



interpret europe
European Association for Heritage Interpretation

Newsletter

Winter 2025



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Dear members,

While the year is coming to an end, our attention is already turning to spring 2026. Our conference team is working hard as we prepare to open the registration for Reinterpreting Heritage in the Light of Faro - a conference you really shouldn't miss. Curious why? Have a look at the first highlights of the programme and be inspired to register and submit your abstract!

Staying with conferences, we invited a member of our sister organisation in the UK, the Association for Heritage Interpretation (AHI), to share impressions from their recent event celebrating their 50th anniversary.

IE has meanwhile marked its own official 15-year anniversary, although its predecessor as an informal network of interpreters in Europe was formed 25 years ago. Together, these groups have built a strong tradition of advocacy for excellence in heritage interpretation. Each year of shared work moves us a little further.

In this edition, you can read how the Cultural Routes Institute of the Council of Europe recently recognised heritage interpretation as a key pillar in the development and management of cultural routes - affirming the qualities IE has been advocating for over many years.

Speaking about sustained effort, you will also find updates on the EU projects we are involved in, as well as news about upcoming activities at IE that you may want to join.

As we approach the conference, we'll continue connecting mainly online. To warm things up, take a look at impressions from our recent networking event and one of the webinars in our monthly series. A recent session offered valuable lessons from a truly co-creative planning process in South Africa, challenging pre-conceived ideas and outdated scientific assumptions. A model worth importing!

A couple of live-interpretation stories about bringing a museum to life and creating dialogue through costume will add more inspiration for those passionate about live interpretation, and you can access the European Commission's new

Culture Compass report, a strategy which puts culture at the heart of a sustainable future for Europe.

As always, we are grateful for the colourful postcards from our course participants. This year we reached a new milestone - more than 50 IE courses! In this edition, you'll find honest, humorous, and deeply personal reflections on learning experiences, as well as practical insights into connecting nature and culture through socially and environmentally responsible interpretation.

We also announce a change in our team of coordinators and you can hear about the plans for IE's important outreach and a path towards co-creation of meaningful interpretation.

So, here's a toast for our future joint successes and encounters!

I wish all of you a relaxed and restorative holiday season and all the best for 2026 - hoping to see many of you in person in Faro in April.

Helena Vičič, IE Managing Director

Thoughts

Send us your thoughts inspired by global events or trends in interpretation to be featured here.

news@interpret-europe.net



Balloons over Cappadocia (Image: Helena Vičič)

Reflections from the 14th Advisory Forum on Cultural Routes

IE News Team

Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe recognised interpretation as the central pillar for their development.

At the 14th Advisory Forum on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe in Türkiye, heritage interpretation was placed as a central pillar and a cross-cutting priority for developing Cultural Routes across Europe and beyond. Drawing on the panel discussion to which IE contributed, this article highlights the Forum's recommendations and what this means for heritage interpretation.

Set against the dramatic landscape of Cappadocia, Forum gathered over 350 participants to reflect on how Cultural Routes can strengthen heritage protection, sustainable tourism, and community engagement. Heritage interpretation as a cross-cutting skill can contribute to all these developmental needs of the Routes. Heritage interpretation was referred to in terms that Interpret Europe has been advocating for in recent years. This was due to some influential speakers, among whom were academics such as Mike Robinson and Chris Whitehead from the UK, and Peter Debrine from UNESCO, who represented our profession alongside IE's director Helena Vičič.

In the panel on Heritage Interpretation, speakers emphasised that interpretation today is no longer simply about conveying information. It is about shaping relationships between people and place, between past and present, and across cultures. The Forum's conclusions strongly echoed this shift, calling for **innovative, inclusive, and values-based interpretation** that emotionally resonates with audiences and brings human values to life through providing holistic interpretive experiences.

An equally important element of the conclusions paper was the recognition that interpretation must be **co-created with communities**, ensuring plural perspectives and acknowledging

diverse, and at times contested, histories. Community interpretation restores the bond between residents and their heritage, and allows visitors to engage with authentic, lived experiences rather than curated narratives.

Interpreters are positioned not merely as communicators but as facilitators of dialogue, empathy, and intercultural understanding across transnational networks. The Forum's encouragement to develop **shared interpretive frameworks (across routes)**, collaborate with guide associations, and invest in training, marks a major step toward elevating interpretation as a professional field within the Cultural Routes programme.

The conclusions also carry significant implications for **European cultural policy**. By linking interpretation to urgent contemporary issues, such as climate change, migration, social inequalities, and environmental degradation, the Forum reframed interpretation as an **action-oriented tool** capable of inspiring societal change.

This positions interpreters as contributors not only to heritage management, but also to democratic participation and social cohesion, echoing the human-rights-based principles of the Faro Convention.

For the future of cultural routes, the Forum's outcomes provide a clear blueprint. Interpretation is recognised as a driver of sustainable tourism, capable of deepening visitor engagement while helping to disperse heavy footfall away from overburdened destinations. It supports local economies by empowering residents to become guides and heritage ambassadors. And importantly, it reinforces landscape-based approaches that place communities at the heart of heritage protection.

As experienced during the discussions in Cappadocia, the momentum around heritage interpretation has rarely been stronger. The Forum's conclusions reaffirm that interpretation is central to building a more inclusive, resilient, and meaningful cultural landscape across Europe.

For Interpret Europe, this moment represents both a responsibility and an opportunity: to support Europe's heritage sector in ways that speak to the challenges and hopes of our time, through training, networking, advocacy and policy work.

These recommendations signal a paradigm shift in the cultural sector that is underway. This new approach to interpretation is a guiding light of all IE programmes, including training, the Learning Landscapes initiative and the upcoming conference in Faro, Portugal, that will build on the spirit of the Faro Convention.

The IE News Team is led by Marie Banks, News Coordinator. She can be contacted at: marie.banks@interpret-europe.net.

Why not join the next IE conference in Portugal in April 2026 to discuss more about the Cultural Routes Forum and the wider implications of the recognition of interpretation.

www.interpreteuropeconference.net



Helena, second from left, on stage with the panel (Image: Cultural Routes Institute)

European projects update: HI-People

Alexander (Sandy) Colvine (France)

As the year ends, it's time for an update on our European projects. Here we discuss HI-People.

HI-People is our largest project, supported by the European Union Creative Europe programme. The programme invests in network organisations like IE that it believes can help transform the cultural and creative sectors in Europe.

That transformation relates to our ongoing efforts to foster value-based and people-centred heritage interpretation through training, networking, advocacy and policy. This centres on a common understanding, or framework of reference (FoR), among European heritage stakeholders of what we mean by the term value-based and people-centred heritage interpretation, its principles and ethical guidelines, so that the approach is used and referenced consistently in the heritage sector.

Work is underway and, in the coming weeks, you'll find an introduction on the IE website to value-based and people-centred heritage interpretation, a starting proposal for the Framework of Reference and a forum for research and exchange on the subject. The exchange will evolve over the next few years, expanding from an advisory group of European heritage sector experts to wider consultation with IE members and beyond.

But to make a real change, the FoR must connect to 'bigger conversations' in Europe on democracy, community building, and sustainable development where it can translate the value of heritage and a practical people-centred approach to achieve the above visions via, for example, the [Faro Convention](#). By anchoring IE's work in the Faro Convention, the FoR can be a model of 'how to do it' and reclaim our essential role in this vital European movement while moving closer to the centre of the conversation.



Connecting people in a Learning Landscape (Image: Thorsten Ludwig)

The [Learning Landscapes initiative](#) is also an important part of this 'bigger picture'. In addition to extra outreach support provided to the LLI team by the HI-People project – to recruit more participating territories for a new cycle of LLI, it will also help revise the interpretive agent course materials from the first phase and ultimately provide new opportunities for our community of certified trainers as the initiative expands.

Continuing with training, IE held a [trainers' summer school](#) in Vrsar, Croatia, in June, while a new Certified Interpretive Trainers course started online in November with in-person training in Frankfurt next February. We look forward to welcoming a new generation of IE trainers very soon!

A [new IE mentoring programme](#) has also been launched to help freelance consultants (IE members or non-members) to grow their businesses, develop their entrepreneurial skills and make long-term careers as interpreters. This has begun with a needs analysis survey (see link above) followed by a multi-annual online programme beginning in early spring 2026.

Such attention to capacity building is vital if we are to ensure that our efforts to advocate for the value of heritage and the profession of heritage interpreters are backed up with a body of highly competent professional consultants and/or trainers ready to translate such claims and ambitions into tangible actions on the ground.

Outreach to promote the value of heritage and the contribution of heritage interpretation to wider society also hinges on our network of Country Coordinators who will be supported to hold national and regional networking events over the next three years. The aim is to connect heritage professionals with IE's approach to interpretation as well as its capacity building and professional offer provided by 'local' members and trainers. One major such event has already taken place in Croatia this year and others will follow. In the meantime, IE's Country Coordinators continue to meet regularly online to discuss their roles and the contribution they can make in their different contexts.

HI-People is also about addressing new realities, such as the growth of digital technology and how this can be best employed and scrutinised to support value-based and people-centred heritage interpretation. Preparations are now underway to produce and test a new two-day digital heritage interpretation module, together with an analysis of best practice and a set of ethical guidelines. Plans are also being made to deliver a toolkit on the sustainability credentials to support the value of HI, to be produced in 2026.

Finally, work has begun since the autumn to refresh the IE website for quicker navigation with more structured content for IE members, potential members, peer organisations and IE trainers. A survey will be published in early January to gather your opinions and experience on user needs, functions and features. The revised website should be online next summer.

Perhaps you've noticed the new IE promotion campaign [Share your story, find your meaning](#) on IE social media? This is part of our new thematic communication strategy supported by HI-People. The campaign theme this winter has been 'participation'. Watch out for more posts on this subject and IE's work! The strategy also sets out other media, such as podcasts and video clips, to raise awareness about the evolution of heritage interpretation and our work to train interpreters - all useful tools that can help us all explain and promote our work.

Alexander (Sandy) Colvine is IE's Project Manager for HI-People and Empaths. He can be contacted at: alexander.colvine@interpret-europe.net.

European projects update: Empaths

Alexander (Sandy) Colvine (France)

As the year ends, it's time for an update on our European projects. Here we find out about Empaths.

Empaths is our second European project, a classic transnational cooperation action, funded by the European Union Erasmus+ programme.

Empaths supports IE's work to pilot a new training course for HI professionals to facilitate participatory heritage interpretation reflecting the democratisation of heritage and the shift to value-based and people-centred heritage interpretation. It will expand our knowledge and experience in this area alongside the Learning Landscapes initiative involving a selection of UNESCO World Heritage sites and the Framework of Reference which is central to the HI-People project.

After a year of research and development, we have produced a methodological framework for an online and on-site course, a curriculum and syllabus, and an [Empaths Manifesto](#), an easily accessible document for all heritage stakeholders that sets out the case for participation (or heritage communities) and the role of interpreters as facilitators of personal meaning-making. You can find all these documents and more on the project website: www.empaths-project.eu.

Our partners in Northwest Greece, Austria/Slovenia and Southern Italy had the pleasure of sharing their work at a recent webinar of the Global Alliance for Heritage Interpretation (GAHI) and are now preparing the learning materials for the training. The focus then turns to recruiting 'local' participants to take part in the pilot training, beginning with a series of six online sessions in May next year, followed by on-site community labs in the autumn.

Click [here](#) for past GAHI webinars, a service which is also supported by the HI-People project.

Visit the www.empaths-project.eu for more details and free-to-access documentation and please register to receive the Empaths newsletter. We are also on social media, so do follow us from the website links.

Alexander (Sandy) Colvine is IE's Project Manager for HI-People and Empaths. He can be contacted at:
alexander.colvine@interpret-europe.net.



The Empaths Manifesto cover

Why work alone when you can have a helping hand?

Heidi de Maine (Switzerland)

IE's online networking events are here for you to find other professionals to work with – Aren't two brains better than one?

IE recently launched an online networking event to help connect our members who wish to find partners to collaborate with. The last event was an intimate affair, but social, interactive and interesting. Getting to know each other better means that we have more knowledge to share and more experience to offer to our clients.

Some of our members have upcoming projects that they need help with and so they came to this networking event to see what others might have to offer. Our participants had a wide range of skills that they could share, from digital solutions, experience in social involvement and fundraising, to interpretive planning, interpretive media design and writing. We're all a part of IE, but you never really realise how much knowledge and expertise is out there until you join an event like this.

The projects were also interesting. We heard from Enrico about his mining heritage project where he wants to help locals to rediscover their history and to showcase the mining migrations across Europe. We heard from Vasilka about her small historic house that has been run by the same family for over 120 years which is being converted into a museum (and a museum theatre project that they would like to make interpretive and international). And we heard from Kris who makes youth documentaries about archaeology, palaeontology, heritage and history, and which he would like to expand into the rest of Europe.



IE training exercise (Image: Helena Vičič)

I hope that there will be many more opportunities like this, where members get to know each other better and through that, help each other out. We are a community here to support all of the professionals in the interpretive industry, so that we can all make heritage more meaningful. Let's get to know each other, work with each other and make our heritage shine together.

Keep an eye on the IE website and your inbox for news about the next networking event and we hope to see you there!

Heidi is IE's Webinar Officer. She can be contacted at:
heidi.demaine@interpret-europe.net.

IE's monthly webinar programme is still going strong

Heidi de Maine (Switzerland)

We recently had some interesting lessons shared from the Humanity Exhibit at the Iziko South African Museum.

Amy Sephton and Wendy Black joined us for our monthly webinar series to share what they learned from the development of the Humanity Exhibit in South Africa. This exhibition was to be truly Afrocentric, needing to include local stories, challenge biases and figure out how to translate and present the text for a country that has 12 official languages.

Not only was it highlighted that the evolution of humans is not linear, but they also showed that the perception of humans having come from apes (specifically people with a darker skin colour) is actually incorrect and racist. A brave step toward correcting the science that we think we know! The themes of skin colour, racism and social identity were highlighted with some fun interactives to make the topics a little easier for audiences to take in and discuss.

Amy also discussed how locals were not just invited to share their stories, they were also asked for their opinions on the exhibit themes during the planning process. A step that takes more time, but is worth it when you see that your audience appreciates what you have done and develops a greater sense of ownership.

It wasn't just the good stuff that they shared with us in this webinar: a hiccup in the planning process occurred when, during translations, they realised that there is a major problem with scientific language use in most of the official languages in South Africa. Many scientific and taxonomic English words just don't exist in Sotho, Xhosa, Tswana, etc. This led to the exhibition adding to the growing new African language scientific lexicon!



Humanity Exhibit taken from presentation slide (Image: Iziko South Africa Museum)

We're so glad that they were willing to share the good, the bad and the ugly with us. An hour-long webinar always feels too short and in this case we could have discussed this exhibit for longer, but it was a great behind-the-scenes look at what is done, how it is done and what is learnt during the exhibit development process. If you would like to find out more about this exhibit, please feel free to reach out to Amy or Wendy at: asephton@iziko.org.za or wblack@iziko.org.za.

Keep an eye on the IE website and your inbox for details of our upcoming webinars. We present a changing programme of topics and hope that you will find something of interest to you. Don't forget that IE members also have free access to the recordings of all past webinars so you can watch again or go and catch up on any that you have missed. Just log in to your account in the members' area of the website: <https://members.interpret-europe.net/login/>.

Heidi is IE's Webinar Officer. She can be contacted at: heidi.demaine@interpret-europe.net.

Distilling meaning together at the Wadden Sea

Aleksandra Głowacz & Marta Hekselman (Poland)

The IE Certified Interpretive Writer (CIW) course offers an opportunity to step out of one's own sphere and find meaning through collaboration.

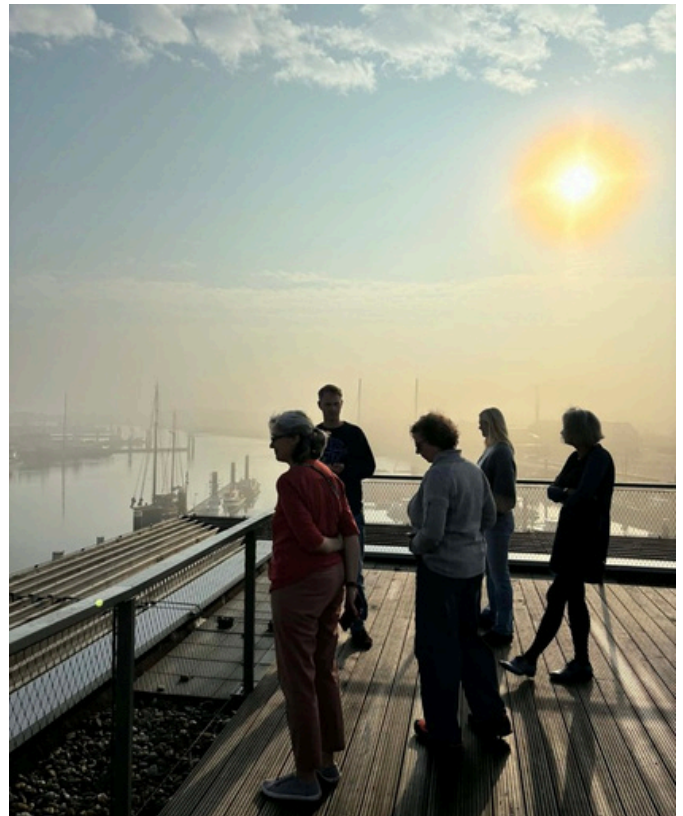
Writing is usually a solitary activity. However, during the Interpret Europe CIW course we found a unique opportunity to step out of our own perspective (and from behind a desk) and distil meaning through dialogue, conversation, and collaboration. In our small group – just five participants – we were able to engage in deeper reflection, exchange ideas, and jointly explore universal values that lie at the heart of heritage interpretation.

The Wadden Sea: A place of paradox

The training took place in a location full of paradoxes. The phenomena we were asked to describe were new to us, and the cultural context we found ourselves in was unfamiliar. The Waddenzee is natural heritage, yet created through human activity. Strongly connected to the historically harsh and brutal living conditions of local communities, who have always faced the forces of nature, the site allowed us to experience how human history and nature together shape the landscape we now have the chance to interpret.

The role of the trainer and collaborative practice

Our trainer combined methodological rigor with creativity and sensitivity to cultural meaning. Under her guidance, we worked daily in the field and in the classroom, both individually and in groups, practicing interpretation as a tool to transform visitor experiences into personally meaningful encounters.



Seeking inspiration (Image: Marta Hekselman)

The workshops demonstrated that interpretation is about more than the object or site itself; it is about the story we craft and the values we convey – such as respect, shared responsibility, and sustainability. Working together allowed us to filter ideas through shared values and test them in practice.

From text to values

Assignments included various forms of interpretive writing. Each participant prepared an individual interpretive panel, reviewed not only by the trainer but also by the other participants. This allowed us to check whether the message was clear across different cultural backgrounds, highlighting that concepts like 'natural landscape' or 'social responsibility' can vary greatly depending on context, and that heritage interpretation requires this sensitivity. This is a key skill that will be useful in our museum, where visitors come from many different places around the world.

What we take home

Participating in the CIW course is not only about developing interpretive writing skills but also about learning a new way of thinking about heritage. Only by standing next to the object, in its space, can one truly check whether the text fits the place and enhances the visitor's experience.

Working in Lauwersoog, a place where the sea has turned into a lake and a national park is a human-shaped landscape, offered a hands-on experience of this principle. Surprisingly, the setting of the course also gave us a chance to understand how Dutch settlement patterns influenced regions in our home country, Poland.

Even though the schedule was tight, we still managed to see a bit of the Netherlands and – thanks to our colleagues at WEC, the World Heritage Centre Wadden Sea – try mustard soup.

Our participation in the training was funded by the European Union as part of the project It's time for Maria! Developing adult education staff at the Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw.

Aleksandra Głowacz is an art historian. She is responsible for audience development at the Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw, Poland. Aleksandra can be contacted at: a.glowacz@mmsc.waw.pl.

Marta Hekselman is a member of the Audience Development Department at the Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw, Poland. Marta can be contacted at: m.hekselman@mmsc.waw.pl.

Interpreting across nature and culture

Philipp P. Thapa (Germany)

A Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) course in Lubmin raised big questions.

I wasn't a model participant. The Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) training recently hosted by the Tourism Association of German Western Pomerania was split across two weekends in October and November. A six-week hiatus gave participants ample time to come up with a short interpretation for their practical exam. It also helped me forget that all interpretations were to take place within a particular two-hundred-metre section of the seaside, all beach, dunes, and forest. So, when I finally thought about what interested me as an interpretable phenomenon in the seafront village of Lubmin, just 20 kilometres from where I live, I picked the pizzeria.

As a result, I had to spend the evening before the last day's exam developing a new 10-minute interpretation, this time on a phenomenon within the designated area.

I had already gone off track that afternoon when we practised turning controversy into dialogue. Each one of us was to give an off-the-cuff interpretation of an item collected in the forest while successfully moderating controversial reactions from the group. But there never were any. So, when my turn came, I interpreted a dead flower that still held up its seeds as nature's lesson on how we should be ready to sacrifice ourselves for the future of our nation, and so on. The group went along complacently. It took near-verbatim national socialist stock phrases finally to raise some eyebrows. However, not only did my demagogue act fail to provoke open controversy, it also kept me from following up on the groups' responses and developing a real dialogue.

As weird as my experiment was, it flew from a genuine concern about the interpretation of natural heritage. If interpretive themes frequently draw analogies between natural phenomena and human life, are interpreters reinforcing the dangerous idea that what is natural is 'right' and vice versa?



Interpreting the trees (Image: Thorsten Ludwig)

So, there is some irony in the fact that the short interpretation I prepared over the following night, the way it actually turned out, fell into the same basic pattern as my social Darwinist act. The main difference was that it worked from cosmopolitan values.

Having realised that I couldn't use the pizzeria for my practical exam the next day, I needed to pick a phenomenon located within the designated area. As we walked back through the wet dusk to the holiday facility that was our base, I noticed a birch tree that grew like a contorted shrub beneath the tall pines of the coastal forest. Well, why not? After dinner, I read up on birches.

The next day, as we criss-crossed the area from one participant's spot to the next, it became clear that most of us had chosen trees to interpret. So, when my turn came and we arrived near the birch, I welcomed the group to another stop on the 'Trees and People' trail.

As taught by our trainer, my interpretation proceeded along three facts and their meanings. Firstly, I got the group talking about the tree species of the forest around them, which they duly labelled either as native or as invasive and dangerous. Secondly, we approached the birch, described it, and discussed what its posture felt like – a little uncomfortable, that is. The revelation came when I asked the group to check the tree against some identifying traits of the weeping birch (*Betula pendula*). Conveniently, a colleague had already used one for her interpretation without even bothering to name the species, overwhelmingly common as it is in Germany. But this tree was different. I suggested that it could be a downy birch (*B. pubescens*) or a hybrid of the two species. The downy birch is known to occur here and there in Western Pomerania and across much of Europe, but is much more at home in Scandinavia.

Thirdly, I told the group how, 28 years ago, a young war refugee from Kosovo arrived in this northerly post-communist land of fish sandwiches and fried potatoes. He was a trained cook, and a friend who ran a restaurant in a nearby town took him in. During a visit to the seaside, they were approached by a local: Weren't they the guys from that pizza place? This parish needed one, too! The refugee decided to put down roots in foreign soil and made Lubmin a better place to eat. Today, Mr Aličkaj runs Pizzeria Adria together with his brothers, their wives, and their children, who were born here.

We were long past the 8-minute signal, and I quickly wrapped up my interpretation with the theme sentence: Both among trees and people, immigrants can enrich communities.

My rookie planning meant that we didn't get to discuss our own experiences of feeling out of place and becoming at home, or to question the connotations of 'native' and 'invasive' species as 'good' or 'bad'. And I would have preferred to end my interpretation with a coda on the diversity of scenarios encompassed by that little word, 'can'. This training brought us a long way in the craft of interpretive guiding, yet creating conversations that embrace complexity and uncertainty across nature and culture may remain a challenge even for seasoned professionals, or so I guess.

Philipp P. Thapa is an ecologist, philosopher, and writer based in Germany. You can contact him at philipp.thapa@elfenbeynturm.de.



Searching for phenomena in the beach area (Image: Thorsten Ludwig)

Autumn colours mean change: A CIG course in Greece

Penelope Gkini (Greece)

In October, a Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) course in a small village in northern Greece sparked reflection.

The course was organised within the framework of Interpret Europe's Learning Landscapes Initiative, supported by the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe (Venice Office).

Eastern Zagori is a remote and often overlooked region, where the gradual depopulation of villages has allowed forests and wildlife to reclaim much of the land. It is also a place where the scars of the Nazi occupation remain visible, adding a layer of historical depth to its rich natural and cultural landscape.

The course attracted 18 participants from nearby villages as well as urban areas. Among them were both young and older individuals, experienced guides, and newcomers to the field. Together, they created a shared space for learning, exchange, and personal growth through heritage interpretation. During those days, the village of Greveniti came alive once again. After the training sessions, participants would gather in the three cafés, where fireplaces were already lit for the season, and share conversations and experiences.

Autumn in Zagori brings change. As villagers were preparing to bid farewell to the summer, the presence of the group seemed to spark new reflections. Mr. Vassilis, an elderly resident and owner of one of the cafés, was inspired to tell participants about his family's long-abandoned watermill. He eventually opened its doors for the first time in many years, expressing the hope that perhaps it could be preserved and revitalised in the future.



Under the autumn leaves of Greveniti (Image: Penelope Gkini)

As for how the course unfolded, it is best described in the words of Georgia, one of the participants: "Some experiences cannot really be captured in words... And yet, during the Certified Interpretive Guide course, that's exactly what we explored: how to let objects speak, how to listen to the whispers of the world around us! How a single stone, a leaf, a sound can tell stories, stir emotions and reveal new meanings through each person's unique perspective. Days wrapped in mist, autumn colours and sounds became part of a shared story, revealing that interpretation isn't just about knowledge - it's a way of connecting with places, people, with life itself. Days full of learning, inspiration and true connection. Every activity, every conversation, every shared moment was an invitation to turn the world around us into experience and emotion. I'm grateful for everyone who shared this journey - for the knowledge, the support, the warmth, and the joy of co-creation. A glimpse of a week that reminded me how the simplest things - an object, a landscape, a sound - can become bridges to something deeper... to caring for and protecting our natural and cultural heritage." (Georgia Pirovoli)

Penelope Gkini is an interpretive guide and Interpret Europe trainer for the Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) course. She can be contacted at: porizocrete@gmail.com.

When the interpreter meets the guide

Natasa Velimirovic (Montenegro)

Creating personal experiences for visitors in relation to heritage, we forge connections that transcend the mere presentation of facts.

In collaboration with the Municipality of Kotor and the Public Institution 'Museums' Kotor (OJU 'Muzeji' Kotor), a heritage interpretation course was held in early December this year at the Multimedia Hall of the Cultural Centre (Centar za kulturu) in Kotor, Montenegro. It was actually an Interpret Europe Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) course, this time delivered with the support of UNESCO under Interpret Europe's Learning Landscapes initiative (LLI). Valya Stergioti, from IE's LLI team explains: The main outcome for each region of the Learning Landscapes initiative is its own co-created interpretive strategy, and IE courses are an indispensable part of the procedure. Not just as the means to build the participants' capacities on interpretive planning, writing and guiding, but also because through them, stakeholders develop interpretive plans, guided walks and non-personal interpretive media for their own sites, that form the flesh and bones of their interpretive strategy.

Our training was designed as a combination of presentations, exercises, individual and group work, including exchange of opinions and conclusions among participants and the trainers. The goal was to improve methods of heritage interpretation according to IE's contemporary principles. The majority of participants were experienced local guides who had the chance to familiarise themselves with the heritage interpretation guidelines, aiming for a more complete understanding of the importance of heritage and its preservation for future generations.



Labelling the phenomenon (Image: Bojana Sekulić)

As a programme participant and a guide with decades of experience, and at the invitation of PI 'Muzeji' Kotor (I am a member of the institution's Council), I accepted the opportunity to participate with a little skepticism. Given my knowledge and long-standing experience as a Montenegrin guide who daily presents and brings my country's heritage to visitors, I wasn't sure how much the training could really improve my interpretation techniques. Even during the introductory talks and practical exercises, it became clear to me that I have already been using these exact techniques in my own work. What was missing was knowing how to name them and an understanding of which one is the most appropriate for a given moment.

During the course, I re-lived memories of my guests with whom I am still in contact today—guests who remained connected to Montenegro because of those very moments when I found the storyteller within myself. Some of them return often, others recommend the country to their families and friends, and I am responsible for every special feeling my country awakens in them. It is not possible to achieve such a connection with a guest every time, but when it happens, you know you have conveyed a part of the love you have for your calling and your country.

Through practical exercises with my colleagues —some of whom I have known for many years— I realised that even professionals such as themselves were taken aback by the emotion created by precisely executed interpretation. The ability to use all the learned techniques to create a completely new experience of familiar phenomena for them surprised me. Heritage interpretation has become a mission, not merely a task.

Living in Kotor and being someone who, every day, depicts its beauty and rich heritage to thousands of people, is a privilege. As a guide-interpreter, I have the unique opportunity to make this town inevitably important for them to understand the significance of heritage, and to build the need for them to treat that heritage, anywhere in the world, with respect and a profound personal feeling that touches both their hearts and minds.

Nataša Velimirović studied journalism at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade. She has worked as a freelance tourist guide in Montenegro since 2008. She is a member of the Council of the Public Institution 'Museums' Kotor. Nataša can be contacted at: velimirovicnatasha@gmail.com.



Group work and an interpretive presentation (Images: Bojana Sekulić)

A phenomenal opportunity to learn about a phenomenon

Dorotea Aščerić (Serbia)

Phenomenon, phenomenon, phenomenon! — was the word echoing in our minds throughout the entire week of the CIG course.

Already after the first day of the first IE Certified Interpretative Guide Course (CIG), held at the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia in September 2025, the word phenomenon became firmly etched in the memory of every participant. Interestingly, although we all arrived with open minds and a great willingness to learn new things, we were still puzzled on that first day by our trainers' intention to guide us back to a childlike way of perceiving the world. At the same time, we trusted them completely, convinced that their approach would eventually reveal its full meaning.

When I was a child, my mother – an artist, taught me to draw by explaining that the entire world is built from basic geometric shapes and colours: rectangles, triangles, circles, blue, yellow, and red. The first day of the CIG reminded me exactly of that. Our trainers were doing something similar. A phenomenon could be any sensory experience around us.

Beyond the phenomenal and fresh insights into our surroundings, what I believe was most valuable that week were the people. It was wonderful that my colleagues and I at the Republic Institute, organised by Ana Radovanac Živanov (Country Coordinator Serbia), had the opportunity to warmly host our peers from the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Belgrade, the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Zrenjanin, the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Niš, the Museum of Yugoslavia, the Museum of Opanak-making, the Faculty of Sciences, University of Novi Sad, and the Faculty of Sciences and Mathematics, University of Niš, as well as our trainers from Croatia.



A fine setting rich in heritage (Image: RZZSK)

Since we all come from fields that require extensive knowledge of history, culture, and art, we expected that interpreting the cultural heritage of Belgrade's old city core would be a piece of cake for us. But there, too, a new surprise awaited! It felt as though the large amount of tedious information we had been memorising for years was now getting in the way of designing an interpretive walk. We felt like true nerds! Thanks to the helpful guidance and signposts provided by our trainers and other peers, even the shyest and most scholarly among us underwent a genuine transformation before our eyes by the end of the week. Their interpretive walks delighted us, and the phenomena came alive.

Our early instinct — to trust the process — paid off. Theory and practice intertwined effortlessly. The entire course came together, and everything finally made sense. All participants returned home enriched with a beautiful new skill: how to present our heritage to the public in an interpretive way.

Although the course took place at the beginning of autumn, our online group chat is still lively. Whenever we encounter a phenomenon that reminds us of one another, we send photos, exchange memories, and share a joke or two. And alongside all this wonderful camaraderie, we are already making plans for new Interpret Europe courses that could be organised in our partner institutions — expanding our phenomenal network even further!

Dorotea is an art historian, dedicated to the marketing promotion and presentation of cultural heritage. You can contact her at: dorotea.lovcevic.ims@gmail.com.

Congratulations to our newly certified members

Certified Interpretive Guides (CIG)

Luciano Sebastian Arias, Croatia
Tea Batinić, Croatia
Ranko Bautović, Croatia
Lidija Begić, Croatia
Matilda Besjedica, Croatia
Paweł Bogunia, Poland
Maja Božinović, Croatia
Jelica Čučević, Croatia
Daniela D'Amico, Italy
Marija Dragišić, Serbia
Tatjana Elez, Croatia
Gordana Hunjadi, Croatia
Matija Ivanetić, Croatia
Maja Jakšetić, Croatia
Tamara Jurković, Croatia
Ariana Koši, Albania
Toni Kuzek, Croatia
Andrea Laurenzano, Italy
Marta Lončar, Croatia
Carla Lousão, Portugal
Cornelia Lütcke, Germany
Miodrag Marčeta, Croatia
Marko Miloš, Croatia
Helen Münnich, Germany
Ajda Ožbolt, Slovenia
Fernanda Quaglia, Italy
Viktorija Rogić, Croatia
Dragica Rogić, Croatia
Karlo Šafarić, Croatia
Rui Santos, Portugal
Marijana Šojat, Croatia
Ivan Vidmar, Croatia
Anđela Višić, Croatia
Ana Živanov, Serbia
Priscila Zumpano Martinović, Croatia
Blaženka Zvošec, Croatia

Certified Interpretive Writers (CIW)

Ronia Anastasiadou, Greece
Bojana Čibej, Slovenia
Lydia Drolia, Greece
Dubravko Fijačko, Croatia
Astrid Gaudefroy, France
Aleksandra Glowacz, Poland
Kornilia Halkidi, Greece
Julie Hilaga, Philippines
Samra Imamović Macić, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Amandine Jaunet, Belgium
Guillaume Lebastard, France
Maram Mahfoudhi, Tunisia
Dušica Milenković, Serbia
Anne-Sophie Navet, France
Aleksandra Pavićević, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Irma Sultanić, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Labrini Tsitsou, Greece
Ivana Vujadinović, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Certified Interpretive Planners (CIP)

Jelena Čečur, Montenegro
Georgia Kitsaki, Greece
Ljubica Krivokapic, Montenegro
Mileva Mrsic, Montenegro
Renate Prins, Netherlands
Mirela Slovníkar, Montenegro
Sander Van Dijk, Netherlands
Miljan Živković, Montenegro

IE training courses and webinars

Certification courses and modules

Would you enjoy an enriching course with like-minded people and to gain an IE certification?

We have no courses currently planned – past students are busy doing their homework to become certified – but keep an eye on the training pages of the IE website for up-to-date information on the next courses available near you:

<https://interpret-europe.net/training/ie-courses/ie-training-courses/>

or email training@interpret-europe.net.

IE webinars

20/27 January 2026 at 15.00 CET

Using children's books as conservation tools -
The case of 'A história do Zeca Garro' in the
S.O.S. Cory's Shearwater Campaign
by Carla Silva (Portugal)

10 February 2026 at 16.00 CET

West Coast Fossil Park
by Pippa Haarhoff (South Africa)

10 March 2026 at 15.00 CET

Two Oceans Aquarium penguin exhibit design
and build
by Claire Taylor and Sam Duddington
(South Africa)

IE webinars are free for members and are conducted in English.

Keep an eye on the website for upcoming webinars, which are usually offered monthly:

<https://interpret-europe.net/training/webinars/>

Email webinar@interpret-europe.net for more information.

Don't forget that IE members can catch up on previous webinars if you missed them – the recordings are available in the members' area of the website.

Living Images: A creative tool for interpreters of history

Aleksandra Berberih Slana (Croatia)

An innovative, human-centered interpretive project using living history to engage communities interactively and personally with Croatian heritage.

The Living Images project at the Zagreb City Museum represents an innovative museological interpretation model based on the method of living history, which was the first of its kind in Croatia. Launched in 2000, this programme was designed as a platform for interactive and personally narrated presentations of history through the roles of curators, who assume the personas of historical figures closest to their interests and expertise. Over the years, the project has developed and attracted external participants, including colleagues from other museums, public institutions, friends, and family members. Individuals could choose characters and roles from history or everyday life, allowing visitors to gain a deeper, more personal experience of history. It is much easier to remember a personal conversation with the Black Queen – Barbara Celjska or Ban Jelačić than a traditional guided tour with standard data and facts.

The advantage of the Living Images approach is that interpretation is human-centered, emphasising the human dimension of history, daily life, customs, misconceptions, triumphs, and struggles of the characters that curators and collaborators interpret. This approach engages visitors on both an emotional and intellectual level. Living Images is the first official example at the Zagreb City Museum of applying living history methods in interpretation, thereby encouraging new approaches in museum presentation and interpretation.

Living Images mainly encourages participatory and experiential methods in museums, emphasising authenticity and context. Through this project, the local community engages with history personally and directly, turning the



The Black Queen, Barbara Celjska (Image: Zagreb City Museum)

Zagreb City Museum into a modern space for connection, reflection, and identity. It also underscores the importance of the human element in interpreting cultural heritage. As a result, this project acts as a bridge between traditional museums and contemporary interpretive methods, offering a meaningful experience that can be expanded or tailored to meet community needs and preferences.

In recent years, the Museum has also begun collaborating with city residents who have expressed interest in cooperation, making Living Images a bridge between experts and laypeople. This provides additional opportunities for residents to participate in education and the interpretation of history. On its 25th anniversary, Living Images remains faithful to its tradition but is also open to change and breaking down walls between worlds.

Due to the popularity, tradition, and high professional standards, the Zagreb City Museum has protected 'Living Images' under the Copyright Law. This in itself stands as a sign of a good interpretive programme.

(More images are shown overleaf)

Aleksandra Berberih Slana is a museum director, cultural historian and museologist with extensive experience in museum interpretation and educational programmes, specialising in innovative methods of engaging the public with cultural heritage. Aleksandra can be contacted at: abslana@mgz.hr.

This article was originally submitted for the autumn 2025 newsletter. I must apologise for the internal admin error that led to the delay in publishing it. - Editor



Living Image interpreters (Images: Zagreb City Museum)



When a costume retires: Rethinking live interpretation

Vasilka Dimitrovska (North Macedonia)

Reflecting on how live interpretation differs from performance, and why dialogue remains at the core of meaningful visitor engagement.

Retiring a costume can seem like a practical decision, but in my recent work it became a moment of deeper reflection on what distinguishes live interpretation from performance. I have embodied the medieval character of Queen Maria Palaiologina for several years, and placing her costume into archival storage allowed me to revisit the principles that guide our practice as interpreters.

The garment itself was originally designed for an AR/VR project, intended for a controlled digital environment rather than open-ended visitor interaction. Its theatrical qualities served well in virtual storytelling, but they were never meant for the dynamic, dialogic nature of live interpretation. Acknowledging this mismatch became a reminder of why our tools must support communication rather than simply visual effect.

Live interpretation, particularly when delivered through a historical character, is often mistaken for acting. Yet interpretation is not a performance presented to an audience. It is a facilitated process in which meaning is co-created with visitors. Actors are trained to project emotion outward; interpreters, instead, should cultivate a shared space where questions, curiosity and reflection shape the encounter.

This distinction is especially clear when working with visitors who arrive with diverse interests and expectations. Interpretation is interactive, and the interpreter must be prepared to respond to enquiries that go far beyond the surface of a costume or a storyline.



Vasilka Dimitrovska as Queen Maria Palaiologina (Image: Karlo Kramarić & Karlo Prohaska, ThreeTech Production)

Solid scholarly grounding is essential: visitors challenge, compare and explore, and the interpreter must offer context with accuracy and empathy.

Museum theatre provides an illustrative example. Although it borrows elements from theatre, its purpose is interpretive communication. Characterisation is used not to deliver a scripted narrative, but to open a dialogue about heritage. Visitors are not passive observers but participants whose perceptions actively shape the experience. Actors can become excellent interpreters, but they require training in interpretive methodology to shift from performance to engagement.

Working with Queen Maria Palaiologina's costume has given me opportunities to explore how embodiment can reveal connections between past and present. Through dialogue, visitors often move from the personal story of a medieval noblewoman to questions of identity, cultural exchange and the role of women in historical decision-making.

These conversations demonstrate how interpretation fosters both emotional resonance and intellectual insight.

The retirement of her costume is not an ending but a transition. The interpretive themes remain alive, and the character continues to serve as a bridge to wider historical reflection. What changes is the medium through which the dialogue is facilitated.

Ultimately, this moment reinforced a core principle of our profession: interpretation is defined not by costumes or props, but by the shared meaning created between interpreter and visitor. When that dialogue is authentic, the story endures long after the garment is set aside.

Vasilka Dimitrovska is an IE trainer for the Certified Live Interpretation course. She is the founder of Kreaktiva – The Storytelling & Experience Design Studio, and Creative Director of HAEMUS. She specialises in experience-based approaches to bringing heritage to life. Vasilka can be contacted at: info@kreaktiva.mk.

What's going on elsewhere

Reflections on the 50th anniversary AHI conference

Jacqueline Braithwaite (UK)

The UK's Association for Heritage Interpretation (AHI) turned 50 in October and it was a fantastic opportunity to attend this milestone event.

This year, in the same year that our 'big sister' from the UK turned 50, Interpret Europe reached its own significant birthday. The initial establishment of the informal European network which later became formalised as IE was 25 years ago (although IE was only officially born 10 years later). Several of IE's founding and active members have also been significantly involved in the sector through AHI over the years and this seems a good time to reflect on our achievements, growth and increased recognition for the heritage interpretation profession. It is a real pleasure to feature the thoughts and experience from one of AHI's newer members in our newsletter. Hopefully you may spot some parallels with the work we are doing and the future ambitions of both organisations aligning. Here's to the next 25 and 50 years of heritage interpretation helping to shape a more inclusive future! - Editor

In an increasingly busy world, it's not always easy to pause and reflect — but attending the 50th anniversary conference of the [Association for Heritage Interpretation](#) (AHI) on 8th October 2025 was an experience worth sharing. It was an outstanding opportunity to engage with professionals dedicated to advancing best practice across the heritage interpretation sector.

As my first AHI conference as a member, it was an invaluable opportunity to connect with colleagues and explore current thinking in the heritage interpretation sector. The AHI continues to play a vital role in supporting interpreters in the UK and internationally through professional development, training, and advocacy.



AHI presentation (Image: Jacqueline Braithwaite)

The keynote address by Dr [Karis Jade Petty](#), 'Into the Garden: Inclusive Heritage for Sight Impaired Visitors', offered profound insights into accessibility and inclusion in outdoor heritage spaces. Her excellent work demonstrates how thoughtful design benefits all visitors.

Gaynor Legall CBE, Chair of The Heritage & Cultural Exchange, delivered an inspiring presentation — 'Whose Wales? Reclaiming the Past, Rewriting the Future'. Her reflections on the multicultural heritage of Cardiff's Tiger Bay powerfully highlighted the need for inclusive narratives that reflect all communities.

Her inspirational talk highlighted the men and women who helped build Cardiff's docklands communities, despite facing discrimination, exclusion, and systemic oppression. Their resilience shaped one of Wales's most vibrant multicultural identities.

Through her ongoing Tiger Bay and World project, The Heritage & Cultural Exchange works to preserve and share these important stories, ensuring that the lived experiences of Cardiff's Black population and its diverse docklands community are remembered, respected, and recognised as a vital part of Wales's national history.

Pete Roch and Jason Davidson of Squeaky Pedal films delivered an insightful presentation: 'Beyond the Label: Unlocking Hidden Stories through Film interpretation'. They are an award-winning heritage film, animation, and television production company working with museums, cultural institutions and broadcasters to create inspiring and engaging content and immersive museum experiences that connect with diverse audiences that bring history to life.

Eric Langham's session, 'A Circular Economy for Exhibitions', also resonated strongly, reinforcing the value of sustainable, reusable approaches — principles I apply in my own heritage art practice including my latest heritage art installation, *Under African Skies*.

AHI50 was both insightful and motivating, reaffirming the importance of interpretation in shaping inclusive and sustainable heritage practice.

Jacqueline Braithwaite is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (FRSA) and a retired Head of Design in FE & HE. Jacqueline is a mixed media & heritage artist, and she gives her time and experience to support the sector through being a Creative & Disability Advocate. She is a community researcher at SS Great Britain and is a Trustee & Advisory Board Member of the same museum and Beckford Tower which is part of The Bath Preservation Trust in Bath, UK. Jacqueline can be contacted at: jacqueline_braithwaite@yahoo.co.uk.



Inspiring exhibits (Image: Jacqueline Braithwaite)

Culture Compass for Europe

IE News Team

The European Commission's report, published in November, sets out the importance of cultural heritage – with implications for interpretation.

Have you heard about the Culture Compass report?

It was published in November by the European Commission, presented by Glenn Micallef, European Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Culture, Youth and Sport. It is available here:

<https://culture.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2025-11/Communication%20-%20Culture%20Compass%20with%20cover%20.pdf>

This strategic document recognises culture and cultural heritage as a cornerstone of Europe's security, resilience, democracy, competitiveness, social cohesion and sustainable development. This forward-looking framework is designed to shape the EU's cultural policy by ensuring that culture plays a central role in fostering European identity, celebrating diversity and promoting excellence.

It will guide EU policies in four key directions, for an EU that: 1. upholds and strengthens European values and cultural rights; 2. empowers artists and cultural professionals, and supports people; 3. draws on culture and cultural heritage to become more competitive, resilient and cohesive; and 4. champions international cultural relations and partnerships.

Members of the European Heritage Alliance, the European Heritage Hub Consortium, and other organisations have already publicly supported the document and agree with the call for the strategy set out to be adequately funded, including allocating at least 2% of the next EU budget to culture.



Culture Compass for Europe (Image: European Commission)

Manos Vougioukas, Secretary-General of the European Cultural Tourism Network (ECTN) stated: "As the only pan-European network for cultural tourism with over 40 members in 21 countries, we very much welcome and endorse this awaited Culture Compass, given that it recognises and highlights the synergies of culture, heritage and sustainable tourism."

City leaders in the Eurocities network "strongly support the EU's new Culture Compass and are ready to help translate its ambitions into action at the local level. They urge the EU to match this vision with robust funding—especially through the Agora EU programme, Creative Europe, and cultural priorities embedded in broader EU budgets. The Compass addresses key challenges facing Europe's cultural and creative sectors, promotes democracy and artistic freedom." (Taken from the Culture Compass Reaction Statements shared by the European Heritage Alliance)

NEMO, the Network of European Museum Organisations, actively contributed to the Culture Compass for Europe by emphasising the independence of cultural organisations and the indispensable role of museums. Through its advocacy, Europe's 30,000 museums are recognised as democratic spaces that foster learning, social cohesion, and well-being.

NEMO's positioning highlights museums as central actors in addressing cultural challenges such as participation, resilience, and rights within the EU's strategic framework.

This new Culture Compass strategy obviously has positive implications for heritage interpretation, and IE's values-based approach could be key in helping communities reach their potential through the people-centred co-creative interpretive processes for which we advocate. Keep an eye on the potential funding streams that may come out of this Culture Compass – it might be fruitful to help us steer the right course for heritage interpretation under this framework.

More info is available here:

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_25_2629

With thanks to the European Heritage Alliance and Europa Nostra for the summary and quoted statements.

When outreach begins with values

Max Dubravko Fijačko (Croatia)

Outreach begins with listening but grows from shared values, helping regions and professionals create interpretation that truly matters.

I have just taken over the role of Outreach Coordinator for IE and my new role begins with a question: What truly matters to the people we hope to reach?

This question will guide my work. Before anything else, outreach begins with listening. In our organisation, it also carries a deeper purpose: to help people, institutions and regions discover what Interpret Europe can offer at this particular moment in Europe's story. And what we offer is truly unique.

Across the continent, societies face questions of cohesion, resilience, participation and meaning. Heritage often sits at the centre of these tensions. It can unify or divide, connect or separate. Everything depends on how it is interpreted. This is where Interpret Europe stands apart. We do not only teach techniques; we cultivate the ability to interpret heritage in ways that strengthen democratic values, social connection and a deeper sense of belonging. This is the value-based and people-centred approach to heritage interpretation (VBHI), and it is increasingly recognised as a response to key European priorities.

IE's training programme, recently updated and refined, reflects this responsibility. It is not simply a series of courses. It is a capacity-building system that develops the competencies needed for meaningful interpretation: curiosity, critical thinking, emotional awareness, empathy and an understanding of how values shape the way people experience heritage. No other organisation in Europe offers this combination in such an applied, accessible and human way.

My task in outreach is to identify where this approach can make the greatest contribution. That means understanding the challenges faced by museums, protected areas, communities and



Are we all looking at the same thing? (Image: Bojana Sekulić)

local authorities, and recognising the values underlying their needs. When a director speaks about relevance, or a ranger worries about public trust, or a municipality looks for ways to strengthen participation, these are not isolated technical issues. They are signals of values seeking expression. Outreach helps recognise these signals and respond with the support that IE is uniquely equipped to offer.

Participation and co-creation, too, can be misunderstood. On the surface, they may appear as simple dialogue or doing things together. But co-creation becomes meaningful only when participants can see their own values reflected in the shared outcome. When this happens, engagement moves from something expected to something deeply felt.

This perspective also shapes how we approach the Learning Landscape initiative (LLI). The LLI is more than a project; it is a long-term vision for cultivating regions that are ready intellectually, emotionally and socially to host interpretation that strengthens communities rather than fragments them. Outreach helps identify these regions, build partnerships and prepare the ground for future capacity-building cycles.

While values also shape how we listen, the heart of outreach lies in showing why IE matters. We reach out because we believe interpretation, done well, can help Europe navigate some of its most pressing challenges.

And we reach out because our training programme can empower people to make that difference.

In every conversation, I return to the same starting point: What truly matters here? From the answers to that question, partnerships emerge, trust grows and the path toward meaningful interpretation becomes clear. And, more often than not, it all begins with a smile and the right question.

Max Dubravko Fijačko is Interpret Europe's new Outreach Coordinator. His mission is to connect, listen deeply, and support people and organisations in developing interpretation grounded in shared values. He believes meaningful change begins with genuine dialogue and the right question at the right moment. Max can be contacted at: dubravko.fijacko@interpret-europe.net.

Learning Landscapes symposium – Call for proposals

IE Learning Landscapes initiative team

Are you ready to contribute to the Learning Landscape initiative symposium in February?

As part of the joint Learning Landscapes initiative, Interpret Europe and UNESCO are organising an online symposium, which will take place on **26-27 February 2026**. It will address the role of narratives in 21st century heritage interpretation, and we are calling for your contributions.

Heritage interpretation is changing. Once focused on entertaining storytelling, it is now more about sharing experiences, inviting dialogue and empowering people to interpret for themselves.

But how do we navigate the diverse - and sometimes conflicting - narratives around heritage?

Narratives are interpretive frames shared by many. They place heritage phenomena in a meaningful context and influence what we remember, and how we form our beliefs. Strong narratives can connect, heal, and inspire but they can also divide, silence, or distort. Engaging with multiple narratives requires new skills and opens new questions, which we aim to address in our symposium.

You can find the questions we want to address on the IE website here:

https://interpret-europe.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/symposium_lli_questions.pdf

We welcome not only academic papers but also invite you to share your own experiences, present our own ideas, or simply stimulate and facilitate exchange on a particular question.

Please select the format that best suits you from [our submission form](#), which we need to receive by 9 January 2026.

We are much looking forward to your proposals!

The Learning Landscapes initiative team



The #iecon26 conference in Portugal is simply a must

Bettina Lehnies (Germany)

Co-creation sessions, activism and south Portuguese landscapes are just some of the experiences our conference has never offered before.

Join us to co-create our Interpret Europe conference 2026: Re-interpreting Heritage in the Light of Faro, which will take place in Faro, Portugal in April. We will explore how heritage interpretation can strengthen democratic values, foster dialogue, and connect people with both cultural and natural heritage in meaningful ways. Faro is the birthplace of the Faro Convention, a milestone in people-centred, value-based approaches to heritage, making it the perfect setting to reflect on how interpretation can contribute to inclusive, sustainable communities across Europe.

To this end, we will organise group discussions and open space sessions and invite you to shape and co-create the future of interpretation with colleagues from all around Europe and beyond.

However, our standard programme with presentations and workshops remains, so you are warmly invited to consider your own contribution by submitting an abstract (and later a full paper) by 5 January.

As always, we will peek beyond the conference halls and visit numerous places in the Faro region. Whether your passion is culture, gastronomy, or nature, there will be something for everyone to remember this remarkable corner of Portugal forever.

You will be able to choose from six long study visits and at least six short ones, making the selection really hard.

Will you be tempted to visit the **Loulé Rock Salt Mine**, one of the most important geological sites of the Geoparque Algarvensis? 230 metres below the surface we will not only marvel at the magnificent underground world but also discuss how interpretation could help small businesses to find new ways forward in times of globalisation.

Or, will you prefer to go to the **archaeological site of Milreu**, surrounded by a serene agricultural landscape. We will rest our senses by wandering through the remains of a luxurious Roman villa and ponder over the succession of beliefs and cultural practices that shaped the south of the Iberian Peninsula.

The group visiting the **Eco-Cork Factory** will learn about one of Portugal's greatest natural treasures and one of its most exported products worldwide. In this family-run factory the love for cork has been passed down from generation to generation. Here, the ancestral knowledge of cork harvesting and transformation is preserved and at the same time adapted to modern times.



'The cubist town' of Olhão, an ancient fishing village, is a living testimony of the historical interconnection of locals with the ocean. We will trace the paths of legends, immersing ourselves in narratives that have influenced lives for centuries. Here, stories of fishermen, sailors and local folklore have woven a rich tapestry of identity.

Or maybe you will choose to hop aboard a boat and experience the stunning **Ria Formosa** with its barrier islands, salt marshes and sand dunes as well as its rich flora and fauna. In conversation with local fishermen committed to sustainable practices, we'll discuss the ecological challenges they face and the strategies they use to adapt to a changing world.

A bunch of short visits will let us explore Faro itself and its near surroundings, its landmarks, hidden gems and the most determinant moments in its history. Whether you chose a museum, the science centre, the digital visitor centre, a guided tour along the beach, a hike on the Ludo trail in the nature reserve or a tour up on the roofs of Faro or in its narrow streets – you will find plenty of food for lively discussions that align with our conference theme. Tastings of food and wine at sunset will round off our days. But this is not all!

Parallel to our conference, our local organisers - Sciaena organisation - will be holding their annual Marmotto festival. This will be our unique chance to enjoy some activism through a lively cultural event that blends music, interactive art, talks and performances inviting visitors to think about ocean conservation and expression through creativity.



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To round up our Portuguese adventure, join us on one of the post-conference tours to Évora or the Geopark Algarvensis. There are good reasons why Évora will be the European Capital of Culture in 2027. A walk in the city centre is like a journey through 2000 years of Portuguese history. We'll go on a guided tour visiting Évora's most remarkable historic sites, including haunting chapels, ancient aqueducts, and serene gardens, and learn about the challenges and expectations of this UNESCO World Heritage city.

Nature lovers should definitely not miss the post-conference tour UNESCO Geopark Algarvensis, a unique landscape of striking cliffs, hidden caves, and dramatic rock formations shaped over millions of years. We will learn about the region's geological history, and discover the rich biodiversity of the area.

However, before we get there, you should be aware of these deadlines so you don't miss out on preparation for the conference:

Call for papers deadline: 5 January

Early bird registration until: 1 March

The [conference website](http://www.interpreteuropeconference.net)

www.interpreteuropeconference.net will be our most reliable signpost and information desk before we will meet in April so keep an eye on that for any extra information.

Bettina Lehnies is IE's Event Coordinator. She can be contacted at:

bettina.lehnies@interpret-europe.net.

Join us to experience Portugal's heritage (Images: Bettina Lehnies)



Welcome to our new members

Institutional members

WHIPIC (International Centre for the Interpretation and Presentation of World Heritage Sites under the auspices of UNESCO), Republic of Korea

Individual members

Joseph Alotto, Netherlands
Cassie Anderson, USA
Davorka Androić, Croatia
Armin Balić, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Gabrijela Baraban, Croatia
Marco Bastos, Portugal
Maja Berger, Croatia
Francoise Boeck, Denmark
Ioana Brindau, Romania
Marie Julienne Caballete, Philippines
Daniela Calinescu, Romania
Nicholas Cantoni, Romania
Marie Caron, France
Kotoulas Christos, Greece
Zeljko Corkalo, Croatia
Cecile Couval, France
Zorana Cuca Krivokapić, Montenegro
Adela Dadu, Romania
Natalija Đaletić, Montenegro
Denes Danko, Serbia
Renske De Boer, Netherlands
Robert De Haan, Netherlands
Maria Gabriela Degeratu, Romania
Chiara Del Turco, Italy
Kristina Delalić Vetengl, Croatia
Sara Dimitrić, Serbia
Jasmina Doboš, Croatia
Felicidade Domingos, Portugal
Bojana Dragic, Montenegro
Jelena Dujovic, Montenegro
Branka Džoganović, Montenegro
Dino Džumhur, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Tatjana Elez, Croatia
Dolores Fabian, Montenegro
Bruno Fernandes, Portugal
Katarina Filipović, Serbia
Anthony Foulquier, France
Milica Frljanovic, Serbia
Mario Fürstenberg, Germany
Emilia Adina Gale Ghidia, Romania
Viktor Gencel, Serbia
Tasis Georgios, Greece

Individual members (continued)

Tripun Grgurević, Montenegro
Marija Grgurović, Montenegro
Flora Gueguen, France
Timofei Gusakov, Serbia
Varja Guttert, Croatia
Belma Halilhodžić, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Damir Hordov, Croatia
Jakov Iskrin, Serbia
Dubravka Ivanovic, Montenegro
Maja Jakšetić, Croatia
Raluca Janó-Ierina, Romania
Vincent Joris, Belgium
Bogdana Jovanović, Serbia
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And finally...

Thank you for your contributions.

Warm winter greetings from your IE News Team!

Marie Banks (UK) – News Coordinator
Anna Carlemalm (Sweden), Abby McSherry (Ireland), Elisabeth Nübel-Reidbach (Germany) and Ivana Zrilić (Croatia).

Any news, projects, thoughts or adventures in interpretation that you want to share? Send a report and some photos to: news@interpret-europe.net. Please consider that we like to promote best practice examples in the field of heritage interpretation, and follow the guidelines for newsletter authors.

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Deadline for contributions for the spring 2026 edition: Saturday 28 February 2026.

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Interpret Europe
European Association for Heritage Interpretation
Carl-von-Ossietzky-Straße 3
14471 Potsdam
Germany

+386(0)41 911 112
office@interpret-europe.net
www.interpret-europe.net

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