not understand each other. Language is also a means to show our point of view and our attitude, to enable inclusion and democratic dialogue, understanding and equal participation.

Cultural heritage touches us in many different ways – whether it surprises us with its dynamics, moves us physically or on an aesthetic level. With the help of a great heritage interpreter who encourages and empowers us, we pass on its message to others - a positive heritage narrative that opens the door to a positive and hopeful future (Prof. David Uzzell).

Let me conclude by wishing you curiosity and openness to the learning, discussion, exchange and networking that will guide you through the conference programme. Have a successful conference and a pleasant stay in Koper.

## How do we make heritage meaningful in ways that speak to the existential crises we face?

### David Uzzell (UK)

David Uzzell is Professor Emeritus of Environmental Psychology at the University of Surrey, UK. His principal research interests are public understandings of climate change, critical psychological approaches to sustainability, and identity and the meaning of the past in heritage interpretation. Recent research has included an EU-funded research project, CRIC: Identity and Conflict. Cultural Heritage and the Reconstruction of Identities after Conflict (EU); On being Australian: Exploring the role of Anzac museum and heritage interpretive experiences in developing visitors' sense of national identity (Australia), and the therapeutic effects of heritage sites during Covid lockdowns (UK).

### Challenging assumptions about changing behaviours

Probably the most frequently quoted sentence from Freeman Tilden's seminal book, *Interpreting our Heritage* (Tilden, 1957), written some 70 years ago is: "Through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection". It continues to provide a guiding principle for communication strategies in interpretation. Underlying this succinct and plausible phrase is a psychological model of persuasion and behaviour change that has not only informed heritage interpretation but has also often been the taken-for-granted approach in communication strategies by governments who wish to change public attitudes and behaviours in various other areas of public policy and concern, not least of which is climate change. This paper draws on some recent research in both climate change and heritage interpretation

and raises critical questions about the most effective ways of changing mindsets and ultimately behaviours. Drawing on recent research on climate communication is relevant to the field of heritage interpretation and communication, not only because the 'default' communication model is the same, but because "heritage sites offer an ideal space for provoking such reflection and strengthen key competences for sustainability" (Interpret Europe, 2024).

The communication model underlying Tilden's claim is an 'information deficit' model of human behaviour. In short, it proposes that if society faces a serious problem, especially backed up by research evidence (e.g., carbon emissions, driving standards, eating habits), all we need do is to lay out the evidence and this will be sufficiently persuasive to encourage the public to change their behaviours. In respect of heritage sites, if we reveal and make apparent to visitors the wonders and value of the natural and cultural environment, they will appreciate and take a positive attitude to it, and then want to protect it. While this seems like an obvious and plausible psychological model of communication effectiveness, most research has shown time and time again that it is unjustifiable.

Information and interpretation do not necessarily lead to understanding. We have long known that visitors do not necessarily read interpretation panels (Screven, 1992; Serrell, 1997). Even if the panels are read, they may provide information but may not answer the questions that people want answering, or provide the information that enhances their understanding in a relevant way to them (Hein, 2013).

Understanding doesn't necessarily lead to attitude change. Giving people information, even if they understand it, may not change their attitudes. One only need look at campaigns

which seek to reduce smoking especially amongst the young, reduce excessive alcohol consumption, warn about drug use, try to influence dietary behaviours and reduce obesity, encourage the use of cycling helmets. The list goes on. Despite these being activities which directly affect an individual's health, security and interest in, many still do not change.

It is argued by some psychologists that attitudes comprise three elements – cognitive, affective and behavioural. Unless you address all three elements you are less likely to bring about change. It was for this reason many years ago that I introduced the concept of 'hot interpretation' (Uzzell, 1989; Uzzell and Ballantyne, 2007) which argued that interpretation should not simply be a cognitive experience, but is likely to be more effective if it incorporates an emotional / affective dimension into the telling of stories.

Attitude change doesn't necessarily lead to behaviour change. Even if someone holds positive and progressive attitudes to smoking, drinking, diet, and safety generally, they may not change their behaviours. For example, many people know that shifting from a car to active transport for journeys under 3kms could reduce of personal carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions from transport by 25% (Dunning, 2021). Many of these same people would say they are very concerned about climate change and want to do anything they can to reduce it. But how many will give up their car?

Change behaviours and attitudes follow. Within liberal democracies, politicians are reluctant to legislate and force behaviour change. Yet the evidence suggests that where they have done so (e.g., legislating against smoking inside buildings; the compulsory wearing of seat belts) the change has been seen by many, if not the majority, as beneficial, acceptance is

forthcoming and attitudes, as a consequence, many change.

While Tilden's formula and indeed government climate change campaigns are appealing, it is not so straightforward in practice. People don't make up their mind just on the basis of evidence. There are all sorts of competing influences such as their identity, the tribes and friendship groups to which they belong, education, and economic resources, which all come with particular ideologies, mindsets, fears and goals. While attitudes and values are seen by psychologists as residing within the head, we must remember they have got there somehow. Changing the conditions which encourage and drive our behaviours may be a more effective strategy for bringing about change. We need to tackle the societal structures and processes that promote and reinforce the desires, demands, values, images, identities and inequalities that influence and determine our lifestyle choices, and how we can and do use the environment (Räthzel and Uzzell, 2019; Uzzell, 2017).

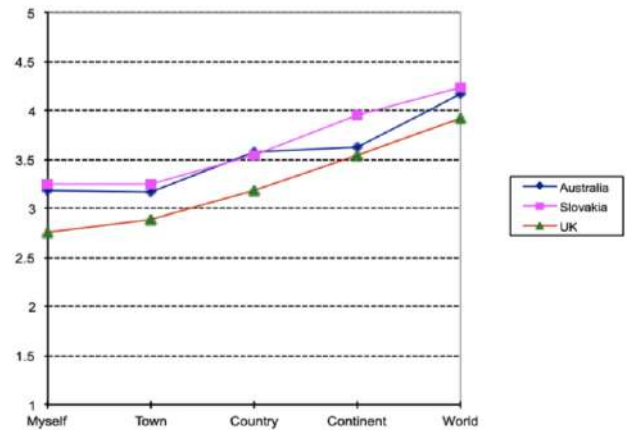
### **The language we use: Where is the global?**

The second issue I want to raise focuses on the language we use - both words and images - to talk about these major global and critical issues. Where is 'the global'? Is it the Antarctic, where glaciers are melting fast? Or Asia and Africa, where floods, storms, and droughts are increasing? Or is it just somewhere else – a long way away from us? Or is every place local and global? If this is the case, it makes little sense to differentiate between a relatively safe local and a threatened global environment. Why do we continue to say, we must treasure and look after our planet. Why don't we say, as we almost certainly feel, we should treasure and look after our home.

Language structures, it frames, it provides us with options and possibilities for action and closes off other options. Global warming and

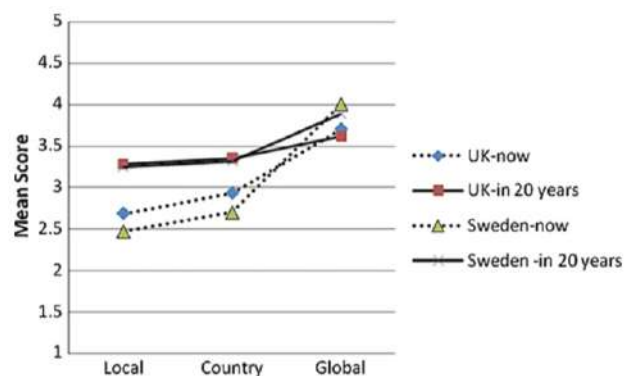
global environmental change encourage people to feel powerless, because how can they influence global processes? People are more likely to feel responsible and feel they have control over environmentally damaging actions when they are local. People not only feel powerless when global environmental problems are discussed, but they think national and international agencies should be responsible for taking action.

The evidence for this sense of powerlessness and alienation comes from a study which investigated concerns about global environmental problems from the perspective of different groups in various countries across the world, i.e., UK, Australia, Slovakia (Uzzell, 2000). There was a remarkable degree of consistency in subsequent studies with other nationalities (Gifford et al., 2009). Without exception, these studies show that people think that climate change effects and environmental degradation generally are more serious the farther away they are from them (Figure 1). There is a dislocation from the local to the national to the international. Moreover, they think that, while they are more responsible for the environment at the local level, at the national, international and global level this is the responsibility of governments and international agencies.



**Figure 1: Concern about global environmental problems. View from Australia, Slovakia and the UK (Uzzell, 2000)**

Ten years later, a follow up study amongst a small sample of students in the UK and Sweden again found that across eight environmental indicators, environmental degradation and climate change impacts are seen to be more serious at the global than the national or local level (Räthzel and Uzzell, 2009). Moreover, the students thought that environmental problems will be significantly worse in 20 years' time at the local and national levels but were not predicted to be any worse at the global level (Figure 2). In other words, they see the most dangerous things affecting the global environment now affecting them at the local level in 20 years' time. Again, there is dislocation from the local to the global, and from the present to the future.



**Figure 2: Concern about global environmental problems. View from Sweden and the UK (Räthzel & Uzzell, 2009)**

If one were to repeat this exercise now, would the graphs look different? The fires, floods, extreme drought, glaciers melting, and sea level rises on every continent have made people aware that the planet's climate is changing. Growing evidence from areas such as clinical and counselling psychology suggest that people are more anxious and frightened than ever before (Wainwright and Annie, 2021). What the public thought were 'global' environmental problems, are now on their doorstep. But what about responsibility? Perhaps they still feel, like Naomi Klein, "I think a lot of climate communication is based on the premise that people don't know these scary facts, ... It's not that we don't know – it's that we actively do not want to read about it... We're all in a different stage of paralysis with this thing that we know is the biggest issue on earth." (Smith, 2015).

### **Social interaction and learning**

What are the most effective means of learning? (Uzzell, 1993, 1992) Visiting heritage sites is a social experience, and this can be an integral part of the learning process. As we explore the environment our pre-existing knowledge is confronted with new information; this can be rejected, accepted or assimilated and accommodated into our existing understandings. This is one way in which we learn. Some social psychologists have argued that this process doesn't simply go on in the head (Doise et al., 1975). It is a social process. People are constantly monitoring the thoughts and actions of others and moderating their own thoughts and behaviours. When we interact socially with others, we are influenced by the way others see the world, an influence we can accept, reject or assimilate in some way. In other words, while learning is the resolution of cognitive conflicts within individuals, it is also a product of the co-ordination and resolution of cognitive conflicts between individuals, i.e., when people talk to each other.

We sought to test whether this theory holds in informal learning settings which aim to interpret scientific concepts and the historic past (Blud, 1990a, 1990b). One study was undertaken in the Science Museum, London, UK, and focused on family groups interacting naturally, rather than in an experimental situation. We were interested in whether the socio-cognitive conflict described above occurs between adults and children when they look at exhibits in a museum, especially as children and adults will be operating at different cognitive levels, and what effect this has on their learning. In this study, learning performance was contrasted across three different kinds of exhibits which sought to explain the operation of gear wheels – a) a static passive display, b) a push button exhibit in which visitors physically interacted with the exhibit, and c) a social-interactive exhibit which required visitors to interact with each other in order to understand the scientific principles behind the operation of gear wheels.

There were four key findings:

- the social-interactive exhibit encouraged more exhibit-related discussion (i.e., leading to socio-cognitive conflict) than the static or physically interactive exhibit.
- the social interaction was qualitatively different to the other interpretive media, i.e., the content of their discussion was more sophisticated and informed.
- visitors demonstrated a better understanding of the concept of the gear at the social-interactive exhibit, but only in the social condition.
- learning was not one way – from adult to child. We found that adults learnt from children because of talking/discussing with them the content of the exhibits. The children's questions and comments made them think more.

These results are important as they suggest that designing interpretation that encourages social interaction with others could be one of the most effective ways of ensuring interpretation is successful. Interestingly, Professor Chris Rapley, former Director of the Science Museum, wrote in 2018, some 20 years after our research, “Yes, the key is starting where people are, in their own minds and bodies, and engaging on their terms. It’s also about connections between people. One of the great things at the Science Museum is that you get a lot of intergenerational discussion between adults and children, whether it’s within families or school groups.” (Rapley, 2018)

### **Experience is learning: Plants Before Time, RHS Wisley**

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), established in 1804, is the UK's foremost gardening charity. The RHS manages seven gardens across England, the largest of which is RHS Wisley, situated about 40 km south-west of London, and covering just under 100 ha. It is also a research centre for horticultural science, and the second most visited paid entry garden in the United Kingdom, attracting 1.2 million visitors a year. I have been a volunteer at RHS Wisley for the last five years working with their small and talented Interpretation team.

In February 2024, an event called ‘Houseplant Takeover - Plants Before Time’ opened (Royal Horticultural Society, 2024). This event sought to show visitors that through scientific evidence and fossilised remains one can trace the origins of everyday houseplants to the earliest known plant forms on the planet. Situated in the Glasshouse (12m high and covering 11,000 sqm), visitors were taken on a journey of some 400 million years back in time and through temperate, tropical and arid environments. In the Glasshouse, the story of prehistoric plants is told to the occasional sound of birdsong, dinosaurs walking and swirling mist. It seeks to

be an immersive experience. Of course, it is backed up by interpretive text and artefacts which encourage visitors to look and see, to listen and hear, to imagine, and to step back in time. Interpretive panels provide visitors with basic information about the key prehistoric periods, life on earth at that time, and in particular what plants were growing, the descendants of which can be found in the Glasshouse and can be grown by visitors.

It is well known that many people visiting heritage sites and interpretive exhibitions do not read most of the material provided. We undertook several evaluation studies in which we tracked visitors through the exhibition, conducted interviews, held a focus group and received spontaneous comments from the public. When we tracked people walking through the Glasshouse it was clear, as noted above, that even if visitors read the interpretation panels, they may only read parts of them. We found:

- The average amount of time people spent in the exhibition was 26 minutes, ranging from 10 to 65 minutes.
- The average time spent looking at all the interpretation panels and ‘formal’ displays was 7 minutes.
- The longest time anyone looked at a single panel was 6 minutes. But the average time for the most viewed panel was just over 1 minute.

There are various ways in which one might interpret these figures. At first sight, it appears that visitors spent a considerable amount of time in the exhibition, but a relatively small amount of time looking at the ‘provided’ interpretation. But learning comes from their experience and social engagement as much as the ‘provided’ interpretation. Experiencing the heritage involves the whole person from the psychological, physical, social to the spiritual, and the interpretation should build on this.

People, of course, were learning from the environment itself. Their senses were being employed to read and feel the environment. They were not just looking but seeing. They were not just listening but hearing. They were sensing changes in the microclimate and commenting on the colours of the plants under different environmental conditions. What the interpretation rightly sought to do was much more than inform, but achieve what Freeman Tilden suggested should be its purpose: encourage; inspire; provoke; reveal; encourage curiosity and imagination. Interpretation which facilitates different kinds of experiences, which challenge ways of seeing and mindsets, may be the most effective way of enabling change. And it was noticeable how many people were talking to each other about what they were seeing – adults to adults, adults to children and children to adults.

### **Heritage bathing**

Do we give visitors the space and time they need to think about and immerse themselves in the heritage? The Japanese concept of forest bathing (shinrin yoku; taking in the forest atmosphere) has been imported into Europe in recent years. Forest bathing involves immersing yourself in an experiential engagement with place and consciously connecting with what's around you. It has been shown to help de-stress and aid health and wellbeing in a natural way.

I do heritage bathing. I like to sit quietly and immerse myself in a heritage setting for an experiential engagement, contemplation, and meditation about time. Who was walking these stones 500 years ago, what was their lifestyle, what were their fears and joys, what were the boundaries of their understanding compared with us today, indeed what was their experience of this very place? We know from our work during the Covid pandemic how historic settings were important places of escape for people (Gallou et al., 2022; Sofaer et al., 2021). Should

we be encouraging heritage bathing where people can immerse themselves in time, place and space; and contemplate past, present and future; the near and far, the global north and south; and think about sustainability and how we impact on the planet – our home? For many people, sitting quietly and meditating in a historic environment is a therapeutic and restorative experience.

How can the research and ideas discussed so far help us change mindsets in respect of the major societal problems we face? I would like to suggest that we need to think more about giving interpretation away. Changing the mindsets of visitors will also require us as interpreters to change the way we think about interpretive provision.

### **Giving interpretation away**

#### **What is the legacy of a heritage experience?**

I sometimes worry that we are creating a dependency relationship with visitors. In other words, visitors expect and need to have the heritage site interpreted for them if they are to get the most out of their visit. Of course, to a degree this is true. But what is the legacy of their visit? Are we building legacy into people's experience? Apart from the guidebook, the branded boxes of biscuits and the digital photographs they have taken on their phones probably never to be looked at again, are we equipping them with something valuable to take away that they can use the next time they visit a heritage site, including those which exist in the everyday world away from labelled heritage sites? Typically, educational activities seek to equip people with skills so that the next time they come across a similar situation they have the competences to decode, make sense of the situation with which they are faced and maybe act. Should we be consciously doing this in interpretation? Of course, visitors will interpret a site whether we provide



interpretation or not; it is in the nature of most people to try and make sense of the world they are encountering. There are many instances where interpreters are needed to provide orientation to help people understand the site and its past, to decode the science, to strip away the jargon, to translate concepts and ideas into a language using images and words that are meaningful to a lay audience. But is there an opportunity for the interpreter to provide visitors with the mindset and a guiding hand to begin to acquire the skills themselves for navigating, understanding and drawing out the meaning and significance of the world around them? After all, we call this practice interpretation, we recognise that there are multiple interpretations of all situations and settings.

### **Questions not answers**

We think of interpreters as providing answers for heritage visitors. I think interpreters should also see one of their strengths as encouraging and showing visitors how to ask questions in order to have a more personal and meaningful engagement with the heritage. It is through asking questions that visitors will start not only to look but also see, not only listen but discuss, thereby building on the learning that comes from social interaction.

### **Community involvement**

There are other ways in which we can give interpretation away. For example, we can involve local communities so they can contribute to the interpretation of their heritage. Indeed, this is happening in many places already. In the Plants Before Time event discussed above, the Communities Team at RHS Wisley worked with a local community group called Enterprise 19 which comprises young adults with disabilities and who are involved in creative projects. They arranged for the group to visit the Glasshouse and view the prehistoric plants such as cycads, tree ferns, conifers and palms. The Communities

Team also created a set of images of the relevant plant species, so the young adults could take inspiration for their drawings. The Enterprise 19 group then used this experience to interpret these prehistoric plants creatively. Their contribution and the perspectives represented in their displays not only made an invaluable addition to the event but is being turned into products which will in turn enable the interpretation to be given away further, as well as earning an income for the charity.

### **Who am I?**

The title of this paper refers to the existential crises we face. There are other existential crises in addition to climate and nature. I am thinking, for example, of the millions of people who migrate, many whom cross borders as refugees. There is nothing more existential than the questions, 'Who am I?' and 'Do I belong in this place?'. I have recently been working with colleagues in Australia examining the impact of museums which position the First World War military engagement at Gallipoli, Turkey, commonly known as the Anzac story or legend, as central to the formation of Australian national identity (Roppola et al., 2021). The Anzac identity, allegedly comprising 15 values, speaks to what it means to be Australian. We conducted in-depth interviews with 93 first-, second- and third-plus-generation Australian visitors to the Australian War Memorial [the National War Museum in Canberra], 37 of whom had recent migrant backgrounds from 20 countries of origin. Our analysis drew on LauraJane Smith's concept of authorised heritage discourse (AHD) as a framework (Smith, 2006). The dominant group positively aligned themselves with the war heritage/national identity AHD. For this group, national identity is reinforced by those qualities typically regarded as being forged out of the ANZAC's experience. A second group questioned the mythological status of the Anzac legacy yet embraced it as important for national identity. Those resisting the war

heritage/national identity AHD challenged the often-assumed links between history, heritage, and identity. They did not feel that to be Australian you had to both have these values and deny the values from your own cultural background.

We cannot assume that visitors will necessarily want to align themselves with the values being promoted by heritage sites, not because they don't respect those values, but they have other values which are no less valid and rooted in their heritage. The Science Museum's 2009 exhibition 'Prove It!' sought to provide the public with evidence for man-made climate change (Rapley, 2018). It asked visitors to send a message of support to the UK negotiating team at the UNFCCC COP15 meeting in Copenhagen. The poll produced unexpected results. Many visitors responded that they did not give their support. Chris Rapley, who was Director of the Science Museum at the time said, "People don't want to be told what to think. They want a framework from which they can begin to make sense of things; they want to be helped in thinking for themselves". As this is true for climate change and how we tackle it, so it is true in respect of how we identify with our own country, and what we may see as our heritage.

### **Ground-up, creative, participative and positive interpretation for change**

Interpreters are in a position to interpret the existential problems society faces but this is more likely to be achieved, as the UNESCO report on The Role of Visitor Centres in UNESCO Designated Sites suggests (UNESCO, 2020), if we work with a variety of stakeholders, including visitors and local communities. If we want to change mindsets, we need ground-up, participative processes in which interpretation techniques are passed onto and used by communities, and which encourage self-critical reflection as well as positive and creative narratives to bring about action and change at

the local/global level. This picks up on two issues discussed earlier: climate communication should be empowering, hopeful and an incentive to action; and learning strategies should reflect the influential social ways in which people learn.

Naomi Klein expresses something of how we need to approach the existential crises we face: "... it involves changing how we live, how our economies function, even the stories we tell about our place on earth. ... We need a vision that doesn't just take on board the catastrophe that is and will be climate change, but it requires a vision in which we collectively use the crisis to leap somewhere that seems, frankly, better than where we are right now" (Klein 2015, 4-7).

Heritage interpretation has a crucial part to play in that vision.

### **Acknowledgements**

Many teams were responsible for the Plants Before Time event at RHS Wisley including Interpretation, Events, Curatorial, Science (e.g., Botany) and Communities, as well as some external contractors (e.g., Illuminate, AG Marketing). I would like to thank particularly Rachel Burgess and Sara Draycott from the RHS Wisley Interpretation Team for their ongoing creativity, discussion and support, and the volunteers who assist with our evaluation work.

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## Heritage interpretation as a meaning-making process

### Sujeong Lee (South Korea)

Sujeong Lee is Head of Research Office, International Centre for the Interpretation and Presentation of World Heritage Sites (WHIPIC). After receiving a PhD in Conservation Studies in the UK, she worked as a research staff member in the Cultural Heritage Administration (CHA) of South Korea, revising heritage law and drafting value-based conservation principles. She leads WHIPIC's research on definition, principle, policy and strategy of interpretation and presentation, adopting an inclusive and community-based approach. She and her research team are devoted to work with different communities and listen to diverse voices for setting out viable interpretation principles.

#### Abstract

"Heritage Interpretation is a meaning-making process through communication, participation and experience. It increases understanding and promotes connections between people and heritage places" (WHIPIC 2022a, 44). The meaning-making process can confirm that heritage for all is an essential resource for sustainable development by expanding our activities beyond conservation and management, expert-centred decision making, site visits and tours, to negotiate conflicting perspectives, share our untold memories, and enrich our lives. What to interpret lies at the value of heritage and the way how to interpret depends on our ability to communicate with different communities. Based on WHIPIC's new definition of heritage interpretation, this presentation introduces WHIPIC's recent, on-going and future research for facilitating the meaning-making process.

#### Introduction

Every heritage has different stories to tell. However, not all stories have a chance to be told. In many cases, we are given a chance to remember only fragments of full history for the next generation to inherit. The Hashima Coal Mine ('Battleship Island'), which was nominated as a World Heritage Site in 2015 as one of the serial nominated sites under the name of 'Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution', has failed to recognise the full meaning of the site in the process of nomination by limiting 'whose story' and 'time'. It still remains as the member state's responsibility to recognise different narratives in the process of management (Figure 1).

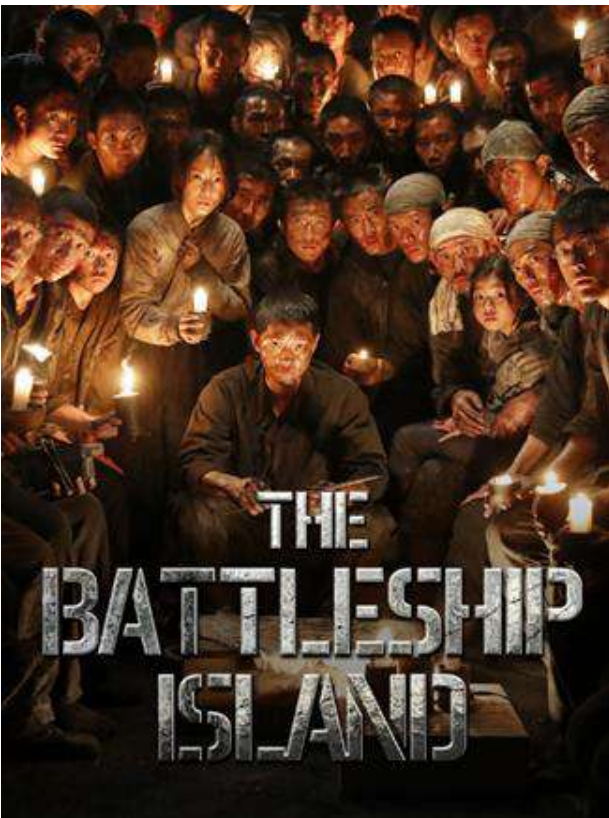


Figure 1. View of Hashima Coal Mine (Battleship Island)

Gunkanjima Digital Museum and onsite tour guides explain about the people who lived in a luxurious house during the site's most flourishing time. It tells the story of the people who enjoyed the life of colour TV during the 1980s, when only a rich family could afford to buy colour televisions (Figure 2). The movie, 'The Battleship Island', speaks about the people who lived during coarse wartimes of history, the people who disappeared without their names but their anger has been imprinted to their grandson's generation (Figure 3). Their story will be forgotten and only a limited part of our lives and memories will be remembered.



**Figure 2. Family room in the 1980s of a house in Hashima Coal Mine**



**Figure 3. Movie poster of the lives in Hashima Coal Mine**

Great Zimbabwe (Figure 4), one of the World Heritage Sites in Africa, has different narratives waiting to be told. During the colonial era and Rhodesia (1888-1964) the significance of the site was written by colonial authority and the meanings to local communities have been ignored. Its meaning before independence is lost in the way the site is now managed, and this

has been heavily contested by local communities who claim to hold the rights of the site.



**Figure 4. View of Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site**

Physically, a place cannot return to the time of the past, but our memory, our stories and narratives can take us to the past and help us to broaden our perspectives to understand our life and history (WHIPIC 2023). Then what time should we tell? Whose story can we – or should we – speak? What information do we need to share and how should that information be arranged or presented? To provoke discussion on the question, this presentation introduces WHIPIC’s research topics on ‘What to interpret, by who and for who to interpret, and how to interpret’.

**A new definition of ‘heritage interpretation’**  
WHIPIC has introduced a new definition of ‘heritage interpretation’ through the two-year project from 2022 to 2023 as follows.

“Heritage interpretation is a meaning-making process through communication, participation and experience. It increases understanding and promoting connections between people and heritage places. In the decision-making process of what is interpreted and how, it premises heritage interpretation based on an ethical and participatory approach and a consideration of

the full range of heritage values including those of outstanding universal value (OUV) and community-held values.” (WHIPIC 2022, 44)

Our literature review suggests that the existing definition highlighted its educational role, as a process of communication, and occasionally as contributing to the formation of public discourse (WHIPIC 2022, 21). Obviously, heritage interpretation serves educational and communicative functions. However, the multi-layered, complex politics of heritage and its broader context has been more stressed in recent discussions. The notion of heritage interpretation has evolved into a process of communication that is different from a unidirectional educational act (WHIPIC 2022, 27-28). In addition, interpretation as a meaning-making process has been more recognised in recent practice. Therefore, the new definition defines heritage interpretation as a meaning-making process that recognises its educational role and reflects recent understanding of heritage as a social process of communication, participation, and experience: the individual and communal process of communication between heritage, different peoples, and different narratives; individual or institutional participation in the process of meaning-making and heritage management, and intellectual and emotional experiences of what heritage tell us.

### **The role of heritage interpretation and community**

Heritage interpretation as a process is all about the relationships between place and people. Since the late 1990s, heritage interpretation has become a part of interdisciplinary work for educational attainment closely connected to personal experiences in heritage places (Stewart and Kirby 1998, 30). The new definition of heritage interpretation as a meaning-making process intends to strengthen the connection between heritage places and people. The dynamics between place and people have been

overlooked until interpretation has become important. In many cases, the value-based approach has been understood as caring for only the well-being of heritage, or material aspects of heritage. However, values change with time when they are assessed by the people who appreciate them. Thus, the real value-based approach is to think of who values a place, how and why people would like to remember, and what meaning and memory they want to deliver to the next generations in the heritage interpretation process. Our mission is to conserve the value of heritage by sustaining tangible and intangible aspects to manifest the value, yet the value we will conserve would be the one that people of past generations intended to express as well as the one that we appreciate in contemporary society.

The World Heritage Convention emphasises the role of heritage and the role of heritage interpretation. Article 5 and Article 27 encourage each country to give cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community and take appropriate means, such as educational and information programmes, to strengthen appreciation for and respect of the cultural and natural heritage. The World Heritage Convention Operational Guidelines recommend including interpretation and presentation in the nomination dossier. They recommend describing the inclusive facilities available on site for visitors and how the facilities and services will provide an effective and inclusive presentation of the property to meet the needs of visitors (Annex 5).

However, the role of interpretation goes beyond what is described in the World Heritage Convention and its Operational Guidelines. It should and can help with how people can connect to heritage places so that it can give heritage a function in the life of the community. Once the connection between heritage and community is increased, the community would

actively participate in the protection and management, both benefiting the community and also being benefitted by the community. Then the community can play an important role as a right-holder and beneficiary in the heritage process.

The role of interpretation in achieving sustainable development goals is greater than we expected. Heritage interpretation is any approach that seeks to provide people with meaningful experiences related to heritage, where they can gain greater understanding of and connections to that heritage (Court 2022, 11). When heritage interpretation is enacted as a deliberate and planned practice based on learning, communication, psychology, and behaviour theories, it can support a change in a person's attitudes, fostering an increased appreciation of heritage (Court 2022, 12). Such appreciation can affect the behavioural changes to support heritage use and conservation for future generations. The process of negotiating different perspectives and narratives for the sites of memory shows that it can bring out a positive social impact on related people by expanding their knowledge and contribute to reducing the gap between different perspectives in some cases.

Through the meaning-making process, the community can; 1. Contribute to the significance of heritage places by ascribing more values and by being part of the heritage; 2. Participate in decision-making in the management of heritage places; 3. Be beneficiaries of a heritage place and its conservation. Participation of the community can allow diverse perspectives to be told and the wholistic approach becomes possible. Heritage communities, in that regard, should no longer be recognised as a passive listener or audience to learn about values.

WHIPIC's recent research on the site of memory shows that the process of contesting and

negotiating different narratives and perspectives can contribute to expanding our understanding of the meaning of a heritage place (WHIPIC 2023). In order for us to appreciate a heritage place and learn we need to allow an opportunity for all untold stories to be told. Recognising the role of communities and interpretation, WHIPIC has a people-centred approach at the heart of all our research, ensuring consideration is given to who and for whom the heritage is being interpreted. A wholistic approach to including all different narratives, values, and stories is also at the basis of WHIPIC's research.

### **The question of what to interpret: Values and attributes**

Narratives and stories play an important role in meaning-making. They are the ingredients for meaning-making and the outcome of the process (Figure 5). Values and attributes are direct sources to constructing the meaning of a heritage place. The World Heritage System, in particular, introduced 'attributes' in relation to Outstanding Universal Value in the 2021 Operational Guidelines. Heritage value is abstract, invisible, subjective, and difficult to comprehend. Values are affected by different people and changed with different times and perspective. *Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context* defines attribute as "elements of a heritage place which convey its heritage/conservation values and enable an understanding of those values" (UNESCO 2022, 56). It can be "physical qualities, material fabric as well as intangible aspects such as processes, social arrangements or cultural practices, associations and relationships which are reflected in physical elements of the property". It means that value is manifested and conveyed through attributes, which are both tangible and intangible aspects of the place and, therefore, identifying attributes is the essential process in understanding the value and meaning of the place.

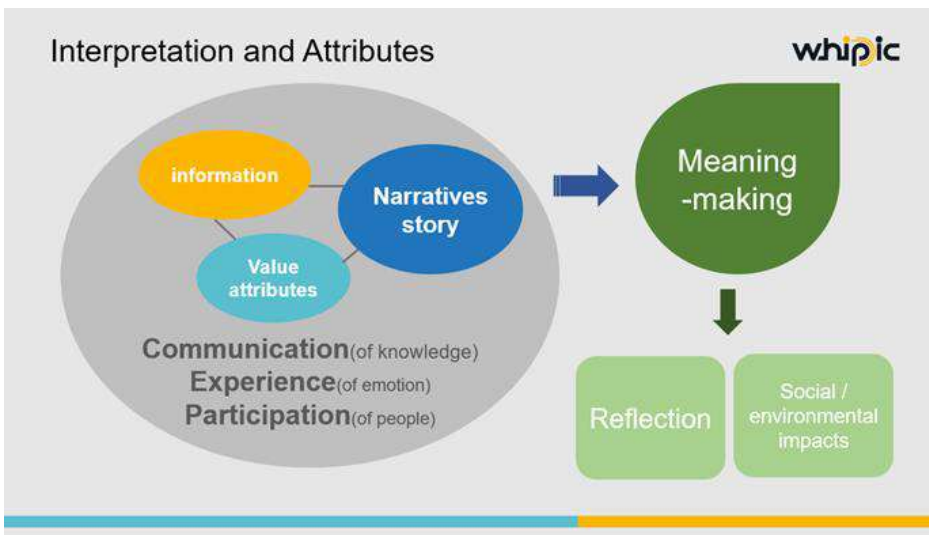


Figure 5. Narratives, stories, values and attributes in the meaning-making process

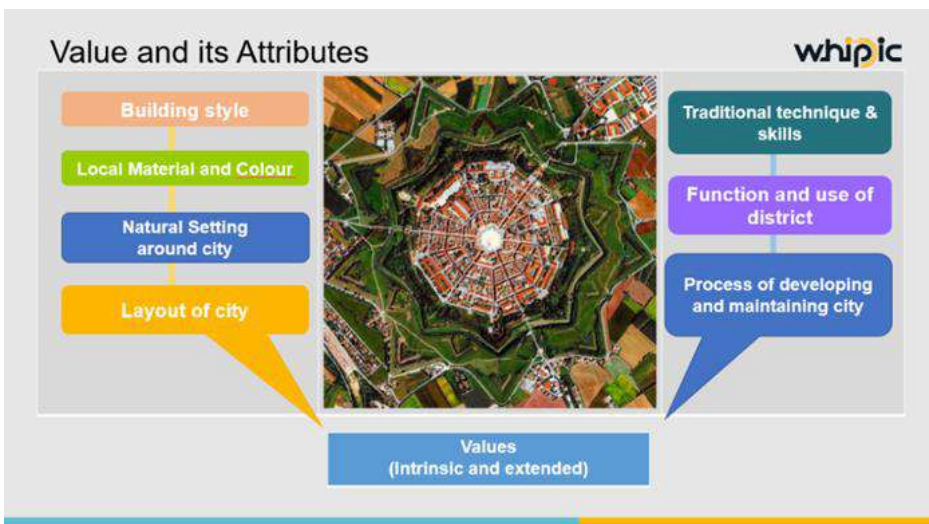


Figure 6. Example attributes of a historic city

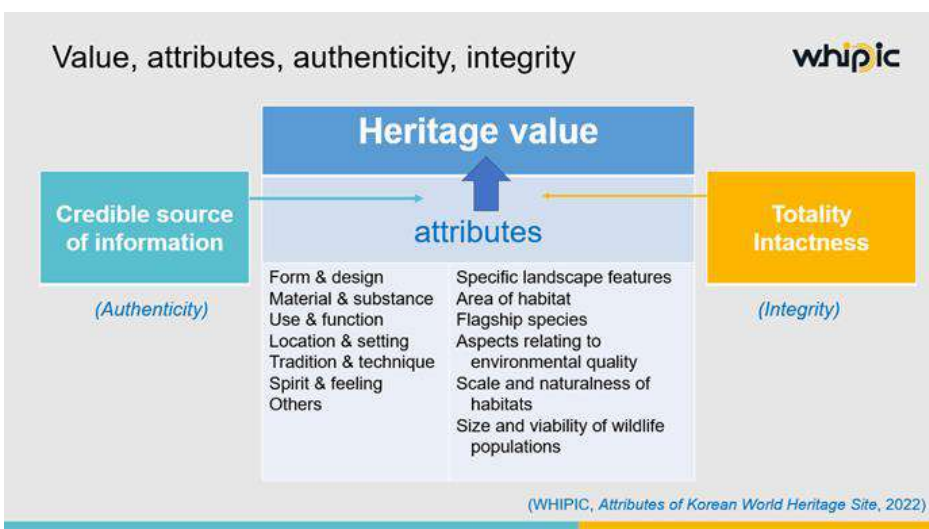


Figure 7. Relationship between value, attributes, authenticity and integrity



The value of a historic city, for example, is expressed by building style, local materials and colour, its natural setting within the city, historical and visible layout in its streets, green and open spaces and functions, traditional techniques used for its construction, traditional practices and customs that accumulated over time (Figure 6).

The five-year (2022-2026) research project of WHIPIC aims to define the relationship between value, attribute, authenticity, and integrity (Figure 7) and develop a methodology of identifying attributes so that we can clearly understand the value of heritage using it in a meaning-making process. By understanding the way that attributes of heritage express the value of heritage and how it affects the change of the value, our research will clarify the way that meaning is constructed and changed in the process of heritage interpretation.

### **Contemplating how to interpret: Principle and guidelines**

At the theoretical and practical level, the heritage field has been faced with several issues to tackle in the future nomination and management of World Heritage Sites. Firstly, there has been artificial division between nature and culture. Nature and culture are not two but one entity. All the environment that we live in contains both natural and cultural aspects. Therefore, we can only give the real meaning of heritage when we understand it as one entity which is impossible to separate. Secondly, there is another artificial division between tangible and intangible heritage. The UNESCO convention and the system of protection for the tangible and intangible heritage are separated. A place and a ritual that happens in the place should not be separated. The value of religious places, for example, has been manifested through both tangible aspects, such as forms and layout of buildings, and intangible aspects such as theology, spirit, techniques, thoughts

and traditions. This artificial separation between nature and culture and tangible and intangible heritage is a big obstacle to understand the meaning of heritage. Thirdly, we have overlooked the community's role, leading to the lack of their communication, participation and experience.

Along with the question of who interprets and what to interpret, WHIPIC's key research project is to examine how to interpret. The two-year project from 2024 to 2025 will collaborate with advisory bodies for the World Heritage Convention such as ICOMOS, ICCROM and IUCN, associations for interpretation such as Interpret Europe, and experts who participated in drafting the Ename Charter in 2008. The collaboration will produce a set of principles for heritage interpretation and finalise these principles after a consultation process with related institutes and experts in 2025. The new principles of heritage interpretation aim to guide us in how and what to communicate and experience, as well as how to participate in the meaning-making process. It will guide us in 'how to think' and 'for whom' rather than in 'what to think'. This project aims to improve our knowledge and ability to understand resilience, forgiveness, diversity, and peace-building through heritage.

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## About WHIPIC

The International Centre for Heritage Interpretation and Presentation of World Heritage (WHIPIC) was officially inaugurated in 2022 as UNESCO's category 2 centre under the auspices of UNESCO. The centre was established to contribute to raising awareness of and enhancing access to World Heritage properties through research activities and global capacity-building efforts in World Heritage Interpretation and presentation. WHIPIC is the only UNESCO centre to focus on interpretation and presentation, which aims to promote interpretation and presentation. The scope of their work is not limited to UNESCO World Heritage Sites but also extends to all heritage places.

The main mandate of WHIPIC is to conduct research on the principles and guidance of heritage interpretation, develop and provide capacity-building programmes and establish an information sharing platform.

WHIPIC's research is divided into four pillars:

1. Theory research;
2. Policy research;
3. Thematic research;
4. Regional research.

Our research aims to answer the questions, 'who should interpret?', 'for whom should we interpret?', 'what to interpret?', and 'how to interpret?'.

All WHIPIC's publications can be downloaded from the following website:

<https://www.unesco-whipic.org/reports>

# iecon conclusions

## Conference wrap-up

### Barbara Gołębiowska (Poland)

It is very difficult to fit three days of keynote speeches, meetings, talks, presentations, experiences, study visits, as well as sun, wind, sea, mountains and delicious food into five minutes. Yesterday, I spoke to some of you and asked about your reflections, because I did not want to share only my personal impression. Thank you everyone who was willing to share your thoughts with me. It turned out that in many areas they coincided with each other, but also with my own reflections.

It's impossible to say everything, so I decided that I would highlight the possible answers for two crucial opening questions Helena posed on the first day of the conference.

Those questions related to the conference main theme, Sustainability: Challenging mindsets through heritage interpretation.

The first was: **Are we ready to provide challenges that reach beyond learning about facts and past times?** After those three days I think I could say - yes, as an interpretive community we are almost ready to challenge our mindsets and give interpretation away to the people. We no longer see ourselves as superstars of interpretation, but rather as those who facilitate people's relation with heritage, ask inspiring questions and support community building around heritage sites. This was incredibly inspiringly discussed by David Uzzell, emphasising that we should strive for 'interpretation for change', not scaring people with visions of disaster, but giving them space for their own thoughts and providing hope for creating a better place on Earth than we have

right now. This resonated with the thoughts shared by Sujeong Lee, defining interpretation as a meaning-making process that happens between people and place, and Špela Spanžel, emphasising that interpretation connects the past with the present to lay the foundations for the future. Lluís Bonet, in turn, challenged our mindsets with the question how, as interpreters, can we break 'the silos of interest' promoted by social media and AI to establish dialogue between different social groups? All of these questions, ideas and thoughts were like 'opening the windows' of heritage interpretation to other fields, professions, networks and – last but not least – our societies and potential participants.

During those three days, we also discussed how to translate theory into practice and how to respond to the challenges of a difficult modern age through interpretation, in numerous presentations and workshops. In the places we visited during our study visits, we had the opportunity to experience the moving beauty of Slovenia and hospitality of our hosts, as well as to enjoy some wonderful interpretations of Slovenia's heritage.

But a conference is not just about lectures, workshops and presentations. It's also about countless meetings, conversations over coffee and wine, laughing together and simply sitting close to each other and experiencing friendship. I think the Interpret Europe conferences are really special in this context, which is why many of us look forward to them all year round. We come from different parts of Europe and even further, from countries with different languages and traditions. The history of our continent is not a fairy tale, so our grandparents sometimes stood on two sides of barricades, trenches, borders and iron curtains. But now we are here together - the founders of Interpret Europe as well as those who have only joined our conference this year, natural and cultural

heritage interpreters, practitioners and specialists from academia. We draw strength from diversity and form a real, living community, based on passion, curiosity about the world, but at the same time - shared values. Although we don't always agree with each other, we are after all looking in the same direction. Almost all of you told me about this experience of friendship and support, the wonderful atmosphere as well as the uniqueness of the energy that was created among us. How much we need such places and communities in our lives in these difficult times! We can really be proud of this gem of our interpretive community and appreciate what we achieved.

The second question Helena asked at the beginning of our conference was: **Are we in any way responsible for helping people find meaning and direction in this complex world?** Looking for the answer, let me go back to our study visit to Trieste, Italy. We visited the extraordinary museum of the Bora wind, which has influenced the nature and culture of the region for millennia. Similarly, in the huge Skocjzan caves, we experienced a transcendent sense of entering into the endless time that has shaped this place. Time and wind are phenomena that cannot be seen, but can be experienced by seeing their effects. Similarly, the passion of the interpreter, but also the values that are close to them, are expressed in action - and it is through action that we can have a real impact on the people and the world around us. Our heritage has not been entrusted to us only to contemplate it in solitude. I firmly believe that being part of this community and working with heritage is a privilege, but also a task - to serve our common better future. In this context, even 'giving interpretation back to the people', as Patrick Lehnés said, we could not give up responsibility and abandon the active role, precisely by 'challenging mindsets', clichés and stereotypes, that are other kinds of 'iron curtains' in the contemporary world.

Of course, we can ask: **Who are we and what we can do as 'normal' people in the face of wars, conflicts, hunger, poverty, gender inequality and climate change?** We do not have the power to solve all these problems, which sometimes pushes us into a sense of helplessness and frustration. However, in this situation, there is nothing more important than maintaining a sense of self-agency, and hope that we are not completely powerless.

We began our conference with the poems connected with stones. Let me finish with a quote from the Polish poet and Noble prize winner Czesław Miłosz from his 'Treatise on morals', which also features stones. Miłosz wrote it in the tragic times of Poland's enslavement by the USSR after World War 2, and his poem was an attempt to answer the questions of how to survive in a fearful reality, not to succumb to indoctrination, to preserve one's own judgement and not to give in to despair and to save values and humanity. Times have changed, but the message of the poem remains surprisingly relevant today.

#### **Czesław Miłosz 'Traktat moralny'**

Nie jesteś jednak tak bezwolny,  
A choćbyś był jak kamień polny,  
Lawina bieg od tego zmienia,  
Po jakich toczy się kamieniach.  
I, jak zwykł mawiać już ktoś inny,  
Możesz, więc wpłynąć na bieg lawiny.  
Łagódź jej dzikość, okrucieństwo,  
Do tego też potrzebne męstwo.

#### **Czesław Miłosz 'Treatise on Morals'**

You're not as numbed as you think,  
And even if you're like a pebble on the ground,  
Together with many other pebbles  
You can change the course of an avalanche.  
And, as someone else used to say,  
If you can change its course, then do so.  
Blunt its ferocity and savagery;  
That also requires courage.

## References

Polish text and translation of the excerpts from 'Treatise on Morality' by Czesław Miłosz, done by Joanna Dudek (based on the translation of R.E. Pypłacz), taken from the article: J. Dudek, Miłosz and Conrad in the 'Treatise on Morality', *Yearbook of Conrad Studies* (Poland), Vol. 7 (2012), pp. 125-158, available online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26424174>

## Full papers

### Towards a European heritage interpretation curriculum

#### Darko Babic (Croatia)

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#### Abstract

After longer planning, starting in 2023, Erasmus+ project cooperation between University of Gothenburg (SE), Instituto Andaluz del Patrimonio Histórico (ES), University of Zagreb (HR), University of Freiburg (DE), Mapa de Ideas (PT), Asociación de Interpretación del

Patrimonio (ES) and On Projects (ES) was launched. The main goal of this Erasmus+ project (titled 'Towards a European Heritage Interpretation Curriculum') is the creation of a uniform (respecting differences by regions and all other peculiarities at the European level) academic curriculum (Master's graduate level) which could/should be an example of how, and in what way, higher education in the field of heritage interpretation should be developed in Europe. In the paper we argue toward the importance of heritage interpretation, especially around recognising it as a defined profession, which could be reached primarily through acknowledgement and entering into formal education at university level.

#### Keywords

heritage, heritage interpretation, university education, training, profession

#### Introduction

What is heritage interpretation? And who is professionalising heritage interpretation? We already have a recognised profession of tourist guides. Is heritage interpretation the same or something new and different? While these questions sound almost unnecessary and the answers self-explanatory for people involved in heritage interpretation practices and theories, many others, including some who work in heritage fields, cannot offer proper, or desirable answers.

After a long planning period, starting in 2021, a collaboration began between the following organisations:

- University of Gothenburg (Sweden)
- Instituto Andaluz del Patrimonio Histórico (Spain)
- University of Zagreb (Croatia)

- University of Freiburg (Germany)
- Mapa de Ideas (Portugal)
- Asociación de Interpretación del Patrimonio (Spain)
- On Projects (Spain)

These institutions joined forces to address some questions under the platform of Erasmus+ project cooperation. The main goal of the Erasmus+ project, Towards a European Heritage Interpretation Curriculum, is creation of a uniform/ exchangeable academic curriculum (at MA/MSc graduate level), respecting differences by regions and all other peculiarities at the European level. It could and should be an example of how, and in what way, higher education in the field of heritage interpretation must be developed in Europe. The project goals argue toward the importance of heritage interpretation, and openly share its results especially around recognising desirable education for heritage interpreters as a defined profession. The Consortium considers that the latter point could be reached primarily through wider acknowledgement, a higher level of scientific production (scientific articles, books, working materials, etc), and by entering heritage interpretation into formal education at university level, especially Master's level.

To explain it simply, no one could be a doctor without a university degree, no one could be an advocate/lawyer without a university degree (and so on), but somehow anyone could act as a heritage interpreter without any degree. In this paper we question whether this is the correct approach. Does it have a sustainable and desirable future? Our prime interest is to discuss why and how some professions do reach a desirable status to be recognised internationally, or at least nationally, while others are less successful in this recognition. We discuss heritage interpretation as a unique heritage field and place particular focus on heritage interpreters and the future of this profession.

### **Where does heritage interpretation belong?**

In his book, *Interpreting Our Heritage* (Tilden 1977), Freeman Tilden, an American writer and endless lover of natural heritage, set some heritage interpretation standards, which are still valid today. However, over the last decades we have been exposed toward the need of more interdisciplinary scientific work, and/or multidisciplinary approaches which could offer better solutions compared to those that already exist, or those produced only within the single field of study. If we look at the case of heritage interpretation, we might easily conclude that it stands on a crossroad. On one side the heritage interpretation does cross many scientific disciplines (so it fits the 21st Century demand 'science meets practice', and inter/multi-disciplinarily stresses perfectly), while on another level it is not (in a great majority of cases, by checking formal regulations, laws, by-laws etc.) a recognised scientific discipline. Nor is heritage interpretation (from an academic work, all the way to tourist guides, or museum or park guides) recognised as a profession. While there are some exceptions, particularly within Europe, globally terms such as 'museum pedagogue' or 'museum mediator' within the cultural sector or 'ranger' within a natural heritage or park setting are more commonly understood than 'heritage interpreter'. This global perspective underscores the need for a unified recognition of heritage interpretation as a profession and scientific discipline. However, the main reason for the limited recognition is grounded simply in a lack of university programmes and qualifications.

Let us look at how the great majority of formal higher education programmes operate (including Bachelors, Master's or Doctoral levels). Many of them (still) have an 'anchor' in one of the already recognised scientific disciplines. Even when diverse Bachelors, Master's or Doctoral programmes are branded as inter/multi-disciplinary they still have a starting point within a specific scientific field, sometimes not necessarily a single one but two

or three of them. In the case of heritage interpretation, it might come from the diverse fields of humanities and social sciences or indeed natural sciences as well as some others too. Within humanities for example, the starting point might be history, history of arts, anthropology/ethnology. Similarly, in the diverse social or natural sciences sub-fields, heritage issues, and accordingly heritage interpretation, might appear as not only relevant cross-boundary (inter/multi) to the field of study, but could be considered to be the crucial (or primary) element.

Higher education – identified as post-secondary education, i.e. third-level or tertiary education – is by definition an optional final stage of formal learning that occurs after completion of secondary education. This third-level education consists of academic programmes from universities, colleges and polytechnics that offer formal degrees beyond high school or secondary school education. How does heritage interpretation stand within this, today and historically? We could track some ideas of activities which today we recognise as heritage interpretation all the way back to the Roman Empire or even earlier. David C. Harvey, in his influential article, 'Heritage pasts and heritage presents: Temporality, meaning and the scope of heritage studies' (2001, 323), says, "Heritage has always been with us and has always been produced by people according to their contemporary concerns and experiences.

Consequently, we should explore the history of heritage, not starting at an arbitrary date like 1882, but by producing a context-rich account of heritage as a process or a human condition rather than as a single movement or personal project".

Furthermore, Peter Howard, in the book, 'Heritage: Management, Interpretation, Identity' (2003), discusses the idea that heritage can actually be whatever we desire it to be, and that an existence of the desire is crucial in any

heritage-related process: "... things actually inherited do not become heritage until they are recognised as such. Identification is all" (Howard 2003, 6).

While the first quotation reminds us of the importance of the time as well as the context, the second is closer to the topic we are discussing here. Heritage exists only after recognition and identification, which is a sort of interpretation of heritage (basically whether it is, or is not, heritage, and why). While 'interpretation of heritage' is not the same thing as what we understand by 'heritage interpretation', the two terms are fully interdependent. Suppose that someone is not aware how heritage is created/constructed and how it could be extinguished or deconstructed. In this case, they will have more challenges understanding and researching the complex and deeper meanings that heritage is able to transmit. By saying this, we do not mean to undermine the work of numerous heritage interpreters (tourist guides, museum people, park guides) who are doing their job in the field extremely well. Our point is that heritage interpretation is a much more complex field of study than how it is often presented.

To make a simple comparison: if we want to broadcast a concert of classical music on radio or TV, the company responsible needs not only to have an educated musicologist who knows the structure of compositions, but also a person who is a technician, an expert who knows where to put different types of microphones to record the sound of each musician to provide the same level of quality for the radio/TV listeners as that enjoyed in the performance in the concert hall.

The very same applies to heritage interpretation/interpreters: the knowledge, skills and competencies needed are rooted equally in heritage-related studies (including theory and practices of heritage), heritage interpretation itself, and a knowledge of the elements (phenomena) they are addressing (e.g. from



archaeology, ethnography, urbanism, gender issues, natural history etc. - this list is endless). These joint skills is the main reason why tertiary education for heritage interpretation is much more complex and more demanding to organise (the same is valid for heritage studies, and/or museology<sup>1</sup> too). It is, from the beginning, an interdisciplinary process. While an interdisciplinary approach has been around for decades, within any over-standardised and prescribed context (which academia/universities often are), it is more challenging to make breakthroughs. In other words, organising an appropriate university-accredited programme is more demanding.

On the other hand, as already explained, heritage interpretation is an interdisciplinary field of study so it is not so surprising that starting initiatives for its formal tertiary education do pop-up (although not as often as we might wish) in the spectrum of researchers in other well-established fields, such as (for example) pedagogy, history, geography, ethnology or diverse natural sciences, as well as the more recently established fields of museology, heritage studies, or environmental studies. This diversity is not a wonder, and in fact fully reflects the importance and attractiveness of heritage interpretation in today's world.

Taking these facts into account, along with our task to look at formal, academic university-based heritage interpretation programmes/training in Europe, we find several challenging issues:

- Heritage interpretation, as a recognised field of study (which is usually a pre-requisite for offering university-based programmes) is not 'an isolated island'. It is heavily interconnected with the idea of heritage per se as well as many other scientific disciplines;
- As long as heritage interpretation remains un-recognised as a (sub-)scientific discipline

within academia, it may struggle to find a place in university programmes at Bachelor, Master's (ideal option) or Doctoral level. However, we should not underestimate its potential to become a strong academic discipline;

- The best way to include heritage interpretation within tertiary education (in the majority of cases) is to incorporate it with existing heritage studies university programmes. Otherwise it could be ignored or over-dominated by other well-established disciplines/programmes.

### **When and how do any field of study become recognised?**

Is heritage interpretation an isolated island? An unwanted baby (if we may use this phrase)? It certainly is not! Many other well-established scientific disciplines went through the same process before gaining full recognition. They grabbed part of this or that from other scientific disciplines before reaching the critical quantity of seminal scientific papers/works necessary to defend original ideas, and the right to be established and (more importantly) recognised.

Heritage interpretation is building its corpus, which we applaud, but it needs some extra time to reach the tipping point. Benchmarking is a useful practice for evaluating us versus similar others, and/or with a standard (if a standard is set). This tool comes from an economy discipline, foremost marketing. It is usually applied to a commercial sector where measuring products, services and processes against companies/organisations that are known to be leaders in one or more aspects. The same practice can be applied to any (human related) activity. As we are discussing the higher (or lesser) importance of the inclusion of heritage interpretation within a formal university education in Europe, we might look at the long

experiences of museology concerning formal, tertiary education in heritage interpretation.

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<sup>1</sup> The next chapter gives a short overview on the similarities with museology and what could be learned from

path that museology/museum studies took to become a recognised profession and a field of study in which European universities (and others around the world) started to offer desirable study programmes for students.

Museology/museum studies<sup>2</sup>, as far as we can track, started shyly in the late 18th century through the writing of Emanuel Mendes da Costa in his book *Elements of Conchology* published in 1776 in which he makes reference to ‘museographers’<sup>3</sup>. It was developed much more in the *Zeitschrift für Museologie und Antiquitätenkunde* (the Journal of Museology and Antique Studies) which was first published in Dresden, Germany in 1878<sup>4</sup> by Johann Georg Theodor Graesse. Since then, some formal education on museology/museum studies has been organised, e.g. at the University in Brno in 1921 by Jaroslav Helfert<sup>5</sup>, and at the École du Louvre in Paris, which in 1927 culminated in the innovative creation of the Chair of Museology. Still, it took decades (almost a century) from the first signs of requirement for education before it was widely argued that an academic programme(s) within the field of museology/museum studies was needed.

As one illustration of how this development came about we might use part of a speech delivered by the influential professor I. Maroević (Maroević 2004, 125), “When in 1965 the 7th General Conference of ICOM<sup>6</sup> in New York concluded that theoretical museology should be developed at the universities<sup>7</sup>, the education of museum specialists as an integral part of the creation of the profession obtained

international backing. The only problem is in the fact that the definition of theoretical museology was imprecise, the result being its different development in different countries.

If we can understand this today as a metaphor identifying a broad museological approach that through the training of new experts will also enable the development and advancement of museum work in a given time and space, then we will be able, with this kind of interpretation of the word ‘theoretical’, to understand the phrase ‘a theoretical approach’ [...] as the academic museological framework within which museological practice is developing. It is only with this kind of approach that we will be capable of managing the changes that are come upon and that are integrated in museum practice, quite frequently changing both the concept and the structure of the museum”<sup>8</sup>.

It is crucial to recognise that the journey towards the recognition and importance of university-based museology/museum studies education for the profession's development spanned a century. The establishment of academic programmes in museology/museum studies, which began in the last two to three decades of the 20th century, marked a significant turning point. But it was only after the 1990s that accredited university-based museology/museum studies programmes proliferated across the globe, spanning all continents.

### **Valuable lessons for heritage interpretation**

What can all this teach us regarding heritage interpretation? In the first instance, since we are

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<sup>2</sup> Skipping deliberately here the first ideas of a museum = the Mouseion of Alexandria or even more earlier forms.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/museum-cultural-institution> (10.01.2024)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.museon.uni-freiburg.de/museon-forscht-2016-tagungspublikation/museon-forscht-2016-tagungspublikation-museology-museum-studies-or-heritage-studies-international-perspectives-on-the-study-of-museum-work> (09.01.2024)

<sup>5</sup> See: Dolak, J. (2007) ‘Czech and Slovak museology, current status and the future of this branch of science’ *Nordisk museologi* 2007 (2), 99-106.

<sup>6</sup> ICOM stands for the International Council of Museums, established in 1946, with headquarters in Paris, France.

<sup>7</sup> Maroević 2004, 125, referring to Maroević 1998, 83.

<sup>8</sup> Maroević 2004, 125. This quote first appeared in a paper published by Maroević in *ICOFOM Study Series/ISS* 33a (2001), 63-68 (in English).

discussing an academic sector and the formal tertiary training provision in Europe, it seems obvious to state that the university sector does not change as quickly as we (sometimes) might like. It takes time and some patience is needed. As we previously indirectly presented, the overall historical development of heritage interpretation is like that of museology/museum studies. Both started a long time ago but without a clear description of what their activities are, what their methodologies are, and without an integrated body of knowledge and accumulated experiences. Museology started to formulate those in the late 19th century and as a consequence its first academic course and/or programmes appeared in the early 20th century at the Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic in 1921 and the École du Louvre, Paris, France in 1927.

Over time, others started to grow, firstly in Europe<sup>9</sup>, and then in other parts of the world. Today, one of the continuing and most influential museum studies/museology academic programmes started in 1966 (at the University of Leicester, UK). This is an important programme since it created a difference by no longer placing an emphasis on the objects represented in diverse museum collections and their related scientific fields (as archaeology, art history, ethnology, history, natural history, diverse technical sciences and so on), but insisting on the theory and the practice of museum work<sup>10</sup> as being at the core of museum studies.

More and more museum studies/museology university programmes became established,

especially in the last 40 years, following the ideas introduced by the University of Leicester. The initial motivations of researchers who started museum studies/museology programmes at their own universities are extremely diverse. That is to say they are often connected to the core scientific disciplines<sup>11</sup> reflected in a museum context where researchers and lecturers are seeking new approaches, sometimes within an overarching scientific field (likewise within information/communication sciences or geography, a management field or conservation or tourism studies). It is worth mentioning here that in some countries (including Brazil and Japan), museum curators are required by law to graduate in museology before they can work in a museum.

Let us compare this situation in museology/museum studies with heritage interpretation. The body of knowledge and experiences on heritage interpretation started to develop after the seminal book by F. Tilden<sup>12</sup> which was published initially in 1957, but which only gained significant international echo after its third edition was published in 1977. Not much more was published on heritage interpretation before the 1990s but then significantly more research and literature appeared in the 21st century when articles, books, conference proceedings and other materials in this field of study started to be more commonly available and at people's disposal, thus encouraging additional authors to make their own contributions. We hardly need to state (as far as the profession and its recognition is at stake) that we should be counting foremost on

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/museum-cultural-institution/Management#ref608991> (10.01.2024)

<sup>10</sup> See: Lewis, G. (1987) 'Museum, profession and University: museum studies at Leicester' *Museum* 1987 (156 / Vol XXXIX, n° 4), 255-258. & Nutting, R. and J. Morris (2016) 'The origin of the School of Museum Studies at the

University of Leicester' *Museologica Brunensia* 2016 (vol. 5, iss. 1) 62-67.

<sup>11</sup> Core scientific disciplines are those which are directly connected with museums' collections (archaeology, art history, ethnology, history, natural history, diverse technical sciences etc.)

<sup>12</sup> *Interpreting Our Heritage*

those which go beyond only the practical aspects of heritage interpretation work. The last is by far a critical moment where universities and their associated researchers will start to look for new options. This is a route to possible new stream(s) of development, depending on the quality and quantity of the accumulated body of knowledge within the newly formed field. And after recognising it (as realistic) to check for opportunities to argue for introducing (yet another) tertiary education level programme.

The existing situation on a European level, but also on a global level, is that university/academia 'study programme markets' do represent a starting point, or the potential for heritage interpretation to become an academic discipline which will (sooner or later) be reflected in increased offers and demands among university programmes in Europe and beyond. This development will not necessarily happen tomorrow. As was the case with museology/museum studies, it will take some time to see it as important and desirable (although certainly less time than these things took in the past).

The situation on developing museology/museum studies and heritage interpretation (within heritage studies, or as a separate university programme) is quite similar, even though they are not happening at the same time in our history. The last is in favour of heritage interpretation to make it quicker. In a similar way to how the interests on research within museology/museum studies came from diverse fields, the researchers who could contribute to establishing heritage studies have a stronger leaning toward the theoretical (the most important) side, as well as covering the practical side too. We need to lift both up, and to make heritage interpretation attractive to a new generation of researchers (coming from diverse fields, directly or indirectly addressing heritage), who will be more and more fascinated

by ideas of heritage interpretation and the benefits it might bring to society and sustainable development.

Heritage interpretation does have a chance to become relevant much more quickly (due to, for example, agendas of green policies) and as such can be more often addressed by a diversity of scientists coming from pedagogy, environmental issues, museology or any other field which we previously marked as a core scientific discipline. As such, it may be more attractive to be created as university-level accredited heritage (or heritage related) interpretation degrees. The growing interest in heritage studies as the main field of research could therefore fit among the flourishing university academic programmes.

The EU funded TEHIC project is just one (small, but important) contribution toward sorting all, or many of the aforementioned issues. Why is heritage interpretation important? And why does it need a holistic approach? The planet on which we live is extremely diverse, not only in the nature it possesses but on a cultural (i.e. human made) side too. This includes geographical, economic and political situations as well as perspectives. There are some huge countries by territory (such as Canada and Russia) as well as those that are very small (e.g. Monaco and Tuvalu), there are countries with over one billion inhabitants (India and China) and those with only several thousand people (Palau and San Marino). But all countries are important, their cultural and natural heritage must be equally treated. Starting positions and existing multi-relevant conditions (geographical, cultural, social, economic etc.) are extremely diverse - what might be the best in one situation is not necessarily the perfect option in another. If we transfer the above-mentioned conclusions into the heritage interpretation field, by questioning firstly on what level and how intensely our future heritage

interpreters must be educated within the formal (or sometimes informal) system, we might identify one critical pre-requisite. Any planning as well as implementation of heritage interpretation must follow some simple but very important criteria: it must always reflect local needs and demands.

The word 'local' here could be understood as global (encompassing all humanity on Planet Earth) if looked at on a world-wide scale, or it could be seen from only a European perspective, or even just on a national level (which is OK as long as it does not clash with other national interests). At the European Union level, the subject might be read at a national, regional level, or even truly local. In other words, if there is a high demand for more heritage interpreters at regional, national or (recognised) European level there are no obstacles to push for it (which is especially important within the higher educational programmes).

However, we need to remember that demands will not be the same across all territories within Europe/the European Union or beyond. As we indirectly mentioned before, there are huge differences between countries, as well between their regions, which must always be respected. This logic perfectly fits to the idea "Think globally, act locally". And it leads us to an increase or decrease in interest, and numbers of expected academic Master's programmes in any heritage field where heritage interpretation is included too. For example, what is appropriate in France will not necessarily fit Poland, Finland, Spain or Croatia, and so on. The reasons for this might be different due to the importance of local conditions, which are reflected in social and economic activities of local/ regional/ national communities. A focus on tourism is critical to some economies and so heritage related educational activities/programmes (heritage interpretation included) will have more importance in some countries, while being less

important for others. Thus, it would not be strange to see in the future more formal, as well as informal, educational programmes (of diverse variety) for heritage and heritage interpreters for example in Croatia compared to some other European Union countries (calculating the number of programmes/offers per capita). It would not be an anomaly but a reflection on the actual reality, representative ratio on (sometimes unpopular measurements of) supply versus demand.

### **Will the TEHIC project make the change?**

The TEHIC project, or to give it its full name, Erasmus Plus project 'Towards a European Heritage Interpretation Curriculum' brings together universities, professional associations and diverse heritage administrations from several European countries (Croatia, Germany, Portugal, Spain and Sweden). The initial motivation of the consortium partners was to check the existing situation within European higher education (on heritage interpretation) and offer some useful tools which could improve and/or indeed speed up recognition of heritage interpreters (as a fully recognised profession) foremost in the European Union countries but also beyond the EU borders. Accordingly, one of the main aims of the project is to develop the heritage interpretation curriculum, as well as drafts of its diverse syllabus recognised as important within cultural and natural heritage interpretation for anyone who is tackling heritage interpretation at higher education (university level) in the Common European Area and beyond.

Its other important aim is to make it available as an open resource so it can be used freely by universities or any other relevant institutions wishing to offer graduate, post-graduate or other relevant courses in the field. In contrast to some other (not all) practices implemented within the European Union as far as capacity building of heritage interpreters is considered,

the TEHIC project proposals for a curriculum and syllabus are not intended to be 'endorsed', so being the only valid one. The idea/concept within the TEHIC project is different: all the project's results will be openly shared. If someone, for example any university or governmental organisation responsible for heritage in Finland finds the entire proposal by the TEHIC consortium on how to organise the Master's in Heritage Interpretation useful, they could fully copy and use the TEHIC methodology and published outcomes. If, on the other hand, any institution (university, governmental public body, association etc.) recognises some parts of the TEHIC outcomes could contribute to their ideas on organising university or permanent/life-long learning training or educational programmes, they are free to use only the part which fits their ideas and needs. So the politics of no limit regarding the use of the project's outcomes is implemented, and there are no copyright issues on materials used except common acknowledgment (if used). Within the TEHIC Project Consortium we firmly believe this is the only, and the fastest, way for heritage interpretation to become recognised as a profession in many (if not all) European Union countries as well as those beyond the borders of the EU.

The Erasmus Plus project, as with many/all other projects, is divided into several working packages. As at February 2024, the TEHIC project consortium reached almost half of its full project cycle. The case studies of the best practices in heritage interpretation (as inputs toward formation of a heritage interpretation curriculum) are complete. As well as the preliminary structure of the (European) Master's in Heritage Interpretation (proposed at the postgraduate level). The detailed syllabus of diverse courses and modules included in the Master's programme is in development. Further parts of the working packages (to be delivered)

include a broader evaluation of proposed progress, as well as creating sample online MOOCs on some specific proposed courses/modules. We are constantly aware of the need to promote employability in the (still to be a fully recognised) heritage sector, which connects areas such as cultural and natural heritage, sustainable cultural tourism and education, thus making heritage interpretation an innovative contribution to the valorisation of European heritage in the context of the UNESCO Millennium Development Goals 2030. Although heritage interpretation still needs wider recognition, it is still the prime candidate which could fulfil all desirable sustainability goals.

### **Conclusion**

The TEHIC Erasmus+ project, 'Towards a European Heritage Interpretation Curriculum' aims to change the situation about formal inclusion (or eliminate unclear reasons for its exclusion) within the European Union's (and beyond) higher education sector. We have summarised where and how heritage interpretation stands today, and why it is often not included in formal, university-based educational programmes. We also reflected upon the options and perspectives of how the situation on heritage interpretation could be improved to reach a position where heritage interpreters become a fully recognised profession.

To gain a better overview we explained why having a clearly defined field of study and well-developed body of knowledge are critically important. At the moment, heritage interpretation, as a distinct Bachelor's degree does not exist at European level, and we could only find one Master's level study programme. Only a few European University Master's programmes within heritage/museum studies offer a separate or unique heritage interpretation course, in fact not so many compared to the overall number of existing

heritage/museum studies programmes. From what we presented (including the development of museology/ museum studies as a benchmark) we might conclude that the situation regarding heritage interpretation within university-based programmes will remain similar.

Over time we will witness more and more heritage interpretation courses incorporated into Master's level (foremost within the Heritage Studies and/or the Museology Master's programmes) but as well as Bachelor's programmes and simultaneously within the Doctoral level. In the near future it is harder to imagine a study programme leading to a Bachelor's degree in heritage interpretation, which in our opinion would not make sense since heritage interpretation is, in a way, an upgrade to basic understanding of heritage phenomena. On the other side, new Master's degrees in heritage interpretation are not only possible but indeed desirable.

We hope that the prerequisites we address in this paper are soon able to be fulfilled and are proud that the TEHIC project is making an important contribution towards the development of tertiary-level education in the heritage interpretation field. This will help heritage interpreters in becoming a recognised profession around Europe and beyond.

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## Dajak – A traditional river boat and window to the past becomes a link to the future

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#### Abstract

This paper explains a successful heritage revival initiative, emphasising community engagement, collaborative interpretation service development and the enhancement of the public's capacity as heritage interpreters. Focusing on revitalising the local heritage represented by the Dajak punting boat along the Vrbas River in Banja Luka (<https://dajak.org>), the paper examines the local community's evolving perspective on Dajak, exploring how the strategic branding of Banja Luka and the integration of Dajak in tourism development foster a comprehensive appreciation of the common heritage, emphasising its historical significance in European history. To overcome the realistic threat of this important piece of heritage falling into oblivion, a series of actions were taken to revive it and, through involving a wide range of local community groups and creation of a unique tourism offer in Banja Luka town, secure its existence for generations to come.

#### Keywords

Dajak, boat, Banja Luka, Vrbas River, cultural heritage, social history, preservation

#### Introduction

This paper examines a heritage revival initiative that used community engagement, collaborative interpretation service development, and public capacity as heritage interpreters to succeed.

It examines Banja Luka's indigenous people's evolving views on the Dajak punting boat on the Vrbas River (source: <https://dajak.org>). This study examines how strategic branding of Banja Luka and Dajak community integration into tourism development affects shared legacy understanding.

This cultural artifact was protected from extinction and saved for future generations with several measures. These projects involved several local community organisations and created a distinct tourism product in Banja Luka.

However, their successful execution required at least one dedicated, long-term supporter. We must remember that 'involving people' means localising activities project by project and community by community. It's time-consuming but pays well. It involves building trust and sharing knowledge. (Power of Place, p. 28). However, a champion is needed to complete the task, show perseverance, and demonstrate proactive leadership.

The Dajak boat club leadership and their partners demonstrated the value of communicating with varied stakeholders to engage them in relevant boat activities and experiences. This strategy revived the city's cultural history, improving understanding and connecting people to heritage.



It was crucial to use an opportunity, especially given the considerable drop in public sector funds for culture and heritage. These opportunities arise in nations that use economic hardship to revitalise cultural heritage. In such countries, varied government and non-government organisations incorporate the ideas and experience of smaller, community-focused enterprises. In countries and regions that have experienced ethnic conflicts or other turmoil, this task is difficult, leading to efforts to reshape historical narratives and selectively interpret heritage to meet political goals. This typically causes heritage interpretation inconsistencies (Tunbridge and Answorth, 1996).

Locations have several meanings, and it might be difficult to keep important heritage sites and objects from being forgotten. Clearly, the goal is to clarify diverse understandings within the time period, allowing for the recognition of its atmosphere and exploration of its links and relationships, preserving cultural legacy.

This case involves a series of community engagement measures in heritage interpretation and sustainable development. These initiatives protected traditional practices and knowledge and enhanced heritage's identity and economic benefits making Dajak boat an excellent illustration of a successful cultural heritage revival initiative.

### **The Dajak boat**

The Dajak boat, also known as the Dajak, has been propelled along the Vrbas River in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, for more than 150 years. A wooden stick (after which Dajak got its name) is struck against the riverbed to propel the boat. Dajak boats are propelled against wild currents on the Vrbas River in Banja Luka, unlike similar vessels on calm waters, backwaters, canals, lakes, and ponds like in Oxford/Cambridge (UK), Amazonia, the Nile, and the Mississippi Delta. The Vrbasans, who live

near the Vrbas River, decorate their boats and rivers with melodious compositions and dedicate their Banja Luka stories to them.



**Dajak Club members racing (Image: Dajak Club)**

"The rivers encapsulate the entirety of time, as perceived by us. Vrbas is a father, remembrance, and symbol of time. Let us speak and eat it." (Alojz Curić, Alvir, 2010).

The current population of Banja Luka, in northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina, is estimated at 200,000. Due to its location between major historical empires, the town has seen many battles and damage since its mid-15th-century Hungarian records. World War II, the 1969 earthquake that destroyed 80% of Banja Luka, and the 1990s conflict that displaced many of its residents were all traumatic events in the 20th century. Large-scale disasters pose long-term obstacles to identifying and preserving a city's cultural legacy and genius spots.

The Dajak boat, used on the Vrbas River for a long time, has no known origin or design. It is believed to have started as a wooden raft used to convey products down the river. This concept optimised local population efficiency by saving

time and resources. According to Mirza Bišćević (2012), the vessel has been in operation for almost 150 years. The vessel's first photos are from the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the early 20th century.

A 1937 letter to authorities showed that Dajak boats were popular before World War II. The letter requested a 100-dinar per-boat Dajak boat tax exemption. The letter suggested that Dajak boats should not be taxed because they were sport and pleasure vessels. The tax's imposition has not been verified. A 1933 police report certified it as legal. The local press provided intermittent coverage throughout Socialist Yugoslavia, limiting its reach outside Banja Luka (Alvir, 2010).

The first Dajak boat monographs appeared in 2010 and 2012. These monographs comprise a large collection of photos from different time periods with comments and anecdotes from Banja Luka inhabitants who owned and operated Dajak boats on the river. Female Dajak punters on the Vrbas River were common in the 1970s and 1980s.

### **Banja Luka**

The initial reference to Banja Luka can be traced back to the year 1494, during which it is believed to have served as a fortified settlement. Banja Luka was designated as the administrative capital of then Bosnia from the late 16th to the mid-19th centuries, after the expansion of the Ottoman Empire.

Later, the Austro-Hungarian Empire progressively expanded into the area. The region had local upheavals and wars between the two empires throughout this time. From the 17th to the 18th century, the city suffered two major disasters: the battle of Banja Luka, which damaged the town, and the plague, which, according to some sources, nearly killed

everyone.

At the turn of the 20th century, Dajak boats on the Vrbas River were photographed after a stormy century. After World War I, Dajak punting became popular in Banja Luka, the capital of the Vrbas Banovina, administrative unit within Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Official records acknowledged and documented this activity.

The Nazi-controlled Independent State of Croatia confiscated and consolidated ownership of all boats as some were used by regime dissidents during World War II. Halil I. recalls that Miralem Dz.'s boat was among the nine confiscated in 1943, which he gifted upon his release (Alvir 2010).

According to Alvir (2010), Dajaks were popular among Yugoslavians of various ethnicities and cultures during the Socialist era. The people participated in the Vrbas Carneval, Dajak racing, and the selection of the most attractive Dajaks. The Vrbas River and boat hosted social gatherings, outdoor lunches, assemblies, professions of romantic love, skill displays, and artisan competitions. Dajak helped investigate the Vrbas River and display local abilities. They sometimes explored the river over several kilometres. Mažar and others' photos show these journeys reaching Jajce town, the Sava River on Croatia's western border, and Belgrade in Serbia.

A massive earthquake nearly destroyed Banja Luka, yet Dajak survived. Alvir includes Banja Luka locals' testimonials, experiences, and memories in his monograph. He describes how long Dajak have been in their families and how important they are.

Some Yugoslavian journalists noticed that international visitors were asking for Dajak rides throughout the Socialist era. They regretted that this opportunity had been underutilised, leaving

the boat unpromoted. People visited Vrbas and Dajaks, attended festivals, and built boats throughout the summer. At that time, around the 1960s, Mr. Zamolo Tonci added engineering aspects to Dajak to improve its appearance and stability. The current Dajak is the result of these changes.

The post-Yugoslavia conflict, which emphasised ethnic, national, and religious differences, nearly destroyed the Dajak community. The population of Banja Luka changed between 1991 and 1995. Banja Luka lost thousands of citizens and gained many newcomers from other regions of former Yugoslavia. Banja Luka, the Vrbas River, and the Dajak people were alien to these visitors.

“In April 1992, all Vrbas boats and paddlers vanished. The boats were moved to sheds, basements, and shelters for privacy from the incoming residents. I kayaked then. Despite high water levels, I paddled my lightweight kayak to the City Bridge in September of that terrible year. Near Studenac restaurant, I saw a person using an axe to chop a boat's stern. I retrieved the axe from him on land and threw it in the bushes. After retrieving the damaged watercraft, I descended it into the Vrbas on the moist soil. After discarding the kayak, I swam in the Vrbas, holding onto the vessels and reaching Kastel. In the kayak, I repelled the boat into the Vrbas and quickly descended the water to Tonci's (an engineer who refurbished Dajak in the 1960s) yard, where an axe would not damage it. In April 1993, the Zamolo family beach protected the three remaining Vrbas boats.” (Boris Potočnik, Banja Luka resident in Ireland, emailed on March 17, 2024.)

The city's landmarks changed from Vrbas and its banks to interwar administrative and religious buildings.

### **The resurgence of the Dajak community**

Andrej Zamolo, a multiyear Dajak race winner and Dajak Club president, says a group of young boys from the Vrbas River used to spend time at the river and listen to older relatives and neighbours talk about the past and Dajak punting. The Kayak Club, founded in Socialist Yugoslavia with official sponsorship, drew many river and sports enthusiasts before and after the 1990s. The Zamolo family, known for their Dajak tradition, began building new boats for the annual races. Due to the lack of skilled Dajak punters, these races were much smaller. Marta Dikic, an elderly female kayaker, proposed a Dajak club to revive the sport and teach younger people about it.



**Andrej Zamolo in his workshop (Image: Dajak Club)**

“In April 1993, the Zamolo family's beach protected the three remaining Vrbas Dajak boats. In 1996, Marta Dikic Vučjak and I organised a kayaking competition in Banja Luka after the conflict ended. She informed me a Dajak Race will be held alongside the kayak competition. I quickly informed Tonči upon arrival. We had only two weeks to the race. He got up, dusted off his pants, and told us guys to quickly lower the well-preserved planks from

the attic. He spent seven days and nights making Andrej a new Lotos boat, laminated bow, white ash, and dark mahogany. He built his first ship after the war. Antonio Zamolo Tonči's boat construction restored rationality in our community. Andrej Zamolo and his Dajak Club friends made history in Banja Luka, writing their names into the history of humanity and seafaring vessels. They produced something greater than themselves." (Boris Potočnik, Banja Luka resident in Ireland, emailed on March 17, 2024.)

No Dajak boat-related scholarly work existed at the time. No formal publication has addressed the topic, except for occasional media coverage, interviews, and local practitioners' work. After registering their Dajak club in 2010, they began collecting sponsors for their annual events. Nektar, a Banja Luka brewery, responded first, followed by Red Bull. Youth Dajak training was launched. Two Dajak fans, one of whom left Banja Luka during the 1990s conflict and the other who stayed, wrote two distinct books.

The Banja Luka tourist agency did not promote Dajak as the city's symbol for a long time. Additionally, tourist companies did not consider Dajak a complete tourism product. As Dajak punters increased and the club sought help at several gates, the situation escalated. The Dajak Club took many steps to raise awareness of the boat's importance to Banja Luka and its citizens.

These efforts included:

#### **Consistent engagement in all endeavors pertaining to the cleansing of the Vrbas River**

The Dajak club organises activities and cleans the Vrbas River and its banks, showing their commitment to the environment and community well-being. The Dajak Club has become an essential part of the local community, open to the community and local

government to improve the quality of life for all Banja Luka citizens.

#### **Robust mobilisation of newly recruited individuals and comprehensive training of the younger cohort**

After discovering that few people knew about the Dajak boat and its goals, the group began recruiting new members. This campaign targeted women too to demonstrate the club's dedication to health and diversity. The Dajak Club membership now exceeds 150.

#### **Dajak boat construction on public square in Trento region in Italy and putting it on the Adige River**

A group of Dajak fans erected a boat in Trento square, Italy, in 2018. The Zamolo family was the only family to build boats during that time, and they were descendants of Italian immigrants who had migrated to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 19th century. This stunt was meant to raise awareness of the boat in Italy. Video was used to promote Dajak in Banja Luka and a cultural legacy gaining global renown.

#### **Creating a prototype of Dajak and strategically positioning it in different areas in Banja Luka, such as cafes, traffic roundabouts, and restaurant yards**

The Dajak Club built life-sized and smaller model boats by working with private stakeholders and local authorities. These models were deliberately positioned around Banja Luka restaurants, coffee bars, and traffic roundabouts to promote the Dajak boat as a local emblem. These boats and types are still in communities, and their number is growing.

#### **Organising annual Dajak races with an increasing emphasis on including and prioritising female participants**

The annual Dajak boat race was held in the former Yugoslavia and ended in the 1990s due to the war. Despite a resurgence, the races were

run traditionally without modern commercial methods and garnered little public notice. The Dajak Club contacted Red Bull for sponsorship. In response, Red Bull marketing manager Jadran Crnogorac offered a modern rebranding strategy for the race to attract younger demographics and garner media interest. The Dajak Club's approval started the '4 Cross Dajak' race, which has been maintained since then.

Dajak eventually added women's and youth races. In 2023, it held the first veterans race to honor Dajak's past heroes, Dajak punters from the time of Yugoslavia.

### **Enlisting the assistance of city authorities by arranging excursions for them on the Dajak boat**

Official visitors to Banja Luka are often taken on tours by the Dajak Club at the request of local authorities, tourism groups, public agencies, journalists, and tour operators. They pledged to promote the Vrbas River and Banja Luka town and kept their word.

### **Being accessible to any media outlet or organisation with an interest in experiencing a trip to Dajak**

The Dajak Club responds to media inquiries 24-hours per day, seven days per week. This earned the organisation a reputation as a pleasant collaborator and substantial media coverage from local and regional media outlets and celebrities. In March 2024, for example, North Macedonian singer Kaliopi posted a positive remark about a Dajak boat on her social media.

After EU Ambassador Lars Wigemark enjoyed a boat excursion in summer 2018, the Dajak Club had significant attendance. Zamolo says things escalated dramatically. The BBC, Serbian state television, and others were interested. "During that summer, individuals would approach our doors and make requests for Dajak excursions" (Zamolo A., July 2023).

Dajak's regionwide recognition began that year. During Ambassador Wigemark's visit, the author of this paper noted that almost no person working for the EU Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina knew about Dajak.

In 2019, the Dajak Club gained over 4,000 Facebook fans due to increased social media promotion. Instagram was used to post the best photos and videos.

The USAID Developing Sustainable Tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina (USAID Turizam) Project, which promotes sustainable tourism, invited the Dajak Club in 2023. The project offered to help make the Dajak ride a viable tourism attraction in the region. The Dajak Club agreed.

### **Transforming Dajak into a signature experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

After visiting Dajak several times and examining similar offerings in other places, USAID Turizam advised the Dajak Club that tourism could protect and enhance this major cultural heritage property. Significant resources were invested in registering a commercial enterprise under [www.dayak.org](http://www.dayak.org) that could lawfully offer Dajak under a sole proprietorship.

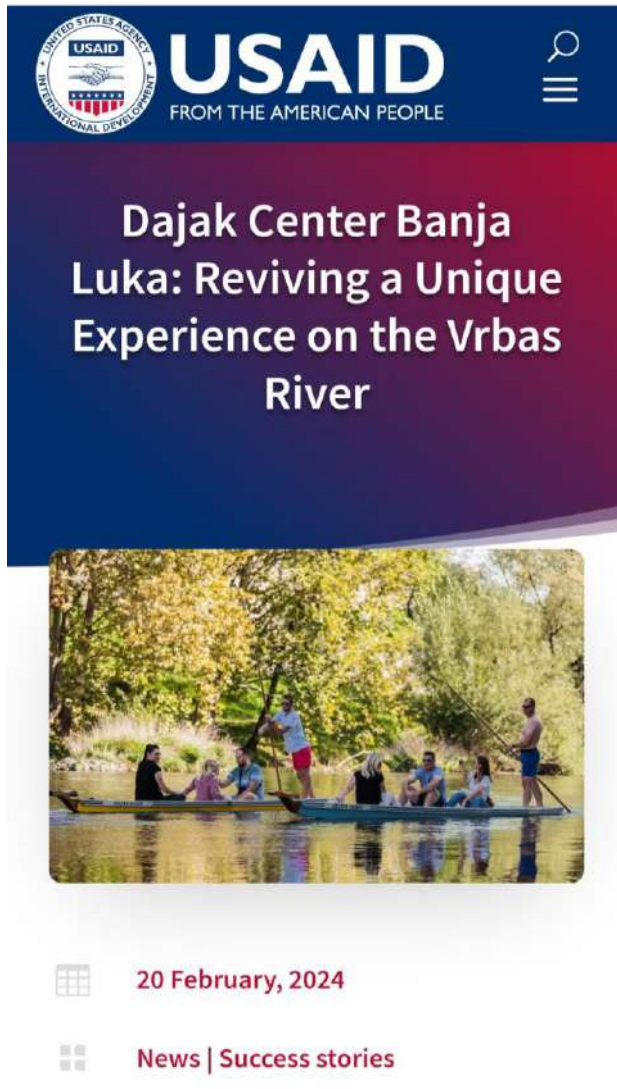
They now offer seven different experiences catering to different audiences, including tailored rides, a Dajak workshop, and direct booking and payment on their new website. By involving foreign travel operators and media outlets in the region, Dajak rides are heavily promoted.

Dajak's rise has numerous major effects:

- The Banja Luka government has allocated funds for building a Dajak pier on the Vrbas River and improving famous river beaches along the route.
- First-year students at the local university must complete a Dajak punting programme

to ensure a sufficient number of punters during the season.

- Traditional inbound travel agents now include the Dajak route.



The screenshot shows a USAID news article header with the USAID logo and the text 'FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE'. The main title is 'Dajak Center Banja Luka: Reviving a Unique Experience on the Vrbas River'. Below the title is a photograph of a group of people in a long boat on a river, surrounded by lush green trees. At the bottom of the screenshot, there is a date '20 February, 2024' and a category 'News | Success stories'.

Dajak as a tourism attraction  
(Image: screenshot by Aleksandra Drinic)

### Conclusion

Dajak aficionados showed that significant progress can be made despite facing several issues: a lack of cultural preservation education and training; the 1990s conflict; the absence of former Dajak owners; and a significant decline in government funding. With a receptive mentality and a deep love for this cultural asset, the community sought opportunities for collaboration in any way that could help.

Through carefully planned activities, they engaged city authorities, writers, young people whose parents were unfamiliar with Dajak, the media, international organisations, sports societies, universities, and development agencies. The Dajak Club members learned more about Dajak, its history, and its link to Banja Luka by participating in well-organised events.

This improved the ability of the whole local community to interpret this important heritage feature.

Through various campaigns to raise awareness and understanding of cultural heritage, the Dajak Club changed the public's view of Dajak from a 'dissonant heritage' to a source of local pride. Electronic and print publications, public lectures, on-site and town-wide installations, educational programmes, community interactions, and interpretation process research, training, and assessment were included.

Dajak saw a 40% increase in tourists in 2023 and is ready to continue its success in promoting and preserving its cultural legacy.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has seen an unparalleled rise in tourism, breaking records year on year. Tourism trends have shifted toward personalised journeys, sustainable itineraries that encourage direct connection with the local population, a strong appreciation for local culture, and new experiences. New vacationers are arriving and Dajak will certainly be able to respond.

The latest Intrepid study, 'Sustainable Future for Travel: from Crisis to Transformation', claims that the current state of travel is dying. At this key point, businesses have two options: climate breakdown and tourist restrictions limit travel,

or regenerative solutions to improve travel and the world.

Community, education, and empowerment will soon be needed to address traveller needs. Collective action could reform the sector by 2040. The new Travel Transformers will shape the future. With climate anxiety, people will change the business by being optimistic and seeking purpose in their travels. Future tourists will have a new agenda, making selfies in front of busy tourist spots obsolete (Intrepid, 2024).

Dajak plans to build a visitor centre to display the boat's history and other improvements. It will also centralise Dajak excursions.

The Dajak Centre will preserve and promote the Dajak boat as a tourist attraction and leisure activity for younger generations and as a portal to the narratives of all Dajak punters and owners throughout its history.

Dajak will preserve the rich and varied stories of Danjak, including the violin maker who made the Dajak boat, the town's famous industrialist who owned his boat, the kayaking lady who founded the club, the World War II national hero who transported Dajak on rivers to Belgrade, and numerous other individuals who have contributed to the creation and ongoing development of Banja Luka.

The preservation of these legends in Dajak serves as a useful connection to several occurrences closely intertwined with European history. These stories play a significant role in safeguarding the cultural history of Banja Luka and its obvious ties with the broader European region.

The Dajak serves as more than just a watercraft; it also functions as a vessel that transports the social history of Banja Luka town, as well as numerous epochs of European history.

Dajak is genuinely embracing the future by providing a glimpse into the past.

While preparing this conference presentation the author implemented a short online survey to assess current citizens' perception of Dajak. Close to 200 individuals responded in March 2024. To the question of which emotions does Dajak evoke within them, they most frequently answered: pride, respect, admiration, nostalgia and excitement.

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## Heritage without heirs? Czech-German Borderscape, its dissonant legacy and the way to socio-cultural sustainability

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In 2021, Veronika took part in the Summer School on Interpretative Planning (in Czechia) and participated in the IE Certified Interpretative Guide (CIG) course. Since 2021, she has become a member of the Czech Institute for Heritage Interpretation (SIMID) and she has also been enrolled at the university of J. E. Purkyně, Ústí nad Labem (PhD) to study and examine in detail, landscape transformation, memory of the place and its (dissonant) heritage.

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### Abstract

This paper delivers a brief analysis (reflection) of civic engagement in terms of dissonant heritage, with a case study from the Czech-German borderland; an area affected by multiple forced migration and nowadays a dam. What remains when a city disappears? Why does it matter? and for whom should its legacy be preserved?

It discusses the challenges when dealing with fixed mindsets, e.g. Czech-German, or East- vs. West-German biases and narratives of the past which, after decades of silence or conflict narratives, finally become a subject of a democratic discussion, and a gap within formal education which has been failing to provide satisfactory knowledge, meaningful solutions and skills to reach mutual understanding.

The paper presents a practical example related to local involvement (people as heritage interpreters), that helps to transform the fixed narratives, based on the themes of landscape memory and disappearing cultural heritage (social and cultural dimension of sustainability).

### Keywords

borderscape, landscape transformation, cultural heritage, dissonant heritage, memory, place-based learning, civil engagement, volunteering, cross-border cooperation, intergenerational dialogue, Pressnitz, Přísečnice, Sudetenland, Czechia, Germany

### Introduction

The presentation at iecon delivered a brief analysis (reflection) on civic engagement in terms of dissonant heritage. It presented a case study from the Czech-German borderland, particularly the area of Pressnitz (Přísečnice) which is located near the Bohemian-Saxonian borders (the region formerly known as Sudetenland).

For centuries, Pressnitz had been known as a '*Königliche Freie Bergstadt*' (free royal mining town) which made it one of the most important centres of the Ore Mountains concerning the town's privileges (mining, local government and institutions). With its altitude around 800 metres, it belonged to the most populous cities in the mountains, counting around 3,500 inhabitants at the beginning of the 20th century. Apart from the Saxonian centres of Freiberg and Annaberg, silver was found in Pressnitz as well, together with cobalt, iron and other ores.

After the decline of the mining activities in the late 18th century, the inhabitants of Pressnitz had to find new sources of income. Some started to do handcraft (lace making, woodwork, smith products etc.), some went abroad and played music, entertaining the privileged groups



of that time's society. Travelling orchestras from Pressnitz (*Damenkapellen*), mainly consisting of 6-10 young female musicians, evolved into a unique phenomenon in the 19th century. At the turn of the 19th and 20th century, approximately 500 Pressnitzers (mainly women) were 'on tour' abroad.

Pressnitz gradually gained its nickname as the 'Musikstadt'. They performed in the spa towns (including in Germany, Italy, France, England), in the busy harbours (including in Crete, Egypt, Singapore, Indonesia, India, China, Japan), in restaurants, hotels or on board the liners while crossing the oceans. This was possible, in part, due to the close ties of the Austrian-Hungarian empire with the other European superpowers that had been controlling those regions (Imperialism). After the collapse of the colonial system (1914-1918), the musicianship decreased and faced new challenges, for example, radio and music broadcasting, as well as a change in the music taste and preference of the audiences. World War II (WWII) and the following expulsion of the Pressnitzers marked the end of the music tradition.

### **Landscape of lost homes**

The area of Pressnitz has been affected by multiple forced migration. Firstly, the German-speaking inhabitants (vast majority of pre-WWII Pressnitzers) were expelled after the war, based on the revolutionary legislation that claimed all the Czech Germans (*Sudetengermans*) were guilty for the war and war crimes. The Sudetengermans, including the Pressnitzers, were expelled between May 1945 and October 1946, being split across Germany and other European countries.

**"None of us wanted to leave."**

**"Look at the church, we do not know whether we see it again."**

**"We were forced to leave in 30 minutes. Just one luggage was allowed..."**

**(Memories of the eye-witnesses born in Pressnitz in the 1930s)**

The city was depopulated within a year but there were already newcomers of Czech, Roma, Slovakian or Hungarian origin, searching for new life options with high hopes and willing to resettle there. However, Pressnitz, renamed as *Přísečnice* since 1945, had never reached the amounts of inhabitants from the pre-WWII time. The newly established Czechoslovak Socialist Republic became a part of the Eastern Block (within the Soviet Union sphere of influence) and the location around Přísečnice appeared in the militarised border zone in the first decades after WWII. Due to its harsh mountain climate, the lack of public services and opportunities, the hopes and expectations were not fulfilled and the city had not been fully inhabited. Some houses started to collapse, others remained in a state of ruin once their wooden parts had been taken and used for heating.

In contrast, the cities in the nearby (dry lowland) areas were expanding and striking for water resources. Thus, in the mid-1960s, the state representatives decided to demolish Přísečnice (together with the neighbourhood towns Rusová/Reischdorf and Dolina/Dörnsdorf) and build a dam (with a protected area around it) there. As a result, the post-war generation of Pressnitzers, mainly ethnic Czechs, Slovaks and Roma people, also had to leave their homes (in 1969/1970). They were resettled to nearby villages and towns before the water flooded the whole area in 1973.

**“My last memory? I see the tree in our garden falling down...”**

**“They started with the church. Its demolition marked the end of all our hopes.”**

**(Memories of the eye-witnesses born in Přešnice in the 1950s and 1960s)**

Nowadays, the location of Pressnitz looks like a lake, surrounded by two mountains reaching above 990 metres, with wide meadows and old beech forests. One can get the impression that such scenery always used to be there. The area is now protected as a water source for the dam, allowing tourists to only walk or cycle around. A few roads, marking the former streets of Pressnitz, now lead directly into the water. For some people it is an idyllic scene, while for others (namely for the eye-witnesses) it might still be an ambivalent experience.

**“There is nothing that disturbs my memories. No strangers, no ruins or abandoned houses, just peaceful water...”**

**“I rarely drive by. The feeling of pity is still present there.”**

**(Memories of the eye-witnesses born in Pressnitz in the 1930s and 1940s)**

### **Witnessing the change(s)**

A personal meeting with the eye-witnesses from Pressnitz (in 2015-2017) had caused a shift in perception of the place and the Czech-German history in past decades. The first result was the documentary movie *Generation “N”*: *Deutschböhme* (Kupková & Komarevtseva 2016).

The narration of the German-speaking Pressnitzer eye-witnesses (*landscape of lost homes*), as well as observation and presence in the border region (landscape defined by *absence*), fully revealed the feeling of lost home (Korhel 2023), radical landscape changes and discontinuity (Kučera & Kučerová 2012). The intimate loss of a deeply-loved place (Tuan

1974), however, has not only applied to the pre-WWII Pressnitzers (German-speakers) but also to the post-WWII generation (Czech-speakers). They just could not meet, talk to each other, share the experience or exchange their perspectives because of the 40 years of international (ideological) isolation and socio-political (mental) barriers. Such an attitude, namely promotion of *dialogic memory* (Assmann 2016), has only become possible due to the socio-political changes of 1989 (the birth of an independent and democratic Czechia) and 2004 (entry into the EU) respectively. As a result, meetings in person could happen freely, people have started to challenge and re-define the artificially implemented state narratives (propaganda), discourses and they have also questioned the deeply ingrained feelings of injustice, misunderstandings and biases (fixed mindsets). Also, the conflict narratives had to be challenged within the European context, in terms of Czech-German relationship (for example, who used to be the ‘victims’ and who were the ‘perpetrators’), as well as within the East-German and West-German context (‘expelled’ versus ‘resettled’, politically engaged groups versus anonymous individuals). Lastly, the long-lasting silence could be broken and the traumatic experience discussed openly (among the representatives of various generations and nations).

However, important questions related to Pressnitzer (cultural) heritage emerged: What remains when a city disappears completely? Is there (still) anything left that could be labelled as ‘heritage’? Why and for whom should that legacy matter?

### **Heritage without heirs**

Speaking about heritage, the last ‘footprints’ of the city do have tangible, as well as intangible and dissonant character. Among the tangible relics are, for example, memorials still located on site (war memorial, crosses or other memorial

sculptures), but also photographs, postcards, literature (newspapers, book, magazines) or objects (musical instruments, souvenirs from the musicians' journeys) that can be found across Europe and beyond. Together with the former inhabitants, the memory has also 'wandered' away. Many of such documents have been preserved due to the outstanding engagement of museums, archives, libraries, and also the eye-witnesses (both individuals and the association of the German-speaking Pressnitzers, Heimatverband Pressnitz). Among the intangible heritage of Pressnitz are, for example, memories, familiar habits, music and above all the knowledge of the history of the Musikstadt (as stated above). This can be found in literature or music sheets, yet rarely among people. Naturally, the intangible heritage has been clearly linked to the tangible.

Because of the fact that the forced migration affected the location twice in the last 80 years, the dissonant legacy also plays a crucial role in considering the heritage of Pressnitz. The loss of home (a deeply loved place, domicile, safety, tradition, network of familiar relationships etc.), together with an impersonal decision (expulsion, resettlement) and inability to protest against the power structures, the experience of injustice or inability to speak about the personal traumatic experience publicly (during the communist regime) – these have been the aspects that multiplied the difficulties people had to face. Moreover, the close ties leading from Pressnitz to the colonies revealed another dissonance: the imperialism and the power structures of those with privileges (Europeans, including Pressnitzers) versus the underprivileged ones (locals, non-Europeans) (Kupková 2024). Thus, while considering the dissonant legacy of Pressnitz, it is necessary to decode at least two or three stages of historical eras: 1970s, 1940s, 1890-1910s, in order to fully understand the socio-political circumstances, as well as peoples' experience (feelings).

Nevertheless, the dissonance, even if it has been forgotten recently, may mediate a significant message – not only for Czechs, but also for (Sudeten-)Germans, Austrians, or others involved in the processes stated above (European and global significance). The need for reconciliation has been greater than ever before, with the fact that the historical memory is dying out with its last holders (the eye-witnesses). Concerning the current situation and scenery, the idyllic looking landscape around Pressnitz still contains lots of 'mysteries' that awaken curiosity or an interest in local history and those who lived there in the past.

### **Learning from the past, about the past and locally**

It is of no surprise that this case study also revealed a gap within formal education and real-life situations, mainly due to the influence of fixed mindsets and public (manipulated) narratives persisting from the past. Until 1989, the tendency to 'de-Germanise' everything, including the curriculum, has caused to a great extent the erasure of the former (Czech-) German history. Such a state had long prevailed and in the early 2000s, the first attempts emerged that dealt with place-based learning, including the Czech-German history and eye-witnesses. Later, the public debate widened but not every educator considered the curriculum flexible enough to dive deeper into the local history. Additionally, not all teachers have been trained in interactive learning methods (known mainly from the non-formal educational environment) or have a personal contact abroad (or, sufficient language skills). In the case of Pressnitz, or the school project Pressnitz lebt-Přísečnice žije respectively, more factors played a vital role in an opposite trend (in order to provide satisfactory knowledge and skills to reach mutual understanding): not only knowing, but also feeling and anticipating was essential there. In 2018, there had been enough open sources, inspiration and also personal contacts

(namely based on previous project Generation N: Deutschböhme) and enthusiasm which helped to establish the connection between two school groups (in Czechia & Germany) and the eye-witnesses. Pressnitz, located right in the centre between these two schools, has thus been a natural area of interest for both groups. Some students already knew the location because of their leisure time activities (hiking, cycling, cross-country skiing) which has awakened their curiosity. Hardly anyone has thought about what exactly disappeared below the water surface, or how life used to look there. Therefore, the interest was multiplied not only by regular meetings with peers from the other side of the borders but also by the meetings with the eye-witnesses who were born and raised in Pressnitz. Suddenly, the history came to us.

The cooperation between the two groups of German and Czech youth participants started as an informal meet-up in the mountains close to Pressnitz with the aim to establish a friendly and safe environment and mutual relationships (expectations). Later, the participants met on-site for a three-day long camp (where they worked in teams, cooked together etc.), in order to build the team and later to figure out what had disappeared when the valley was flooded. Such a collection of information provided a basis for a) a small exhibition, and b) a book (Kupková et al. 2020). The main focus was on history, traditions, architecture or land-use changes (study of old maps and literature). However, the extension of the project into two (and later three) years made it possible to also include more meetings with eye-witnesses and collection of their memoirs. Among them were not only German-speakers (expelled in 1946) but also Czech-speakers (resettled in 1970). As a result, it was possible to collect 30 personal stories of former Pressnitzers, men and women, dating back to the 1930s-1960s. Such a database illustrated not only the factual

information found before, but also helped the students to understand the dissonance of the place. In reality, they heard the life stories of those who deeply missed their homes (homesickness) and experienced the place from a new perspective. Such a long-lasting engagement (happening mainly on weekends and in the free time of the students and educators-project coordinators) resulted in a series of public events in which the students performed as presenters and multipliers. It was organised both in Germany and Czechia, caused a significant change of attitude and personal values of the participants and also impressed and inspired the audience.

**“What we do for others, we do for ourselves. The suffering of others is also our suffering, so it is joy and love.”**

**“When you hear a personal story of the eye-witnesses, it is moving. Everyone has an own story to tell. We have to speak about good and bad, in order not to repeat the tragedy again.”**

**“At first, I thought it was right to expel them after the war. But now, when I heard their stories, I think it was an act of injustice – innocent people were affected, too. Moreover, I can’t even imagine that my place disappears!”**

**(Students’ feedback, school project Pressnitz lebt-  
Přísečnice žije)**

The final stage of the project was documented by the students in a movie which can be found on YouTube (Mala, Hrnčíř & Kupková 2021). Not only the intergenerational and international dialogue is visible there (history has finally become a subject of a democratic discussion), but also the principles of the collaboration: non-hierarchical teamwork, shared-leadership, empowerment of the youth, mutual respect and taking the responsibility for a personal task. As a result, students have become more self-conscious, showing empathy and openness to collaborate actively within an intercultural team. Additionally, they started to be aware of differences, to observe the landscape through

different lenses and broke the (physical and mental) barriers.

### **Next step: socio-cultural sustainability?**

It would be naïve to think about reconciliation between nations based on a single school project. However, the Pressnitz lebt-Přísečnice žije project initiated 'something bigger', too. Based on the school collaboration, a Czech-German association has been established which aims a) to take care of the physical (tangible) relics of Pressnitz, b) to cooperate with others in terms of the intangible heritage of Pressnitz, and c) to continue working on/with dissonant heritage while crossing the borders. Since 2021, the volunteers have organised Memorial Care Days, an event happening at the former train station, an international workcamp, and support for the local community. In terms of intangible heritage, they conduct research, present the results to the public (including the film and newly gained knowledge), or network with other initiatives in Czechia, Germany and Europe. While concerning the dissonant heritage, they aim to create a safe space for democratic discussion (giving 'voice' to the 'voiceless', examining the fixed narratives), for dialogic remembrance (democratisation of the memory, avoiding selective memory) and organise guided tours (value-based interpretation).

Thanks to these activities, it is possible to re-define the Czech-German relationships (on a local, regional level) that were shattered 80 years ago. Additionally, they re-tell the story of Pressnitz that almost disappeared from public memory, or re-interpret the phenomena that have not earned much socio-historical attention yet (in terms of validation, recognition of emotions). It is, therefore, an example of an outstanding civil engagement of locals (a bottom-up attitude, intergenerational and international approach, shared responsibility, and empowerment), contributing as local

heritage 'ambassadors' to the socio-cultural dimension of sustainability.

In this way, the place (Pressnitz) has served as a unique learning landscape where tangible relics carry (hidden) meanings and the layers of intangible (dissonant) heritage have to be discovered. Nevertheless, the disappearing place has still been part of people's lives (memories) and identity. The case of Pressnitz then shows that a location on a periphery might also be rich in stories that enable local people to interpret great phenomena and help them to become more aware and mindful towards our common cultural heritage.

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## Transforming the (non-existent) Hindle region as a path to Europe's future

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on community-led dialogue about history and sensitive heritage on the Czech-German border, with an emphasis on transforming thinking through the engagement of local actors. Using an example from the fictional region of Hindle (districts of Domažlice (Czech Republic) and Cham (Germany)), I show how the involvement of local communities as active participants, guides, teachers and lecturers and the presentation of regional history from both Czech and German perspectives improves the process of mutual understanding. The Hindle project focuses on overcoming prejudices and mental barriers by promoting dialogue between communities across borders. It aims not only to increase understanding of the history of the region on

both sides of the border, but also to strengthen the regional identity necessary for the sustainable development of the area. It further seeks to inspire a change in thinking towards embracing cultural diversity and harnessing it for sustainable social transformation.

### Keywords

public history, sensitive heritage, active boundaries, community-led dialogue, local identity, cultural diversity

### Introduction

Motto: "Don't ask what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country. Together we can and must save our planet, or together we will perish in the flames of its fire" (John Fitzgerald Kennedy).

The cross-border project Hindle is based on the idea that if we think of our home, which is considered the periphery, as a place in the middle, we will live better here. If we actively overcome borders and historical injustices together, our home will be a culturally diverse region encompassing two countries and people of many nationalities who share the same values and belong to the European Union. Such a change of mindset can contribute to the sustainable development of the region and to a better quality of life for locals. Interpreting the sensitive historical heritage of the region, which is one of the barriers, offers a good opportunity to initiate this change, as it opens the way to mutual understanding and cooperation.

### Where is the imaginary Hindle region and why it is considered a periphery?

The Hindle region consists of the district of Domažlice (western Bohemia in the Czech Republic) and parts of the districts of Cham and Schwandorf (Upper Palatinate, Bavaria, Germany). The region is crossed by the

Bohemian Forest/ Bayerischer Wald mountain range.

The district of Domažlice covers an area of less than 1,000sqkm. The district of Cham is the easternmost and largest district of the Bavarian administrative district of the Upper Palatinate, and covers an area of more than 1,500sqkm. More than 70% of it falls within the Hindle region. The rest of the region on the German side is part of the Landkreis Schwandorf. In total, the Hindle region covers an area of approximately 2,000sqkm.

Until 1990, the two countries were separated not only by mountains, but also by the heavily guarded Iron Curtain. Bavaria and western Bohemia found themselves on the border between the Eastern and Western Blocs and, logically, on the periphery of the former Czechoslovakia and the Federal Republic of Germany. This brought with it more limited prospects in terms of job opportunities, access to education, health care, cultural life and services.

Moreover, the mutual relations between the inhabitants of the two regions are burdened by the events that preceded the partition of the Iron Curtain. In the course of ten years, the region experienced the rise of Nazism, the annexation of Czechoslovak territory by Germany, coupled with the expulsion of Czechs and the murder of Jews, and the post-war expulsion of the German population from Czechoslovakia, coupled with another wave of violence, this time by Czechs.

All of these very painful events, together with decades of mutual isolation and the influence of communist propaganda, which deliberately fed the hatred, made relations very difficult. They have created deep-seated distrust and resentment, justified by mutual historical injustices.

The year 1990 brought the opening of borders and a gradual start of cooperation. A significant number of Czechs found work in Bavaria or in the branches of German companies in the region. Topics that had been taboo for decades slowly began to open up, yet the power of prejudice and fear even influenced national politics, for example in the Czech presidential elections.

The idea for the Hindle region came from the realisation that neighbours no longer separated by the Iron Curtain still knew little of each other, as physical borders had largely been replaced by mental and linguistic ones. The Hindle Region aims to help break down these barriers.

The region of interest falls largely within the territory of the Euroregion Šumava, which was defined in the Eurobarometer 2015 survey as a place where some of the strongest barrier effects are present across the EU, along with the lowest level of openness to accepting a member of a neighbouring ethnic group as a neighbour or family member.

Although the Iron Curtain fell at the turn of 1989-1990, the political leaders of the Czech Republic and Bavaria did not communicate with each other for another 20 years after the fall of Communism because of the so-called Beneš Decrees adopted just after the end of World War II. On the basis of these presidential decrees, the Germans were expelled from the Sudetenland and everything that accompanied this transfer or expulsion was legalised.

The research conducted in 2018 and 2019 defined that the formation of a cross-border space of shared communication, cooperation and integration here requires much greater demands on intercultural competences, on overcoming economic asymmetries, collective prejudices, including dealing with the common cross-border history.

It was only the visit of the Bavarian Prime Minister Horst Seehofer in 2010 and the speech of the Czech Prime Minister Petr Nečas in the Bavarian state parliament in 2013 that opened the space for change (although President Václav Havel had already tried to change the paradigm). Prime Minister Nečas thanked Prime Minister Horst Seehofer for his courage and his conviction that Czechs and Bavarians are able and willing to look together and openly not only to the future but also to the past. At the same time, he deplored the post-war injustices caused by the forced displacement of Germans from Czechoslovakia. In doing so, the two politicians created a space for dealing with the past in the form of dialogic remembering; a way of remembering the past that allows people to relate to their own and others' memories and experiences.

This is also the way in which the Hindle project has come to work with border history.

### **The Hindle project as a means of changing perspectives**

#### **Active boundaries**

In contrast to the notion of the border as a barrier is the concept of the so-called active border, which the Hindle project is trying to implement, albeit unconsciously at first. It reflects different perspectives on historical events from both sides of the border. The active border represents a specific cultural form that contributes to strengthening public reflection and learning, while promoting social inclusion and democratic integration.

The aim of the active border is to offer a space for positive identity formation, other/other orientation, cooperation and dialogical engagement with the past. This concept coincides with the objectives of the Hindle project. Active borders can connect. Self/reflection of the bounded community,

crossing the boundary and confronting otherness is an important part of it.

At the core of any collective identity is the distinction between 'us' and 'others', i.e. the construction of an idea of ourselves and others beyond the border. The active border is characterised by permeability and a multitude of communication channels. Its counterpart is the passive border, characterised by little permeability or even impenetrability. It is this kind of border concept, where difference is not an obstacle to dialogue and cooperation, that we are striving for in the Hindle project.

An active border allows for cultural encounters and understanding in a way that does not cause polarisation and rejection, but creates space for continued dialogue or cooperation. This does not mean that there must always be agreement. Unsuccessful conflicts must also be valued. Even this is better than not resolving conflicts, because even raising these issues increases the likelihood of their resolution in the future. An active border is based on solidarity and respect for others, which we respect not because of our familiarity with their context, but because of our belief in the efficacy of a shared discursive space – offering 'unity in diversity'.

#### **Hindle project**

How to tackle the active frontier practically? A key tool is to bring citizens from both sides of the border together, for example during events and programmes of a cultural, sporting or religious nature. One of the aims of the Hindle project is to create a platform for meeting together and sharing experiences.

The Hindle project was born out of my long-standing interest in local history and my desire to understand more deeply the developments on the other side of the border and their impact on the situation on the Czech side. The project offers the possibility of a different point of view and seeks to communicate effectively through



the interpretation of local heritage. The aim is, therefore, first and foremost to engage the participants, make them think for themselves and then search for personal meanings and relevance.

As part of our association activities, we work with people in their free time and also prepare programmes for schools. We adapt our choice of resources to different people's interests, offering a mixture of lectures and outdoor field activities. There are people in the region who are interested to go out into the field but do not attend lectures; the excursions are for them, while lectures appeal to a different sub-group of participants.

The region is not a large one, but we still try to rotate the meeting places, both to have an even representation, but also for practical reasons to make the activities more accessible to different visitors. The core of the lectures takes place at the association's headquarters in Domažlice, but they are also held once in a while in other towns on both sides of the border (Kdyně, Poběžovice, Waldmünchen. Furth im Wald, Schönsee). The excursions are half on the Czech side and half on the German side. Ideally, they cross the border. If there is a thematic connection, excursions outside the region, for example to nearby Pilsen, can also work.

We try to ensure that visitors are not just passive participants and recipients, but are actively encouraged to come up with suggestions on topics or places that interest them.

The following overview gives an idea of the activities in the year 2023:

- 11 lectures (Domažlice, Waldmünchen, Furth im Wald, Poběžovice), 25 participants on average, 275 participants in total
- 11 excursions (across the border, at the border, 10 different guides), average 60 participants, total estimated 700 participants

- Czech-German picnic in Domažlice, about 500 participants
- Guided tours of the exhibition Beware of the Border, about 1,000 participants
- 4 exhibitions in the Hindle Centre, about 500 visitors
- Handicraft workshops focusing on traditions and crafts: Easter (easter eggs and pomlázka), straw baskets, gingerbread, about 200 participants in total
- Further cooperation with similar partners in the region: Europe Direct Furth im Wald, Freiraum Furth im Wald, Centrum Bohemia Bavaria Schönsee
- Programmes for schools: 8 classes from the district of Domažlice and Cham

Our project activities are based on the premise that a plurality of opinions, values and interests cannot preclude meaningful dialogue or peer review. We do not seek to create a homogeneous, global culture, but a space for cultural encounter, public learning and a free change of perspective. We discuss the same topics at the same time, with the same frame of reference. The premise of such discussions is that actors on both sides of the border respect each other as legitimate partners in the discussion. And this is what we try to do both by the choice of topics and speakers and by moderating the discussions.

While national narratives have historically been shaped on a monolithic monological principle, dialogical recollection should lead to a diversification of national constructions and thus open a vista to a common future. By creating plural European narratives that can be shared, European trauma can be processed. Dialogic narratives are embedded in national narratives, but they transcend borders; through a cross-border perspective, there can be mutual recognition of victims. This involves taking responsibility for the traumatic past and acknowledging a share in the suffering inflicted

on the other ethnicity, which is included in one's own collective memory by virtue of mutual remembering.

During the discussions, different historical interpretations are clearly revealed, which re/produce discursive perceptions, also determined by different interpretations of history on the Czech and German sides. These different narratives are given space in the common space of our events, but also in other activities of our association. Even after the relatively short duration of the Hindle project, a year and a half, it is clear that one-off events are not enough to bring about change. What is important is continuous long-term action, which is why we do not consider one-off actions without further follow-up to be meaningful. This does not mean that we do not engage in further activities. On the contrary, we do our best to link different activities and use them to support common goals. Examples include three Czech-German books on the history of places in the region, or the Czech-German exhibition *Beware the Borders!/ Achtung, Grenze!* in Domažlice, or the partner exhibition *Heimat - Grenze - Drache/ Home - Border - Dragon* in Furth im Wald, which I co-authored.

There are many similar initiatives in Europe that try to overcome conflicting historical interpretations. They differ in the degree of public and political support, and, therefore, in the degree of their impact and success in terms of overcoming conflicting stereotypes and narratives. The Hindle project is one of the initiatives dedicated to fostering a shared discursive space in which Europeans seek to shape a shared view of conflict history.

The Hindle project is partly based on regular public events. In this context, the results of a survey among the mayors of the Šumava and Nisa Euroregions (2018 and 2019) are interesting. 35% of them answered that cross-

border events are held in their municipality only occasionally, 32% said they are held several times a year, 20% once a year, 12% not at all. Mayors on the German side were more active in this respect, which is probably related to the strong tradition of association life: in Germany, these activities are often organised by associations, while in our country they are largely organised by the local government (association life has suffered from 40 years of systematic suppression of civil society). In this comparison, the Hindle project is more active than average.

In the same survey, mayors also commented on historical conflicts, the topics on which the Hindle project focuses. 64% of mayors agreed that the focus should be on developing cross-border relations with neighbours, and dealing with and commemorating historical injustices is a necessary part of this. For 15% of mayors, it was important to deal with these conflicts and disputes through an objective understanding of historical events, including finding the guilty parties and condemning them, even though most of them are now dead, and 21% of mayors would prefer not to commemorate the injustices at all and thus not burden relations in the future. The research also confirmed that the positive attitudes of mayors towards the border and cooperation, and frequent contacts with partners from the other side of the border, have a close positive relationship with their self-identification with the EU, a more positive assessment of relations between the inhabitants of the Euroregion and a more open attitude towards historical conflicts and injustices. Their perception of cross-border cooperation as a suitable tool for coping with the past was also highlighted.

Thus, the research results confirm the productivity of the active border concept in shaping positive identities. It turns out that the activity of local actors plays a crucial role in

determining the development of an active border. The human factor and the competence of local actors are also considered decisive by many interviewees.

### **Hindle: How and to whom?**

If a change of attitude is to have any chance at all, it must be freely accepted and come from the bottom-up. Particularly in a society that has a deep experience of state propaganda and manipulation, people are extremely sensitive to questions aimed at changing values and personal preferences. The current climate of growing mistrust of the standard media and traditional academic or political authorities also contributes to this.

The project's approach to communicating with visitors can be viewed through the lens of the principles of interpretation as defined by Sam Ham in the TORE model, which was subsequently developed by the US National Association of Interpretation (NAI) into the POETRY model. What can we imagine under this umbrella?

### **P – Purposeful**

All the activities of the Hindle project have a clear purpose, which is sustainable development and a better quality of life in the region. The project activities are intended to contribute to people's well-being, their desire to live in the region, to improve it and to love it. But only their free decision and activity can be the key to this, because positive changes will not come from outside. But they can come from within.

### **O – Organised**

Sam Ham says that interpretation is organised if it is easy to follow. Therefore, to make such Hindle events, we use a clear format, have a message, the project has one distinctive visual from the start and a clear contact where one can find out more. A clear schedule is worked out - a lecture and walk every month, an exhibition

four times a year - and information is available on the website, on posters and in print six months in advance. This is supplemented by occasional programmes for schools.

### **E – Enjoyable to process**

In order for participants to want to receive and engage with content that is often not uplifting, they must first and foremost decide for themselves. That's why we publish event annotations, so that attendees can set expectations in terms of both content and logistics. In our communications before events and at the events themselves, we try to create a friendly and free atmosphere and a sense of personal interest and care for visitors. We provide little things like refreshments, toilets, souvenirs (e.g. a booklet with stickers commemorating the events).

We select guides from the region who have a strong personal connection to the place. We invite participants to discuss and try to have a dialogue. To ensure a safe environment, an informed moderator is always present in addition to the guide or presenter. We answer all questions. We also leave time within the events for participants to talk informally with each other.

### **T – Thematic**

As part of the dramaturgy, we select locations and themes where we can test and break down boundaries, stereotypes and prejudices in the spirit of the motto "understand and you will stop hating". The overall message of the project, which we take not as something to remember but as a platform for people to think for themselves, is: we are not peripheries and there is much more that unites us than what divides us. Boundaries today are mostly in our heads, but they can be overcome if we get to know and understand each other.

### R – Relevant

We are looking for themes and viewpoints that take into account what matters to people, whether it is the universal concept of home or a location that appeals to a local audience, such as the dominant mountain near the border, Čerchov. We are always trying to update, to connect historical places and stories with the present. The thematic diversity brings in different groups for whom different personalities, stories, places or eras are relevant. The fact that Hindle provides space for other local sustainable activities, such as various handicraft classes, fashion shows, meeting spaces and partnerships, falls into this category.

For our school programmes, relevance to the students is important and can provide a basis for them to engage freely and creatively in the process. We give them the space to direct the process (outcomes) and to explore on their own.

### Y – You

We try to build on personalities. We don't have professional guides or presenters, but lovers of the region with strong stories, family history, people who burn and can ignite others. Plus, rotating guides offers the desired variety of programme, locations, styles, language. The role of the moderator at events is to act as a dramaturg and to reveal the personal level of the stories in a subtle and gentle way.

### How do participants see the Hindle project after a year and a half?

The questionnaire was sent out via a social network and 51 people responded over three days. This represents approximately 3% of the 1,500 participants who had attended the 26 events (lectures, excursions and exhibitions) that had taken place. However, the actual proportion will be slightly higher, given that approximately 10% of participants are repeat attendants of the events. The results of the survey should,

therefore, be seen as roughly indicative, bearing these facts in mind.

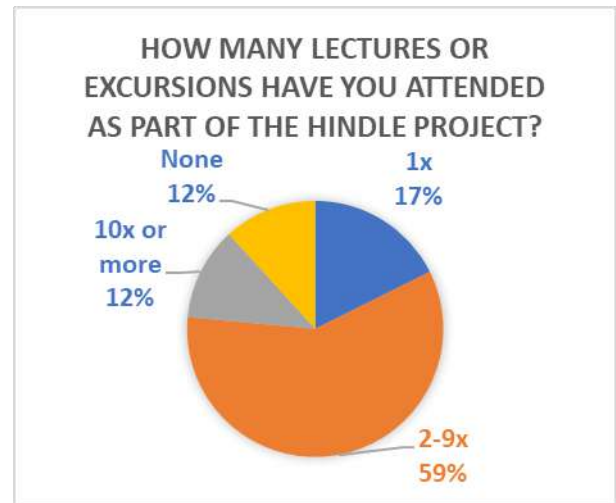


Figure 1. How many Hindle project events did people attend?

Of the 51 respondents, 88% had personally attended at least one event. Most respondents, (59%) attended between two and nine events. 12% had attended ten or more events.

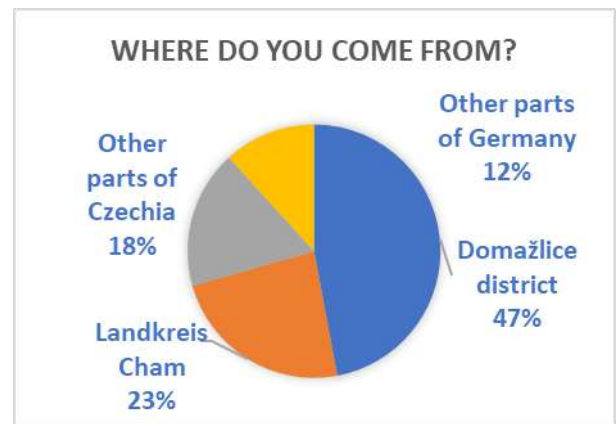
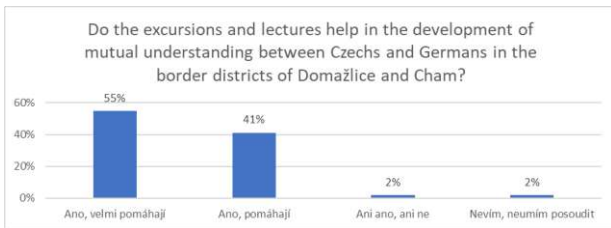


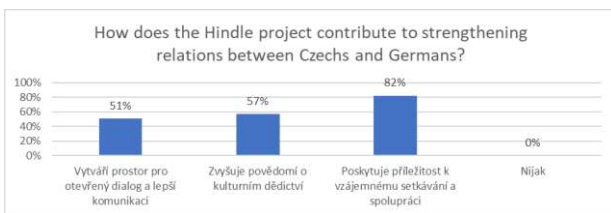
Figure 2. Where did participants come from?

70% of respondents were directly from the Hindle project area of interest (Domažlice district 47%, Cham district 23%). 30% came from outside the project area (Czech Republic 18% and Germany 12%).



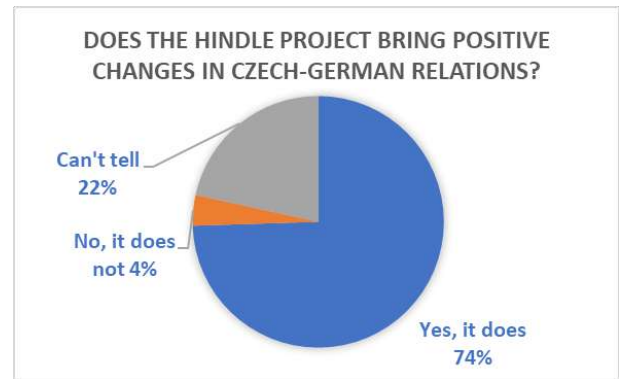
**Figure 3. Does the Hindle project help in developing mutual understanding?**

The vast majority of respondents (96%) felt that excursions and lectures were very helpful (55%) or helpful (41%) in developing mutual understanding between Czechs and Germans in the Hindle project area. Thus, the chosen form of project activities was overwhelmingly rated as effective by the respondents in terms of trying to foster mutual understanding between the inhabitants of the Hindle region.



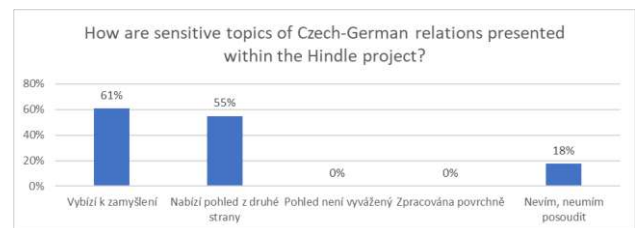
**Figure 4. How does the Hindle project strengthen relations?**

When asked how the project's activities, i.e. bilingual excursions and lectures, contribute to strengthening relations between Czechs and Germans, most respondents (82%) highlighted the creation of opportunities for mutual encounters and cooperation. 57% answered that the activities raise awareness of the cultural heritage of the region and 51% that they create space for open dialogue and better communication. Thus, the respondents mainly perceived the fact that the project offers the opportunity to meet in person and do something together. The deeper motives of getting to know each other and communicating were reflected as important by about half of the respondents.



**Figure 5. Does the Hindle project bring positive changes in cross-border relations?**

74% of respondents were convinced that the project brings positive changes in Czech-German relations. Only 4% believed the opposite. The rest could not answer. The majority of respondents, therefore, perceived the project as having a positive contribution to mutual relations.



**Figure 6. How are sensitive topics presented?**

18% of the respondents were unable to assess how the project presents sensitive topics of Czech-German relations. 55% appreciated the fact that the project conveys the other side's view of contemporary events and 61% assessed that the project encourages them to reflect on these topics. None of the respondents considered the way they were presented to be superficial or unbalanced. Given that the project's activities often touch on sensitive topics such as World War II and post-war events, it is significant that 82% of respondents rated this area positively. Approximately equally often they appreciate the creation of space for self-reflection and the provision of a different perspective.

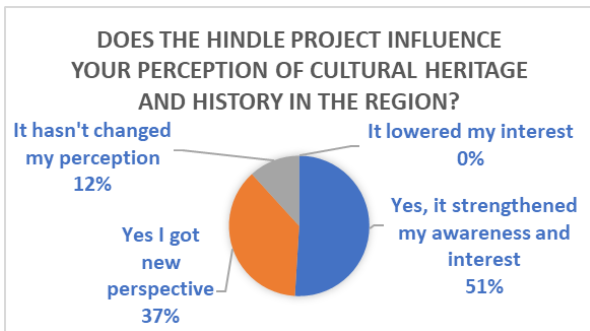


Figure 7. The project's influence on the perception of cultural heritage.

51% said that in terms of their perception of the cultural heritage and history of the region, the project had increased their awareness and interest, and 37% said that they had gained a new perspective. No respondents experienced a decrease in interest as a result of project activities. For 12% there was no conscious change, and it should be noted that half of them had not personally participated in any event. Thus, on a personal level, respondents were more likely to value broadening their general awareness of the region and less likely to value gaining a new perspective.

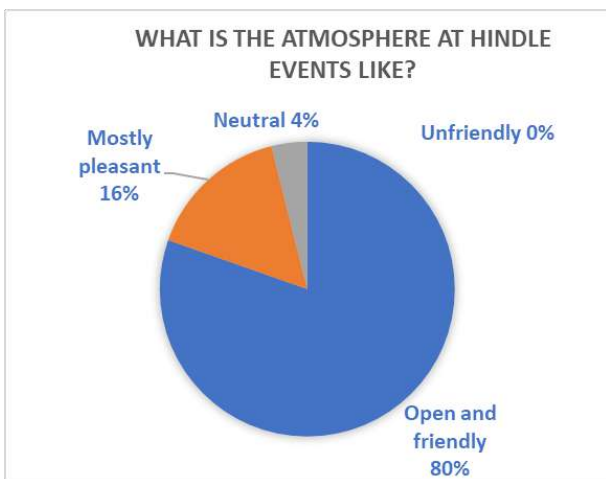


Figure 8. The atmosphere of the Hindle events.

As the project is based on personal encounters and shared experiences, the respondents' opinion on the atmosphere of Hindle events was also important. 96% of respondents perceived it positively (80% as friendly and open and 16% as mostly pleasant). 4% described it as neutral (these respondents also stated that they had not

attended any of the events in person). No-one experienced it as hostile. Thus, respondents rated the atmosphere of the events highly positively.

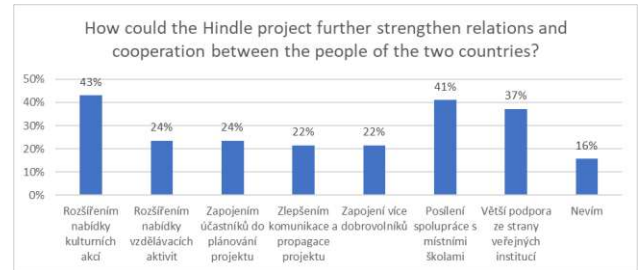


Figure 9. How could the project further strengthen relations?

I was also interested in the future perspective of the project and its activities. Among the things that the project could do to further strengthen relationships and cooperation, the most frequent were expanding the range of cultural events (43%), strengthening cooperation with local schools (41%), and more support from public institutions (37%). Less important in this sense were expanding the range of educational activities (24%), involving participants in project planning (24%), improving communication and promotion of the project (22%), and involving more volunteers (22%). 16% of respondents did not know. Thus, the most frequent suggestions were to develop the offer of the 'tourist' part of the activity, to focus more on the target group of children and to obtain institutional support to ensure longer-term financial stability.

### Can working with and interpreting sensitive heritage contribute to sustainability and quality of life?

The dialogical recollection that takes place in the Hindle events is a reflective approach towards a critical reassessment of one's own memories and interconnectedness. It is not about replacing individual narratives with a common one. This remembering is based on the foundation that national borders remain the baselines of the contextual framework for interpreting the past, but this is not an obstacle

to fostering openness and sharing of individual narratives. In the process, monologic national interpretations of the past become interconnected views of the past. The intention of this approach is to achieve the social relief, the catharsis, the belief in justice that is necessary to break down collective traumas.

Through a shared experience that touches on sensitive issues on both sides, participants in the dialogical remembrance at Hindle events gain a greater understanding, empathy and trust for each other, which are essential for thinking about living together and the future.

One of the significant limits of cross-border activities on the Czech-German border is the language barrier, which makes mutual understanding difficult and naturally alienates the environment in which the other party has difficulty finding their way. Creating linguistic hospitality and comfort is important for mutual understanding, for example through multilingual services in the form of museums, monuments and other landmarks, guides and nature trails or signs. The Hindle project has consistently sought to remove the language barrier by making all outputs bilingual from the outset. It also seeks to promote interest in the language and culture of its neighbours among school children by offering cross-border programmes. There is a deeper symbolism in populating the landscape with the language of neighbours – for many peoples, including Germans and Czechs, language has become perhaps the most important objective marker of national belonging. Thus, bilingualism strengthens critical thinking skills, empathy and self-reflection.

The aim of the project is to change the perception of the border as a place on the edge into a place in the middle, where neighbours from both sides can create their future together – the future of the fictional Hindle region.

Instead of nationalism, the project wants to foster a conscious local patriotism, pointing to the uniqueness of the place and strengthening people's relationship to it. In this way, the project builds on the idea of Euroregions, which also lie on the borders of EU countries, but gives it a more graspable scale, which is more manageable organisationally with the resources of civil society and easier to grasp mentally for the participants involved.

Strengthening the idea of the Hindle region, which connects two districts on the border, is first and foremost to strengthen the identification with the common space that connects Czechs and Germans today – the space of the European Union – and to give it concrete content. For example, that neighbours are able to overcome the boundaries imposed by different languages and the complex history of their relations, and develop their region together in the light of the challenges of today with the aim of building a better future for future generations. Hindle wants to be a place where neighbours are aware of their own traditions, history and art, but see them as a source of mutual enrichment and encounter rather than as a tool for separation and isolation. The aim is to support each other and strengthen the bond to the region and the community. This also implies a commitment to develop their home sustainably and to strive for the best possible quality of life. This development can take many forms. Interpretation of sensitive, but also other natural and cultural heritage, can encourage tourism, which, if properly managed, can be an important element in the sustainable development of a region, bringing employment opportunities and better infrastructure that also contribute to the quality of life of local people.

Our own natural and cultural heritage, including sensitive heritage, is a resource for which a level of education is important for appreciation and protection. Working not only with sensitive

heritage, on the other hand, offers an important incentive and tool for education and awareness raising. The creation of programmes and activities aimed at school children and the public can raise awareness of the history, traditions and significance of a given heritage and thus contribute to its preservation.

Sustainable development undoubtedly includes the sustainable use of natural resources, which can be linked to traditional agricultural or craft practices. Promoting them, for example by supporting handicraft courses, can also contribute to the preservation and creative development of these traditions and to the sustainable use of natural resources and the reduction of the negative environmental impact of modern technology.

Working with sensitive heritage can also encourage the involvement of local communities in decision-making processes concerning the conservation and interpretation of this heritage. This can strengthen social capital and contribute to the creation of more sustainable communities that are at peace with their own past. Awareness of the value of sensitive heritage can also contribute to the regeneration of historic town and village centres and the revitalisation of abandoned or neglected areas, which has a direct impact on the quality of life of residents. But it can also contribute to changing perceptions and perspectives on parts of villages or landscapes, and to counteract efforts to change that ultimately lead to the loss of local memory.

Overall, then, working with and interpreting sensitive heritage can play a key role in promoting sustainability and enhancing quality of life, especially if these activities are undertaken with the needs and perspectives of local communities in mind.

### **Where are our limits of an NGO project?**

The experience of the Hindle project also clearly shows where its limits are. One of the key ones is the language barrier. It is directly related to the problem of 'mutual ignorance', which is the result of a lack of communication from both sides.

The issue of language permeability is central, both in issues of everyday cross-border cooperation and in the formation of cross-border belonging, collective memory and coming to terms with the past. All these issues are directly dependent on the creation and maintenance of a shared communicative space. Multilingualism promotes tolerance, empathy and critical thinking.

In the Hindle project, we also see offering programmes for school children and young people as crucial. Unlike other activities that reach an active part of the population, programmes for schools can have a wide reach and reach the future 'silent passive majority'.

From my own experience, I can confirm Karl B. Müller's observation that specific partners often do not find equal partners with corresponding competences, and often these are partnerships between schools. I see school systems as another limitation of the Hindle project. It is somewhat understandable that the political representation still clings to its educational monopoly. But in the face of global challenges, this claim seems anachronistic. It contradicts the current needs of coping with global threats, but also the needs of dealing productively with one's own past.

One of the results of the unsatisfactory performance of the education system in overcoming 'mutual ignorance' is the continuing popularity of nationalism and populism, which has been evident in recent years not only in the border regions of the Czech Republic and Germany, but also in Hindle. Yet



the geographical proximity and long-standing membership of the EU offers both countries quite extraordinary opportunities to stimulate children's curiosity by exploring linguistic, ethnic and social diversity. Thus, education can also be imbued with respect for cultural diversity and the ability to get along with others who are the same and yet different. But it is clear from the intensity with which this is happening that this is not a priority for political representation on either side of the border.

Related to this point is another obstacle to a more massive impact of education in the culture and language of neighbours, namely the project form of funding or the lack of institutional support. Today, the Hindle project is partly funded by the Czech-German Future Fund, and partly supported by hundreds of hours of volunteer work. The project's promoter is the registered association Chodsko žije!, with limited capacity. The Bohemia Bavaria Centre operates in the Hindle region on the German side of the border, but Hindle has no parallel in the Czech area in terms of its concept and ability to bring people from both sides of the border together in a realistic way.

However, the future of its activities is uncertain and, as with many other projects, there is a risk that the contacts, projects and intentions that have been laboriously established will be interrupted due to lack of funding. The project is currently not supported by local authorities, regional or national structures.

It is questionable whether European society can afford to neglect investment in structures that demonstrably contribute to mutual understanding between neighbours, to coming to terms with a difficult past and to building a common sustainable future based on shared European values.

## **Conclusions**

If you want to impress others these days, you have to invent something very crazy, like Hindle, a non-existent region that is supposed to connect people on a previously impenetrable border. The idea of an active border that connects rather than divides can serve as inspiration for many places. Projects that seek to create an active border, and to overcome deep-seated barriers through mutual encounters and communication, require a great deal of effort and time on the part of the organisers.

In the long run, supporting projects like Hindle should pay off. On the one hand, they help to improve the situation in a particular place and on the other hand, they can serve as a clear European playground or small laboratory. Here we can try out how best to cultivate tolerance and mutual understanding, without which a better future together in Europe is unthinkable.

The goodwill and enthusiasm that is enough to get a project up and running is not enough to make a deeper difference. Society must decide that it wants such change and create an environment that enables and systematically supports it. Without this support, fear of difference will dominate the public space instead of appreciation of diversity, and fear and prejudice instead of a spirit of cooperation. We know all too well in the Hindle region where such a choice can lead.

Europe's wealth today is also the result of its ability to learn from its own mistakes and prejudiced conclusions. Shortcomings are easier to find in a diverse environment offering different perspectives than in a homogeneous environment stereotypically reproducing conformity. Thus, shared diversity can be seen as a key source of innovation, conscious growth and public learning. This requirement is also promoted in EU strategic documents. The call for European solidarity and active citizenship is

also about reconciling (self)confidence with uncertainty, learning to approach the different and the unknown with trust and respect.

The European space should be an environment where everyone has a place to build their own local identity, where there is space to differentiate, not to define against each other. Differentiation is always the result of open communication. This is what we actively strive for at Hindle.

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## Changing mindsets in nature conservation: Czech experience

### Ladislav Ptáček (Czech Republic)

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#### Abstract

This paper focuses on the complex change of mindset not only among visitors, but also among conservationists and politicians in the context of nature conservation in the Czech Republic. It identifies the need to evaluate and name the gaps in existing approaches to mindset change and highlights the importance of learning from these findings. It analyses the need to engage all stakeholders, including conservationists, visitors, politicians and other stakeholders, and the need for mindset change within each group. It discusses the importance of collaboration and initiatives that lead to improved understanding and dialogue between these groups. It considers the need to start by critically assessing existing practices and approaches to identify areas in need of mindset change, and sets out a pathway for incremental change that supports conservation in all its aspects.

#### Keywords

nature conservation, mindset change, visitor centres, interpretive planning

#### Introduction

The current system of nature protection in the Czech Republic was established in the 1990s, at a time when the restoration of the environment devastated by the previous regime was considered a priority by the public and the new political representation. However, the situation has changed considerably in 30 years. Conservation today has to face not only a changing climate but also shifts in society's perception of its role. It can use new tools to influence public opinion. To what extent is it succeeding?

#### Large-scale protected areas and visitor centres

The backbone of the system are the large-scale protected areas: four national parks and 26 protected landscape areas (PLA). 24 PLA are managed by the AOPK ČR (Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic) and the remaining two PLA are taken care of by the national parks to which they are adjacent. The total area of the PLAs is 10,700sqkm, which represents 13.6% of the territory of the Czech Republic.

Since 2015, I have had the opportunity to get to know ten PLAs in the framework of intensive cooperation, as I have been working on Concepts for Work with Visitors (KPNV) and interpretive plans for the Houses of Nature (DPs). These are described below.

The need to build visitor centres was formulated by the Ministry of the Environment in the State Programme for Nature and Landscape Protection of the Czech Republic in 1998. Subsequently, the AOPK proposed to build a total of 42 such centres in its needs analysis in 2000. This was not possible due to the financial requirements. In 2006, support for their construction was approved from European funds (OPŽP). In 2009, the Ministry of the Environment approved the House of Nature

Programme, the aim of which was to have a visitor centre in every protected landscape area by 2015. This was later postponed to 2020. In 2023, ten DPs were in operation and three about to open.

### **Only with an interpretive plan**

Prior to 2014, an interpretive plan was not required to build a DP, and nine of the ten DPs currently in operation were created without one. This means without a solid foundation and analysis of the entire area being presented and without clearly defined presentation objectives formulated through a rigorous interpretive planning process.

The requirement to prepare an interpretation plan for each proposed DP was successfully added to the conditions for the next programming period (2014-2020). Such a plan should logically have been based on the IP for the whole area of the PLA. From these PLA IPs, the Concepts for Work with Visitors (KPNV) gradually evolved.

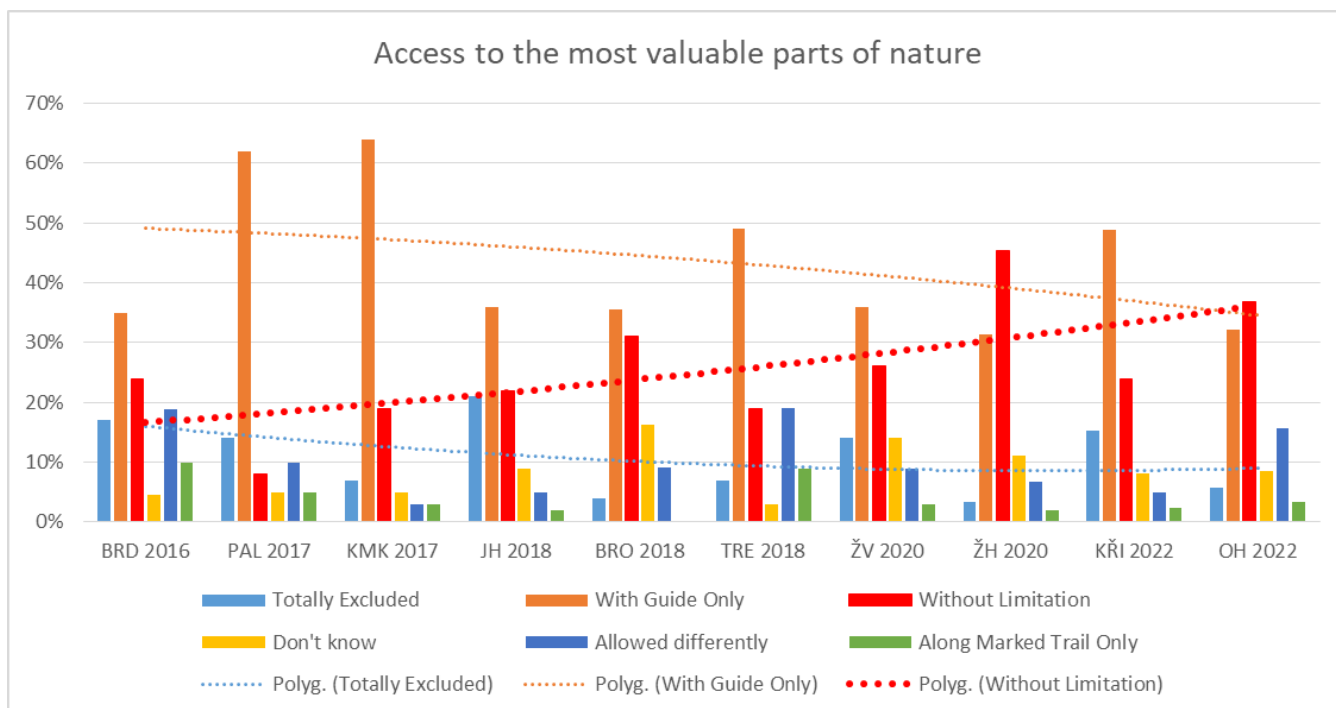
Interpretive plans for the DPs and KPNVs of the PLA have been developed since 2015 and to-date, out of the 24 PLA, 15 KPNVs have been developed and two are now being finalised.

### **Situation changed**

What does mindset and its changes have to do with all this? If we take the fact that part of the development of the interpretive plan is to define the purpose of the document and its communication goals - cognitive, emotional and behavioural - then we can conclude that the goal of interpretation and its planning is nothing other than changing the mindset and the resulting behaviour of visitors towards nature.

Surveys of visitors to the area have been and continue to be a regular part of the development of the KPNV, involving between 200 and 600 respondents per PLA. Some shift in the prevailing mindset of visitors in relation to restricting access to the most valuable parts of the countryside is indicated by the aggregate data from the 2016 to 2022 surveys. It would undoubtedly be interesting to compare this with the situation in the 1990s, but there is a lack of data to do so. However, even over this seven-year period, some shift is evident.

There is a clear upward trend in the response that people should have unrestricted access to even the most valuable parts of nature. On the other hand, there was a slight decrease in the responses, Access should be 'Totally excluded' or 'Allowed only with a guide'. The view that nature is primarily there for people and should be as accessible as possible to them thus seems to be on the rise and is confirmed by the experience of the area managers too.



**Figure 1: Responses to surveys on access to nature (2016-2022)**

(Source: Visitor surveys of individual KPNV: PLA Brdy (BRD), PLA Pálava (PAL), PLA Kokořínsko-Máchův kraj (KMK), PLA Jizerské hory (JH), PLA Broumovsko (BRO), PLA Třeboňsko (TRE), PLA Žďárské vrchy (ŽV), PLA Železné hory (ŽH), PLA Křivoklátsko (KŘI), PLA Orlické hory (OH))

### New tools and opportunities

Mindsets are changing and evolving, and area managers must take this into account, or better - try to influence mindsets in favour of protected nature. AOPK can use the mentioned tools, i.e. DPs (Houses of Nature) and KPNVs (Concepts of Work with Visitors).

While the DPs are mainly designed to communicate with visitors to the PLA and schools, the KPNVs have a broader scope. They are intended to help better communicate with businesses, local politicians and the public.

### House of Nature (DPs)

DPs offer specific educational programmes, most often aimed at schools. This is related to several facts. The DP programme is set up as a PPP (public-private-partnership), and operates on a franchise principle. The state, through the AOPK, does not operate the DPs, it only contributes a small part to their operation (about 20% of all costs) and the operators have

to provide the remainder themselves, respecting certain rules and restrictions.

Since the operators are often recruited from among NGOs that are running environmental education programmes and the schools have allocated funds for these programmes, the use of DP premises for these programmes is offered. However, as a rule, general environmental education programmes are only marginally related to the fulfilment of the main purpose of the DP as a visitor centre of a specific PLA.

DPs also run expositions that are intended for tourists and present the values of the nature and landscape of the protected area. The number of visitors to DPs ranges from a few thousand to the lower tens of thousands in the busiest tourist sites. The operator may charge an entrance fee to fund the operation. DPs also offer programmes for visitors, for which they can also make a charge.

As is evident, although DPs are meant to represent the protected area and its values, they are not directly linked to the managers of the area. In order to present the current issues facing the protected area, DPs work with the managers, who have very limited capacity. Thus, the influence of the PLA managers on the management of the DPs and presentation of the PLA is usually only marginal.

### **How efficiently?**

Who evaluates the effectiveness of the DP for its clients and how? As far as I know, no one has addressed this question comprehensively in the 14 years of the programme's operation. Apart from the fact that operators are obliged to report the number of visitors and programmes, no data is collected. Nor is there any evaluation of the quality of services provided.

Offers for external evaluation of the quality of interpretation have not been taken up, presumably for fear that any critical evaluation might be used by opponents of the DP programme to stop it. This has created a vicious circle that has not yet been broken.

Thus, the only official external evaluation of the programme was carried out by the Supreme Audit Office (SAO) in 2021, which concluded that funds spent on the visitor centres, including the DPs, were not being used efficiently and economically. A significant criticism in this context was that the Ministry of Environment did not set clear evaluation criteria and indicators that would tell how the construction of this infrastructure helps in halting the decline of biodiversity and reducing negative anthropogenic impacts on protected areas. However, the SAO did not directly address the issue of the quality of the functioning of the DPs.

### **Concept of Work with Visitors**

A more comprehensive tool for influencing mindsets is the Concept of Work with Visitors (KPNV). The concept proposes strategic steps not only in terms of interpretation of the area, but also the limits of its possible use. It offers a space for strategic discussions amongst the conservationists in the field office, who do not often have similar structured discussions amongst themselves and deal more with the operational issues of the territory and the office.

Furthermore, the KPNV offers space for discussions in broader working groups that include conservationists as well as mayors, representatives of business, destination management, forest managers, etc. The aim is then to ensure that these discussions continue after the document is finalised and that the dialogue between the various actors in the territory continues.

The potential for influencing mindsets among conservationists, local politicians and businessmen, as well as among visitors to the area, is therefore considerable. What is the extent of its use and effectiveness of action? This question cannot be answered unequivocally, as targeted and systematic evaluation is not taking place here either.

This is mainly due to capacity. With a few honourable exceptions, there are no staff dedicated to implementing the proposed measures, let alone evaluating them. And if they are, they have a low hourly allocation for this agenda. This points to the fact that other items have a higher priority in the range of tasks that the AOPK provides. KPNVs are therefore gradually emerging, which is positive, but their functionality is unclear.

### **First motivation?**

The main motivation for their creation is the obligation to acquire the KPNV as an annex to the key document for the management of the area, which is the Management Plan. The need to achieve a qualitative shift in communication is certainly not the main motivation.

Yet it is clear that public and political views are evolving, and with them the mindsets that directly influence conservation options. The aforementioned response from visitors to protected areas to access the most valuable parts of nature, and the heated public debate around the designation of new large-scale protected areas, are cases in point.

### **Questions and attempt to answer**

Is a change of mindset needed for the long-term sustainable development of the territory? For whom should it occur? What should it be? How can it be achieved? And what prevents it? These questions should be answered by those responsible for the fate of protected areas.

My answer to these questions is based on limited personal experience. In my opinion, a change of mindset is needed first and foremost among those responsible for nature conservation. Until they consider effective communication with the public a top priority, nothing will change. When we have proposed appropriate staff reinforcements within the KPNV, we have always been told that this is politically unviable, unthinkable.

If staffing nature conservation is politically impassable, the ability of conservationists to communicate and garner political support is limited, hence staffing of nature conservation remains politically impassable. This vicious circle can only be broken by a change in the mindset of the leaders, which will make substantial strengthening of nature conservation in the area of communication viable and sustainable.

### **Nice to have or duty is not enough**

As long as communication tools such as DPs or KPNVs are just a 'nice to have', not an obligation - as an annex to PLA management plans or a ticket to money for DPs construction - nothing substantial will change. Sufficient professional capacity and a perceived need to use the tools systematically, be it KPNVs or DPs, is necessary for this change. Until then, their creation is positive, but at the same time also largely a missed opportunity for needed change.

It turns out that getting the motivation for action right is critical to success. If it remains at the level of formal compliance, it is not accompanied by adequate resources and, therefore, real change cannot occur. Because you can't make real change with the old mindset.

## The ethics of changing others' minds (summary)

### Philipp P. Thapa (Germany)

Philipp P. Thapa is an ecologist, philosopher, and writer. He has worked in international conservation and development, taught ethics and environmental philosophy at several universities, and published literary writings and translations. As a fellow of the Sustainable Europe Research Institute Germany, he leads the research under The Big Green (2023–27), an EU project on culture and sustainability.

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#### Abstract

That we try to persuade each other of what we believe to be true and good is a commonplace and often beneficial part of social life. More so, some situations are inherently about and for persuasion. When we attend a lecture or read a newspaper comment, we at least accept the risk of having our minds changed, and we often want just that, in that we want to learn something. The same applies to guided heritage tours. Still, heritage interpreters, like teachers or journalists, find themselves in a position of special trust and hence special responsibility. If they use it to challenge and influence their audience's habits of mind, they have a moral obligation to make their agenda transparent and be prepared to support it with arguments, not just appeals or suggestive storytelling.

#### Keywords

persuasion, ethics of interpretation, good practice, Socratic method

#### Introduction

It is quite literally the job of heritage interpreters to help their audiences make sense of the world and our place in it, at least as reflected in the piece of the world they happen to be interpreting. In other words, interpreters have a platform, and many of them feel that they should use it to encourage sustainable behaviour. Depending on the audience, this may require no more than affirming, in passing, what people already believe and practise. In other cases, encouraging sustainable behaviour may require an interpreter to "challenge mindsets", as the theme of this conference asks us to consider. Between particular habits and comprehensive mindsets, which combine worldviews, ethics, politics, and more, there extends a wide field of topics, large and small, on which interpreters may want to change others' minds.

I condense the subject matter of this paper by using the phrase "to change someone's mind" as a general term covering topics of all sizes as well as various degrees of intended influence. Of course, raising a question is not the same as brainwashing an audience. Arguably, however, in the context of a conference that introduces its theme by stating that "radical shifts in our way of life are needed", it is clearly implied that even polite challenges and open-ended discussion serve the ultimate purpose of making people "more mindful towards our common future" and encouraging them to "transition towards a sustainable lifestyle" (Interpret Europe 2023).

(I bracket here the question how effective changing people's minds can be as an approach to changing behaviour. I tend to agree with David Uzzel (and Karl Marx) that on a societal scale it is often more effective to change behaviour first – by changing the material, economic and legal conditions within which people make their lives. Minds will follow. Then again, it is easier for governments to implement



such lifestyle-changing policies if the dominant cultural values or mindset supports them. And of course, however effective as a point of leverage, people's minds are usually all that interpreters get to work on.)

Is it okay for heritage interpreters to try and influence people's behaviour by changing their minds? After all, this could be seen as adding an undue moral and political agenda to interpretation, among other conceivable objections.

I consider this question from an ethical point of view, as outlined by Anthony Weston's useful textbook definition: "To think or act ethically is to take care for the basic needs and legitimate expectations of others as well as our own." (Weston 2013:5)

For our present purposes, keep in mind the following questions: Who are the others that interpreters should take care for? What legitimate expectations should interpreters strive to meet? And how should their own needs, hopes, and desires influence their decisions in a professional context?

### **The situation**

The first step of an ethical assessment should be to understand the situation (cf. Bleisch et al. 2021). Here, I'm considering not a concrete, individual case but a generalised type of situation, the one heritage interpreters find themselves in when doing their job. Stakeholders are the persons (or, more generally, beings, depending on your ethical outlook) who could be affected by the interpreter's actions. In other words, they include the interpreter themselves and relevant "others" in Weston's sense. The most obvious stakeholders are probably the interpreter's immediate audience, such as a group of people taking a guided tour around a heritage site or the visitors of a related exhibition or website.

In addition, recall what sustainable development means and why someone would consider using their platform as an interpreter to change people's behaviour. This should make it clear that the stakeholders also include everyone in the world who could be affected by any actual changes in the behaviour of audience members. These indirect stakeholders range from immediate associates of a person who tries to live more sustainably today to everyone whose chances for a good life in the future, say in 30 or 100 years, stand or fall with the cumulative effects of such individual efforts.

At the same time, as the horizon of this ethical decision-making situation expands, the causal link between the effect any individual interpreter has on their audience and future states of the world quickly blurs and disappears. This means that an interpreter cannot be sure what good, if any, their sustainable-development messaging does. At the same time, if they deliver a bad interpretation experience or otherwise wrong their audience in the process, the moral damage will be quite concrete and immediate. This makes it hard to use our shared responsibility to future people as a blanket justification.

### **Changing minds is okay ...**

As this conference has taught me, when I ask how heritage interpreters should interact with their audience, I have already answered another contested question: Should there be professional interpreters in something like the traditional sense at all, instead of everyone doing interpretation by and for themselves? As will become clearer below, I think there is much to be said for professional interpreters who challenge people's interpretations with well-informed questions *and* alternatives. In their respective talks and responses at this conference, Patrick Lehnés and others have argued for and about this with reasons arising from research-based theories and extensive practical experience. For my present purposes,

however, I think I get can get away with an argument by analogy.

Recall our moral question: Is it okay for heritage interpreters to try and influence people's behaviour by changing their minds? If you think heritage institutions and professionals should avoid offering a specific interpretation of heritage, it is only consistent to reject the even more intrusive idea of using interpretation to influence behaviour. The organisers' call for contributions to this conference had expressed such qualms by suggesting that we need to think about "ethical issues that might arise when considering how to influence people's mindsets, which approaches are acceptable and which are not" (Interpret Europe 2023). In comparison, the audience at my talk, or at least its vocal members, seemed quite nonchalant about instrumentalising their professional role for the worthy cause of sustainable development.

My answer mirrors this situation in that it has two corresponding parts. Firstly, heritage interpreters belong in a category of professionals that also includes teachers, journalists, or artists. These professions are united by the fact that it is part of their job to challenge what people believe and try to change their minds if necessary, including by making them see the world in new ways that may change their lives. This grouping of professions makes sense despite the fact that our legitimate expectations towards teachers, journalists, and artists differ widely in other ways. With teachers and journalists, heritage interpreters share a responsibility to be truthful when reporting facts, and transparent about the way they interpret them. The example of artists of all kinds goes on to highlight that 'we', or at least a majority of the population in liberal democratic societies, positively revel in exchanges of diverse interpretations of the world and of what is important in life. Therefore, as a principle, if the typical work of teachers, journalists, and artists

is morally permissible, then so must be the transparent attempt of heritage interpreters to educate their audience on sustainable development.

Secondly, however, just as for other professions, the freedoms and powers of heritage interpreters come with related responsibilities and pitfalls.

### **... except when it's not okay**

Among the moral pitfalls that heritage interpreters should be aware of as part of their general professional ethic (as I imagine it), it is moralising, manipulation, and lying or warping the truth that seem most relevant to our present discussion. These terms may sound a bit extreme, and you didn't need me to remind you that you shouldn't lie. But keep in mind that each of these failings comes as a gradual scale of moral shadiness rather than a singular type of bad action. The question you should ask is, how does the way I interact with my audience rate on each of these scales (among others)? Be careful to keep the overall shadiness down as much as possible.

*Moralising.* As someone who teaches ethics in the context of nature conservation and sustainable development, I have often found myself in the position of telling (prospective) professionals that they should ask moral questions where they may think they're just doing their job, and use moral reasoning to figure out what is right. It amounts to teaching people to see moral problems potentially everywhere, and it is what I've been doing here. However, over the years, I've come to appreciate that this extension of moral concern can itself be harmful and requires a balancing awareness – against moralism (Taylor 2012). Imagine a religious or political fanatic who insists on pressing their particular beliefs on you at every turn of a conversation. Don't be that person. While offering some moral perspective and

discussion can be a legitimate and valuable part of the heritage interpreter's role (see above), not every piece of information, topic, or situation calls for moral judgment and messaging, including in terms of sustainable development.

**Manipulation.** While moralistic appeals may cross a line, they are at least easy to spot, enabling the audience to disregard them if they want to. Manipulation relies on influencing people without them having a clear idea of what is going on. Unfortunately, you may slip into manipulation in the very attempt of avoiding open moralising. For example, some participants at my talk mentioned how they select and arrange information so that their audiences will arrive at certain conclusions by themselves. Depending on details and degree, this can be just good teaching, or it can be a morally dubious alternative to making your message transparent.

**Lying and warping the truth.** Further down the slippery slope of manipulation, telling the truth selectively may turn into changing it to fit one's story and then into outright lying – all for the good cause, supposedly. Beware of the danger.

### **Good practice**

If you do decide to promote sustainable behaviour in your heritage interpretation, the following principles can help you do it responsibly.

**Be transparent.** If people come to you to learn about heritage and you frame the factual information in a certain way or add a message, tell your audience what you're doing. This way, you give them a fair chance to decode what you tell them, to object, or to walk away.

**Maintain reasonable proportions (or, Don't overdo it).** Perhaps needless to say, heritage interpretation should focus on the heritage, lest it turn into an exercise in Education for

Sustainable Development that the audience didn't ask for. If people actually visit a heritage site to learn about it, don't get in their way.

**Keep the conversation open.** Even if you send a strong message, make sure to invite questions and objections and respond to them fairly. Don't lecture, but offer a conversation.

**Know your claims and arguments.** Like all learning experiences, heritage interpretation works with emotions, and it may involve various styles and devices of communication including storytelling, jokes, suggestive audiovisuals, and the design of visitor environments. Such a mix of media can help avoid lecturing and make space for different voices and interpretations. However, when you claim a fact, you should be able to support this claim with evidence. In the same way, when you try to convince people that they should act differently, you should be prepared to back this up not just with stories or emotional appeals, but with clear arguments. Do you know what you claim when you try to turn people's minds towards sustainable living, and do you have good arguments to support your case? (The audience at my talk seemed rather fuzzy on this.)

**Respect dissent.** Some people may reject even your best arguments. Some may make alternative claims that you think are false. Respect their freedom to disagree with you while making it clear that you disagree with them. Then continue the conversation with the whole audience.

### **Conclusion: Philosophy over rhetoric**

The sets of principles and moral pitfalls in the previous sections are ad-hoc proposals meant to set us thinking. I came up with them based on the idea that interpreting with the goal of changing people's minds is a form of persuasion (cf. Kastely 2022 on the ethics of persuasion). I make no attempt here to explore how they

relate to the larger conversation about good practice in heritage interpretation (for recent contributions see TEHIC n. d., UNESCO 2022, Interpret Europe 2020). Judging from the reports of UNESCO's new International Centre for the Interpretation and Presentation of World Heritage Sites (e.g., UNESCO WHIPIC 2023), the global community of professionals and researchers recognises various ethical issues in their field of practice. However, as far as I'm aware, a coherent ethics of heritage interpretation that could inform good practice remains to be spelled out. Let my talk serve to underline that this could be a worthwhile project.

I came to this conference as an environmental philosopher newly working on the relationship between arts/design/culture and sustainable development (under a European project called The Big Green,<sup>13</sup> with partners including Interpret Europe). It was my first immersion in the professional community of heritage interpretation, but I immediately felt at home. One reason is that I began my own career as a volunteer at a national park – or, as I now know to say, in the field of natural heritage conservation and interpretation – and still hope to return to that kind of work. The other reason is that the more examples I saw of what interpreters do, the more familiar it seemed. While I've usually taught environmental philosophy in a classroom, I know that some colleagues offer philosophical walks and other forms of outdoor philosophy, open to everyone. To bring the similarities to a head, environmental philosophy as a whole can be described as an effort to *interpret* the relationship between humans and their natural heritage. If this seems plausible, then consider the flipside: Heritage interpreters, whose job is routinely defined as facilitating a "meaning-making" process (e.g., UNESCO WHIPIC 2023: 8;

Tilkin 2016: 7), always-already find themselves in the role of philosophers, for better or worse.

With this in mind, I may be professionally biased in making the following final point. It has been a long time coming, ever since Plato wrote the dialogue known as *Gorgias* around 380 BCE. In it, the founding figure of Western philosophy, Socrates, argues with a professional speaker, Gorgias, and some of his colleagues about the nature and worth of rhetoric. Socrates criticises rhetoric as an "artificer of persuasion, having this and no other business", a mere "knack" for producing a desired effect on the minds of the audience. Against it, he sets his own style of conversation, which has come to define philosophy and, by extension, the ideal of the sciences, informing modern expectations towards good communication in general. At its best, a Socratic, philosophical conversation uses questioning and reasoning to discover the truth (as Socrates puts it), as a team, in an open-ended way, without a foregone conclusion.

Heritage interpreters face the same choice, or rather they need to strike a good balance between persuading their audience of what they believe is right and keeping the conversation open. When in doubt, I hope you will choose philosophy.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://thebiggreen.philippthapa.me>

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## Abstracts of other presentations

### Border's heritage: migration, memory, (in)visibility

**Roberta Altin (Italy)**

This workshop was organised in cooperation with the European alliance T4Europe, and aimed to critically reflect on the meaning of 'common heritage' in a European context. How does intergenerational transmission work in a Europe that wants to build a sense of common belonging by bringing together different national and local histories, often traumatic memories? How can the mobile, often invisible or, on the contrary, all too visible heritage linked to migrations and displacements be recognised? In a borderland, memories, identities and legacies are intertwined and overlapping, but they are not 'contained' in a homogeneous agglomerate. Beyond a rhetoric of inside/outside social inclusion, border heritage presupposes intermediate and graduated measures, in which the parts cannot fully constitute the whole, in order to also recognise the invisible, the traumatic, the silenced or the subaltern memories that are often invisible. The aim is an interdisciplinary and mutual confrontation between the different visions and experiences of heritage experts from ten European universities participating in T4E WP7 on 'Common Heritage & Multilingualism', stakeholders working in GLAMs (galleries, libraries, arts, museums) of the different regions and students of the European Alliance.

**Roberta Altin** is associate professor of cultural anthropology at the Department of Humanities, University of Trieste. Her research has mainly focused on transnational migration, refugee studies, museum and media anthropology.

### Blooms, birds and bees, and what can an old goat teach us?

(Accepted by the review committee but unable to present)

**Marie Banks (UK)**

A look at how interpretive techniques helped two different community groups in Ireland to engage with some big issues and how lessons from the past can secure a more sustainable future. In the first case study, a community-owned Group Water Scheme (like a small private water company) turned a former school into a new learning environment to engage with climate change and biodiversity loss. Through a mix of interactive exhibits, activities and outdoor learning environments, schools from Ireland and Northern Ireland can access free opportunities for students to develop new skills and critical thinking to help change attitudes and foster positive action for the environment. The second example reveals how looking to Ireland's ancient past and cultural heritage through the eyes of a living beast that was thought to have gone extinct but was rediscovered in 2012, can help us combat some of the effects of climate change for a more sustainable future.

**Marie Banks** has 25 years' experience in interpretive planning and delivering engaging exhibitions worldwide. She works freelance and teams up with her husband's exhibit design and build skills, and other design companies. She was previously an international consultant for the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) and exhibition manager for a large UK natural history visitor attraction. Marie has been IE's News Coordinator since 2015.

## **Karavanke UNESCO Global Geopark as a tool for sustainable development**

**Mojca Bedjanič (Slovenia)  
with Darja Komar, Lenka Sterneck  
& Gerald Hartmann**

The Karavanke UNESCO Global Geopark follows the goals of sustainability in the field of development of eco-friendly geotourism, education, and above all in the field of sustainable use (protection) of natural resources. The rich geodiversity is the basis for the exceptional biodiversity that the area boasts. Through activities, development of programmes and products, and implementation of educational programmes, the Geopark Karavanke actively participates and encourages the preservation and restoration of habitats and species, aware of the fact that preserved nature is the basis for the survival of humankind. By developing (and pre-defining) green products and programmes that encourage limited visits and direct visitors outside of vulnerable nature areas, with the help of story interpretation and training of heritage interpreters (teachers, educators, guides, etc.), Geopark Karavanke achieves changes in the way of thinking, behaviour, and in the way that both locals and visitors can take co-responsibility for nature and heritage.

**Mojca Bedjanič** is involved in interpretation of geological and other natural heritage, including interpretation points, information centres, educational trails, exhibits and materials for children and schools, and delivering interpretative workshops for educators and for tourist guides. Her studies include nature interpretation conferences, interpretive workshops, internal workshops for IRSNC.

## **What's your time like? My time is crawling, and so am I**

**Árpád Bőczén & Zsuzsa Berecz  
(Hungary)**

The audience was guided through a very short 900-metre path in a tiny peat bog on the outskirts of the Hungarian capital. This place is so small and hidden that it almost doesn't look like a bog. The neighbouring shopping mall, industrial park and highway also distract our attention. Here it really matters if you watch in a different way from others. If you change the usual way of connecting to your surroundings, then you can experience and understand things that ordinary visitors do not. For instance, you can contact a European pond turtle without even seeing it or you will be able to see the future where the value of such sites will be appreciated again. During the virtual walk the presenters told how they noticed this exciting, mysterious world, one of the last witnesses of an extensive wetland. They told the birth story of an educational trail and how they as interpreters tried to challenge not only the mindsets of the visitors but of those involved in the planning process.

**Árpád Bőczén** is the president of the Association of Cultural Heritage Managers (KÖME). He graduated as an architect and as a cultural heritage and sustainable development expert. The interpretive approach is the basis of his practical and theoretical work. He is an IE Certified Trainer and IE Country Coordinator Hungary.

**Zsuzsa Berecz** is a dramaturg and a curator in various socio-cultural and artistic contexts, based in Budapest. Her work revolves around transversal knowledge-production and art as a social activity. Zsuzsa is an IE Certified Interpretive Writer, vice-president of the

Association of Cultural Heritage Managers (KÖME), and is active in the field of interpretation, enriching it through her artistic experience.

## Shorter format, but reaching out to more - new one-day workshops to answer practitioners' needs

### Árpád Böczén & Zsuzsa Tolnay (Hungary)

This was an excerpt of an International Visegrad Fund project aimed at developing shorter trainings in interpretive guiding, exhibition planning, and writing, as well as live interpretation. This project was largely motivated to provide one-day events that are more likely to reach out to more participants. These events not only serve as promotion for the official Interpret Europe courses, but also fill a gap in engaging participants with the notion of heritage interpretation. The workshops consider pragmatic aspects that heritage managers face in their everyday professional life. Within the development of a one-day interpretive writing workshop we focused on interactivity. It is a catchword for many, but often understood in an over-simplified way, mostly restricted to physical activities, such as turning around cubes or opening and closing niches. We wanted to challenge this approach and provide the complexity and potentials of true interactivity in written genres, while also arranging the sessions around the 'interpretive triangle'.

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Certified Trainer and IE Country Coordinator Hungary.

**Zsuzsa Tolnay** has been working with the nature-culture complex, often at World Heritage cultural landscapes. The challenges of how we grasp the sense of the place and create our own meanings of it have inspired her in the pursuit of heritage interpretation activities for the past two decades. Zsuzsa is an IE Certified Interpretive Writer and Guide, as well as an IE Certified Trainer.

## Vivid language has a powerful grip on your audience

### Árpád Böczén & Zsuzsa Tolnay (Hungary)

In chasing interactivity, most heritage professionals have a narrow understanding. And it becomes particularly challenging when dealing with a written format. As part of a one-day interpretive writing workshop curriculum, we included vivid writing. Figures of speech are such powerful tools, they add to the interactive character of any text. Applying them takes practice and properly applying them takes mastery. This workshop, as a companion to the presentation 'Shorter format, but reaching out to more - new one-day workshops to answer practitioners' needs' invited participants to practice this potent tool, to more effectively facilitate meaning-making in interpretive texts. Although the exercises were developed for another format, this workshop gave a glimpse into Interpret Europe's Certified Interpretive Writer (CIW) course as well.

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## **The small politics of heritage-led regeneration: The impact of investment on volunteer-led groups**

### **Magnus Copps (UK)**

This presentation used the UK's Heritage Action Zones (HAZ) programme as a case study to understand how professionalised investment in the built environment (in the form of heritage-led regeneration grants) affects the vital volunteer-led societies and associations that often play a major role in collecting and interpreting local heritage, particularly in post-industrial places. Using three case studies from the HAZ programme - Tyldesley, Coventry, and Ramsgate - the presentation explored the legacy of this investment within local heritage societies in relation to two key areas. Firstly, the future sustainability of the organisations themselves, through a changed position in regenerating places. Secondly, how behaviours and attitudes that can be related to the UN SDG goals develop through HAZ activities and programmes and may persist through local societies' ongoing heritage interpretation activity. This paper is supported by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council through Clore Leadership.

**Magnus Copps** is an experienced community archaeology and heritage practitioner. Currently an independent consultant, Magnus undertook the Clore Cultural Leadership Fellowship 2022-2023 with focus on how heritage engagement can support new ways of thinking about climate change and climate resilience for audiences. Prior to that Magnus lead the UK's largest professional community and public archaeology team at Museum of London Archaeology, working on major regeneration and participatory projects across England.

## **Yours, mine, or ours? Dissonant heritage and new narratives for sustainability**

**Katia Dianina (USA)**

Recent trends in heritage studies point away from the rhetoric of ‘authorised’ heritage discourse and towards pluralistic, multivocal interpretations. The participatory model of curating and narrating heritage sites offers a human-centered approach, which helps embrace divergent memories and open space for critical reflection. When we deal with ‘uncomfortable heritage’, however, social sustainability runs into inevitable problems. The ‘inclusive heritage discourse’ paradigm, proposed by Višnja Kisić, offers practical, actionable solutions for addressing diversities and conflicts; it also suggests a tentative path toward building engagement and reconciliation. A decade ago, this approach was put to a test in the Museum of Yugoslavia, which explicitly fashions itself as an inclusive public space. Contrary to optimistic expectations, the results of several exhibitions at the museum, meant to open up a dialogue between different ethnic and national groups, delivered controversial results. This presentation considered the benefits and limitations of inclusive heritage discourse.

**Katia Dianina's** experience with heritage interpretation ranges from guided tours to academic publications. The topic of safeguarding and negotiating dissonant heritage has a long history, and studying how different communities in the past and present have approached the issue provides invaluable insights into understanding of our common future. It also offers pathways into practical steps that we can undertake today, when the preservation of heritage as a sustainable tradition is more urgent than ever.

## **Community engagement and sustainable cultural tourism: Mediating role of heritage interpretation**

**Evinc Dogan & Nasim Abedi Dadizadeh (Turkey)**

We examined the role of heritage interpretation in promoting sustainable cultural tourism and community engagement, based on the Antandros heritage site in Turkey as a research case. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative data collection methods and a hybrid thematic analysis technique, to examine the heritage interpretation practices implemented by the Antandros Association, a local NGO Altınoluk, Turkey. The findings highlight the significance of heritage interpretation in creating a destination theme or brand through storytelling and myths, the barriers to community engagement posed by the lack of cooperation with the public sector and financial support, and the crucial role played by local NGOs in connecting stakeholders.

**Evinc Dogan** holds a BA in Tourism Management, MSc in History of Architecture, and PhD in Management and Development of Cultural Heritage. She is an Associate Professor at Boğaziçi University in the Tourism Administration Department. Her research focuses on the role of heritage interpretation and storytelling for community engagement. She is an IE Certified Interpretive Guide and Certified Interpretive Writer.

**Nasim Abedi Dadizadeh** graduated in Information Technology from Tabriz University. She has collaborated voluntarily with various NGOs, such as Mahyaye Azar Tabriz, for the protection and assistance of socially disadvantaged women and children. She has a

Master's degree in Sustainable Tourism Management from Božazići University. Her research interests involve heritage interpretation, community empowerment and cultural tourism.

## **Interpreting dissonant heritage: From painful to healing stories**

**Lana Domšić &  
Andrijana Milisavljević (Croatia)**

Dissonant heritage (difficult, controversial, unwanted) encompasses disturbing histories and pasts that challenge the established identities of the groups they are associated with. Rather than reinforcing positive self-images, they disrupt or even pose a threat by revealing social differences and conflicts. Contested sites, objects and practices, linked to atrocity, conflict, colonialism, totalitarian regimes or multiculturalism, often carry different narratives and diverse values. Such heritage is frequently neglected or inaccurately presented. This workshop, building on the general theory of dissonant heritage and drawing from examples across Europe and beyond, explored methods to incorporate multivocal perspectives and dissonant narratives into heritage interpretation. Workshop participants examined strategies for communicating dissonant heritage to encourage critical engagement and awareness among local communities and tourists, promoting positive contemporary values.

**Lana Domšić** graduated in Art History and Museology, holds a Master's degree in Cultural Management, and a PhD in Information Sciences. Her thesis focused on participatory heritage interpretation and its social impacts. She is a professor at the University Baltazar Zaprëšić, teaching courses on heritage management and cultural tourism. She's a co-

author of several heritage interpretation projects.

**Andrijana Milisavljević** is a co-owner of Zelena gradnja company, where she works as a content designer and project manager. In the last few years, she has led projects of various scales, interpreting cultural and natural heritage, and coordinating diverse professionals. She also works as an interpretive writer, crafting engaging and interpretive content. Andrijana is IE's Country Coordinator Croatia.

## Vernacular architecture: An open book on sustainability

### Marija Dragišić (Serbia)

Vernacular architecture has been the subject of institutional heritage protection in Serbia for almost eight decades. Although key changes in the theory of protection took place in that period, it cannot be said that it had a complete impact on the practice of protection. Interpretation and presentation are still far from being an integral part of the heritage protection process, and cultural property with a professionally designed interpretation and presentation plan are rare.

Monuments of traditional architecture have the same fate. In a small number of cases, when working on their interpretation and presentation, they were mainly based on the cultural and historical value of these objects. Thus, with the addition of an appropriate interior, static ethnographic exhibitions were obtained that exclusively spoke about the past of these objects.

When the time came to present folk architecture in a more modern way, a topic came up that offered to look at it from another aspect - from the aspect of sustainability, based on the strong connection between folk architecture and sustainable construction. In the past, people were not familiar with the concept of sustainability, but they intuitively appreciated it and incorporated it into their houses, thanks to the harmonious relationship they had with nature and the environment.

The presentation looked at how today, when it is relevant, the objects of folk architecture can be shown as bearers of traditional knowledge, applicable in modern design, for the benefit of humans and environment. Concrete examples of traditional Serbian construction show how outdated models of presenting this part of architectural heritage can be overcome and

show it as an open book on the principles of sustainability, which should be applied in the modern aspiration to establish sustainable development.

**Marija Dragišić** is an ethnologist and anthropologist and works as a conservator-researcher at the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia in Belgrade. She is professionally oriented towards the protection of vernacular architecture, with a special interest in its interpretation and presentation. She designs and organises educational programmes for children and teachers and believes that, with a clear interpretation and presentation and good cooperation with the local population, this is the only way to achieve sustainable preservation of heritage. She is the author of several published articles in domestic and foreign magazines and a documentary film, co-author and collaborator at several exhibitions. She is a member of ICOMOS Serbia.

## The House of the World tree: Ancestral secrets embedded in the landscape and their relevance today

### Mirna Draženović & Iva Klarić Vujović (Croatia)

Liuzhi principles guided the development of the ecomuseum in Mošćenička Draga, the municipality on the northern Adriatic coast of Croatia. The ecomuseum's components—interpretive centres, living spaces, heritage tasting areas, and cultural activities—recreate, regenerate and celebrate this community year-round. One of the steps was the transformation of a traditional house into an interpretation centre, The House of the World tree, in an

abandoned hamlet at the foot of Učka mountain.

The ancient inhabitants of the mountain inscribed the ancient Proto-Slavic mythical cycle on the landscape, which is revealed through toponyms that have been preserved to this day. Getting to know the actors of the mythical worldview in the form of a world tree, visitors get to know the key characters of Slavic mythology. Here they explore their relevance in the rural way of life of the hamlets for the last hundred years and how they inspire us today to live a life in balance with nature.

**Mirna Draženović's** professional sensibility for various artistic and heritage disciplines comes to life in the process of interpretation planning, creating exhibition concepts, and developing content. She joined the Muze/Muses team in 2013. She has been a key expert in the realisation of more than ten permanent exhibitions in interpretation centres in Croatia and Slovenia.

**Iva Klarić Vujović** is the projects and business director at Muses Ltd, known for her expertise in organisation, planning, and education. Her academic journey includes a specialist study in management of sustainable tourism and a Master's degree in art history, museology, and heritage management. As a Certified IE Trainer, she passionately empowers heritage stories and professionals.

## Forest of Immortal Stories

### **Ioana Duica & Iulia Astefanei** **(Romania)**

The Forest of Immortal Stories is an initiative of the Nucșoara commune, carried out with the support of the Foundation Conservation Carpathia, and was born from the desire to protect some of the oldest and most spectacular beech trees in Europe. We don't live long enough to tell our tale, but these secular beech trees are almost immortal. Anyone can adopt a secular beech tree, choosing it from the map of the area or searching for a favourite number, for a fee of 700 lei (approximately 140 euros). If you want your beech tree to tell your story, write it in 200 words in the dedicated form. The story will be edited, audio recorded, and placed on a QR code tag on the tree of your choice within one month. The project allows you to adopt a beech tree without leaving a story.

**Ioana Duica** discovered interpretation during the Master's programme of the University of Bucharest – Geobiology applied to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage. For the last seven years she has been developing interactive exhibitions and workshops for children, promoting cultural and natural values. Since 2022, she has been coordinating the education programmes of the Conservation Carpathia Foundation.

**Iulia Astefanei** is a communication specialist at the Conservation Carpathia Foundation.

## Interpreting landscape of democracy: Front gardens in Polish garden cities

### Beata Gawryszewska (Poland)

Garden cities and suburban garden districts were a 19th century idea of sustainability. Living in such places, although reserved for the newly emerging middle class, was associated with adherence to the idea of equality and the sustainable city, which are included today in the list of sustainable development goals.

The composition of these gardens, especially in the front section, supported a phatic function - social communication through collectively recognised models of a beautiful environment. One result is the scale of participatory democracy in these places, which is superior to others. The presentation aims to show good practices in interpreting such a heritage. The idea of Open Gardens, which has been running in Poland for 18 years, is a way to network people and institutions and strengthen the platform for local action. Post-environmentalism and urban movements allow the social layer of meanings of gardens to be reread and used to interpret the heritage of the traditional gardens.

**Beata Gawryszewska** is a landscape architect and garden designer, and an associate professor in the Department of Landscape Art at WULS, Poland. Her specialisation is the social issues in green planning and the interpretation of inhabited areas (e.g. home gardens, community spaces, bottom-up greenery). She has authored several papers and books about the image and meanings of social, community and family urban gardens.

## Coworking with villagers in a conflictual context in a small village in Crete, Greece

### Pinelopi Gkini (Greece)

In summer 2023 after a year of conflicts about the water springs in a village which are bought from a big investor, some people from the local assembly complained about not being included in the 20 new cultural paths of the region established by the mayor. Proposing to create their own path without any institution's help, just working together, led us to 5-6 meetings under a big platanus for two months, while preparing for European Heritage Days in the village in September 2023. The process was very creative and the outcomes were more than just a cultural path to talk about the importance of water. The goal was to invite people to come in September to be guided onto this path, and for them to understand the importance of water in this village and in their culture. Almost 200 people came for the tour, the discussion and the concert. What happened next? Which mindsets have changed after the event of September 2023 just a few weeks before the elections?

**Pinelopi Gkini** was introduced to heritage interpretation in 2015 through the Heriq programme in Greece. She found this tool very interesting for her work as a mountain leader and tourist group leader. She has since used it in some educational programmes, including 'The postman road', a project financed by the green funds of Greece and presented at the 2023 Interpret Europe conference. Pinelopi has also participated in events created by the Ministry of Culture about agricultural landscapes guiding and instructing people around heritage interpretation, helping to create an internet link about heritage interpretation in Greek. This year, after finishing her MA in alternative approaches of psychology

to education, she found it very relevant to use heritage interpretation in education programmes for the children around her village. Pinelopi took part in the IE Certified Interpretive Trainer (CIT) course in November 2023.

## **The forgotten half of history? An interpreter in search of the female voice**

**Barbara Gołębiowska (Poland)**

One of the Sustainable Development Goals is gender equality and the empowerment of women worldwide. This workshop considered how heritage interpretation can support this goal and how heritage sites can contribute to strengthen the female voice without dominating other voices. The workshop began with the exercise of creating a circle of women related to the heritage the participants are concerned with. It was then discussed why it is important for us to actively seek out and bring out stories related to women in the context of heritage, what kind of language to use to describe these stories, how to relate them to values and what mistakes to avoid. Concrete examples of museum stories about women were presented – they were critically analysed, noting what kinds of clichés and biases appear in the stories about women's history and what bona fide errors are made. The final goal of the workshop was to develop a catalogue of 'good practices' in the field in the context of heritage interpretation.

**Barbara Gołębiowska** is an art historian and museum professional with 25 years of experience. She is director of Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw, formerly creator and head of the Education Department at the Józef Piłsudski Museum in Sulejów, and coordinator of Erasmus+ programme, during which 30 museum employees earned IE Certified Interpretive Guide and Certified Interpretive Writer certificates. She is IE's Country Coordinator Poland, an IE Certified Interpretive Guide and Planner, and completed the IE Certified Trainer course in 2023.

## We need to talk about audio description. Between the art of description, meaning-making, universal planning, and multi-sensory museum experience

### Małgorzata Hordyniec (Poland)

“A picture is worth 1,000 words? Maybe. But the audio describer might say that a few well-chosen words conjure vivid and lasting images” (Joel Snyder).

Audio description (AD) translates the visual into verbal and is dedicated to blind and visually impaired audiences. As heritage interpreters, how can we enrich it? Can AD be interpretive? And if so, how? Or maybe how can AD broaden or even flip our interpretive mindset? How to pass from the understanding of audio description as a necessary inclusive tool, to a mind-opening stepping stone, challenging the perception of visual arts to us all - whether sighted or not? This presentation looked at the history of AD in museums and heritage sites, the basic rules of creating this literary form, and discussed its interpretative qualities and potential. The multi-sensory guided tour in Princes Czartoryski Museum in Krakow served as a case study on how to implement AD and other inclusive solutions to create an immersive, interpretive experience for all kinds of visitors.

**Małgorzata Hordyniec** is a social anthropologist by education (University of Warsaw, Poland) and avocation/ her hobby. She is an IE Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) and Certified Interpretive Writer (CIW). At Malopolska Institute of Culture in Krakow, she acts as a field worker, cooperating with local communities and cultural institutions on heritage interpretation. When not in the field, she fiddles with words, writing audio descriptions for museums.

## How to deal with the group? Managing the group process in interpretation

### Piotr Idziak & Małgorzata Hordyniec (Poland)

Interpretation is usually directed towards a group. To make interpretation fruitful and satisfying, the interpreter has to be conscious of the group dynamics. During the meeting relations among participants change and develop - it influences how the group participates in interpretation.

How should we follow the needs of the group in subsequent stages of its process? How should we pay attention to the nature of group dynamics? Which stepping stones are best to introduce and when? In this workshop, we focussed on our experiences with groups and connected them with the elements of the group process theories.

The workshop followed the facilitation pattern - defining key problems of managing group work, discussing solutions and trying to apply elements of group process theory to our guiding practices. Reflection upon the group process can help a guide to play the role of facilitator for the group - this is the tool to open lively discussions and share reflections upon presented heritage.

**Piotr Idziak** is a social anthropologist, museologist and sociologist (Jagiellonian University of Krakow). He works in the Malopolska Institute of Culture in Krakow as a consultant, trainer and facilitator of strategic processes. He is author of interpretation strategies and multi-sensory heritage trails in the UNESCO sites the Silver Mine in Tarnowskie Góry and Wieliczka Salt Mine. He is author of the heritage-based education games for groups. He



is an IE Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) and Trainer.

**Małgorzata Hordyniec** is a social anthropologist by education (University of Warsaw, Poland) and avocation/ her hobby. She is an IE Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) and Certified Interpretive Writer (CIW). At Malopolska Institute of Culture in Krakow, she acts as a field worker, cooperating with local communities and cultural institutions on heritage interpretation. When not in the field, she fiddles with words, writing audio descriptions for museums.

## Promotion of geotourism as an opportunity for sustainability – A case study: Përmet Municipality

(Accepted by the review committee but unable to present)

### **Fjorentin Ismaili (Albania)**

The promotion of geotourism as an opportunity for sustainable economic development in Përmet Municipality is a topic that aims to address new alternatives in this field and how the local population can benefit from these innovations. It is not only the rich natural and cultural heritage of a country that supports sustainability, but the ways in which this heritage can be used and become part of the tourism movement for the benefit of the community.

The municipality of Përmet is one of the most typical case studies in this respect, since in this area there are two National Parks of particular importance and many geosites with great potential. By developing the concept of geotourism, which focuses mainly on the promotion of the geological and geomorphological characteristics of landscapes as tourist attractions, through the application of

GIS, the promotion of geosites with tourist potential is aimed at diversifying the tourist offer through the development of geotourism.

**Fjorentin Ismaili** has completed doctoral studies and worked for years in the study, assessment and promotion of geoheritage as a function of the economic development of the Municipality of Përmet. From his studies, he has proved that the achievement of tourism sustainability is based on many factors related to the way the local population promotes it.

## Language as a powerful tool – How to use it ethically?

### **Julia Janowska (Poland)**

Our daily life is immersed in language. The average person speaks about 16,000 words per day, and knows more than twice as many. There are hundreds of thousands of connections and possible contexts in which given words can be used. Creating linguistic constructions is a responsible task, because it is through them that we can influence the formation of human ways of thinking. In interpretation, we talk about a framework of meaning. This means that certain words refer us to conceptual areas that are rooted culturally and socially. This is a sensitive field that is easy to abuse and may lead to manipulation. The most vulnerable topics are those that are particularly important and widely discussed in society. Thus, they become a potential tool for various groups, trying to appropriate the narratives for their own purposes. Does a neutral vocabulary exist and is this one of the aspects that we should consider when creating interpretation? If so, how would such language relate to engaging audiences by evoking emotions?

**Julia Janowska** is head of the Education Department of the Józef Piłsudski Museum in Sulejówek. For many years she was coordinator of the family programme, in which she conducted workshops. In her daily work she draws on heritage interpretation methodology and is an IE Certified Interpretive Writer and is in the process of certification as an IE Trainer. She holds degrees in art history and Polish philology, from where her deeper interest in language originates.

## The state-of-the-art and future directions on sacred sites and ecosystem benefits

(Accepted by the review committee but unable to present)

### Alebel Melaku Kolech (Japan)

A well-functioning natural system and a habitable climate are the foundations of people's good quality of life. Forests play an essential role in social, economic, and ecological dimensions. Evaluating the biocultural benefits of forests is critical to justifying their importance for conserving the ecosystem and its components. Even though numerous research papers and reports have been released on sacred forests and ecosystem services, an up-to-date and global-level synthesis of studies and the implications for future research on sacred forests is lacking. We comprehensively analysed the literature on the studies about sacred forests and ecosystem services, focussing on cultural ecosystem services, biodiversity conservation and carbon accumulation. Our study on urban sacred forests showcases how these sites contribute to environmental sustainability through cultural ecosystem services. Emphasising heritage interpretation, we provide tangible examples of how sacred forests prompt reflection on values like care for the

environment and social justice. Our research actively involves local communities, exemplifying a co-creation approach to interpretive services, supporting a focus on local involvement and empowering people as heritage interpreters. Demonstrating the establishment of learning landscapes, our findings illustrate how urban sacred forests function as networks for value-based heritage interpretation, engaging diverse stakeholders in their vicinity.

**Alebel Melaku Kolech** is a PhD student and Research Assistant at the Operating Unit Ishikawa/kanazawa, United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability. Before joining UNU-IAS, he engaged in delivering courses for undergraduate students, undertaking research, and community service activities. His research interests include agroforestry, climate smart agriculture, urban forestry, and urban ecology.

## Implementing value-based heritage interpretation (VBHI) in training practice

### Thorsten Ludwig (Germany) with Max Dubravko Fijačko & Ivana Jagić Boljat (Croatia)

Since 2020, IE has reviewed its training programme to meet the requirements of value-based heritage interpretation (VBHI), a term first introduced by UNESCO. The workshop explored what this means in practical terms. After an introduction to the principles and innovations of the concept, participants were divided into three sub-groups related to interpretive planners, writers and guides. Some of the recent changes in the individual IE training courses were presented, experiences were collected from

attendees about expected opportunities and challenges in their own field of work and then all thoughts and insights were shared.

**Thorsten Ludwig**, MSc Interpretation, worked at a German national park until 1993, when he founded Bildungswerk interpretation. For 12 years he was on the Board of ANU, the German association for environmental education. He is an IE Certified Interpretive Trainer and was a managing director of Interpret Europe from 2015-2021.

**Max Dubravko Fijacko** is a tourism professional with more than 15 years of experience as the owner of a travel agency and Tour Manager, awarded by the national award, 'Simply the best'. Dedicated to providing meaningful and holistic experiences, he is also an IE Certified Interpretive Trainer for guides and committed to practical implementation of a value-based interpretive approach.

**Ivana Jagić Boljat** holds a Master's degree in Tourism, Museology and Heritage Management. She is an experienced interpretive planner, and an IE Certified Interpretive Trainer for guides and writers. Ivana is the owner of Visitor Friendly, a small business specialising in sustainable development and education.

## Interpreting through immersive technology: An overview of Serbian cultural institutions

(Accepted by the review committee but unable to present)

### Ivana Manevska (Serbia)

This research explores the use of immersive technologies such as VR, AR, and MR in Serbian cultural institutions, focusing on cultural heritage interpretation to enhance global competitiveness. Methodologically, the research employs a comprehensive approach, involving the collection and analysis of relevant literature and documents, coupled with a questionnaire designed to interview managers and employees of cultural institutions. The survey conducted in January 2023 among Serbian cultural institutions revealed that a modest yet significant proportion of managers and employees (14 out of 50) actively participated, expressing a generally positive outlook on their digital competencies, while indicating a growing interest in, and potential for, integrating immersive technologies, particularly augmented and virtual reality, into their cultural practices. The study concludes that these institutions are in the early stages of embracing technological innovation, offering opportunities for further development. The significance lies in contributing to the understanding of immersive technologies in cultural contexts, with original insights into Serbian cultural institutions. However, a limitation of the study is the small questionnaire response rate, suggesting a need for on-site research.

**Ivana Manevska** has been engaged in heritage interpretation for three years through academic research, studies, and volunteering. Her Master's thesis was focused on interpreting natural and cultural heritage in Fruska Gora National Park. In her current doctoral studies she is researching

interpretative panels in the Fruska Gora National Park and interpretation in cultural institutions. With two years of volunteering and experience as a tour guide at the Gallery of Matica Srpska in Novi Sad, Serbia, she has interpreted more than six exhibitions. She has also done research on non-material cultural heritage interpretation, particularly Serbian celebration customs through film.

## **Sustainability applied to guiding in natural environments: Some lessons from experience in the field**

### **Evarist March Sarlat (Catalonia, Spain)**

This presentation gave some examples of learning through experience as a guide and trainer of guides in diverse natural and cultural environments, mainly in Europe and Latin America.

The aim was to provide information from practice that can be valuable for other professionals in the sector and at the same time generate an exchange based on reflections on controversial aspects in the context of sustainability.

**Evarist March Sarlat** has been a professional interpretive guide for the last 12 years under the umbrella of the company, Naturalwalks. He has specialised in working in diverse kinds of tourism, natural environments, and related to the culture linked to the place, especially gastronomy and wellbeing. He has been an IE Certified Interpretive Trainer for guides since 2014, and has delivered 29 courses to date in the context of the Iberian Peninsula and some Latin American countries (Colombia, Peru, Chile).

## **Eurovikings? Presenting Viking heritage in a sustainable European mindset**

**Eleonora Narvselius (Sweden)**

Less than a century ago, stories about Vikings and references to the Viking mythology were actively used (especially in Germany and Scandinavia) to reinforce grandiloquence of national myths and authority of military elites. Presently, Vikings mirror popular mythologies of a different kind. Vikings caught the eye of the EU heritage managers who discerned the potential for cultural memories about mobility, cultural contacts and sustainable lifestyles of the ancient northern seafarers to bring to the fore specific normative qualities of European identities. Since 1993 the Council of Europe has supported Destination Viking as one of numerous heritage routes in Europe. This network of Viking-related tourist sites is nowadays extensive and non-linear. Its proclaimed aim is: “European cooperation in linking Viking Age attractions and development and marketing of these attractions for tourists throughout Europe” (Egberts and Bosma 2014). The Foteviken Viking Museum, one of the initiatives connected to Destination Viking in Sweden, is especially instructive in this respect. This presentation argued that the popularity of the ‘Viking reservation’ of Foteviken may give clues about a sustainable framework of thinking about the Viking heritage.

**Eleonora Narvselius** is a university lecturer in Applied Cultural Analysis at Lund University. She has studied the heritage of migrations and memory cultures in the European borderland since 2012. Critical Heritage Studies is one of her key research interests. She has regularly visited ACHS conferences and published on the subject of Europeanisation of cultural heritage in Ukraine, Poland and Sweden.

## **Romantic ideas versus sober scientific research - Heritage interpretation mediates**

(Accepted by the review committee but unable to present)

**Monika Nethe (Germany)**

The romantic Liliental with its wealth of trees attracts a large number of visitors every year. However, the valley is managed by a renowned forestry research centre, which plants trees there for research purposes and sometimes has to remove them again after finishing the experiment. Sometimes this leads to great anger and incomprehension when favourite trees suddenly no longer exist.

Heritage interpretation can help to promote mutual understanding and demonstrate the social relevance of such research, especially as they can be important experiments in dealing with tree species in a changing climate. But the Liliental also has many other exciting stories to tell...

**Monika Nethe** has spent 20 years working as a geographer in interpretation projects and teaching, both regionally and internationally within and outside the university.

## Negotiating the culture-nature interface: The institution of early kingship

(Accepted by the review committee but unable to present)

### Conor Newman (Ireland)

This presentation examined early kingship as an institution created to moderate between culture and nature, and regulate the agronomic exploitation of natural resources. The underlying dilemma is a quintessentially human one—subsistence is existentially subordinate to establishing our place, purpose and worth. Early kingship traded on the axiom that sustainability relies on the equitable merging of culture and nature. Today we would call this mutual sustainability of nature and humankind. The paradigm speaks to the remarkable prescience of our ancestors concerning an issue that has developed into a full-blown global crisis. Heritage tells us, therefore, that our ancestors were wise enough to know that we must first ground ourselves in time and in place, in history and in geography, if we are to respond to the global crises of climate change and biodiversity loss in the holistic and collective manner that is so urgently required. Students draw from the study of early kingship lessons for today.

**Conor Newman** is a lecturer in archaeology (1996-present), leading multiple field classes and public events. He was chairman of the Heritage Council of Ireland (2008-16) and is a specialist in early kingship. He is director of the MA Landscape, Archaeology, and Heritage at the University of Galway.

## Towards sustainability in heritage protection through interpretive planning

### Ana Radovanac Živanov (Serbia)

The presentation delivered an example of how one cultural monument, with the involvement of the local community and support of the local population, can be discovered, protected and presented in a way that is sustainable. The Empress's city (Iustiniana Prima) was built by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I (527-565) in the south of Serbia. Archaeological research started more than 100 years ago and was recently stopped due to lack of funds. The most valuable artifacts, mosaics of about 400m<sup>2</sup> were covered, protected and preserved.

In 1979, the Empress's city was added to the list the Archaeological Sites of Exceptional Importance of Serbia, and since 2010 it has been on the Tentative list for nominations for UNESCO World Heritage Site status.

The Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia has a plan to develop the project to make an interpretive plan for the Empress city. New funds are expected for the archaeological research to present the mosaics in the visitor centre, as a new interpretive service. In addition, a new interpretive plan will engage the local population and stakeholders to launch a specific way for interpretive services that would promote this exceptional cultural monument in order to provide the best path to sustainability. The idea is that through co-creation of promotional activities, workshops and special interpretive services this will enhance the role of local people as heritage interpreters.

**Ana Radovanac Živanov** is an art historian and works as a senior consultant at the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia in Belgrade, at the Department for Research,

Protection and Documentation. In addition, she is finishing her PHD thesis at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Department of Art History. Ana is IE's Country Coordinator Serbia and an IE Certified Interpretive Planner. Her fields of scientific interest include interpretation of cultural heritage, history of architecture in Serbia between two wars, conservation of cultural heritage, interpretative methodologies and concepts, memory studies, history of private life. She is the author of many professional and scientific articles, a member of ICOMOS and the Society of Conservators of Serbia.

## **Ecomuseums – Vital allies of heritage and communities, 50 years on**

### **Dragana Lucija Ratković Aydemir (Croatia)**

Ecomuseums, a concept originating in the 1970s, actively involve local communities in preserving and promoting their natural and cultural heritage. By fostering a sense of ownership and stewardship, these museums empower communities to interpret their unique identity. Emphasising the interconnectedness of nature and culture, ecomuseums integrate educational programmes, cultural events, and community engagement, fostering sustainable practices and encouraging responsible tourism. Ecomuseum Batana in Rovinj, Croatia, serves as a compelling case study. Beyond heritage preservation, ecomuseums promote community resilience, environmental sustainability, and cultural diversity, making them a vital force in the 21st century cultural landscape.

**Dragana Lucija Ratković Aydemir** is based in Zagreb and Istanbul/Cesme. She started her career in the Ministry of Culture of Croatia. In 2005, she founded a niche company that connects culture and tourism. With an all-female team of Muses, she focuses on heritage interpretation, (eco)museology and sustainable cultural tourism. Dragana has a European diploma in cultural management and was a UNESCO scholarship holder.

## Sustainability is more than just a buzzword for Slovenian beekeeping heritage

**Alenka Selčan Božič (Slovenia)**

Beekeeping is one of the essential Slovenian heritages, rooted in the beginnings of modern European beekeeping. Widespread beekeeping in Slovenia, overseen by the Slovenian Beekeepers Association, which is dedicated to the wellbeing of the native Carniolan bee, is a heritage where sustainability and environmental protection mean more than just a buzzword. A sustainable approach and active environmental care are essential not only for beekeeping but also for the survival of bees, without which the entire planet is at risk. In 2022, Slovenian beekeeping as a way of life was added to UNESCO's list of intangible heritage. People can learn about this heritage in various ways, from contemporary interpretation centres to personal experiences with local beekeepers. This presentation demonstrated how interpretation follows sustainable principles through the example of a vision for urban transformation into a bee tourism centre rooted in IE principles.

**Alenka Selčan Božič** represents Art Rebel 9, a private company dedicated to implementing quality digital and contemporary audiovisual solutions to various sectors. As a chief creative officer and IE Certified Interpretive Planner, she is the creative force behind various interpretive experience centres, such as the Center of Large Carnivores Dina and House of Carniolan Bee.

## Understand the past, interpret the present and plan for the future. Heritage interpretation at Herculaneum

(Accepted by the review committee but unable to present)

**Stefania Siano (Italy)**

Since 2017 the archaeological site of Herculaneum has been managed by the Institute of the Ministry of Culture. At the centre of the management strategy sits engagement with the territory and involvement of local communities, through the use of value-based heritage interpretation.

Over the years, the interpretation of the archaeological and historical heritage has increasingly substantiated the Park's action programme, gradually increasing the involvement of the different actors of the territory and creating opportunities for reflection on the common heritage and shared interpretive experiences that seek to project the site and its territory towards a common future. This presentation examined and assessed the past six years' activity, in which there have been critical issues, but also growing results.

**Stefania Siano** has been responsible at Herculaneum since 2018 for visitor services, teaching and training, exhibitions, events, relations with the territory and partnerships, and she tries to base all the activities on heritage interpretation. She joined the IE Certified Interpretive Planner (CIP) course organised by Interpret Europe and the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe.



## Addressing the climate crisis through a community and landscape based museum

(Accepted by the review committee but unable to present)

### Bill Taylor (UK)

Three different, but related, approaches reveal how we connect our communities with what has happened in our landscape in the past; what is happening now and how we build resilience for the future. The Ceteran Ecomuseum in East Scotland covers 1,000sqkm with a major fault-line separating fertile farmland in the south from mountain and moorland in the north. Since the Ecomuseum's foundation in 2019 we have been working on connecting our communities with outstanding heritage across these different landscapes.

The first approach engages residents in citizen science to understand past changes within our river systems and valleys. The second looks at the development of a community-led exhibition showcasing agricultural changes that are addressing the climate crisis now. Thirdly, we look at a strategic approach to funding river restoration within the Ecomuseum to better connect the communities with their river resources and the wider heritage assets of the area.

**Bill Taylor** has worked in heritage interpretation and management for nearly 40 years and has been involved in Interpret Europe since its inception. He has been involved in the delivery and management of many heritage interpretation conferences in several countries.

## Sustainable exhibition on sustainability

### Zsuzsa Tolnay & Erika Szmoradné Tóth (Hungary)

Heritage interpretation, more often than not, touches upon sustainability issues of some form. However, it is time to consider not only the content, but also the form. Low-tech exhibitions might not represent main-stream, and it is not to claim that low-tech solutions are sustainable per se. However, when it comes to the afterlife of an exhibition, we are in trouble. Low-tech solutions are quite often cheap, and it is cheap that is most available and most widely used. However, when the opportunity came to develop a small travelling exhibition on composting, we felt obliged to think way beyond the heydays of the exhibits and consider its demise. It therefore became a compostable exhibition. It will reach mostly primary school children in the third largest city of Hungary, but we hope that we set a good example beyond this geographical area. We should think more about the full life cycle of an exhibition, to become what we preach.

**Zsuzsa Tolnay** works with the nature-culture complex, often at World Heritage cultural landscapes. The challenges of how we grasp the sense of the place and create our own meanings of it have been an inspiration for her in the pursuit of heritage interpretation activities for the past two decades.

**Erika Szmoradné Tóth** is a biologist, an IE Certified Interpretive Guide and Writer. She has 30 years of experience in the field of natural heritage interpretation. She is the author of numerous eco-education materials, and also a content developer and construction support expert for nature trails and exhibitions.

## Karlovac and its rivers – Tale of eternal love

(Accepted by the review committee but unable to present)

### Maja Vidović (Croatia)

Living in a wetland with four rivers would generally be considered a disadvantage. But Karlovac would never have been born if the situation had been different. Rivers have played an important, if not the most important, role in the history of this city. They defended it, developed it and made it rich and advanced. But they also regularly flood it. Rivers define Karlovac and its people. And the people are in love with their rivers, enchanted by their beauty, relaxed on their banks, purified by their water. There is not a person in this city who does not have some memories in which Kupa, Mrežnica, Korana or Dobra do not play a role. And these four rivers, like four sisters, are beautiful each in their own way and completely different. Kupa is calm and serious, like the eldest sister, followed by moody and strong Korana, extremely beautiful and sensitive Mrežnica and, my favourite, wild and youthfully unrestrained Dobra. This presentation introduced them and told the story of the eternal connection and love of nature and people.

**Maja Vidović** completed the IE Certified Interpretive Guide course in May 2022 and since then has been enriching her tourist guidance with the interpretation of tourist attractions, translating the presentations into a more interpretive and unique visitor experience. Working mainly in her hometown of Karlovac in Croatia, she wants to change the view of Karlovac as a military fortress and commercial river centre into a vivid landscape experience. In addition to guiding tourists, she also uses her acquired skills in lectures at the training course where future tourist guides are trained.

## Sustainability for a CIG course

### Ondřej Víttek (Czech Republic)

This workshop was based on a scheme used in Interpret Europe's Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) courses but differed significantly from the official training. Sustainability is one of the key values for value-based interpretation. In this workshop, I used interpretive techniques such as open-ended questions leading to discussions, examples connected to guiding, and sharing personal experiences of participants. We discussed a definition of sustainability stressing two key terms: 'need' and 'limitation'. With the three pillars of sustainability, I focus on their necessary balance, and mention greenwashing, too. History is reduced to just a couple of dates and names from international (Brundtland, Carson, Club of Rome) as well as Czech (Vavroušek, STUŽ) space. Examples of sustainability in organising the particular course followed with a discussion on what elements could be organised in a better way. Participants were then encouraged to find ways of organising a guided trip in a sustainable way.

**Ondřej Víttek** is a long-term member of Interpret Europe as well as the Czech Alliance for Local Heritage Interpretation. He has been an IE Certified Interpretive Guide since 2016 and a Certified Interpretive Trainer since 2018. Ondřej uses his interpretation skills not only in his visitor monitoring and management position in the Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic, but also in other activities focused on sustainable tourism.

## Using SWOT-analysis to start the flame of interpretation

**Lars Wohlers (Germany)**

Imagine a customer for whom you have successfully developed interpretive exhibitions. In the past, everybody was satisfied. The financial business of this particular customer has even improved quite a bit. Thus, money is not really a question either. Plus, the interpretive potential is huge, since the site wants to bring together historical local heritage with modern demands regarding sustainability. So, why should anything go wrong?

Often, presentations highlight success stories. In this concrete project, the whole picture was shown. Despite very innovative participatory elements and visitor study aspects the presentation was about the pitfalls in strategic planning and implementation.

Using the example of the Watertower of Lueneburg, A SWOT-analysis identified the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of the interpretive planning processes. The challenges of local involvement and co-creation that interpretive services are facing in such projects was also looked at.

**Lars Wohlers** (PhD, Professor) has been involved with interpretation for 35 years. He worked as a guide in national parks and visited these jewels of nature conservation in various parts of the world. Lars is also engaged with zoos, museums, historical sites and sustainability-oriented NGOs. He has experience working in various countries of Europe, Africa, USA and Chile. His main areas of work include interpretive planning, visitor studies and training. He works part-time at the International University (Tourism Management), part-time for his own business KON-TIKI, and is a co-founder of Eid Coaching.

## Employing action research to link theories and practice of nature interpretation

**Jasmine Zhang & Eva Sandberg (Sweden)**

One way to self-criticise our own mindsets in the context of heritage interpretation is to regularly revisit how the theories and practices of interpretation relate to each other. Despite the fact that theories and practices are co-evolving in interpretation, they are often seen as done by either researchers or practitioners. How do we as researchers and practitioners of interpretation learn together, when trans(inter)disciplinary research is increasingly needed for future sustainable transformation?

This workshop explored the question with a focus on action research. In a turbulent world aspiring to a sustainable future, action research can supplement traditional research and development strategies with more creative, innovative and swift actions that are grounded in the pursuit of a common good. Through interactive activities we created a space for sharing experiences - good examples but also challenges - and thereby identified key issues that we need to tackle.

**Jasmine Zhang** is a researcher at the Swedish Center for Nature Interpretation. Her experiences with interpretation include working with the interpretation system of national parks; interpretation's role in place-making in rural tourism; interpreting embodied knowledge of environmental changes; interpretation of multifunctional landscape; and how interpretation can facilitate dialogues.

**Eva Sandberg** is the director of the Swedish Center for Nature Interpretation and current acting chair for Interpret Europe's supervisory

committee. She has worked for many years with nature interpretation in Sweden, closely with authorities, NGOs, nature interpreters, researchers and other actors engaging with the practice and theories of interpretation.