



**interpret europe**

European Association for Heritage Interpretation

# Strategic Plan 2025 – 2029



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## Introduction

Given rising levels of global social, economic and environmental uncertainty, a strategic plan is more important than ever to provide Interpret Europe with a level of assurance in the goals it sets itself to continue to grow and develop as a membership organisation. These goals and ambitions of this strategy are the result of a participatory process with the membership comprising surveys, SWOT analysis, together with appraisals of the previous plan and supporting documents.

However, if the future is uncertain, flexibility and responsiveness are key to identifying realistic strategic long-term goals. As a result, this five-year plan acts as a compass towards those goals but the addition of suggested actions to achieve them will be reviewed annually to account for changing circumstances. The reality in 2025 may be very different from that in 2029 and these suggested actions can be accelerated, temporarily paused or modified to take up opportunities or overcome obstacles to keep on track with our goals.

The strategic plan strives to address our members' needs and aspirations. It is also geared to our partners, peer organisations and potential funding partners, to better understand what we do and why we do it, with a view to working in partnership with others, deriving mutual benefit and securing financial support for our work. It also recognises external factors that influence Interpret Europe and the ecosystem in which it operates.

## Our story

Heritage, put simply, is anything that is considered important enough to be passed on to future generations, from a great grandfather's WWI tobacco tin, the art of making Bosnian coffee or the ancient beech forests of the Carpathians. This heritage, our heritage, is universal, shared, tangible and intangible, big and small. Heritage interpretation helps us to learn from our past, reflect on the present and consider the future to find fresh ways of approaching global or local challenges.

This process of reflection does not simply happen of its own accord. It is facilitated by heritage interpreters who play a key role by fostering dialogue and offering meaningful connections for people to appreciate their heritage as a wonderfully powerful and rich mutual asset. Heritage shapes our individual and collective identity, including things that fill us with pride and or even remorse, contradictions that are part of human life.

Heritage interpreters understand the role of heritage as the root that grounds us but which also releases the potential to grow to expand our horizons, our minds and our hearts. No matter how much heritage might be used to distinguish us from one another, the underlying values that are reflected in heritage are universal.

That is why we deeply believe that the power of heritage interpretation to communicate the story linked to tangible and intangible heritage is key to engaging citizens and help create an open, more tolerant and inclusive society.

## Our mission

**Empowering:** IE provides its members with a platform for professional exchange to advance interpretive principles, tools and techniques for mutual benefit.

**Inspire:** Emphasises the positive influence of interpreters to move, guide and make people feel something – the 'magical' side, or alchemy, of the profession.

**Natural and cultural heritage:** Natural or cultural? There may still be two schools of thought, our focus is on advancing both types of heritage in unison.

**Empowering all who inspire meaningful connections with Europe's natural and cultural heritage to shape our common future**

**Meaningful connections:** Connections between people and heritage that they can (re) discover, relate to and which really matter to them.

**Our common future:** Rooted in sustainability, this term originates from the Brundtland Report. Given recent trends, its relevance is undimmed. It emphasises a collective benefit and provides IE with a springboard to emphasise that our actions contribute to our common future in terms of sustainability, tolerance, inclusiveness, active citizenship.

**Europe:** While IE is an international organisation, fostering the European project is also part of IE's purpose.

## Our vision

Consistent with our mission, our vision defines the future state IE wishes to achieve by reinforcing the connection between heritage and society, thereby emphasising heritage's fundamental contribution to understanding and appreciation together with the wider benefits this brings.

Heritage interpretation will be established as the generally accepted and professional approach to creating public understanding and appreciation of natural and cultural heritage throughout Europe.

## Our qualities

### Inspiring

There are many creative and inspirational people in IE who set new standards, consistently seeking to advance the practice and principles of interpretation.

### Dedicated

We believe in what we do. We help people to connect with their heritage in their own way for unique, personal, memorable and meaningful visitor experiences.

### Supportive

Life is challenging for many self-employed interpretive professionals so having a network to find inspiration, share experiences and exchange with other professionals is important to strengthen the efforts each of us makes.

### Sharing

IE encourages exchange among members and shares its intellectual property, such as latest research or its successful training programme, to establish interpretation as an accepted approach to enjoying, understanding and appreciating heritage throughout Europe.

## Our challenges

IE is a compact, pro-active organisation largely dependent **on voluntary efforts** to provide high quality media, events and services to dedicated heritage professionals.

IE is perceived by some to be **too small to make a difference** while heritage interpretation appears a luxury at a time of global uncertainty.

IE's **limited funding fuels an over-reliance on voluntary contributions** from members while the latter sometimes struggle to see the benefits.

IE promotes value-based interpretation to support Europe's shared values (greater tolerance, solidarity, non-discrimination and equality, etc.), outputs which are often **complex to explain and demonstrate concretely in short timescales**.

IE must make **personal meaning-making appealing and relevant** and, as such, the value of heritage interpretation.

IE seeks to be an **international collaborative platform** through the actions of its members and other non-member stakeholders.

IE experiences a pressing need to **secure external funding** from projects and financial aid for our work and initiatives.

## The process

This five-year strategic plan was drafted in spring 2024 for review at the IE General Assembly in Koper, Slovenia, on 21-24 March 2024. The plan is a result of a twelve-month participatory process, including previous consultation and outcomes of the 2022-2025 plan that itself spanned some twenty-four months.

### Input resources

The strategic plan 2025 - 2029 is the result of surveys, a SWOT analysis, various participatory procedures including workshops and questionnaires, the previous draft plan for 2022-2025 and related documents. More precisely, the following resources provided content for the development of the plan:

**2022-2025 Strategic plan.** The Supervisory Committee at the time produced a draft strategic plan intended to assist post-Covid recovery of the organisation after the suspension of most face-to-face activities and the subsequent loss of members due to issues related to this unprecedented event and the ensuing circumstances impacting travel, tourism and heritage sectors. The subsequent plan was presented at the 2023 IE General Assembly but not adopted as the consensus that the context and challenges had changed sufficiently to merit a new, enhanced participatory process with the membership to produce a new strategic plan.

**Membership survey 2021.** This survey was conducted with members in January 2021 to gather opinions about existing services offered by IE, proposals for additional services, satisfaction and what priorities IE should be focusing on to benefit its members as well as society in general.

**SWOT.** An online SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) was undertaken by the SC and Management in February - March 2021. Comprising two online sessions facilitated by IE member, Peter Seccombe, the exercise built on the membership survey to identify priority issues and pathways for action for the strategic plan.

**Mission review.** A day-long participatory workshop held online in March 2021 was informed by the SWOT analysis findings, a review of trends influencing heritage interpretation. Again facilitated by IE members supporting the SC and the Management, the review asked a series of questions about IE's purpose, who it should serve and what it should achieve over the strategic plan period. The new mission statement (see above) was subsequently drafted and adopted by IE after further consultation.

**Participatory process.** At the IE conference in Sighisoara, Romania, in May 2023, attendees were invited to a workshop organised by the Supervisory Committee to share their visions or aspirations for IE in the future. A group of more than 20 members, both experienced and newcomers, participated. The results were reviewed and arranged into themes to form key strategic goals (KSGs). In September 2023, all members were invited to an online workshop to continue working on how to formulate KSGs from the previous findings or suggest other goals. A third workshop then elaborated subgoals and discussed concrete actions to reach them. The Supervisory Committee then held a series of meetings to formulate KSGs, subgoals and suggested actions from the process preparing for a survey for all interested members to comment in January 2024.

**Members' survey on key strategic goals and suggested actions.** After formulating new KSGs and suggested actions to accompany them, the Supervisory Committee consulted the membership via an online survey conducted in January 2024. Members were asked to prioritise the suggested action proposals and add new ones. Seventy-five members answered the survey, by scaling each action between 1 to 5, as well as adding comments.

**Management input.** Managing Coordinators and members were invited to make any final comments during summer 2024. This final version was ready in January 2025.

## Key strategic goals and suggested action items

The key strategic goals are accompanied by suggested action items. As their name implies, they are “suggested”, and may be implemented as and when financial or policy circumstances allow over the next five-years. They can also be implemented by the Management or be member-led initiatives. The strategic plan should remain dynamic to adapt to changing conditions to keep on track with our key strategic goals. As such, the Supervisory Committee and the Management will conduct an annual review to identify yearly priorities and add new suggested actions if appropriate.

### **KSG 1. Foster a membership that supports and represents the whole interpretive community, in terms of geography, sectors and professional occupations.**

<b>1.1 Be a platform for collaboration and exchange between all IE members</b>		
SAI 1.1.1 Empower country coordinators or other members to organise and facilitate regional or national face-to-face or online events addressing specific regional topics, needs and Europe-wide trends and challenges related to heritage interpretation.	SAI 1.1.2 Continue to improve and develop membership services, including improved IE live and online spaces for knowledge-sharing, project partner searches, capacity building, networking, collaboration and dialogue.	
<b>1.2 Facilitate mutually beneficial initiatives that inspire members to advance the purpose and practice of heritage interpretation</b>		
SAI 1.2.1 Promote examples of heritage interpretation and recognise innovative and inspiring good practices and initiatives.	SAI 1.2.2 Provide advice and support to members pursuing a career in heritage interpretation (for example, a mentoring scheme).	SAI 1.2.3 Review and improve the sustainability of IE Management, subject coordinators and country teams.
<b>1.3 Expand IE’s outreach Europe-wide representing both natural and cultural heritage</b>		
SAI 1.3.1 Foster events or membership initiatives and strengthen Interpret Europe’s presence Europe-wide. With a special focus on less-represented regions of Europe.	SAI 1.3.2 Establish more connections with natural heritage organisations such as national/regional parks and protected areas.	

## **KSG 2. Reach financial sustainability supported by membership and external funding sources.**

<b>2.1 Secure core funding for sustainable growth, value and quality of the association</b>	
SAI 2.1.1 Increase participation in grant-funded project-based initiatives or programmes to strengthen management and administrative activities (EU or other).	SAI 2.1.2 Improve IE membership retention rate and increase the number of institutional members.

<b>2.2 Secure independent funding to further develop capacity building offers</b>		
SAI 2.2.1 Develop a strategy for outreach and expansion of the training programme.	SAI 2.2.2 Increase participation in grant-funded, project-based initiatives or programmes (EU or other) to finance capacity building, including the development of materials as well as training offers. For example, projects on how interpreters strengthen place-based learning.	SAI 2.2.3 Increase participation in grant-funded/sponsored/ joint conferences or symposiums fostering collaborative opportunities on subjects of common interest with other organisations.

## **KSG 3. Anchor heritage interpretation at national and international levels**

<b>3.1 Become a reference organisation for heritage interpretation in Europe</b>		
SAI 3.1.1 Encourage and support members to be ambassadors for IE in conferences held by other European organisations on relevant subjects.	SAI 3.1.2 Encourage and facilitate the production of resources on heritage interpretation subjects by individual members, other specialists, or working group initiatives.	SAI 3.1.3 Engage influential academics and experts in IE conferences and related external events.

<b>3.2 Serve as a key partner for cooperation between associations, universities, and professionals engaged in or providing heritage interpretation</b>		
SAI 3.2.1 Strengthen ties with leading organisations, such as UNESCO, European Heritage Alliance, Europa Nostra, ICOMOS, ICOM, IUCN and Europarc, demonstrating the relevance of the interpretive profession for other disciplines.	SAI 3.2.2 Join other potential partnerships and platforms dealing with specific relevant subjects (e.g. European Landscape Convention, the FARO conventions, and the Convention on Biological Diversity).	SAI 3.2.3 Support and collaborate with universities interested in integrating heritage interpretation in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and relevant research topics.



