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Re-interpreting heritage in the light of Faro

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in the light of Faro

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Interpret Europe's Conference 2026, **Re-interpreting heritage in the light of Faro**, #iecon26, was held in Faro, Portugal, on 16-19 April 2026.

The conference included a full programme of parallel presentations and workshops as well as six different study visits and several walking tours for participants to choose from to get a good and diverse sense of the area's history, culture and wildlife, and provide a perfect basis for discussions around how we can re-boot the 2005 Faro Convention for all heritage.

Thanks to our keynote speakers:

- Guilherme d'Oliveira Martins (Portugal) – Former president of the Steering Committee of the Council of Europe that adopted the Framework Convention on the Value of Heritage for Society in Faro, Portugal in 2005 (known as the Faro Convention)
- Dr Amra Hadzimuhamedovic (Bosnia and Herzegovina) – President and CEO of HIDR-Centre for Peace and Heritage in Sarajevo, and who also sat on the 2005 Faro Convention committee

Thanks to Peter Seccombe and the review committee for their support in putting together a programme that explored many angles of the conference theme. The abstracts of presentations and workshops are included after the full papers.

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Thanks to our conference local partner, Sciaena.



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Welcome address

Helena Vičič, IE Managing Director (Slovenia)

Dear ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, dear fellow interpreters,

Welcome to the Interpret Europe Conference 2026 and welcome to Faro.

It's truly good to see you all here, at what might feel like the very edge of Europe... and yet, in many ways, right at the centre of what we are here to discuss.

Faro might look like a small holiday destination. And yes - Portugal will probably win us over as tourists as well. But this place is much more than that.

In 2005, a group of visionary thinkers gathered here and launched what we now know as the Faro Convention, formally: the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society.

This legal text introduced a quiet but radical shift:

From heritage as things... to heritage as a meaningful reflection on things or as meaningful relationships with things.

From preservation alone... to participation, rights, and responsibility.

From expert authority... to people and communities as co-creators.

And today, 21 years later, we are here to ask a new question:

How can the 'Faro spirit' be universally applied – beyond the Convention – to all heritages?

Cultural and natural, tangible and intangible, in Europe and elsewhere.

And what is our role as heritage interpreters in this endeavour?

We are grateful that two of the Convention's original authors came back to Faro, to join us in this discussion.

When we first started planning this year's conference with our partners from Sciaena, we actually had a different focus. We wanted to talk about nature interpretation. About the ocean.

But as we began to dive deeper into the Faro Convention, we realised something:

If we talked about heritage independent of the Convention, it would be like having an elephant in the room. Because the essence of the Convention is so important that it felt like a lighthouse directing its beam at us. (By the way, did you know that farol in Portuguese means a lighthouse?)

We need it in dark and stormy times – especially when we have to navigate through dangerous waters.

We are living through overlapping crises – political, environmental, societal.

But increasingly, they are also crises of truthfulness – and meaning.

We see it everywhere:

Heritage being used to divide rather than connect.

History reshaped to fit agendas.

One-sided narratives presented as unquestionable truth.

This is what happens when interpretation turns into something else. What we often call 'interpreganda'.

Heritage is often complex and nuanced.

It is, as our reflection paper puts it, a set of moving mirrors. And in those mirrors, we don't just see things. We see ourselves. Our values. Our assumptions. An opportunity to reflect on our blind spots.

Which brings us to what we believe has been missing in the mainstream heritage discourses up until now... Interpretation. Because there is no heritage without people who interpret it.

And if people cannot reflect on how meaning is constructed, then others will do it for them.

So, the question is no longer only: What heritage should people care about?

But: How do we create spaces where heritage becomes meaningful dialogue? (Rather than a predefined story told by an unquestionable expert authority).

How do we strengthen interpretive literacy – the ability for people to question, reflect, and navigate complexity by themselves?

And this is exactly where Faro questions our roles and responsibilities as interpreters.

Some years ago, Interpret Europe started working on a major task:

Rethinking our profession within a new paradigm and building foundations together with stakeholders.

It is time to broaden and deepen these discussions.

You have received the Faro Reflections paper. Over the coming days, we invite you not just to read it, but to challenge it, test it, and respond to it.

And perhaps here, the ocean we first planned to focus on still has something to teach us.

Because if we take the Faro spirit seriously, we cannot separate culture and nature, we cannot separate the tangible heritage from the intangible meanings, the values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions which we inherited from our elders, we cannot separate Europeans from humanity.

Heritage is not divided. It is a whole.

And interpretation is not something we apply only to culture or to nature, it is a fundamental human capacity. One that we urgently need, not just for broadening and deepening our understanding of the past, but for developing power of judgement, which is so urgently needed today, in an increasingly polarised world.

And this is why this moment – here, in this room – matters.

We are 143 participants from 30 countries, across three continents.

We come together with: Different backgrounds. Different experiences. Different perspectives.

Over the next few days, we will listen, we will share, question, reflect – and, yes, sometimes disagree.

And that is not a problem. That is the work.

Because what we are building here is not just a conference outcome, but a shared commitment.

Let me also express our sincere gratitude:

To all our keynote speakers and contributors, who share the belief that this work is not only relevant, but necessary.

And to our colleagues from Sciaena for their hospitality and collaboration, to the local sites and guides, to the municipality and region, to the Club Farensen, and to the EU's Creative Europe Programme

And let me close with this: Heritage is not what we inherit, it is what we make of it.

And interpretation is not a technical skill, it is a civic responsibility.

If we want heritage to strengthen peace, we must make it a space for genuine dialogue.

If we want democracy to endure, we must strengthen people's ability to interpret for themselves, not just to receive.

And if we want the Faro vision to become reality, then we should roll up our sleeves.

Thank you, good luck – and welcome to Faro!

Keynotes

The story of the Faro Convention

Guilherme d'Oliveira Martins (Portugal)

Guilherme d'Oliveira Martins presided over the Steering Committee of the Council of Europe that adopted the Framework Convention on the Value of Heritage for Society in Faro, Portugal, in 2005.

Guilherme holds a Master's degree in juridical and economic science. He currently serves as the president of the Grand Council of the Centro Nacional de Cultura (CNC) and as chairman of the General Assembly of the World Monuments Fund. His extensive career includes prominent roles, including trustee of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, president of the Tribunal de Contas (Court of Auditors), and national coordinator of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018.

Guilherme has been instrumental in various governmental positions, including Minister of Presidency, Minister of Finance, Minister of Education, and Secretary of State for educational administration. He has also been actively involved in legislative affairs as a member of the Portuguese Parliament and served as vice-president of the Portuguese National Commission for UNESCO.

The recording of this keynote can be watched on IE's YouTube channel here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0qsa7Du6CY>

Heritage integration into postwar recovery and peacebuilding

Dr Amra Hadzimuhamedovic (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Amra Hadzimuhamedovic is a founder of HIDR (House of International Dialogue and Research), which includes ISSYH, a school for sustainable, inclusive, resilient and holistic recovery of heritage. She is the president and CEO of HIDR – Centre for Peace and Heritage in Sarajevo, and has managed diverse projects integrating cultural heritage into post-war recovery in Bosnia, Kosovo, Palestine, and Iraq.

Alongside her work on international projects, Amra served as a member of the Council of Europe's Committee for Cultural Heritage (CDPAT) and as a member of the expert group that drafted the Faro Convention in 2005.

The recording of this keynote can be watched on IE's YouTube channel here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDHA0bRZ_qw

iecon26 conclusion

Shifting paradigms in heritage interpretation, in the light of Faro

Max Dubravko Fijacko (Croatia)

Max Dubravko Fijacko is an active IE trainer and is IE's Outreach Coordinator.

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You know that feeling... when you walk into a dark room and you can't see anything? Then someone lights a small candle. Not to show you the whole room. Not to give you all the answers. Just enough light so you know you are not alone!

This was the spark that ignited the final session of the IE Conference 2026, where we gathered under the title, Re-interpreting heritage in the light of Faro. But this New Paradigm Cafe was much more than a traditional wrap-up. Eight groups, eight tables, one morning. It was a live, collective creation and one of the crucial first steps in a much longer journey toward building Interpret Europe's new Framework of Reference. We didn't come to listen to lectures. We came to talk, to argue, and most of all, to listen to each other. Anchored in the Faro Convention. Driven by its spirit.

We didn't come to Faro to stay safe. We came to set sail. Like the Portuguese navigators: Gil Eanes, Vasco da Gama, Magalhães. No perfect map. Just a brave heart. And each other.

Under the banner of 'The Winds of Faro', the eight working groups actively gathered raw ideas, insights, and perspectives to feed into this new process. We learned that co-creation

matters more than delivery, and that visitors want authentic experiences rather than official stories. We talked about brave environments instead of safe spaces. Safe can be too still, too quiet. Brave is alive, messy, and open to change. Disturbance, we realised, is not a problem. It is a chance to adapt. The core? Trust. Love. Respect. And gentle humour.

We drew a red line. All opinions are welcome, but when human dignity is attacked, we do not stay quiet. We take a stand. Pushing our values onto others is still colonisation, even when we mean well. We faced the heavy stuff too: guilt, lies, and difficult history. We learned to move from guilt to acceptance, and from acceptance to making things right. It's not about whose story wins. It is about relationships.

Then came the idea of empathy as a vaccine. If 85% of people in a community truly care, the whole community becomes immune to hate. Not conflict-free, just immune to hate. And that, we agreed, is enough. This changes how we see the interpreter. Not an expert on a hill with ready-made answers or narratives, but a listener, a mediator, a host. Someone who builds trust over time, reacting to the community instead of lecturing it.

Eight winds. One direction. Stay in conversation. Build relationships. Strive for empathy.

This collective effort brought us directly back to the heart of the Faro Convention through the words of Amra Hadžimuhamedović, one of the key experts behind the Convention and one of our keynote speakers at this conference. She reminded us of a vital truth: if heritage is a resource, it is a resource for peace. Not for tourism. Not for money. Peace.

Reflecting on more than two decades since she helped shape the convention, she invited us to go a few steps further, expanding our relationship with heritage into something more

holistic, balanced, and responsible. This relationship reaches its true meaning only when we also embrace the planet and the children we will never meet. All of it belongs together.

The new Framework of Reference will not be written behind closed doors. The invaluable raw material gathered in Faro is just the beginning of a broader collaborative effort that will continue through dedicated working groups and deeper analysis. But it proved that our members are ready to share the weight of this journey. Because the best heritage interpreters don't tell you what to see. They show you where to look.



Figure 1. Group discussions and visualisations at the Paradigm Café (Image: Dubravko Fijacko)

Full papers

Heritage of rural Belarus in tourism: identify, interpret, sustain, protect and transmit

Valeria Klitsounova
(Republic of Belarus)

Valeria Klitsounova has worn many hats during her career as an interpreter. She was an Associate Professor of the Belarusian State University for 25 years, where she developed and taught her own course, Heritage Interpretation in Tourism, alongside Marketing in Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, and Promotion in Tourism. As chair of the National Association of Rural Tourism for 20 years, she introduced interpretive approaches to rural tourism operations.

Valeria is a trainer in interpretation and interpretive guiding (certified by the NAI) and wrote the first book in Russian about heritage interpretation in tourism (two editions - 2016, 2021). Valeria studied interpretation in the USA as a Fulbright scholar in 2013-2014 and has been a member of the US National Association for Heritage Interpretation (NAI) and Interpret Europe for many years. Now she is vice-president of the Global Agritourism Network where she promotes interpretation ideas.

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Abstract

This article introduces a Belarusian experience of rural tourism development based on the intangible heritage of rural communities. This heritage belongs to rural communities and society, where villagers are the bearers of their

culture: rights, rituals, folklore, crafts, cuisine, etc. They need support in protecting and transmitting their heritage. Nowadays, tourists are seeking authenticity and genuine experiences and are ready to pay for that. Tourism products based on heritage interpretation can provide a competitive advantage for local communities and strengthen their self-identity.

Keywords

intangible heritage, safeguarding, local communities, rural tourism

Introduction

Belarusian cultural heritage is an enduring topic that is rich in depth and meaning. Researching and preserving our precious heritage is essential to our sense of national identity and origins, as well as our future. Time, wars and other historical events didn't spare our magnificent castle, stately mansions, beautiful parks and other significant cultural landmarks. UNESCO's World Heritage List includes only four items from Belarus: the Mir and Nesvizh castles, Belavezhskya Puscha National Park and Struve GeodesicArc.

But we are rich in treasures equally defining of our culture. The State list of cultural intangible heritage, initiated in 2005, already includes more than 160 entries, including rights, traditional crafts, habits, rituals, folklore, etc.

As of early 2026, Belarus has seven elements inscribed on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list, primarily focusing on unique, urgent-safeguarding traditions, including the Kalyady Tsars Christmas ritual, Budslau Fest, Jorauski Karahod spring rite, tree beekeeping, straw weaving, Vytsinanka paper-cutting, and the Negliubka textile tradition.

But there are hundreds of intangible heritage examples still alive that local villagers live with and practice often. They inherited them from their ancestors and try to transmit them to younger generations. Many communities which develop community-based tourism create impressive tourism programmes based on their heritage. We helped to develop many such programmes, working together with regional cultural managers. In Belarus, we still have a system of House of Culture in every region, which we inherited from the Soviet Union, and they work rather efficiently.

The Faro Convention (2005) focuses on the value of cultural heritage of society, emphasising its role in human rights, democracy, and sustainable development. The main statement and principles of the Faro Convention are very relevant to some case studies which were introduced at the Interpret Europe conference in Faro and are described below.

- **Heritage communities:** It encourages the creation of 'heritage communities' – groups of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage and wish to sustain and pass them on.
- **People-centered approach:** It stresses that places/objects are important not just in and of themselves, but because of the meaning and values people attach to them.
- **Shared responsibility:** It emphasises a shared responsibility towards cultural heritage, encourages both public authorities and civil society to participate in its management.

Three different case studies of heritage interpretation are introduced here: 'Rural Renaissance'; the greenway 'Volozhin Routes'; and the culinary festival 'Motol Delicacies'.

Case study 1. Rural Renaissance.

The interpretive tourism programme, Rural Renaissance, takes place in a tiny village. It is the former home of a woodcarver/sculptor, and where people now introduce the heritage through a museum, small performances, masterclasses, a cultural centre and craft festivals.



Figure 1. Traditional puppet theatre
(Image: Valeria Klitsounova)

This first case study describes a model of rural heritage interpretation for tourists based on the heritage of Mikola Tarasiuk, a woodcarver from the village of Stoyly. He was the last person to live in this place and he presented the daily routine life of locals in little wooden sculptures. He had been doing this throughout his life and created a real encyclopedia of rural life. He created his own universe of local villagers with their traditional activities, principles, values, suffering and love. When art critics found this collection, they were impressed and understood its value. Now his heritage is added to The National Intangible Heritage list of Belarus.

By chance, a lady called Larisa Bytcko from the local city, who used to work as a cultural

manager, has bought a house here and decided to revive the village and tell the story of Mikola Tarasiuk and the whole village. Her activities so far have been to initiate interest in both locals and tourists. These have included: creating a map showing all the villagers and their houses as the village was many years ago; initiating a meeting for wood sculptors; and publishing a book about this locally famous sculptor. She has also created a big space where tourists and guests may spend time and participate in performances, such as puppet theatre masterclasses. She developed her own performance about the life of Mikola Tarasiuk and his villagers, showing it to the public here in the village and at other places and festivals.



Figure 2. Example of a sculpture made by Mikola Tarasiuk (Image: Valeria Klitsounova)

Due to this lady's own interest and activities to raise awareness of this village and its heritage, now many people visit the village, the museum of Tarasiuk, and participate in different actions here.

This is a good example of how people first identify, and then interpret, sustain, protect and transmit their heritage through volunteers, local people, tourism companies, tourists, school groups, etc.

Case study 2. The greenway Volozhin Routes.

This is where examples of cultural heritage (crafts, rituals, traditional food and the production of bread, vodka and cheese) are combined with natural heritage (the oldest forest, the kings' hunts, alternative herbal medicines). This local initiative started 20 years ago in the frame of international projects. Our association, Country Escape, organised many workshops, brainstorming sessions, and meetings with local communities to form a team for tourism development. Local farmers, rural tourism providers, craftsman, musicians, the local national park, and community leaders along other active people, have organised a real tourism cluster.

This group has developed a unique greenway, which attracts different kinds of tourists – guided groups, families, individuals, cyclists, and workers of different ages. People can experience and learn many things here, including how to make bread, how to play traditional instruments, sing songs, dance, make crafts, cook local delicacies, walk ecotrails, meet animals, and see rare birds. All this is local heritage which has been identified and presented to visitors. Income generated by tourists and locals is invested for safeguarding and transmitting the heritage to new generations.

The concentration of creative people in this region is so high that we developed a special status: Space of Creative Economy.

The active locals – including many artisans and musicians – have managed to do many outstanding things – even creating an opera based on a local legend. Working together in a cluster, they have formed a private-public partnership, which is attracting representatives from other regions to share in the experience.



Figure 3. Greenway in Volozhyn Routes
(Image: Valeria Klitsounova/ Country Escape)

Case study 3. Traditional culinary festival **Motol Delicacies**

This is where tourists can taste a unique traditional meal, learn how to cook it, and experience local rituals, such as songs, dances and rituals. Motol is a unique place situated in a wetland area isolated from the wider world. The local people have managed to maintain their traditions, crafts, culinary recipes and rituals. We find a mix in this melting pot: Belarusians, Polish, Jewish, Italians, and Russians.

It took time to convince the locals to hold culinary festivals and show their uniqueness to the world. Popular culinary experts from Holland and France were enlisted to help us identify the best traditional dishes and drinks to showcase, and find the best cooks among the old 'babushkas'. Local people here are very bright

and talented in folklore, and there are many rituals connected with the traditional dishes.

The first festival was tremendously successful among locals and guests. Its uniqueness shone and the focus of attention was on the amazing local people. Together with UNESCO's experts, we planned to introduce it to the heritage list.

Unfortunately, local government has slowly turned it into an ordinary folklore festival, giving it international status. Today, after more than 15 years, this festival has sadly lost its authenticity and has become full of alien components. To 'clean' it and return it to the original aims will be very difficult and many changes are needed – cultural experts, nongovernmental organisations, local community leaders, and the local communities themselves, will have to form a real partnership and start to work together putting local people and their intangible heritage back at the centre.



Figure 4. Motol delicacies on display
(Image: Valeria Klitsounova)



Figure 5. Traditional local bread with decoration
(Image Valeria Klitsounova)

Conclusion

The intangible heritage of rural Belarus requires a special approach. UNESCO experts call it safeguarding. We should not only recognise and document this heritage but also protect it and find ways to share it from generation to generation. We must be sensitive and respectful, reminding ourselves that this heritage belongs not only to us but to the whole world, but, first of all, to the local communities.

The three case studies described here demonstrate different models of the use of intangible heritage in tourism in partnership with local communities. Sensitive use and interpretation can bring additional income to communities and, most importantly, help us to understand our national identity.

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Pula's fortification heritage: Layers of military legacy and the transformative role of the Pula Fort Center

**Katarina Marić, Katarina Pocedić
& Ida Skoko (Croatia)**

Katarina Marić is a museum adviser at the Historical and Maritime Museum of Istria. She graduated in History and German Language and Literature. From 1997-2012 she was curator (and director 2006-2010) at the Rovinj City Museum, then since 2012 she has held her current position of curator, responsible for the collection of graphics and prints and the press collection.

Her specific areas of interest are: history of the 19th century, Austrian- and Austro-Hungarian influence in Istria, especially in Pula. Katarina has authored several exhibitions and books, and is coordinator of regional museum projects.

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Katarina Pocedić is curator superior at the Historical and Maritime Museum of Istria. She graduated in History and Croatian Language and Literature, and has held her current position since 2002, where she is responsible for the collection of urban life, the flag collection and the collection of maritime history and shipbuilding. Her specific areas of interest are the history of city life and maritime history. Katarina is the author of several exhibitions and books and coordinator of educational programmes.

Ida Skoko is a media artist and audio-visual producer. She holds degrees in Autonomous Visual Arts (KABK, The Hague) and Media Arts

(UMAS, Split). Since 2017, she has worked as a freelancer, collaborating with cultural institutions, museums and film festivals on production and film projects. In 2025 she became an Interpret Europe Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG).

Abstract

Pula, a south coastal city in Croatia's Istrian peninsula on the western Adriatic, boasts one of Europe's most extensive and multifaceted fortification systems, reflecting centuries of strategic military importance. This heritage spans different historical epochs, beginning with ancient Roman walls and gates, evolving through Venetian defences, and culminating in the vast Austro-Hungarian network that transformed Pula into the empire's primary naval base in the mid-19th century.

This layered legacy of 28 forts and over 200 structures reflects defensive and historical narratives. The Pula Fort Center, housed in the Kaštel, the Historical and Maritime Museum of Istria, serves as a pivotal interpretive hub, employing multimedia exhibits to demystify this heritage. The centre highlights not just military engineering but technological evolution and imperial ambitions with impact on local identities shifting from symbols of division to platforms for intercultural dialogue and urban regeneration. In essence, Pula's fortifications embody contested histories side-lined by tourism. The Fort Center's interpretive role ensures the preservation of the fortifications, enriching Pula's identity as a bridge between turbulent pasts and harmonious futures.

Keywords

fortified heritage, documentation centre, interpretive practice, legacy remnants.

Fort Center Pula: A platform for digital transformation of fortified heritage

An extended summary of the paper published in the proceedings of the FORTIC International Scientific Conference 2025 (NP Brijuni, Croatia, 15–17 September 2025)

Pula, a coastal city located in the southern part of Croatia's Istrian peninsula on the western Adriatic, features one of Europe's most extensive and multifaceted fortification systems, reflecting centuries of strategic military importance. This heritage spans multiple historical epochs, beginning with ancient Roman walls and gates, evolving through Venetian defences, and culminating in the vast Austro-Hungarian network that transformed Pula into the empire's primary naval base in the mid-19th century.

The fortifications around Pula, originally comprising approximately 28 forts, of which 24 remain today, and over 200 military structures, were designed to protect the harbour and surrounding areas, extending from the western to the eastern coasts of Istria and even to the outlying island of Lošinj.

Venetian influences are evident in sites such as the Kaštel fortress, while later periods incorporated Austrian, Italian, and Yugoslav era remnants, underscoring Pula's role as a significant military hub. The complexity of Pula's military heritage derives from its multi-layered historical narratives, which intertwine imperial ambitions, technological innovations, and socio-political shifts that reshaped the urban, semantic, and demographic landscape. As the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy's main military port, Pula's fortifications integrated defensive strategies across land, sea, and island systems, showcasing engineering achievements such as interconnected underground tunnels.

However, this legacy remains marginalised, often overshadowed by Pula's more prominent Roman landmarks.

During the Yugoslav period, these fortifications coexisted with civilian life, as in earlier historical phases. The army occupied prime urban and coastal zones, fostering a relationship characterised by both interdependence and tension: local populations benefited from military infrastructure while simultaneously experiencing restrictions and environmental degradation.

Pula is no longer a military centre but an expanding tourist destination, and it increasingly perceives abandoned military zones as strategic resources for tourism development, raising significant conservation, planning, and sustainability challenges.

The processes of privatisation and urban development have further fragmented this heritage, with some forts repurposed for commercial or community use, while many sites remain abandoned or overgrown, symbolising 'liminal' spaces – thresholds between past military utility and present neglect, often deteriorating into inaccessible ruins.

Amid this complexity, the Pula Fort Center, established within the historic Kaštel fortress as part of the Historical and Maritime Museum of Istria, has emerged as a key institutional framework for the interpretation and revitalisation of this marginalised heritage. The centre functions as a multimedia visitor hub, introducing audiences to the fortification system's scope through interactive exhibitions that trace its development from Venetian origins to Austro-Hungarian dominance.

Launched under an Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) programme in late 2020, the project mobilises cultural assets to enhance

education, public programming, and sustainable tourism, primarily benefiting the local community. By contextualising the fortifications within broader historical frameworks, the centre addresses their layered narratives – highlighting not only military prowess, but also the human, technological, and political dimensions of empire-building, technological evolution, and post-conflict transitions.

The Pula Fort Center's contribution extends beyond preservation by fostering dialogue on sustainable valorisation, digital transformation, and the adaptive reuse of military sites for cultural and educational purposes.

The project emphasises immersive visitor experiences, enabling visitors to engage with centuries of military history and connect emotionally with the narratives of daily life, conflict, and empire-building. To increase accessibility and local engagement, the centre developed vertical-format video presentations of 24 fortresses, designed for exhibition screens. These were subsequently adapted in 2025 into short social media reels with added text and contextual storytelling, achieving significant audience ratings.

This digital strategy has rendered previously inaccessible sites widely visible via mobile platforms, enhancing their interpretive value. This approach demonstrates how tangible heritage can be augmented with interpretive media, fostering curiosity and emotional engagement prior to physical visitation.

The challenges associated with Pula's fortification system, together with these digital initiatives, underscore how fortified heritage can shift from symbols of conflict to platforms for intercultural dialogue and solidarity.

Selected revitalisation initiatives illustrate adaptive reuse, transforming defensive structures into accessible cultural spaces that encourage reflection on historical turbulence. Moreover, the centre's interpretive approach incorporates nuanced narratives that critically address dissonant aspects of this heritage.

By highlighting the Austro-Hungarian system's strategic infrastructure – once a bulwark against naval threats – it invites critical reflection on imperialism, militarism, and their enduring impacts on local identities, whilst simultaneously contributing to scholarly discourse through research on fortified landscapes as spaces of community resilience and urban regeneration.

In this context, the Pula Fort Center not only preserves knowledge of physical structures but also cultivates interpretive frameworks that integrate marginalised perspectives, including those of former military personnel and displaced civilians, thereby fostering empathy and broader understanding.

Six years after the project's launch, much remains to be done. Most forts are still unmanaged, overgrown, and difficult to access, despite growing public interest and digital engagement. The next phase requires the establishment of a dedicated expert working group – comprising historians, conservators, tourism planners, and local stakeholders – to evaluate sites, prioritise safety and accessibility, and guide sustainable interventions.

The Pula Fort Center represents a foundational initiative whose long-term significance depends on sustained engagement with this fortification system. This initiative should transcend political cycles and emphasise cross-institutional collaboration and long-term stewardship.

In conclusion, Pula's fortification heritage represents a complex tapestry of defensive innovation and contested histories, often overshadowed by more conventional tourist narratives. Through curatorial interpretation and audio-visual storytelling, the project demonstrates how video can connect tangible heritage with universal values, provoke critical reflection, and render marginalised military heritage accessible, transferable, and relevant for inclusive, community-oriented interpretation.

The Pula Fort Center plays a crucial role in this process, offering interpretive tools to reposition military remnants within contemporary cultural discourse. Its objective is not only to preserve this legacy but also to contribute meaningfully to ongoing discussions on heritage management, ultimately reinforcing Pula's identity as a bridge between past conflicts, diverse governance systems, and prospects for future cohesion.

Script of the video presented at the conference

When we look at Pula, we usually see the Roman Arena. It is iconic. Recognisable. Photogenic.

But what remains outside the frame?

Beneath the postcard image lies a landscape shaped by defence, fear, ambition and power. A landscape that rarely appears on tourist maps.

Pula holds one of Europe's most extensive fortification systems.

Roman walls. Venetian defence structures. Yugoslavian military zones. And a vast Austro-Hungarian military network.



Figure 1. Kaštel fortress and the Roman amphitheatre
(Image: Ida Skoko)

For centuries, people in Istria have adapted to changing governments, shifting borders, and new identities.

This is nothing new to us, the country we live in today is younger than I am.

Layers define our heritage.

Is there a way to travel through them — consciously, critically, together?

The closest thing to a time machine in our city is Kaštel. The fort where I am standing now, and the home of the regional History and Maritime museum.

We were always geographically close to the tourist centre — yet psychologically distant, difficult to access.

Until we built an elevator that connects the street level directly to this hill.

A physical connection.
But also a symbolic one.



Figure 2. Zerostrasse – Tunnel system with the lift
(Image: Ida Skoko)

Let's see how this time machine functions now. Please join us as we follow one of the many visitors we welcome every day.

Through the Twin Gate, one of the Roman and medieval city gates, entering the tunnels constructed between the two World Wars. Four branches of underground spaces, and with the elevator finally at the top of the hill, in the Venetian fortress, once the centre of Pula's defence system – today home of the History and Maritime Museum and the Pula Fort Center. In just a few minutes, we have crossed centuries. And the view is amazing.

We began this project on the eve of the Covid-19 pandemic, at a time when boundaries and restrictions shaped our everyday lives.

With many permissions, we moved through more than 250 mostly abandoned military structures, the remains of over a century of Austro-Hungarian presence in Istria.

The central question was not only logistical — but interpretive. How do you translate 700 square kilometres of fortified landscape into 150 square metres of exhibition space?



Figure 3. Exhibition with touchscreens
(Image: Luka Pretegiani)

Pula was the main harbour of the Habsburg Monarchy. Between 1913 and 1918, a carefully planned and technologically advanced defence system was completed.

Systematic. Integrated. Thorough.

Yet most of these fortresses were never war-active.

They were built for conflict — but mostly inhabited in peace.

The Pula Fort Center serves as a starting point for anyone interested in the buildings. It offers orientation within what was officially called the Maritime Fortress of Pula.

The exhibition unfolds in three parts.

First: the landscape overview — a map and 28 fortification videos.

Second: construction — typologies, plans, models, engineering intelligence.



Figure 4. Models of forts, typologies, etc. (Image: Luka Pretegiani)

And third: everyday life.

Letters written home.

Oil lamps.

Original toilets.

Objects once held by soldiers.

This is where visitors respond emotionally.

Some laugh.

Some grow quiet.

Some imagine possible stories that unfolded within these walls.

Fortifications shift from structures of defence to spaces of human experience.



Figure 5. Mayor of Pula laughing in front of the toilets (Image: Luka Pretegiani)

To increase visibility, we transformed the 28 fortress videos into short social media narratives. We adjusted the rhythm, added storytelling and created accessibility.

Sites that were once forbidden or difficult to reach became visible on every mobile phone. The reels resonated strongly with local audiences. They brought visitors who had never considered entering a history museum. Our primary focus was local people.

This stone legacy is compelling — yet difficult to adapt.

A few fortresses have found new roles: as an aquarium, and for cultural festivals and temporary events.

Most remain precisely constructed and carefully planned stone architectures, slowly being swallowed by Mediterranean vegetation.

Nature has reclaimed some.

Others survive through the commitment of volunteers and enthusiasts. Because what happens when a city shaped by the military becomes a city shaped by tourism?

The fortification system transformed Pula into an impregnable harbour. It fulfilled its strategic purpose.

The medieval town of church bell towers became a city of artillery towers, awaiting the end of the First World War with only minor damage.



Figure 6. The harbour of Pula, around 1917
(Image: PPMI-62855)

Yet, despite the impressive defensive plan, the centuries old Habsburg Monarchy collapsed — defeated elsewhere, on distant battlefields.

Empires fall far from the places they fortify.
And these forts remain. Not as weapons. But as witnesses to a long and powerful Austrian epoch.

The future of Pula will not be written by walls. It will be written by those who inherit their strength, complexity, and memory.

The question is no longer how to defend the harbour. The question is how to anchor meaning.

Strategies for the revitalisation of museums as cultural tourism sites

Simana Markovska (Bulgaria)

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Abstract

Modern audiences are looking for opportunities to empathise and participate in the tourist experience even in museums, creating valuable and exciting memories. In response, museums, including those in Bulgaria, are capable of positioning themselves or holding on to this rapidly changing market, and some of them are doing so successfully, even after the restart of the sector provoked by the global covid-19 pandemic in 2020. At the same time, achieving this goal is tied to choosing an appropriate strategic approach that sets the framework for management.

The PhD study entitled, 'Strategies for Revitalisation of Museums as Cultural Tourism Sites' explores existing approaches towards successful and sustainable tourism development of museums at several levels: international, national, regional and local – the last three in the context of Bulgaria. It works with the research thesis that heritage interpretation is an effective strategy, widely applicable under

various conditions. To prove the thesis and within the framework of the adopted functional-and-structural approach, traditional research methods such as observation, case study, comparison, interview, induction and deduction, analysis and synthesis are used. A special place is given to the experiment, as a general scientific method of research and as an observation carried out in specially organised conditions.

As a result of the study, a framework strategy for the revitalisation of museums as cultural tourism sites has been proposed, based on the principles and toolset of heritage interpretation.

Keywords

tourism, heritage, interpretation, culture, museum, sustainable

Introduction

The beginning of the New Millennium brings additional aspects to the development of cultural tourism (Richards 2021). The demand for performing culture is increasing compared to static culture; it is a demand for a culture that not only shows and tells, but also recreates. There is increased interest in intangible cultural heritage, local gastronomy and lifestyle, as well as in different types of cultural events. There is also the introduction of new means and methods for communicating culture, defined by Tribe (2008) as "new curatorial systems" – mediating methods for perceiving culture in new ways that contribute to the tourist experience.

With the changed consumer models, new roles are being sought for traditional participants, including at museums. Considering that the museum, according to the current definition of the International Council of Museums - ICOM, is "a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and

intangible heritage...", its touristic connection should be sought out. Because, from official definitions, the impression remains that tourism as a functional orientation in the activities of museums is not present, except indirectly, which as a consequence does not engage museum workers with welcoming tourists.

A similar focus is found even in the strategic documents related to the development of museums, elaborated by UNESCO. In the Recommendation on the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections (2015), museums are assigned four main functions, among which tourism is not mentioned, unless it is assumed that it is generally associated with "working with audiences". This is also found in the position of Hugues de Varin, former director of ICOM, who defines the main function of the museum as establishing a connection with the public (1976), since "the museum is first and foremost called to serve people, not objects".

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and ICOM also contribute to the topic through their Handbook for Local Authorities, Communities and Museums (2019), where among the five priority areas of action in the management of museums, the very first one is related to the utilisation of the potential of museums for economic development. The development of the idea of the museum as a tourist site subject to targeted management is also found in The Future of Museums (Bast et al. 2018), in which expert opinions unite around six main directions of development, one of which emphasises the museum's commitment to maintaining the link between culture and tourism.

Assuming that the era in which tourists are shown and told is in the past, such strategic

approaches should be studied, analysed and adapted to allow for an adequate response to the increased expectations of the tourist experience. As can be seen from the experience of world-famous museums, there are different approaches. Hence, the analysis of existing successful strategies to position the museum on the map of (cultural) tourism, and the identification of an approach that could be recommended, has become the subject of the current PhD study. In the course of the study itself, heritage interpretation has been identified as an effective and applicable strategy in different conditions.

Part one: Development parameters and status of museums as cultural tourism sites

The first chapter of this study examines the theoretical foundations and development of cultural tourism from a global and national aspect, starting with the many different definitions and typologies of cultural tourism. According to some researchers (Seyed et al. 2016), the problem comes from the complex relationship between culture and tourism. For example, if it is assumed that culture is an integral part of every aspect of human life, including travel and tourism, then any type of tourism can be defined as cultural. Most available definitions of cultural tourism ultimately unite around the basic idea that it represents "consumption of culture by tourists".

Marketing researchers, Coherent Market Insights in the US, report a 6,760 million Euro valuation of the cultural tourism market in 2024, with forecasts for this value to increase to 17,230 million Euro by 2031¹. The most visits were made to historical sites and monuments, with museums attracting only 11.8% of visitors. There is a lack of current data on the state of cultural tourism in Bulgaria. In 2019, before the global

¹ See: <https://www.coherentmarketinsights.com> [accessed 20/05/26]

Covid crisis, the Product Analysis of Cultural Tourism in Bulgaria made by Esplika-Global Metrics DZZD on behalf of the Ministry of Tourism identified the demand for unique experiences with an emphasis on adventure, local culture in destinations, including cuisine and nature, as leading trends in travel choices.

Against this background, the current study has also explored the conceptual framework and the evolution of the museum as an institution. As per the definition from ICOM from 24.08.2022, "A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage...". In the Bulgarian context, the Cultural Heritage Act defines the museum as a "cultural and scientific organization which searches, studies, protects and presents cultural values, natural samples and anthropological remains with cognitive, educational and aesthetic purposes."

Museums can be viewed and defined from many perspectives. According to some authors, museums are institutions that have "the extraordinary ability to materialize culture through physical objects, as well as to shape the visitor's view of the world as an exhibition" (Macdonald & Fyfe 1996). According to others, there is complete chaos in the attempts to define a museum, as new institutions constantly emerge that define themselves as museums, while existing ones choose to call themselves something else for various reasons (Van Mensch 1987). Ginsburgh and Mairesse (1997), for example, decided to focus on the goals and priorities of the museum and found that the majority of museums see the maintenance of collections and education as their main mission, paying little attention to tourism.

To this end, museums should work together with the tourism industry and other cultural organisations to attract new and more diverse audiences, and explore their potential for tourism development.

Part two: Methodological aspects of the research on existing strategies for revitalisation of museums as cultural tourism sites

Chapter two of the study describes and justifies the methods used in it. At the beginning, special attention is paid to the specific parameters of the museum as an object of cultural tourism. Data on museum attendance in Bulgaria are available from the National Statistical Institute². They show that in the years before the covid-19 crisis (2014-2019), the total number of visitors slowly increased to nearly 5.4 million, of which foreign visitors were less than 25%. After the sharp decline in all indicators during the global pandemic in 2020, a slow recovery began, which is still ongoing.

Internationally, the place and role of museums can be extremely diversified. Pre-covid data from the American Museum Alliance³ show the important place of museums in the US economy, with an annual contribution of 5 billion US dollars. At the end of 2024, only 51% of these museums had reached their pre-crisis economic indicators. In Europe, 9 of the 20 most visited museums had not yet reached their pre-covid levels at the end of 2023, although some were close, and 7 had surpassed them (Statista⁴).

Many theorists and practitioners believe that the most important aspect in the modern development of museums is visitor management, which combines the economic and social functions of the museum. One of the most popular authors is Simon (2010), who

² National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria: <https://www.nsi.bg/>

³ American Museum Alliance: <https://www.aam-us.org/>

⁴ Statista: <https://www.statista.com/> [accessed 20/05/26]

studies and promotes successful practices that allow museums to involve their visitors in activities that enrich the experience. Studying numerous museums in the United States, Samis and Michaelson (2017) identify six common characteristics of visitor-oriented institutions, from visitor research to integrated interpretation. And according to Falk (2016), the key to creating museums for visitors lies in adopting a completely new understanding of their relationship, namely that visitors and museum exhibitions/ programmes are not separate parts of one system, but represent an integral whole.

In summary, modern audiences have higher expectations of their tourist experience, in particular their experience in the museum as a site of cultural tourism, and the museum must adapt in order to meet these expectations.

To achieve this goal, there are different strategic approaches. The methods used to study them within the framework of this work are mainly qualitative. One of them is observation, defined by Miles and Huberman (1994) as: "a research method for perceiving, registering and evaluating phenomena, processes and states and studying them for a specific purpose".

The next method used is the case study. A more general definition of it was proposed by Simons (2009): "an in-depth examination, from multiple perspectives, of the complexity and uniqueness of a specific project, policy, institution, program, or system in real life." The advantages of the method, cited and summarised by Starman (2013), include conceptual validity, the extraction of new hypotheses in the research process, the tracing of cause-and-effect relationships, the assessment of complex relationships, relevance to real life, and attention to detail.

One of the most common methods of collecting information by asking questions is the interview. An in-depth interview according to Chengelova (2016) is used as a method of collecting data and information from respondents with extensive knowledge in the given field (experts). The questionnaire survey is sometimes considered a quantitative method or at least a method that allows for both qualitative and quantitative research (Orloev 2002).

This study includes several levels of museum research. At the international level, 77 museums from 16 countries have been selected, based on their 'visibility' on the cultural tourism market in the respective destination. Observation has been carried out with detailed photographing of the museums. A group of parameters was selected for research and description of those museums by adapting an existing methodology for determining the status of cultural and historical attractions in Bulgaria (Asenova et al. 2021). These parameters include: condition of the physical and technical base; level of socialisation; services offered to visitors; organisation of exhibitions; marketing. The information obtained has been summarised and an analysis and comparison of the strategic approaches used by museums for market realisation has been carried out. Six different strategic approaches are identified.

At the national level, five of Bulgaria's national museums have been visited, to which the same approach was applied as above. During the study period, 25 of all 27 regional historical museums located in the regional cities of Bulgaria have also been visited. An expert assessment of the museums was made according to previously set parameters, and a comparison of the museums was made based on this assessment.

The Regional History Museum (RHM) of Blagoevgrad has been selected as a study site in

relation to its role and function at the local level in the city of Blagoevgrad. In-depth interviews were held with three experts. An experiment was also designed and conducted in the same museum, by applying heritage interpretation to an existing exhibition. The experiment is a popular research method defined by Chapin (1947) as "observation under controlled conditions". Beveridge's definition from 2004 is similar, but offers additional details: "an experiment usually consists of inducing an event under controlled conditions, in which many of the external influences are eliminated as much as possible, and constant observation is applied so as to reveal the relationship between the phenomena".

Heritage interpretation (HI) has been in focus throughout the study as the research thesis is based on it. The definitions of the term are numerous. Freeman Tilden is considered to be its 'father', defining HI in 1957 as "an educational activity that seeks to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, through first-hand experience, and through illustrative media, rather than simply communicating factual information".

One of the most common definitions, however, is that of Sam Ham (1992): "an approach to communication that makes it personal and meaningful". In a simplified version, it can be said that interpretation works in the following way: raw, factual information is 'translated' and transmitted through a system of stimuli for the person or people perceiving the object (phenomenon, situation). The stimuli include understandable language and sensations received through the senses. The process of perception builds on sensory sensations by adding selection, organisation and processing of the information thus obtained (Dumbraveanu et al. 2016).

The qualities of interpretation can be summarised as follows: it is meaningful, personal and entertaining, thematic and organised; it conveys messages and changes the attitudes of the audience. Interpretive programmes can be implemented in two main ways – with and without the direct participation of an interpreter. The first is also called personal interpretation and is usually valued more for its personal contact and personal attitude towards visitors (Brochu & Merriman 2002). Interpretation carried out without the direct participation of an interpreter is called impersonal. The advantage is that it can be consumed by the audience at any time, without being tied to the presence of an interpreter, and the disadvantage is that there is no way for the individual visitor to receive a truly personal attitude. Museum exhibitions are often viewed as a typical example of impersonal interpretation.

Regardless of how interpretive programmes are implemented, the aim is to give the audience a "first-hand experience" and thus involve visitors physically and mentally in the process of interpretation (Gallo 2016). A wide range of tools are used for this purpose. Interpret Europe – The European Association for Heritage Interpretation, divides them into two main groups: methodological and rhetorical (Ludwig 2015).

Methodological techniques include: explanation; description (observation); narrative (adventure story, fairy tale, legend, anecdote); representation through performing arts (poetry, song, dance); stimulation of sensory perception; stimulation of imagination; demonstration; illustration (photograph, drawing); investigation (experiment); and play (including role-playing). Rhetorical tools include: comparison; example; figurative language; shift of perspective; humanisation; contrast; apparent contradiction; and quotation.

Regarding the specific relationship between interpretation and museums, it should be noted that there are conflicting views on the purpose and role of cultural institutions, and museums in particular (Staiff 2014). As McCall and Gray (2014) point out, there is a widespread expectation that museums will shift from the 'old' to the 'new' museology, which includes interpretation as a key element.

The design of the experiment conducted within the framework of this study is based on HI. A part of the Permanent Exhibition of Archaeology of RHM - Blagoevgrad was selected for inclusion in the experiment, which presents antique funerary plates (steles) from the region of Southwestern Bulgaria. The experiment was planned and implemented in three phases:

1. Design of an alternative exhibition based on the principles of HI and including currently exhibited items;
2. Development of a prototype of the interpretive exhibition;
3. Presentation of the prototype to selected audiences and evaluation of the achieved effect.

The design of the alternative exhibition entitled, 'Plan Your Afterlife' was prepared jointly by the author and museum experts. The prepared prototype was presented to several groups of visitors:

4. Experts – museum workers;
5. Students from the South-West University of Neofit Rilski in Blagoevgrad;
6. Pupils from the 7th Primary School of Blagoevgrad.

A survey was conducted among the participants to establish the outcomes of the experiment.

Part three: Selection of a strategy for improving the efficiency and performance parameters of the museum as a cultural tourism site

Chapter three quotes the results of the research conducted in response to the set objectives for the international, national and local case studies.

International

The first part presents six international case studies, illustrating different successful strategic approaches for museums as tourism sites.

1. The Swedish History Museum in Stockholm relies on the following: 1. Modern approaches to the planning of exhibitions are focused on temporary exhibitions, based on HI; 2. Permanent exhibitions are partially updated, mainly through re-design; 3. Tours and programmes based on HI are developed for permanent exhibitions; 4. Museum spaces are kept as welcoming as possible.
2. The Tropical Museum (or Museum of the World) in Amsterdam applies a different approach: 1. The overall concept of the organisation of museum exhibitions is replaced and HI is introduced as a common basis for planning; 2. The museum is opened to contemporary artists who can create on site; 3. The old interior is updated with taste and tact.
3. The Pompeii Archaeological Park, in turn, having product and marketing uniqueness, can afford to use a simpler approach, based on maintaining the site in good condition, good management of visitor flows, and making the most of the uniqueness of the site.
4. A fourth approach, based on unlimited resources of all kinds, is demonstrated by the Louvre of Abu Dhabi - maximum

utilisation of these resources, completed by an attractive accompanying programme of activities, using the principles of HI.

5. Mystical Transylvania in Sighisoara is a project by a group of young people for an unconventional museum, which is more of an attraction centre, and unlike the Louvre in Abu Dhabi, has very limited resources. Their strategic approach is based on the following: 1. Create something unique, which is not available elsewhere in the destination, and unexpected as an experience; 2. Fully use the principles of HI to build connections to the themes and enrich the experience.
6. The last case study presented is that of Fabrique des Lumieres in Amsterdam – a space for presenting art in a new way using AR. Their market approach relies entirely on digital technologies and tries to get the most out of the advantages of augmented reality; at the same time, the attractiveness of the historical building in which the site is located is maximised.

From the cases studied in this way, the conclusion is that museum sites with unique features and/or residing in unique circumstances can afford to limit themselves to good maintenance, good visitor management and adequate marketing. Sites that do not have this advantage must invest additional efforts in creating attractive services for visitors. Various approaches can be applied here, and an applicable strategy is to use HI, since it can work with any availability of resources.

National

To study the national context in Bulgaria, two case studies were included, to which the same approach was applied as above. The first case study is the National Museum of History in Sofia, whose approach to attracting visitors is summarised as follows: 1. It relies on the

expectations of the audience, which coincide with the fact that the most valuable and unique treasures of the country are located in this museum; 2. First steps are being taken in expanding visitor services through the museum's Educational Center.

The second case is that of the National Museum of Military History, also located in Sofia. It demonstrates efforts in terms of tourism, and these can be formulated as: 1. Create interactive and interpretive programmes for permanent exhibitions; 2. Apply HI to temporary exhibitions, so far sporadically; 3. In addition, there is a clear desire to take care of the client in all aspects, from the arrangement of the spaces to the services offered. The conclusion that can be drawn here is rather similar to that made in the case of international museums.

The information collected about the Regional History Museums in Bulgaria is structured in five topics: friendliness (are they welcoming to visitors?); accessibility; exhibitions; visitor services; and events. Each theme is divided into five evaluation parameters, with each parameter worth one point, so five is the highest achievable score. The evaluation of each parameter is also five-levelled. To avoid subjectivity, the evaluation was done by two independent experts in parallel.

The parameters under each topic are summarised below.

Topic 1 – Museum friendliness:

1. Surrounding spaces (streets, buildings, courtyard, etc.)
2. Exterior (condition of the building, facades, windows, doors, etc.)
3. Interior (condition of the interior spaces)
4. Comfort of visiting (lighting, heating)
5. Sanitary facilities (sufficient number, condition)

The range of RMH assessment marks under this topic is quite wide, with most museums falling in the upper half and more precisely between grades 3 and 4. Considering that most buildings are old and the maintenance budgets are small, this is a fairly good result.

Topic 2 – Museum accessibility:

1. Location (is the site easy to find?)
2. Opening hours (is it well organised for the convenience of the visitor?)
3. Access for people with special needs
4. Orientation in the museum (map/s, signposts, provision of information)
5. Website (how practical it is, and how easy and pleasant it is to use?)

The distribution of RHM's according to the ratings on this topic is approx. between 2.6 and 3.8. The efforts of the museum teams to make their museum as accessible as possible on the other four parameters were rated relatively high, but there were often objective limitations, e.g. the Law prohibiting interventions in historic buildings.

Topic 3 – Museum exhibitions:

1. Condition of permanent exhibitions (obsolescence, means of expression, design)
2. Condition of temporary exhibitions
3. Virtual exhibition (yes/no, quality)
4. Interactivity (presence of interactive modules, quality)
5. Use of interpretation in museum exhibitions (yes/no, to what extent)

The range of marks on this topic is more varied, the difference between the lowest and highest scores received is nearly 2.4 units. The assessment on parameters 4 and 5 (interactivity and use of interpretation) in almost all museums is relatively low; the differences in the assessments reflect the varying success of

museum teams in updating their exhibitions with the means and methods available to them.

Topic 4 – Visitor services:

1. Museum talks (quality, degree of obsolescence/innovation)
2. Special programmes (if available, quality, variety, attractiveness)
3. Museum shop (is there one?, quality in terms of condition, hospitality and range of stock)
4. Museum café (is there one?, quality)
5. Other services (quality, attractiveness)

On this topic, the Bulgarian RHM's received the lowest scores. One of the reasons is that all of them have a score of zero on parameter 4 (availability of a café), which is practically a mandatory part of a modern museum. The other reason is that many museums are content with offering standard talks and educational programmes, plus selling souvenirs and publications.

Topic 5 – Museum events:

1. Celebration of important dates for the museum (yes/no, frequency, attractiveness of the events)
2. Celebration of holidays not directly related to the museum (yes/no, frequency, attractiveness)
3. Educational events (yes/no, frequency, attractiveness)
4. Tourist events (yes/no, frequency, attractiveness)
5. Other events (yes/no, frequency, attractiveness).

The reason why the majority of RHM's were marked relatively low on this topic is that not only the presence of the events was assessed, but also their attractiveness for visitors. The examples of real tourist events organised by Bulgarian museums are still few.

After the study of Bulgarian RHMs, the following conclusions can be drawn.

The understanding that the museum is essentially a tourist site, since it exhibits treasures of heritage and expects visitors to come, is poorly represented. The museum is perceived by the employees themselves as: (a) an exhibition area that is subject to filling with objects from the museum's collections; (b) a treasury for valuable heritage objects; (c) a scientific institute for the study and conservation of heritage; (d) an administration exposed to all the challenges and limitations of bureaucracy. In the best case, the following is added to this list: (e) an educational institution striving to build a positive and respectful attitude towards heritage in the younger generations. In museums where modern approaches are manifested, this is due either to the management abilities and understanding of the directors, or to the activity of individual experts.

In short, Bulgarian RHMs are in a favourable position as to their friendliness to visitors, despite the needs of better maintenance of the infrastructure. Growing efforts are invested in improving the accessibility of museums in all existing aspects. Permanent exhibitions are largely outdated (physically and morally), poorly maintained, poorly lit, often still showing the old socialist design and poor quality of photo materials, which is mostly due to inadequate legislation. Attempts are being made to overcome this obstacle by modernising the design and introducing some interactive elements. Modern approaches are being applied widely to temporary exhibitions, and virtual exhibiting is of growing importance.

All museums offer guided talks of their exhibitions as a basic service for visitors. There are museums where the standard talks have not been changed for years. Audio guides are still rare. All museums have educational

programmes for children, which are generally attractive, innovative, often interpretive and practically prepared according to all modern expectations and requirements of educational tourism. That is usually the most being offered as a specialised tourist service at the museum.

All museums organise various events, the most frequent and traditional ones being the celebrations of important dates for the museum (for its territory, local heritage). These, however, generally have no tourist value. The second most frequent event are museum celebrations of holidays indirectly related to the museum's activities e.g. Christmas, Easter, etc. As a rule, they are celebrated in a more attractive way. Educational events are also widely represented in museum calendars of activities, while the events organised for tourists are few in number.

The relationship between RHMs and heritage interpretation can be summarised by saying that the application of interpretation in Bulgarian museums is currently not systematic and does not have the character of a strategic approach to the development of the museum as a cultural tourism site.

Local

At the local level of study, the focus was on the Regional History Museum of Blagoevgrad. In-depth interviews were conducted with three experts. The questions were divided into two groups: (1) positioning of RHM - Blagoevgrad as a tourist site in the present; and (2) strategic opportunities for further development/revitalisation of the museum as a tourist site.

From the interviews, it is evident that RHM – Blagoevgrad has been active for many years in areas related to tourism, as an initiator or as a partner of other organisations and institutions. The main challenges are excessive bureaucracy, which hinders the work of employees and negatively affects their motivation; the lack of

adequate legislation regarding museums in Bulgaria; insufficient budgets; and a general perception that museums are not interesting to visit. As for future opportunities, the respondents agree that the emphasis should be put on the tourist service. The possible role of HI for the tourist development of museums is noted on several levels.

Application of the heritage interpretation toolkit

The experiment on the application of the heritage interpretation toolkit was carried out at RHM – Blagoevgrad. After presenting the 'Plan your Afterlife' interpretive exhibition model to the three target groups, a survey was conducted among them to report the results. 18 respondents participated in the survey from target group 1 – museum experts. The non-traditional presentation of museum exhibits with interpretation is considered successful by the experts, since 89% approved of it. 83% of participants found the new exhibition meaningful; at the same time, 94% were intrigued, and 61% found it thought-provoking. 89% found the exhibition entertaining; the hesitation of the rest may be due to the topic – death, burial, afterlife. 50% of the respondents are categorical that the exhibition can provoke a higher appreciation of cultural heritage and is able to attract the attention of more people; 72% believe that such exhibitions will increase the number of visitors to museums.

The second target group of participants – students from the South-West University of Neofit Rilski – filled out 24 evaluation questionnaires, and a comparison was made with the traditional exhibition of the stele in RHM – Blagoevgrad. Approval of the exhibition was definitely higher for the interpretive exhibition – 75% versus 38%. Respondents found more meaning in the interpretive exhibition – 92%, compared to the traditional one, which only scored 67%. 60% of all participants found the connection personal in

the interpretive exhibition. The only thing that respondents agreed on was that the interpretive exhibit was very entertaining for them. This can be considered a major success, as it is very difficult to 'lighten up' sensitive topics like death, even when they are universal concepts.

From the third group of participants – pupils from a primary school, ten answers were received, which also compared the 'new' and 'old' style exhibitions. This was the only group that evaluated the traditional and the interpretive exhibition almost equally. The simplest explanation is that the interpretation of heritage does not make a different impression on primary school students; however, it should be borne in mind that this group of respondents often come to the museum, led by their class leader, and they are used to participating in various initiatives. Another possible explanation is that this particular way of interpreting the theme is not appropriate for the age group. The participants are unanimous on only two issues – that the interpretive exhibition would attract more people to the museum and that they would recommend it to a friend (100% versus 60% for the traditional style exhibition).

As a result of the experiment, some important conclusions can be drawn. The first is that Bulgarian audiences react positively to the experience that HI offers. The second is that museum experts demonstrate approval and understanding of this approach and are practically ready to apply it if certain conditions are met, e.g. changes in the museum environment. Thirdly, the experiment proves that HI 'works' in any space, at any time, with any topic and with any audience – as long as it is planned correctly.

Framework for creating a strategy for revitalisation of museums in Bulgaria

Based on the research results, this last section looks at formulating some strategic

recommendations for the revitalisation of RHM – Blagoevgrad in the cultural tourism market in Bulgaria, followed by a proposition for a framework for creating a strategy for the revitalisation of museums in Bulgaria.

The suggested strategic framework has the following structure.

Part one: Summary of the baseline situation regarding the museum and cultural tourism

A. Summary of the internal environment factors

A.1. Material and technical base

Museum building/s – their own history as historic monuments; architectural and artistic features; significance.

External spaces – yards, gardens, etc., which can be incorporated into tourism services.

Internal spaces – halls, corridors, foyers, staircases, landings where various tourist activities can be developed.

Museum assets – showcases of all types, but mostly modern ones; pedestals, boards, etc., which can provide opportunities for a livelier style of exhibiting.

Outdoor sites – fortresses, archaeological sites – suitable for organising interpretive routes, activities, events.

A.2. Museum funds/ collections

Thematic groups – which can be formed into interesting themes for interpretation.

‘Charismatic’ objects – which stand out among other artefacts due to external features, history or significance.

A.3. Exhibitions

Permanent – they are the core of the tourist offer. State of permanent exhibitions.

Temporary – what ready-made exhibitions are there in the funds that can be used, in whole or in part, for new activities?

Virtual – digitised content is a resource with great potential in assembling a tourist product.

A.4. Currently offered services for visitors

Talks – overview, specialised, in different languages.

Audio guide – is there one?, in what form is it available?, what information does it contain?

Digital products – AR/VR, other electronic services, in what form can they be used?

Tourist routes – developed routes, with a starting point, route and end point, which visitors can travel on their own or with a guide from the museum.

Activities – those that are actually offered by the museum, not those that ‘can be organised’.

Shop – presence of a museum shop or stand, a summarised description of the offered assortment.

A.5. Events organised by the museum

Events with a touristic focus – festivals, special holidays celebrated in the museum, summer children's schools and archaeological schools, creative studios and craft workshops.

A.6. Information provision and marketing

Information provision for tourism purposes – signboards, info boards, posters; information materials about the museum and the services offered; provision of electronic information via a website/ other sources.

Tourism marketing – traditional and e-marketing.

A.7. Human resources

Museum workers – members of the museum team who are trained and/or should be prepared to welcome visitors.

Partners – organisations, institutions, businesses and individuals with whom the museum works and are related to tourism.

B. Summary of external factors

B.1. State of (cultural) tourism in the destination

Types of tourism that are being offered.

State of cultural tourism – is it a factor for the destination; are there established cultural and tourist sites nearby that can be combined with it?

Current attendance of the destination – as far as data is available.

B.2. Key actors

Stakeholders who can become future partners of the museum in tourism development.

Part two: Strategic vision and goals, and measures to achieve them

A. Strategic vision and goals

Vision – should formulate the desired state of development at the end of the period.

Main strategic goal – what the museum should strive for to fulfil the desired vision.

Subgoals – can also be viewed as tasks that the museum must complete to achieve the main strategic goal.

B. Measures to achieve the objectives

B.1. Applying the tools of HI to all museum exhibitions

Measure 1.1. Renewing permanent exhibitions

The first applicable approach is to update the design - fully or partially. Changes in the design should be made in sync with the application of the tools of interpretation.

Measure 1.2. Creating interpretive temporary exhibitions

Everything said about permanent exhibitions above also applies to temporary ones, with the valuable addition that the temporary exhibition can be planned entirely as an interpretive one from scratch.

Measure 1.3. Creating of exhibitions by visitors

The modern museum can gain a lot from offering creative spaces for guests. For example, to arrange at their discretion (parts of) an exhibition with replicas of real artefacts from the museum's collections. To select information and prepare texts for it. To provide ideas for design.

B.2. Developing a set of attractive tourist services based on the toolkit of HI

Measure 2.1. Development of interpretive talks

Updating the talks with the means of heritage interpretation will create a quality tourist service. If it is impossible to provide an interpreter on site, a paper self-guide or a mobile device can be supplied instead.

Measure 2.2. Development of interpretive activities

It is necessary to develop activities for other target groups of guests besides children and to structure them as visitor services with the appropriate price.

Measure 2.3. Development of interpretive routes

It is appropriate to offer routes to connect the different museum sites at a given location, to tour an outdoor museum site or to enrich the experience at the destination.

Measure 2.4. Developing interpretive tourism events

Organising a tourism event follows slightly different rules than simply celebrating a holiday. To begin with, the focus should lie on the visitor experience, their comfort and entertainment.

B.3. Implementation of targeted and professional marketing, integrating the principles of HI

Measure 3.1. Visitor management

At a minimum, it is necessary to identify target customer groups and plan measures for their satisfaction.

Measure 3.2. Branding approach

In this part of the Strategy, the museum should choose to brand itself as a tourist site.

Measure 3.3. Pricing policy

The museum should decide on price levels for different target groups of visitors, discounts on various occasions, free days, etc.

Measure 3.4. PR and advertising measures

Printed materials - publication and distribution of advertising brochures, leaflets, flyers, albums, museum catalogues, children's books, posters, postcards, etc.

Souvenirs – it is advisable to provide a range of souvenirs, from expensive and valuable items to smaller, cheaper ones that are accessible to a wider range of consumers.

Participation in tourist exhibitions – depending on available resources.

Working with tour operators – companies are gradually reorienting and starting to offer individual boutique programmes for small groups of clients. This is where museums with their new interpretive offers can come in.

Familiarisation events for journalists and influencers – organising special events with their participation, getting feedback in the form of publications and broadcasts.

Website – they must have a modern, attractive design, be easy to use and navigate; be up-to-date.

Social networks – Facebook is the most popular social network in Bulgaria but Instagram and TikTok should not be ignored, as well as YouTube. The content must be attractive and museums can work extensively with partners in this regard.

Mail advertising – more email marketing today.
Direct advertising – in printed press, on radio and television, or on appropriate websites and platforms.

C. Operational plan for implementation of the Strategy

The Operational Plan should foresee the necessary resources – material, human, time and financial.

Conclusion

Museums have all the prerequisites for successful performance in the cultural tourism market. They are treasuries of valuable cultural and historical heritage; they have experts who are in a position to present the relevant heritage, as well as partner networks – a source of support and additional resources. At the same time, the market positions of museums as tourist sites are not at the required level in many destinations.

The reasons for this are multifaceted and can vary from inadequate legislation to unfavourable market conditions. An additional complication is the fact that this is happening against the backdrop of a rapidly changing society, including changes in the consumption of culture and travel.

In order for the museum to take its rightful place in the cultural tourism market, it is necessary to choose the right strategic approach and plan specific measures and actions towards it. Heritage interpretation is an effective and broadly applicable approach that will meet the needs of museums in terms of tourism development and will help them fit into the rapidly changing reality of the new era.

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How to revive interest in Belarus heritage and crafts during a children's tour of Dudutki Museum

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[This paper was accepted to the programme but the author was unable to present in Faro]

Abstract

This paper presents some features of the modern children's audience, using the 'Dudutki' Museum as an example of the historical and cultural heritage revival. It also considers some methods and techniques for children's museum excursions that can help to attract the attention of children to the heritage of Belarus, thus sustaining the future.

Keywords

children's interpretation, Dudutki Museum, heritage revival

Main text

It is important and relevant to introduce our heritage to children in a bright and interesting way to awaken their curiosity to explore crafts and traditions. My audience includes families and school groups, local and foreign young guests. I use different methods and approaches and will share some of them in this paper.

Modern children are overloaded with various forms of information; they are almost inseparable from their gadgets. To attract their attention on the way to the Dudutki Museum, I suggest to them a journey not only in space but also in time – a journey into the past of Belarus, 200 years ago. Using their knowledge of gadgets, you can invite them to become a blogger on this unique journey into the past.

Another feature of the modern children's audience is their scant knowledge of local folk customs, crafts and life in the old village. The rural population in Belarus is now around 20%. Just 100 years ago, according to the 1926 census, the rural population accounted for 80%. Villages disappear in the process of urbanisation. Many children have never been to a village, their grandparents now live in the cities. So, how can we interest children in folk traditions and crafts?

The functions of custodians of cultural and historical heritage are transferred to craftsmen, museum workers and tour guides. For example, there is a craftsman called Ivan Suprunchik, the only resident of the Terblichy village. He created a museum of wooden sculptures carved with an axe, which illustrate local rituals and legends. Some museum workers transform into ancient musicians. These custodians of our heritage are

trying to keep it alive by passing it on in the best way they know how.

The Dudutki Museum of Ancient Folk Crafts and Technologies is an example of the successful revival of local historical and cultural heritage and the successful cooperation of museum workers and tour guides. The museum was created in 1994 by Eugene Budinas, a famous journalist and businessman (1944-2007), to draw attention to Belarusian historical and cultural heritage and to the revival of ancient crafts. The museum represents a model of a local noble estate of the 19th century. Since it houses a working farm with its own fields, garden, cows, beehives etc, the museum also functions as an example of the modern economy complex.

Historical and cultural heritage in Dudutki is represented by a wooden windmill of the early 20th century, and some popular Belarusian crafts such as woodworking, pottery, blacksmithing, and straw weaving, which are presented in workshops and in the Museum Ethnographic Gallery. Ancient technologies of bread baking and distillation of 'moonshine' drink are also represented in the museum.

The Ethnographic Gallery presents unique examples of local crafts such as vytsinanka (the traditional art of paper cutting), straw and textile weaving, woodworking, and egg colouring. Belarusian straw weaving and vytsinanka have been included on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List. Some highly qualified craftsmen work in the Dudutki Museum, including: Konstantin Titov, a Laureate of International Ceramic art competitions; Alena Kamluk, the People's Master of Belarus; and Galina Udodova, Founder of the family dynasty of straw weavers. Visitors have the chance to watch these craftspeople at work, ask questions and even have a go themselves to really get a feel for the heritage.

The uniqueness of the Dudutki Museum is characterised by various master classes, and by the opportunity to ride a horse, to participate in festivals of history, folk and modern music, and to try distinctive traditional drinks and dishes.

A village atmosphere reigns in Dudutki and helps children to discover the poultry yard, stables, wild animals in the zoo, and even apple blossoms. Children in Dudutki are interested in everything: in swinging, horse riding, watching exotic birds. They buy souvenirs and participate in festivities. At the beginning of our journey together, I promise them free time after the tour and they are very glad to try out the wooden swings, just like their parents used to. They buy souvenirs, just like it was at the Dudutki fairs 200 years ago.

The Dudutki Museum is located 40 km from Minsk. During the journey there, I suggest that children make an imaginary journey into the past of Belarus, back to 200 years ago, and to compare it with our modern views. On the way I use some leading questions:

- What would our road look like 200 years ago? Narrow, small, thick with stones...
- How would we travel? Horse-drawn carriage
- What served as ancient road signs? Birch trees
- What signs of village protection might we see? Wooden sculptures, crosses, huge stones.

Some of the techniques I use to engage children and hold their attention are included below.

Poetry: I use poems inspired by trees or seasonal changes. Poetry has a different rhythm of speech and helps to activate children's attention.

Reporting technique: During our journey, we observe and note the seasonal changes in nature, find out what grows in the fields today,

e.g. looking at cereals as popular agricultural plants. We see stork nests and compare this bird's style of life with ours. Storks are considered a symbol of Belarus.

Visual comparison: While passing a village, I invite children to compare their city and the village, the village school and the city school, find the differences, advantages and disadvantages. I use questions, such as:

- Where are the houses taller - in the city or in the village?
- Which location has more cars?
- Where can you ride a horse?
- What pets would you keep if you lived in a village?

When comparing city and village schools, I ask children to clarify which one is larger, which has its own garden, vegetable plants, and its own bus.

Grandmother's technique: Taking advantage of my grandma status, I tell riddles, fairy tales, jokes and legends. I pay special attention to the ancient seasonal holidays that are celebrated in Dudutki.

Before taking a group tour of the Dudutki Museum, it is very important to interact effectively with museum guides and specialists. I negotiate with museum guides regarding the order in which to visit the galleries and workshops. When entering a workshop, I introduce the craftspeople and give them an opportunity to demonstrate their art. For instance, in the woodworking workshop, Tatiana Marchanka presents some ancient musical instruments and invites children to play them. I then demonstrate some mysterious household items, including a butter churn and a wooden iron, and share my own childhood memories.

Children explore the secrets of the traditional crafts during master classes in pottery or straw weaving workshops. At the bakery, there is an

opportunity to try fresh bread, homemade cheese and butter, as well as a herbal tea.



Figure 1. Pottery studio workshop
(Image: Sviatlana Mashchanka)

At the Beekeeper's House, I introduce the children to a log hive as an ancient bee house, and we look at some tools of the tree beekeeping culture, a popular local forest craft, which is included on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. We then watch a master class on wax candle making.

Transformation into a bee. While telling about the bee family members, I suggest that the children themselves transform into a bee. They start to communicate: how to survive in cold times, and how to report about the best flower fields. Children learn the danger signal – the smoke smell that I demonstrate to them. I explain that people can use the smoke smell to protect them from bee stings and present the smoke smell as a keepsake. I learned this method from the beekeeper, Sergey Selyakh.



Figure 2. Beekeeping talk
(Image: Sviatlana Mashchanka)

The essential part of the tour programme is the free time to explore what has interested them. I announce it at the beginning of the tour so that they know they can look forward to it. Children are happy to use their free time to try out the swings and games, have a picnic, buy souvenirs, or visit again an area that they enjoyed, such as the zoo, horse stables, poultry yard or vintage cars gallery.

The Dudutki Museum regularly hosts festivals such as the Historical Knight Festival, Children's Fest, and seasonal folk holidays. I announce these festivals during my tour, which encourages repeat visitation.

When I have family groups on tour, I use the same methods but by focusing on the children, we try to involve their parents in the games, exploration and creative process.



Figure 3. Family fun on the farm in Autumn
(Image: Sviatlana Mashchanka)

The presentation of local historical and cultural heritage is very important, even more so nowadays. The demand for museums like the Dudutki Museum is growing. Similar museums have been opened in various parts of Belarus. Some state museums include craft and folk master classes in their programmes. The functions of presenting our cultural and historical heritage are transferred to tour guides and museum workers to keep our heritage alive.

Children are our future. I like to work with children and I am glad when they tell me at the end of a tour that it was the best day of their life. It is very important to present our historical and cultural heritage to children in engaging ways to awaken their interest in crafts and to arouse a desire to participate in festivals. By presenting the lifestyle of our ancestors, we can strengthen in children a sense of pride in our talented compatriots and arouse a desire to see and protect other cultural sites.

From participation to polarisation: The Faro Convention's unintended consequences for heritage practice

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Abstract

The Faro Convention (Council of Europe, 2005) redefined cultural heritage as a "democratic resource", giving heritage communities a leading role in heritage processes. However, the lack of precise operational definitions is generating a paradox: rather than promoting

dialogue, the Convention's application fuels polarisation between heritage professionals and civil society, with consequences for conservation sustainability itself.

In countries lacking consolidated laws and regulations, the vagueness of its key concepts has transformed the Convention into an uncritical normative compass. Interpreters (administrators, cultural mediators, educators) often find themselves unprepared to facilitate dialogue when heritage communities spontaneously form around contested heritage, claiming exclusive legitimacy over narratives and conservation choices. This excludes marginalised voices: ethnic minorities, local residents outside of organised groups, and those with specialised technical knowledge.

The Faro Venice case exemplifies what doesn't work: goals of countering mass tourism and repopulating the historic centre entrusted primarily to community mobilisation, proved ineffective without structured institutional mediation and integration of technical expertise. On the contrary, Bolzano's Finance Palace intervention demonstrates the potential of heritage interpretation as a connection practice through guided co-design.

To overcome polarisation, interpreters need multi-level competencies: facilitation skills, heritage literacy, technical-narrative abilities, and sustainability ethics. This paper proposes a mediated co-design model, including institutional accompaniment, plural interpretation forums, narrative transparency protocols, and ethical interpreter accreditation: transforming heritage into an effective democratic resource that connects rather than divides.

Keywords

Faro Convention, heritage communities, heritage interpretation, contested heritage, co-design models

1. Introduction

The Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, better known as the Faro Convention after the city where it was conceived and adopted on 27 October 2005, represents one of the most ambitious attempts to redefine cultural heritage from a European normative perspective. Unlike previous conventions, of which it nevertheless maintains some founding elements, this document introduces what is today defined as a radical paradigm shift, as it explicitly introduces the necessity of protection dedicated also to the intangible part of cultural heritage through respect and care for the “right to cultural heritage” (Council of Europe 2005).

Drawing on concepts from previous European conventions, but especially on Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which establishes the right to participate in cultural life and benefit from scientific knowledge, the Convention becomes the bearer of new responsibilities that society must necessarily assume towards the cultural heritage of each people, shifting focus from the 'heritage' object to the 'community' subject.

These principles, defined by much of the criticism as innovative and necessary for developing awareness of protection issues, represent the foundations of the Faro Convention, which rests on the recognition of so-called 'heritage communities'. This formulation marks a break from previous tradition, according to which it was protection experts who determined the value of cultural heritage. It gives new importance to communities who thus acquire the right to

participate in decision-making processes and in the interpretation and management of the heritage they recognise as their own.

However, almost 20 years after adoption, the Convention's application is generating controversial effects compared to its initial intentions. In some contexts, the concept of role reversal has produced a polarisation effect among protection actors, with sometimes problematic consequences for protection process quality.

This paper, therefore, will investigate what causes may underlie this phenomenon, critically analysing elements of the Convention's text and how the concrete practices developed have contributed to its dissemination. Subsequently, through comparative analysis of two emblematic case studies, the Faro Venice experience and the restoration intervention on the Finance Palace in Bolzano, the paper will identify what competencies heritage interpreters must possess in order to facilitate participatory processes by collaboratively integrating scientific knowledge.

Interpreting Faro means building mediated collective design processes in which societal participation and expert knowledge mutually legitimise each other, producing conservation choices that reflect the complexity of the cultures to which they refer, without marginalising either community voice or the technical competencies indispensable for conscious protection.

2. Participation between democratic ideal and polarisation

“Heritage wasn't only about the past (though it was that too), it also wasn't just about material things (though it was that as well), heritage was a process of engagement, an act of communication and an act of making meaning in and for the present”. Thus Laurajane Smith

(2006:44) denounced the existence of what she defined as 'Authorised Heritage Discourse' (AHD), namely an authoritarian discourse on heritage constructed by protection institutions and based on Western-derived criteria, which tended to exclude what lay outside such criteria, reflecting power relations that determined who had the right to define what was heritage and who, instead, remained excluded from it.

Based on this context, the Faro Convention represents an attempt to democratise cultural policies, with the ambition of shifting attention from heritage as object to heritage as resource, from material conservation to focus on the social aspect and community participation. Heritage is no longer defined as an objective category through scientific criteria conceived as 'universal' but becomes the result of processes that obtain important recognition from the community, regardless of whether it corresponds to traditional canons or not.

However, the Convention's application has revealed tensions and contradictions that the text had left partially unresolved, entrusting them to the discretion of the member states. The main problem concerns the vagueness of definitions characterising some fundamental concepts of the document. A striking example of this complexity is precisely in one of the Convention's initial articles, Article 2, consisting of two sections referring to the document's key concepts. The article's first part defines cultural heritage as "a resource inherited from the past that populations identify [...] as reflection and expression of values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions". The second part of the article, instead, concerns the definition of 'heritage community', understood as "a group of people who attribute value to specific aspects of cultural heritage". Both definitions are open to broad interpretation, which has proven contradictory in criticism, due to the generic and

merely descriptive character that distinguishes them.

In countries with strong, established laws, the vague wording of the Convention was actually helpful and constituted a potential opportunity. It allowed them to easily add new ideas – like public participation – into the system they already had. Conversely, in countries with weaker laws and regulation, the Convention was introduced as the main framework of standards to follow, and was often followed too strictly without due consideration of local needs. This disrupted how those countries make decisions about protecting their heritage.

In these contexts, heritage communities, identified by the Convention as the main instrument for cultural heritage democratisation, carry the risk of becoming the sole decision-making focus, marginalising specialist knowledge. The Authorized Heritage Discourse mentioned above is paradoxically turned upside down and almost replaced by an opposite dynamic, one that does not genuinely seek an open and democratic dialogue, but instead simply looks for the community's approval and legitimisation. The result is polarisation between heritage professionals and experts, who perceive participation as a threat to scientific rigour, and groups constituting heritage communities who interpret technical mediations as a form of denial of their rights.

The resulting imbalance is amplified by the poor diffusion of cultural heritage education in contemporary society. Without awareness regarding conservation choices, what is interpreted by the Convention as a 'community feeling' can be transformed into a form of arbitrariness that ignores the complexities inherent in heritage. Participation thus becomes a form of identity claim, which although translated into community projects, leads to

controversial aspects that paralyse decision-making processes.

A problematic aspect of this concerns possible marginalisation within the heritage communities themselves. In defining heritage communities, the Convention presupposes the existence of cohesive groups, capable of expressing a common feeling towards heritage and designing solutions necessary for its protection. However, social reality is more complex, and as such must be analysed: multiple communities could coexist within the territory, representing a diverse mix of interests. When heritage communities spontaneously grow around contested heritage and claim a certain legitimacy on narratives and their conservation, a parallel mechanism is produced to what the Convention intended. The most capable and most visible communities tend to prevail, while others are excluded from decision-making processes.

In this scenario, the role of heritage interpreters becomes crucial but extremely delicate, as they find themselves in the position of facilitators of dialogue between different actors, often proving unprepared for situations characterised by conflict, incompatible claims and power relations. The solutions in this case become twofold: let these dynamics resolve themselves, with the risk that the strongest voices prevail and that the concept of marginalisation persists, or impose technical methodologies that ignore the definitions given by the Convention and, therefore, create the mechanisms that the document intends to avoid.

3. Comparing heritage protection experiences

The dynamics described in the previous paragraph are not confined to theory, but are easily comparable with the ways in which the Faro Convention is applied in real-world contexts. To understand which factors

determine the success or failure of participation processes, it is useful to analyse emblematic experiences that embody different approaches to participatory management of cultural heritage protection. We will look at a case in Italy, characterised by a multiplicity of cultures and cultural heritage that reflects the diversity of wider European experiences. Italy also possesses a complete set of laws, which particularly influences heritage protection processes and tends to clash with policies promoted by the Convention. For these reasons, it is appropriate to compare realities that have successfully combined participatory processes in rather delicate situations, obtaining different but extremely significant results.

The case of the Faro Venice heritage community represents a problematic application of the Convention, characterised by community protagonism that has not led to positive solutions in resolving the problems underlying the heritage community's constitution. Conversely, the intervention on the Finance Palace in Bolzano constitutes a mediated co-design model that can be considered positive: heritage interpreters facilitated dialogue between viewpoints, technical knowledge and different opinions, producing a sustainable and effective intervention. The comparison between these two cases allows identifying elements that distinguish participatory processes, providing indications that can help overcome this polarising drift, thus building more awareness and mature approaches to protection.

3.1 Faro Venezia: A community without interpreters

The Faro Venice experience is a symbolic case of when applying the Convention is problematic. It is useful for understanding dynamics that can potentially lead to participatory process failure, despite legitimate intentions. The project was born from the actions of local associations, who were beginning to seriously worry about the

historic centre's progressive depopulation due to devastating impact of mass tourism on residents' daily life (Figure 1). The heritage community's constitution inspired by Faro Convention principles, therefore, claimed the right to actively participate in decisions concerning the city's future.

The associations' objectives were urgent and clearly shareable, as they wanted to counter Venice's progressive transformation into a 'museum-city' without residential function, limit the unsustainable tourist flow, preserve traditional commercial activities and guarantee better quality of life for inhabitants. However, the ways in which these objectives were pursued reveal the limits of an approach that lacked an institutional mediation structure and integration of specialist competencies.

The movement concentrated mainly on protest and denunciation actions, which didn't transform into concrete sustainable or realisable projects. The complexity of processes governing Venice's urban transformation and falling within the economic sphere of tourism, infrastructure and services, long-term demographic dynamics, was ignored and reduced to the responsibilities of individual institutions. The result was growing polarisation between the community movement and local institutions. However, the most visible associations were able to 'monopolise' the Venice community's representation, marginalising equally legitimate perspectives and transforming the authenticity claim into an exclusion mechanism. The Faro Venice case demonstrates that sustainable results are not produced when there is a lack of qualified institutional mediation and integration with technical competencies. Heritage interpreters, in this case the municipal administration, failed in their mediation task, oscillating between ignoring the movement's requests and accepting them symbolically or ineffectively.



Figure 1. Zecche, Biblioteca Marciana, Saint Mark's Campanile, and Palazzo Ducale, Venice - part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site

(Image: Martin Falbisoner (own work, copyright CC BY-SA 4.0 from:

https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venezia#/media/File:Saint_Mark's_Campanile_and_Palazzo_Ducale,_Venice,_September_2017_-2.jpg)

3.2 Palazzo delle Finanze in Bolzano: Interpretation as a co-designed process

In sharp contrast with the Venetian case, the intervention on the Finance Palace in Bolzano represents a good example of heritage interpretation as a connection practice, capable of integrating communities and technical competencies in a co-design process. The case is particularly significant because it addresses a delicate situation in the cultural heritage field, dealing with a building linked to divisive memories.

The Finance Palace (Figure 2) was built during the Fascist period as the headquarters of the financial administration in the province of Bolzano, which had been annexed to Italy only in 1920. There was controversy relating to the force with which it had been added to the national territory. The building, which exhibits the monumental architectural language characteristic of the regime, includes symbolic elements celebratory of Fascism and was designed as an architectural instrument of power over a territory that, until that moment, had not been Italian. For the German-speaking community, the building represented a symbol denial of their cultural identity.



Figure 2. Palazzo degli Uffici (Bolzano) before the intervention in 2017

(Image: Wolfgang Moroder. (Multi-license with GFDL and Creative Commons CC-BY 2.5 from: https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Palazzo_degli_Uffici_Finanziari_Bolzano.jpg))

After the end of the Second World War and the Trentino-Alto Adige Region's constitution, Fascist cultural heritage management became a particularly delicate question. The German community requested demolition, clashing with the position of the protection institutes, which recognised the architectural value and considered it worthy of conservation, despite its divisive symbolic meaning.

How, therefore, to respond to the two linguistic communities' contrasting needs? The solution was identified by announcing an ideas competition. This was won by two artists, Arnold Holzknecht and Michele Bernardi, who opted for a conceptual intervention. Rather than removing the original frieze, they flanked it with a luminous inscription in neon characters. The intervention fits into a contemporary art movement that uses writing not only as a visual element but as a critical device, which overturns the meaning of contexts in which it is inserted.

The chosen phrase, taken from Hannah Arendt's writings, reads "Nobody has the right to obey" and is reproduced in Italian, German and Latin (Figure 3), recognising the territory's linguistic and cultural plurality. The citation creates dialogue with the Duce's image on the frieze,

depowering its celebration without materially cancelling it. The building thus becomes a critical memorial and a place for reflection on historical responsibility, and the intervention demonstrates how contemporary art can offer excellent tools for symbolically reworking conflictual memories, making history critically readable and allowing different generations to consciously confront it.

The elements that characterised this process were, firstly, the interpreters' facilitation capacity: being capable of creating listening and dialogue spaces in which different perspectives could be expressed and recognising the legitimacy of traumatic memories without yielding to the temptation of simplistic solutions. Secondly, heritage literacy: the process included training moments in which the communities involved acquired awareness of the technical, historical and legal complexities of heritage protection, transforming emotional claims into informed projects.



Figure 3. Facade of the former headquarters of the Fascist party in Bozen-Bolzano, now displaying a quote by Hannah Arendt (2018)

(Image: Bartleby08 (own work, copyright CC BY-SA 4.0 from: https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casa_del_Fascio_%28Bolzano%29#/media/File:Fassade_finanzamt_bozen_2018.jpg))

3.3 A comparative lesson: What works, what doesn't

The comparison between the two case studies allows us to distinguish effective and ineffective participatory processes. In the case of Venice, the absence of good institutional mediation and strategies that could help the heritage community confront problems certainly produced a significant decision-making stalemate. In the case of Bolzano, the presence of interpreters capable of making effective dialogue with cultural heritage and implementing the strategy to realise the intervention, expanding the design pool outside the institutional structure, which led to a shared and symbolically effective solution.

What emerges clearly is that community participation alone is not sufficient to guarantee sustainable democratic processes. Unconditional decision-making power is not the same as cultural democracy; it still requires mediated collaboration processes between different forms of knowledge - scientific, social and operational. The interpreters' role, in this perspective, is not to uncritically amplify community voices, but rather to build conditions for plural dialogue capable of including community voices to satisfy both population needs and a project's technical effectiveness.

4. Necessary competences for heritage democracy: Towards a new professional profile

The scenarios described above join with the necessity of defining not only the strategies that allow making participatory processes effective for more conscious protection and avoiding polarisation processes but also understanding what specific competencies may underlie mediation between the actors who must decide on the fate of heritage. It becomes necessary, in this regard, to analyse the facilitator figure as a new professional profile that can lead to balance

in this controversial aspect of the Faro Convention.

The first category of competencies important for heritage interpreters concerns the facilitation of participatory process development in contexts characterised by conflict, asymmetries and traumatic memories. The experiences implemented so far have been subject to development of confrontation tables, and community consultation through interviews and meetings, but these activities are not sufficient to make the collaboration process effective in the protection field. A starting point could be knowing how to build an authentically inclusive dialogue space, capable of giving voice to each party's perspectives and managing conflicts that inevitably emerge in confrontations.

This requires a margin of familiarity with structured participatory methodologies, such as workshops, community map creation and so on (IAP2 2015), but also requires, above all, the capacity to recognise and make explicit the power dynamics involved in participatory processes: interpreters must be aware that even 'spontaneous' participation tends to follow hierarchies, which see the most silent voices marginalised. In contested heritage cases, this competence becomes even more crucial. If the value of something is the object of conflict between communities for whatever reason, the interpreter must know how to create conditions for the conflict to be explored and resolved without one party prevailing simply due to its numerical or organisational strength. This does not mean denying conflict, but building narratives capable of recognising the legitimacy of different perspectives, synthesising them.

A second topic concerns heritage education, understood as a process of building shared awareness relating to protection processes and all their facets, whether economic, political or social. If the participation process is 'educated',

it becomes more aware than the purely 'emotional' one, based on identity claim, and thus allows a better decision-making quality, as it implies an understanding of the consequences of choices made, legal and regulatory constraints and the intergenerational implications of conservation.

Interpreters have a responsibility to guide participation processes so that heritage communities can acquire the necessary tools to address constructive dialogue with heritage protection professionals. This does not mean transforming citizens into sector experts, but providing knowledge that allows them to understand that, for example, some restoration interventions are possible and others less so for various reasons, and to understand what the real conservation costs are and what maintenance strategies to refer to. Community training is certainly not easy to implement, but it is a necessary condition for democratic dialogue. Without a knowledge base shared by all actors, there are various risks: communities could advance impossible requests, fuelling the perception of exclusion when these requests could not be satisfied; or, communities could accept technical decisions without fully understanding their motivations, effectively transforming an inclusive phenomenon into a fiction.

A third category of competencies that interpreters should learn is translation between different languages - that of experts and that of communities. This follows the previous opposite ways: if educating on heritage allows the community to learn to dialogue with new awareness, it is the facilitator who moves between two different registers and linguistic fields. They must know how to make technical concepts accessible, explaining the motivations that link a historic building to a regulatory constraint, what criteria guide its restoration choices, and so on. On the other hand, they

must be able to understand the community's requests even when these cannot be expressed through protection language: recognising that a community wants to demolish a monument because its political message does not represent them personally must be understood as an emotional request and a need for elaboration of motivations to reach a balanced solution.

This aspect was decisive in the case of Finance Palace in Bolzano, where interpreters knew how to recognise emotional need, transforming a demolition request into an artistic project with a symbolically effective result.

Finally, it is good to be aware that the role of mediator has another important point to implement when addressing a participatory process: understanding that conservation choices have intergenerational consequences and require balance between present urgency and long-term impact. In this sense, interpreters must be capable of introducing a long-term temporal perspective into participatory processes, which allows going beyond immediate claim and considers what heritage to build for future generations. Mature participatory democracy is that which addresses these dilemmas without removing them, recognising that there are no perfect solutions but compromises through which to build negotiation processes between different values.

5. Conclusions

The analysis conducted here highlights the contradictions characterising the debate relating to the Faro Convention, showing how, although rooted in noble intentions, the document can generate effects contrary to inclusion and the right to cultural heritage in the absence of a mediation strategy between parties. The comparison between the two cases of the Faro Venice heritage community and the Finance Palace in Bolzano intervention clearly shows that community participation alone is not

sufficient to guarantee sustainable democratic processes. The presence of interpreters capable of facilitating democratic dialogue, educating on heritage protection and translating the languages of experience and technique can guarantee a more sustainable approach closer to the Faro Convention's proposal, without forgetting the cultural and regulatory context in which it is applied in each member country.

It is necessary, therefore, to build projects that blend different perspectives into a single, sustainable plan. By combining multiple views and expressions of knowledge, in an environment of mutual respect and recognition, we can come to decisions that are more able to handle the complex needs of our communities. In this perspective, interpreting the Faro Convention means putting oneself in the condition of applying methodologies that produce conservation choices balanced between community needs and the technical feasibility of the proposed inventions.

The heritage interpreter figure assumes a crucial role here, which builds inclusive decision-making processes through recognising difficulties in confrontation between communities and institutions, constructive conflict management and building mutual trust that leads to conscious choices for cultural heritage protection. In this sense, the heritage interpreter would not only be an expert who transmits knowledge to the public, but a mediator who builds decision-making processes recognising that both parties can benefit from each other.

This model would certainly require adaptations for each local context, the political-economic situation and regulatory state, but some general principles emerge: the need to invest in participation quality; recognition of a confrontation that must be constructive and not destructive; awareness that these processes

require long periods of time for effective resolution, together with the professional competencies discussed.

The challenge is complex and requires a true cultural transformation within institutions, for educational systems and for heritage communities themselves, but it is important to understand that cultural heritage management is not only a technical or administrative question, but rather a practice that includes citizenship. It is the facilitation of coexistence between all recalled aspects, ultimately, that becomes the first responsibility to entrust to those who want to interpret the Faro Convention as a far-reaching cultural project.

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Rethinking heritage interpretation: Co-creating principles for a changing world

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Abstract

This paper presents WHIPIC's ongoing work on developing principles for heritage interpretation and presentation, presented in a workshop at Interpret Europe's 2026 conference as an invitation for professional reflection and dialogue. It argues that interpretation is increasingly important because heritage is no longer understood only as a fixed object of expert explanation, but as a field of meanings, values and relationships shaped by different communities and contexts. In this situation, principles are needed not as rigid rules, but as a shared foundation that can guide practice while allowing flexibility. The paper introduces five emerging principles: Diversity and authenticity; Inclusive accessibility; Equitable participation; Contemporary relevance; and Sustainable implementation and impact. Together, these principles suggest that interpretation should be plural but evidence-based, accessible as meaningful participation, participatory as shared authority, relevant to contemporary society, and sustained through adaptive implementation. The paper concludes that interpretation can connect past, present and future when it is practised as an ethical, inclusive and impact-oriented process.

Keywords

heritage interpretation, participation, accessibility, authenticity, sustainable implementation

1. Introduction

Heritage interpretation is increasingly expected to do more than explain the past. It is asked to connect heritage with people, support dialogue, address different perspectives and make heritage meaningful in changing social contexts. This paper presents WHIPIC's ongoing work on developing heritage interpretation principles, based on the presentation delivered during a workshop at Interpret Europe's 2026 conference. The aim of the workshop was not only to introduce a draft framework, but also to invite reflection on how such principles could be refined with practitioners, experts, communities and other stakeholders.

The draft principles were developed from 2024 through a working group convened by WHIPIC, bringing together WHIPIC researchers and international experts in the heritage field. Through this process, the working group reviewed existing discussions on heritage interpretation, exchanged opinions on key issues, and gradually refined the structure and content of the principles.

The paper begins with an observation of changes in the context surrounding heritage: the understanding of heritage has shifted. Heritage is not only a fixed object managed and explained by experts. It is also a field of values, meanings and relationships. This shift is consistent with wider international discussions that recognise the social value of cultural heritage and the role of people and communities in identifying, valuing and sustaining heritage (Council of Europe, 2005). It is also relevant to World Heritage, where heritage protection and management are

closely linked to authenticity and integrity (UNESCO, 2024). WHIPIC's earlier research on the definitions and concepts of heritage interpretation and presentation also provides an important basis for this work (UNESCO WHIPIC, 2023).

In this context, interpretation matters because it acts as a bridge between heritage and people. It connects meanings, enables dialogue and creates relevance. However, interpretation has also become more complex. Diverse values and contexts can enrich interpretation, but they can also create tension. The key question is, therefore, not only why interpretation matters, but how it can be guided responsibly and effectively. This is why principles are essential. They can provide a common foundation for practice without becoming overly prescriptive.

2. Why principles are needed

The ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites identifies interpretation and presentation as essential components of public understanding and heritage conservation (ICOMOS, 2008). However, contemporary heritage practice increasingly requires guidance that can address not only communication techniques, but also participation, access, relevance, evidence, and long-term impact. Interpretation is not a neutral act. It involves choices about whose knowledge is presented, which values are emphasised, who is able to participate, and how heritage is connected to contemporary life.

The five principles presented in this paper are, therefore, proposed as a framework for reflection rather than as a closed set of rules. They build on WHIPIC's ongoing research on principles for heritage interpretation and presentation (UNESCO WHIPIC, 2025). They aim to support interpretation that is inclusive, responsible and adaptable. They also recognise that heritage interpretation must be rooted in

evidence and respect for heritage values, while still responding to the needs, questions and experiences of people today.

3. WHIPIC's Principles for heritage interpretation and presentation

Principle 1: Diversity and authenticity

The first principle, diversity and authenticity, begins with the recognition that heritage is not a single story. Heritage is plural, layered and often contested. Different communities may attach different meanings to the same place, object, practice or memory. Interpretation should, therefore, acknowledge diverse perspectives while avoiding the reduction of heritage to one dominant narrative.

At the same time, diversity does not mean that anything goes. This is where authenticity matters. The Nara Document on Authenticity emphasises that understanding heritage values depends in part on the credibility and truthfulness of information sources, and that judgements about authenticity should be considered within relevant cultural contexts (Nara Conference, 1994). In the World Heritage system, authenticity and integrity remain central to the assessment and protection of heritage properties, and interpretation should not weaken these foundations (UNESCO, 2024).

This principle, therefore, calls for responsible plurality. Interpretation should recognise different voices, including difficult or contested histories, but it must be grounded in credible evidence and guided by ethical responsibility. Without an evidence-based foundation, interpretation can become arbitrary, distort historical meanings or weaken public trust. The aim is not to reach a single official narrative, or to embrace unlimited relativism, but to represent multiple perspectives grounded in evidence and professional standards.

Principle 2: Inclusive accessibility

The second principle, inclusive accessibility, asks who can actually access, understand and benefit from heritage. Access has often been understood in a narrow sense as physical entry to a site. However, meaningful access is broader than entry. It includes the ability to understand, engage with and connect to heritage in ways that are relevant to different people.

Barriers to heritage are not only physical. They may also be cognitive, sensory, linguistic, cultural or social. This point is supported by wider human-rights frameworks. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises the right of everyone to participate in the cultural life of the community (United Nations, 1948). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities further recognises the right of persons with disabilities to take part in cultural life on an equal basis with others, including access to cultural materials and cultural activities in accessible formats (United Nations, 2006).

Inclusive accessibility, therefore, means designing interpretation so that different people can participate meaningfully. It may require diversified communication methods, accessible formats, clear language, multi-sensory approaches, culturally responsive interpretation, and continuous review of barriers. In this sense, interpretation is not only a service offered to visitors. It is a public responsibility. The core message is clear: heritage should be accessible not only as a place to enter, but as a field of meaning in which people can participate.

Principle 3: Equitable participation

The third principle, equitable participation, moves from the question of who can access heritage to the question of who has the right to shape its meanings. Traditional heritage interpretation has often been expert-driven, with communities treated mainly as audiences or recipients. Contemporary practice

increasingly recognises that heritage meanings are socially constructed and that communities are not passive beneficiaries, but active participants in heritage processes.

The Faro Convention is important in this regard because it defines a heritage community as people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage and wish to sustain and transmit them within the framework of public action (Council of Europe, 2005). This supports a participatory understanding of interpretation, moving beyond one-directional communication towards dialogue with people and communities. It also suggests that participation should not be limited to consultation after decisions have already been made.

However, participation alone is not enough. Participation can be symbolic, unequal or dominated by more powerful stakeholders. The principle, therefore, emphasises equitable participation. This means creating fair opportunities for diverse stakeholders, including local communities and Indigenous peoples, to contribute to interpretation processes. It also means recognising power imbalances and designing participatory structures that are transparent, inclusive and meaningful.

Equitable participation does not remove the need for professional expertise. Rather, it repositions expertise within a wider process of dialogue and shared authority. Interpretation becomes a space where knowledge, experience, memory and evidence can meet. In this sense, co-creation is not a loss of professional standards, but a way to produce more relevant and trusted interpretation.

Principle 4: Contemporary relevance

The fourth principle, contemporary relevance, asks why heritage matters today. Heritage is not only a record of the past. It can also be a resource for the present and the future. Without

relevance, heritage risks becoming distant and disconnected. Interpretation should, therefore, help people connect heritage with their own lives, questions and responsibilities.

This idea is closely related to sustainable development. UNESCO's policy on integrating sustainable development into the processes of the World Heritage Convention supports the alignment of conservation and management strategies with broader sustainable development objectives, while maintaining the protection and conservation requirements of World Heritage properties (UNESCO, 2015). Interpretation can contribute to this by helping people understand how heritage relates to identity, belonging, social cohesion, education, sustainability, and other contemporary challenges.

Contemporary relevance must nevertheless be handled carefully. It should not reshape the past simply to fit present-day expectations. It should not compromise authenticity or integrity. Instead, contemporary reflection should create a complementary relationship between past and present. The aim is not confrontation between historical values and current concerns, but dialogue. Interpretation should make heritage meaningful today while respecting and preserving its original values.

Principle 5: Sustainable implementation and impact

The fifth principle, sustainable implementation and impact, asks how interpretation can actually work and last. Strong principles alone are not enough. There is often a gap between ideas and practice. Interpretation should, therefore, be understood not as a one-time product, but as an ongoing and adaptive process.

Sustainable implementation requires mid- and long-term strategies. Short-term projects may produce visible outputs, but they can also lead

to fragmented efforts, inconsistent quality and limited impact. Interpretation needs continuity, institutional support, professional capacity, appropriate resources, and regular review. This is consistent with the wider view that interpretation and presentation should be integrated into heritage conservation, site management, and public communication, rather than treated as separate activities (ICOMOS, 2008).

An impact-oriented approach also asks what changes as a result of interpretation. The question is not only what programmes, exhibitions or media are produced, but whether interpretation enhances understanding, supports engagement, strengthens relationships, improves access or contributes to sustainable development. This requires monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation. What is effective today may not be effective tomorrow, because audiences, social contexts and heritage challenges change. Interpretation should, therefore, be a learning process.

4. Conclusion

Together, the five principles offer a framework for rethinking heritage interpretation in a changing world. They suggest that interpretation should move beyond the transmission of information and become a shared process through which people, communities and institutions connect heritage values with contemporary life. Informed by the Faro Convention (2005), the principles emphasise participation, dialogue, shared responsibility, and the social value of heritage.

At the same time, the development process has revealed several areas requiring further refinement. Some parts of the draft may still appear overly authoritative or prescriptive, and the concept of authenticity needs clearer articulation, particularly in relation to its specific meaning in the World Heritage context. The

people-centred approach may also need to be expanded into a more holistic perspective that considers places, ecosystems, material conditions and management contexts. In addition, the emphasis on evidence-based interpretation raises questions for intangible heritage, oral traditions, myths and community-based knowledge systems, while the implications of AI and digital environments remain insufficiently addressed.

These issues were further discussed during the workshop at the Interpret Europe conference, where the draft principles were tested and reflected upon with practitioners and experts. Building on this feedback, WHIPIC will continue to refine the principles through further consultation with communities, site managers, policy actors, researchers and other stakeholders. Ultimately, the principles aim to support heritage interpretation as a responsible, inclusive and adaptive practice that connects past, present and future in meaningful ways.

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Bow your views to reviews – Adapting, people-pleasing and self-censoring in interpretation

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Iva Silla has been crafting creative tourism services for 15 years and has been a dedicated heritage interpreter for ten. Her flagship project, Secret Zagreb, attracts around 3,000 visitors per year, and she has created many educational workshops and materials, as well as dozens of interpretive products and services. Iva is also an Interpret Europe trainer, with a track record of delivering impactful courses.

Iva's company was recently selected among the top ten Croatian impact companies thanks to her efforts to create mindful self-guided tours, one of many recognitions she has received for her work. This led to her latest endeavours, the creation of the Croatia Underrated app, and the start of a series of alternative guidebooks. She is currently exploring the possibilities of transformative play and working on an art project that challenges tourism experiences, including her own work.

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Abstract

This paper aims to start a discussion within the interpretive community about the indirect yet persuasive influences that lead to self-censorship in interpretation. The author cites texts that warn about phenomena such as self-censorship and social-pleasing, and shares some real-life examples, including her own. Review-based environment, self-censorship and their sister phenomena have crept into the work of heritage interpreters, taming their creative aspirations and neutralising their output. The

paper explores their effects on both interpreters and society.

Keywords

ethics of heritage interpretation, freedom of expression, self-censoring, societal sensitivity, democracy, authenticity, reviews, interpreters

Introduction

"I'm just an individual who doesn't feel that I need to have somebody qualify my work in any particular way. I'm working for me."

These thoughts on the importance of individuality are from David Bowie (Ferris, 1972), a pop-cultural icon, an artist, and someone who had many different personas while managing to stay authentic. Throughout this paper, we will consult other professions and explore whether these words apply to heritage interpreters. Can heritage interpreters be considered artists, or at least stay true to themselves? How can they be artistic if they are governed by a set of (unwritten) guidelines? Do they even understand the effect of such implied guidelines?

We will look for quotations and examples in areas that already address self-censorship, such as hospitality, arts, marketing, and journalism, because heritage interpreters often put themselves last in their research. There are ongoing discussions in the heritage interpretation community about heritage, audiences, methodology, approaches, participation, shared values, society in general, and other professional interests of heritage interpreters. But we hardly ever switch the focus to the actual interpreter. This paper will shift the focus, emphasising the broader damage caused by simply ignoring the needs and desires of interpreters, thereby subtly leading us into compliance.

Many heritage interpreters are self-employed or run small enterprises. As the initial quote says, they are literally working for themselves, yet they end up with a number of clients, and they must accommodate the needs of those clients. From the personal well-being of the interpreter to the societal scale, we are about to scratch the surface of many topics.

Before we dive into the analysis, I would like to add a personal note. Those questions matter to me because, in my late 40s, I still consider myself an aspiring artist. In fact, I've had a personal epiphany over the last year or so, as I realised that I no longer wanted to work as an interpreter the way I did up until a few months ago. I don't want to feel like a contract worker who should create super-likeable, non-controversial content. I've lost myself along the way. I followed this resentful feeling to its source and realised that the core of my personal issues lies in self-censorship and adaptability. And then I realised, I wasn't alone. Cultural communities around the world are raising their voices to warn against that, even if they haven't yet found solutions.

Special thanks to Bettina Lehnies, Interpret Europe Events Coordinator, for sharing how she chose a tour for the 2024 Interpret Europe conference based on a poor review and the way the guide handled it; and to Danijela Matijević and Sabina Viezzoli for openly sharing their feelings and experiences.

The absurdity of reviews

Anyone who deals with audiences is bound to face reviews, and the very notion of it will influence their work. The influence can be very direct, with management looking for highly rated personnel, including interpreters. Or it can be a result of adapting to deliver anything that results in five stars. There are several problems here. Firstly, you cannot please everyone, but that doesn't mean a bad review doesn't hurt a

business, a site, or a person. I tend to consider myself a person with thick skin, but after all these years of being on display and being rated on a daily basis, I feel like I am stripped naked in front of the world when I receive a poor review. In fact, if the review is unfair, or wasn't even intended for my own business, the feeling is even worse.

On the other hand, if an experience is praised by the majority, with constant fabulous ratings, it might have already turned into the dark side of people-pleasing. It is no wonder that, in recent years, there have been many iconic reactions to the absurdity of five-star realities. The number of people supporting such reactions shows growing dissatisfaction with this entire concept. Among the distinguished projects that draw attention to the terrible reviews are Amber Share's Subpar Parks and Subpar Planet (Amber Share Design, n.d.). Share creates illustrated visuals of heritage sites, but instead of a positive slogan, she mockingly cites poor reviews of those places. Examples such as "Just Don't" for Machu Picchu, a UNESCO site of outstanding universal value (UNESCO, n.d.), entertain audiences, whilst also increasing awareness of unfair ratings and giving all of us a charming tool to cope with our own unimpressed visitors. I myself was inspired by this example and, some years ago, started an Instagram account, Croatia Underrated, to expose poor reviews of Croatian gems. In the meantime, this account grew into a podcast with a variety of other topics, but I still follow and get entertained when I see the one-star review of St James' Cathedral, another UNESCO site, with a simple title, "Pity" (Croatia Underrated, n.d.). The comical perspective takes away some of the power from such negative reviews.

Another interesting example is the chef Davide Cerretini, who used to own a bistro called Botto in the American town of Richmond. He waged a war on the famous user-recommendation

platform Yelp by inviting customers to award it a one-star rating and help it become the worst-rated restaurant. With such trolling, according to Cerretini's own words, "Botto Bistro became an inspirational symbol for many restaurants and small business owners around America, who now refuse to advertise with Yelp despite the pressure and the blackmailing" (Aldax, 2020). As a small business owner myself, I was also inspired by his quirky rebellion, and following its development helped me move my own tour-guiding business away from the OTAs (Online Travel Agencies) whose corporate policies I find dishonest and damaging for several reasons. These examples, and the support they receive, show a need for transformative tools to cope with being constantly exposed to ratings of our work and our personalities.

An example that could be more relatable to the interpretive community is one of Sabina Viezzoli, the person behind La Guida della Bora. Viezzoli is based in Trieste, Italy, and her speciality is tours of the bora phenomenon in her town. She cleverly chose to show one of the poor reviews she received on her website. The one-star reviewer complains that Viezzoli talked only about bora (La Guida della Bora, n.d.).

Viezzoli shares how she coped with this experience:

"That was the very first review I ever received, not long after I had launched my Bora tour. The excitement of getting a notification for my first review quickly turned into frustration, along with some pretty unpleasant feelings, once I saw it was a one-star rating. Reading the content made me feel a lot of different emotions all at once, but the language used and the critical comments were so surreal, given the actual situation, that I tried to emotionally detach right away so I could respond appropriately. My training and professional background, even before becoming a guide and interpreter, is in

institutional communication and science communication. I also worked as a journalist for a public administration institution, and training in risk and emergency communication was an important part of my professional development. So, in responding to that review, I wanted to put into practice everything I had studied, treating it almost as a textbook case. The hard part, of course, was setting aside my personal involvement.

For many years, I didn't have the courage to reread the review and my response to it, until Bettina Lehnies contacted me to tell me how much she'd appreciated it, and to invite me to include my tour in the Koper conference [Interpret Europe conference 2024 held in Koper, Slovenia].

Over time, especially with the rise of social media, reviews have become a real problem, because many people write them with the intention of stirring controversy or venting, often commenting on things with no real basis or concrete justification, and it's increasingly hard to have a constructive exchange.

In my experience, particularly with the Bora tour, I've come to understand that there are still many people, especially older visitors, who remain attached to the 'old-school' tour guide figure: someone who delivers long explanations and leaves little room for interaction with their audience. My approach is completely different; as an interpreter, I involve people a great deal, I ask questions, I invite active participation, in a kind of visit that's very different from a classic tour. I've noticed that when my service is booked by third parties or agencies, the group often arrives without really understanding what they'll be doing with me, which sets the stage for criticism and dissatisfaction. For this reason, and to avoid being penalised by negative reviews stemming from a mismatch

between expectations and experience, I've chosen not to offer my tour through intermediaries, but instead to only offer it by direct booking. This way, I know it will be chosen by people who have genuinely understood the value and the nature of the tour, and I am able to keep control over my own communication.

The bad review was posted on a third-party platform where my tour was listed, and it really upset me to think about what potential clients would read about me there. I decided to re-post it on my own website to show to the 'right participant' what to expect... or not."

If this example of an unfair review still doesn't feel that it should concern anyone but one person and her business, then let us look at another review. This one demonstrates that bad reviews can actually pose a danger to democracy. Other similar platforms show similar conclusions from a concerning number of visitors.

This is what the 2-star review of a site with sensitive history says:

"My husband and I were extremely disappointed in this tour. We didn't come to hear a lecture on how the white people treated slaves, we came to get this history of a southern plantation and get a tour of the house and grounds (...) I am by far not a racist or against all Americans having equal rights but this was my vacation and now we are crossing all plantation tours off our list, it was just not what we expected. I'll go back to Louisiana and see some real plantations that are so much more enjoyable to tour" (Brockell, 2019).

Societal sensitivity

Working with tourists from different parts of the world or with locals, especially in divided societies, can make it very challenging to remain

interpretive. Sometimes, even people considered as heritage interpreters give up entirely on interpretation, especially on the ideas being discussed at Interpret Europe's 2026 conference, only to find work opportunities, create heritage-related projects, or attract and keep audiences.

In the value-based heritage interpretation approach that Interpret Europe advocates, we aim to spark discussion and exchange among visitors, or participants as we call them. Does that lead you to a 5-star review? I will admit I self-censor all the time during tours, choosing to ignore ignorant comments or let go of discriminatory remarks from some guests.

There is a limitation for value-based heritage interpretation in practice, as interpreters need to check many boxes. They should be enthusiastic about the heritage they're presenting and, at the same time, ready to lead a fruitful and meaningful discussion that challenges harmful views. People who are enthusiastic about anything are often passionate, and it's hard to be a diplomat when a fire is burning within you. They should also show significant empathy while resisting the urge to be too accommodating.

Sometimes, I don't stay quiet. On one occasion, during my Badass Women of Zagreb tour, a man asked me, "Isn't it discrimination if you exclude men from the stories?" By this point in the tour, if he had been more receptive to the content, he would have known that the tour doesn't exclude men or stories about men; it simply highlights women. Did I take my role as a facilitator on that occasion? Did I take on the role I'm often good at, the one of a people-pleasing guide? Did I try to subtly explain the reality? Not really. I took off all of my masks, as that small remark hit me in the stomach, and I blatantly served him my opinion on his question. I am human, too, and actually, I want to show my humanity in my

work. I believe it distinguishes me, hence the name of the tour. Most people seem eager to hear about the badass women when they sign up for the tour, and do not find it discriminatory, unlike that man.

Is there art in interpretation?

"It will be obvious at this point where we are driving. We have already given up the notion that Interpretation, in the sense we are employing the word, is direct education. Now, then, we may as well plump it right out: The interpreter must use art, and at best he will be somewhat of a poet. This sounds frightening, I allow. I can see some of my readers shuddering at the thought and wondering where it leaves them. "But I never wrote a line of poetry in my life. You cannot expect me to be an artist."

I reply: You do not know yourself. You have been so frustrated by the curatorship of unimportant details that you have forgotten your inborn talent. We are all, in some degree, poets and artists. If you mean you are not capable of the exquisite flights of a John Keats or the rumbling organ tones of a Thomas Hardy, very well. None of us are. But we can have something of the perception of a poet without having the graphic skill. We can have a sense of joy at sounding a lovely chord, without being a virtuoso" (Tilden, 1957/1977: 27-28).

This quote is a reminder that almost 70 years ago, Freeman Tilden identified art as a distinctive part of interpretation in his legendary book, *Interpreting Our Heritage*. Why has our profession given up on this notion over the course of time? I recently found my first script for the first tour I ever crafted more than 15 years ago, when I still didn't know that heritage interpretation existed as a profession, and had never stood in front of a paying audience. It got me thinking about how much I have changed along the way! With hindsight and more

experience, I see the script is poor in terms of understanding the customer, but it has depth, raw emotion, and a unique, weird, and at times uncomfortable way of thinking that cannot be easily trained. I know, because I've spent the past year training to get it back, and I still haven't fully recovered it. The emphatic nature of interpreters, or at least their jobs, makes them very easy to cultivate. Once they understand the motivation, enthusiasm, and goals of a project and the client, they will start blending in, as a facilitator or consultant should. But does that leave room for art?

Does artistic freedom exist at all?

This is a 2000-year-old question, as old as the Roman Gaius Maecenas, the original maecena, who seemed to have influenced his investments, poets Virgil and Horace (Britannica, n.d.). Even if we dismiss the idea of an interpreter as an artist, we could reformulate and expand the question to: Does freedom of expression exist at all? I am the last one to throw the rock because I am guilty of judging some clients for expressing views I didn't believe in. But that is common sense in every job, especially in creative professions: in the best-case scenario, the service provider and the customer should align in values. In her book, *The Human Centered Brand*, aimed at solopreneurs and small businesses, Nela Dunato states: "There are thousands of potential clients in the world, and there's only one you. Your priority is to treat yourself with care and respect, and to make sure you're getting what you need out of your business. One of the needs we have is to live a fulfilling life" (Dunato, 2018:71). In heritage interpretation, it's easier to feel aligned with your clients even if we unwillingly comply with the client's request to censor some topics because there are plenty of other topics and phenomena to interpret.

Can you still have credibility once a brand gets involved? That is one of many thought points

from the 2011 documentary, *The Greatest Movie Ever Sold*. The movie illustrates product placement and explores the integrity of creators, from marketing experts to artists, once they agree to sponsorships. The ethics explored and the questions raised can easily be applied to cultural or nature-protection environments that use heritage interpretation. The major difference is that, “advertising as a concept is manipulation” (Spurlock, 2011), and our profession and working environment are supposedly not. Although that opens a whole new topic. The noble role we feel we’re taking on as interpreters could be what makes us unaware of just how much we’re bending the knee.

Why do we self-censor?

Self-censorship is becoming a hot topic in art circles, and extensive research has revealed what causes it. A report by ArtsProfessional points to several main causes: fear of consequences; fear of causing offence; good old ‘what’s the point?; organisational control; fearing that honest conversation is not welcome; and even actual payment for silence (ArtsProfessional, 2020).

The first time I became aware of self-censorship in culture and arts was while researching the local street art scene. That’s when I noticed that none of the street art in my hometown of Zagreb challenges authority. There have been movements engaged in reviving neglected areas or raising the visibility of invisible heritage, so the art is socially engaged. But when it comes to subversive social and political art, things have been pretty quiet. Then I started noticing other creative professionals saying things like, “We need to put it this way”, “I can’t say that”, “I’d love to, but...”, “They won’t like it.” And finally, I started thinking of my work. I often respond to all sorts of calls to try to secure financial support for my projects. After I do, I try to comply with the funding bodies’ mindsets without being explicitly told to do so. If the project is co-

funded, can I say this? Will they like this? Will they fund it again next year? These are the lingering questions we cannot escape, and they make us self-censor even when we’re working for ourselves.

Precisely because we’re working for ourselves. The irony is, when you’re a sell-out in billion-dollar industries, as exposed in *The Greatest Movie Ever Sold*, the clients have a price to pay, and the sell-out knows how much money their integrity is worth. In our case, the sponsors are not really our clients, and it costs them almost nothing. Just one look at the results of calls by the Croatian Ministry of Culture and Media (Ministarstvo kulture i medija Republike Hrvatske, 2026), or cultural bodies of local and regional authorities in Croatia (Grad Zagreb, 2026), and it’s easy to understand that we are not even paid to be silent. We are given pocket money, and it works. Dozens of projects receive amounts insufficient to execute them. In return, Croatia is exploding with creative industries, which gives bonus points for the authorities. The co-funded organisations and artists need to find other sources of funding to deliver on their promises, which often starts an enchanted circle of burnt-out project managers and underpaid artists. And most of them subconsciously agree not to bite the hand that feeds them breadcrumbs.

“A culture of self-censorship and fear of backlash from funders, colleagues and the public is convincing arts and cultural workers to stay silent on important issues” (ArtsProfessional, 2020).

Feardom of expression

Fear of backlash? Or is it simply fear? These days, fear of backlash may be more of a concern for the organisations behind them than for the sole interpreters. The latter might be facing actual fear for their lives. In August 2025, Croatian media reported on graffiti found on an

apartment building where the home of prominent writer, Miljenko Jergović, is located. The graffiti was in Croatian, and it could be translated as: One August night, Miljenko won't fare all right. Our country, our rules.

"The threat is obvious and unequivocal. I take it very seriously. I know, just as you do, where it comes from. I know, just as you do, who its inspirers and patrons are", the writer responded firmly on his social media, also pointing out that it "creates unease among the target's neighbours. It is never comfortable, in societies gripped by fear and governed by fascist and racist ideologies, to live in a building where someone has been singled out and publicly marked as a Romani, a Jew, a Serb, a Yugoslav, a leftist..." (Index, 2025).

As interpreters, we might not be as exposed as the writer, but we are well aware of the potentially provocative situations, and we might, because we are only human, decide to tone down or even dismiss topics that would advocate tolerance, inclusion, antifascism, and everything that should be at the core of our shared European values. If we are honest, we sometimes just don't dare to openly critique the practices that run against our own values, simply because of the very human feeling of fear.

The aforementioned article from ArtsProfessional quotes an interesting thought: "One person explained it as a matter of picking battles. "I sometimes have to weigh whether what I really need to say requires the element that will turn others away. If it is important to me, I will stick to my plan, but sometimes, it is not the most important thing and I choose to tame my ideas. I have felt like a traitor to my own self-expression, but I have to ask if anyone needs to hear from me at all" (ArtsProfessional, 2020).

Danijela Matijević from Croatia has been running Walk with Tito since 2021. It's a two-hour tour of the city of Zagreb about Josip Broz Tito, the former Yugoslav president and World War 2 antifascist leader (Walk with Tito, n.d.). Even though her work was praised by many, she was also accused by far-right circles in Croatia of promoting a totalitarian dictator. Some even compared the walk filled with stories about the antifascist movement in WW2 to a tour about Hitler (Walk with Tito Facebook Page). Just like Jergović's neighbours, there were secondary victims when the City of Zagreb and the Zagreb Tourism Board were called out for it by some organisations and politicians, saying it was political provocation or simply a disgrace for such a tour to take place in Zagreb (Novi List, 2022). Matijević was prepared for that. She didn't let the comments slide. She continued with her programme even when the police recommended that she have security! Let that sink in: security for the guide delivering a 10am walking tour. She didn't bend to values that were opposing hers; she didn't hide or try to trick anyone into changing their opinion. All she did was expose the trolls with clarity and arguments, shutting down their ideas that hate speech was freedom of speech.

"Reasonable and educated people support the Walk with Tito tour because they see that it is good quality content in the domain of cultural tourism. Passionate extremist individuals and groups are prone to historical revisionism and often use threats to do so. We must not give them an inch of concession. We must bravely fight against the falsification of historical facts. We must also bravely fight for our undisturbed right to work, which is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia. These cowardly attempts at intimidation are actually a threat to our freedom of work. The threats pointed at me came exclusively from men whose brain synapses probably explode at the mere mention of Tito, so they feel justified in

threatening a woman doing her job; that says a lot about these 'heroes'. The police dealt with them. In moments like these, what gives you strength is that you refuse to allow a handful of extremists to threaten you in your country, in your city. I returned from Berlin to Croatia because I love my country. I know that Croatia can be a wonderful place to live, despite all the problems we are facing. What we all need is more tolerance, more empathy and more mutual respect for diversity", Matijević stated.

But it has been a battle for her. A battle with those aggressive historical revisionists. She has been successfully running this tour for several years now and welcomes guests from all over the world. Would it even be possible to start it and endure all that without her bold spirit and the fact that she chose not to respond to anyone but herself?

Matijević is also a PR manager and a former journalist. It so happens that journalism is one of the first professions whose reality was deeply affected by self-censorship. It is ironic that those who criticise Matijević's work are choosing to fight what they consider a communist dictatorship from half-a-century ago by attacking a solopreneur, and having absolutely nothing to say against the country's three judges who have been awarded the top European SLAPP offenders in the last five years, or the fact that Croatia is one of the EU countries with the biggest SLAPP problem (Jurić, n.d.) (SLAPP – Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation, is any unfounded or abusive court proceedings against public participation, brought about (usually) by powerful corporations and politicians to silence mainly journalists and activists. It should not be an honour to be awarded a 'winner').

Croatia is not alone in this. You must be brave to use your freedom of expression in this new world where critical thinkers live under constant

threat. Even if the general population is mainly aware of the decay that self-censorship in journalism is bringing to society, do they recognise that the strategic lawsuits threaten culture, and therefore interpreters, too? While people who criticise Matijević act as if we are somehow threatened by the former president of a country that hasn't existed for 35 years, let us look to the words of a contemporary democratic leader:

"The Smithsonian is OUT OF CONTROL, where everything discussed is how horrible our Country is, how bad Slavery was, and how unaccomplished the downtrodden have been - Nothing about Success, nothing about Brightness, nothing about the Future. We are not going to allow this to happen, and I have instructed my attorneys to go through the Museums, and start the exact same process that has been done with Colleges and Universities where tremendous progress has been made. This Country cannot be WOKE, because WOKE IS BROKE. We have the "HOTTEST" Country in the World, and we want people to talk about it, including in our Museums" (Donald J. Trump 2025).

With these words that the US President posted on Truth Social in August 2025, I will leave you to decide whether it is dangerous and damaging not to comply, or is it more dangerous to comply? And finally, do we, as interpreters, even have what it takes to resist?

Conclusion

Freedom of expression is making way for fear of expression in every area of our lives, and heritage interpretation isn't exempt. Some fields have been pointing to issues such as self-censorship, commercial pressure, societal sensitivity, cancel culture, backlash, neutrality, and audience alienation, even though they still don't offer actionable solutions. Heritage interpretation communities still haven't even started this discussion properly. Hopefully, for

many interpreters, this paper will prompt introspection and an understanding of the problem's scale. My personal hope is that it will inspire some of us to stay true to ourselves and thus join the battle for freedom, because the war has already started without us.

The previous sentence would be a wonderful interpretive wrap-up with nice framing and strong universals. But I'll use another proven method: a circular narrative. Let's return to David Bowie again, because I share in his wishes and I'm not sure if being human is enough to join the battle. This time, however, for the sake this publication, I will have to... well, censor him: "I felt very very puny as a human. F*** that! I want to be a Superman" (Bowie, in Crowe 1976).

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From maps to meanings: Exploring local heritage in Tavros through students' perspectives

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Abstract

This paper uses the Faro Convention as an interpretive lens to reflect on how formal education can support students' engagement with local heritage. It focuses on a school podcast project developed with Grade 9 students in Tavros, Athens, in which students explored their neighbourhood through observation, research, discussion and audio storytelling.

The project followed a shift from disengagement to connection: a neighbourhood initially described by students as "boring", "ugly", or "a place everyone wants to leave", gradually became visible as a field of stories, memories and meanings. Through the podcast, *A Neighbourhood Unfolding*, students communicated their own interpretation of Tavros beyond the classroom.

The paper argues that cultural heritage can become a valuable educational resource when students are given opportunities to inquire, interpret and create. It also illustrates how local

heritage can provide a meaningful context for exploring migration, labour and urban change.

Keywords

podcast storytelling, inquiry-based learning, active citizenship, heritage interpretation, formal education, Faro Convention

1. Introduction

Heritage education often concerns places people already value. This project began somewhere else: in a neighbourhood that many students saw as ordinary or unimportant. What followed was not simply a lesson about local history, but a process through which familiar places gradually became visible in new ways.

This reflective paper presents a school-based educational project developed in Tavros, Athens, with Grade 9 students. The project was implemented within the Greek Skills Workshops curriculum, a school framework that focuses on 21st-century skills, active learning and citizenship-related competences. (Institute of Educational Policy n.d.). Students had the opportunity to engage with their neighbourhood through an inquiry-based exploration of the place.

The paper first presents the local and school context from which the project emerged. It then follows the educational process, before revisiting the experience through the lens of the Faro Convention. The reflection focuses on two dimensions: how students came to recognise meanings in familiar places; and how they participated in the interpretation of local heritage. The paper concludes by considering the potential of cultural heritage as a resource for education and active citizenship.

2. Context

2.1 The area of Tavros

Tavros is situated near Piraeus Street, the historic axis connecting the port of Piraeus with Athens and the area of the Acropolis. From the 19th century onwards, this axis became associated with industrial activity and, later, cultural reuse. A characteristic example of this industrial past is the former municipal slaughterhouse complex of Athens, developed in the early 20th century in Tavros. Its design drew on European sanitary standards, with plans adapted from the slaughterhouse facilities of Offenbach in Germany (Daniil 2017). For many years, 'Sfageia' - meaning 'the slaughterhouses' in Greek - functioned as an alternative name for Tavros. The complex shaped the neighbourhood's image through the smells, trades, labour relations and social struggles connected with this activity. In recent years, the building has acquired new cultural and community uses.

Another defining feature of Tavros is its apartment blocks, many linked to the area's history of social housing. They were originally developed to accommodate Asia Minor refugees after the population exchanges of the 1920s. Later, the area received internal migrants from other parts of Greece, many connected to Athens' growing industrial workforce along the Piraeus Street axis (Myofa 2020). Some housing blocks reflect modernist approaches to social housing, with open communal spaces and small areas of greenery. Yet they are not static remnants of the past. They continue to function as lived environments, where residents gather, children play, neighbours meet, and everyday community life unfolds (Image 1).



Image 1. Everyday life in the social housing buildings of Tavros (Image: Evgenia Stavradi)

2.2 School community and educational challenge

This layered history is also reflected in our school community. Some students had family roots connected to Asia Minor or internal migration from other parts of Greece, while others came from families who had moved more recently to Greece from Albania, Georgia and other European and non-European countries.

Despite this rich and diverse context, the idea of exploring Tavros in class initially revealed how distant many students felt from the place. When first invited to explore the neighbourhood, several described it as "boring", "ugly", or "a place everyone wants to leave". They pointed to the lack of parks, attractive public spaces, or places widely considered culturally important. For many students, Tavros was not experienced as a place of belonging, but as a familiar environment they wished to move beyond.

Rather than being treated as an obstacle, this initial disengagement became pedagogically significant. Our challenge was not simply to 'teach' local heritage, but to create conditions

through which students could notice, question and narrate the meanings embedded in their everyday environment. During this process, Tavros became more than the place around the school: it became a living field of interpretation.

3. The educational process

3.1 Illuminating the neighbourhood

The first stage of the project challenged students to see Tavros as a field of inquiry. They were invited to observe the present in order to reveal the past: to identify monuments, traces of industry and distinctive elements that were already part of their everyday surroundings but often remained unnoticed.

Research played a central role in this process. Students worked with archival material, photographic collections and oral-history testimonies, using them to illuminate different aspects of the place. Photographic archives helped them visualise earlier forms of the neighbourhood, while oral histories allowed them to relate to people narrating memories, experiences and everyday life in Tavros across different time periods.

Students gradually connected these visible traces with wider historical and social processes. Discussions around social housing, industrial activity and urban transformation situated Tavros within broader European and global contexts. The former slaughterhouses, for example, were discussed alongside post-industrial sites that have acquired cultural uses, such as Matadero Madrid or New York's Meatpacking District. Similarly, the social housing blocks of Tavros opened comparisons with housing projects in cities such as London and Vienna. These connections helped students relate their own neighbourhood to wider histories of urban change.

3.2 Activating imagination

Once students had become familiar with the neighbourhood's visible layers, the educational focus shifted from information to imagination. A central aim was to transform historical material into personal meaning and lived experience.

Students were invited to imagine the lives in Tavros at different moments in time. One activity, for example, asked them to imagine themselves as a person arriving in Tavros during the 1950s in search of work: Where would they work? What might their daily routine look like? What music would accompany their everyday life? Through such exercises, students gradually positioned themselves within the place and its history.

Historical information gradually acquired an experiential dimension. Sources were no longer approached as detached documents but as human voices connected to memory, movement, labour and everyday life. Imagination, empathy and interpretation encouraged students to move beyond factual description and engage with the neighbourhood's social history as a field of human experience.

3.3 Shaping a shared narrative

As the project evolved, students were invited to reflect on a key question: What stayed with you from all this? They were encouraged to organise sources, impressions and experiences around what they found most significant.

Classroom discussions helped them articulate their own perspectives on Tavros, negotiate different viewpoints and identify which stories, images or memories resonated most strongly with them. Gradually, these reflections came together into a shared narrative (Image 2).

The narrative was anchored in Tavros, but moved across time: from refugee settlement

and workers' housing to industrial life, later migration and the neighbourhood's present. This structure helped students present Tavros not as a sequence of isolated facts, but as a place where different historical layers coexist. The project thus shifted from gathering information to constructing meaning collectively, preparing the ground for the next stage.



Image 2. Students' narrative timeline of Tavros, forming the basis of the podcast (Image: Student work produced by Class C3, 1st Junior High School of Tavros, 2025–2026)

3.4 Transforming narrative into sound

To communicate the ideas that had emerged through the process, we used the European School Radio (ESR) platform. As a school radio network, ESR promotes creativity, communication and student participation in public discourse, making it an appropriate medium for a project centred on students' voices and local heritage. Participation in the ESR Contest, through the podcast A Neighbourhood Unfolding, offered students an authentic audience and a public framework for expression beyond the classroom. The podcast is available on the European School Radio platform (European School Radio 2026a), while the contest results are published separately by ESR (European School Radio 2026b).

The podcast medium strengthened the interpretive dimension of the project because meaning had to be communicated through voice, sound and atmosphere rather than through written text alone. Music became an important narrative element. Students selected sounds and songs associated with different historical periods, from Asia Minor musical traditions and rebetiko (an urban Greek popular music linked to working-class life and marginalised communities), to sounds connected with the 1990s and contemporary urban culture.

Sound design also became part of the interpretive process. Everyday urban sounds - cats, outdoor markets, street ambience, and fragments of ordinary neighbourhood life - were used to create atmosphere and bring scenes to life. At the same time, students were introduced to the logic of audio communication itself. They worked on script rewriting, voice, rhythm, atmosphere, sequencing and basic sound editing with digital tools. Through this collaborative process, individual interpretations gradually evolved into a shared audio narrative.

3.5 Voicing our interpretation

The podcast allowed students' voices to move beyond the limits of the classroom. Their work circulated through the wider European School Radio community, where it received recognition through the contest process: an excellent jury evaluation and voting support from other schools. What began as a school assignment became a piece of student work heard, assessed and valued by audiences beyond the immediate school environment.

A second level of response came from the local community. Local institutions, including the municipality, as well as local media and social media networks, supported the dissemination of the podcast and gave visibility to the students' narrative of Tavros. On a more personal level,

families, classmates and teachers also supported the work, reinforcing a sense for the students that their perspectives mattered.

Overall, the students' narrative entered a wider community of meaning around place, memory and neighbourhood identity.

4. Re-reading the project through the lens of Faro

Revisiting the educational project through the lens of the Faro Convention allows us to highlight two dimensions that resonate strongly with its philosophy of heritage: how students came to recognise meanings in familiar places; and how participation in heritage interpretation became a small practice of active citizenship.

4.1 Heritage as a process of meaning-making

The first dimension concerns the way students gradually began to recognise meanings embedded in their everyday environment.

Particularly relevant to this project is the Faro Convention's understanding of heritage as including the environment shaped by the interaction between people and places over time (Council of Europe 2005, Art. 2a). Seen from this perspective, the apartment blocks, the former slaughterhouses and even everyday streets can be read as traces of successive layers of human activity, memory and experience (Image 3).

Through the lens of Faro, the project reveals how students can begin to recognise an ordinary, even rejected, neighbourhood as a living environment shaped by people, memories and meanings over time. Places that initially appeared boring or insignificant, gradually became connected with stories of migration, labour, housing, and everyday community life.

This matters because connection to heritage cannot be assumed, especially for young people. It can be cultivated through inquiry,

imagination and storytelling. Students were encouraged to identify what interested them and to shape their own interpretation of the neighbourhood.



Image 3. Social housing block in Tavros as an everyday heritage landscape (Image: Evgenia Stavradi)

4.2 Participation in heritage interpretation

The second dimension concerns participation in heritage interpretation. In the Tavros project, participation was not confined to taking part in a classroom activity. Students identified aspects of their local environment, explored them through different sources, interpreted their meanings and ultimately communicated their findings through a shared podcast narrative. This process resonates with Article 12(a) of the Faro Convention, which refers to participation in the "identification, study, interpretation, protection, conservation and presentation" of cultural heritage (Council of Europe 2005).

The educational setting is important here. The project took place within formal schooling, where heritage was not treated as a separate subject, but as a framework for exploring history, place, identity and communication. This also reflects Article 13(a), which refers to the inclusion of the cultural heritage dimension "at all levels of education", "not necessarily as a subject of study in its own right", but as "a fertile

source for studies in other subjects” (Council of Europe 2005).

Through the podcast, students offered a stimulus for wider public attention to Tavros and to their own interpretation of the neighbourhood. This can be understood as a small but meaningful practice of active citizenship: making one’s perspective visible, shareable and open to recognition by others.

5. Conclusion

Our project suggests that cultural heritage can become a powerful educational resource when approached through inquiry, interpretation and communication. In this case, students’ feedback suggests that the experience may have reshaped the way they viewed their neighbourhood: a place initially described as insignificant gradually became visible as a field of stories, memories and meanings. Seen through the lens of Faro, this shift is important because it shows that connection to heritage can be cultivated when young people are given opportunities to interpret and communicate their own perspective on place.

Moreover, the project points to a wider educational possibility: local heritage can support interdisciplinary (STEAM-oriented) and inquiry-based learning by bringing together research, communication, collaboration, creative expression, digital media and storytelling around a real place. By interpreting their own neighbourhood, students also began to recognise their place within wider European stories of migration, work, community, and change.

Ultimately, heritage education begins when familiar places cease to be taken for granted and become open to interpretation.

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The haunting of the stones – An interpretive ‘play book’ for heritage sites in Ireland

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Abstract

For site custodians, it has become obvious that most of Ireland’s heritage sites have an underlying fragility. It can sometimes be challenging to try to understand their significance. This leads to challenges for their presentation, for decision making around the narratives presented by guides and interpretation, whether on site information panels, in paper brochures or online. This paper focuses on a number of significant culturally rich heritage sites chosen for their contested

histories. The prevalence of contested, dark, difficult or dissonant history may be an underlying fact for many of Ireland’s heritage sites. The challenge was to establish what needed to change in terms of positioning new interpretive models at those sites. The resulting analysis sought to develop and devise a series of recommendations, which took the form of an ‘interpretation playbook’. This may have potential for future application, at heritage properties, sites and ensembles beyond these shores.

Keywords

contested history, colonialism, heritage presentation, protection paradigm, conflict sites, othering, Faro ‘suitcase’ model, participatory governance of cultural heritage (PGCH)

Introduction

The Irish context

Static and audio-visual exhibitions were installed for visitors across a range of historic centres and monuments in Ireland from the 1970s to the late 1990s. This was managed by the various government agencies that had stewardship of these sites; this included both unguided and guided monuments and sites, as well as historic houses and estates. Many of these featured exhibitions that had become outdated and needed to evolve and take on new approaches to interpretation. There were a number of catalysts for this. Firstly, new academic research emerged, which was important for understanding the significance of the sites. Secondly, more funding was made available through a number of European Union initiatives, and thirdly, two sites were successfully inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1993 and 1996⁵, respectively.

⁵ Brú na Bóinne was inscribed in December 1993 and Sceilg Mhichíl was inscribed in 1996 as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Meanwhile, controversy surrounded the State's plans to provide Interpretive Centres in Ireland in the 1980s and 1990s, which were 75% EU-funded under a major tourism programme. In the late 1980s, a centre was designed for the Burren region at Mullaghmore in County Clare. In 1993, following a High Court challenge by the Burren Action Group and An Taisce (Deegan, February 2, 2001), the works were deemed to be illegal, unconstitutional and were stopped. The partially built centre was later demolished in 2001, at a cost of IR£850,000 (€1.08m), amid ongoing bitterness that divided the community at the time and for a long time afterwards (Press Association, February 4, 2001)⁶.

In parallel, permission was granted (to be later challenged) for an Interpretive Centre at Luggala, County Wicklow in 1991, but in 1993 a case was taken in the Irish High and Supreme Courts to stop the works, with the judgement following that the development was unauthorised and illegal. Following the granting of a planning application for the works by Wicklow County Council in 1994, it was appealed to An Bord Pleanála⁷ by local environmental activists, and a refusal was issued in 1995. The site was restored to its previous state following expenditure of over IR£1.6m (€2.032m).⁸

In addition to the above factors, the brokering of the Good Friday Agreement (Belfast Agreement) in April 1998 has had a lasting impact. Until the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, there was a long and bitter period of conflict and unrest affecting Northern and Southern Ireland, known as The Troubles. This reflected a sectarian conflict and contested histories on both sides of the border. The

Agreement added potential for a deeper level of understanding around these sites, in the context of contested Irish history. This was the most significant catalyst for change in the evolution of heritage interpretation in Ireland from the 1990s to today. The possibility for contested historic sites to reveal more of their past than would have previously been palatable, and to effectively seek remedies to mend divisions, was now open. The way forward might be to return to these 'haunted' ruins, naves, keeps and sacred stones, and seek to uncover their hidden stories. The question might be, are these stones haunted? Or, are we still haunted by the past that they silently represent?



Figure 1. Map of Ireland showing locations mentioned in this paper (Not to scale)

(Image: Cormac Sweeney Meade)

Markers – Red: Turlough Park, Co. Mayo; **Navy blue:** Boyle Abbey, Co. Roscommon; **Light blue:** Mullaghmore, The Burren, Co. Clare; **Orange:** Oldbridge and Staleen; **Purple:** Luggala, Co. Wicklow; **Pink:** Vinegar Hill, Co. Wexford

Hatched areas – Purple: The Province of Connaught; **Green:** County Clare; **Pink:** County Wicklow

⁶ Press Association, (February 4, 2001). "Demolition of Mullaghmore centre to begin", The Irish Times.

⁷ An Bord Pleanála were the authority that ruled on planning appeals. They are now called An Coimisiún Pleanála (The Planning Commission).

⁸ <https://www.rte.ie/archives/2024/0721/1458181-luggala-visitor-centre/>

Part 1. Literature review

Heritage presentation and the meaning of place

Ebejer (2024) writes extensively about the concept of a sense of place or *genius loci*, which is when a visitor has an emotional reaction upon visiting a particular site or historic monument. According to Richards (2021:286), "People feel connected to places because they have meaning: they are special because of the things that happen there, the experiences we have, and the feelings of identity that they create".

The Faro Convention (2005) was conceived and intended to establish the concept of shared responsibility for cultural heritage between communities, public institutions and elected representatives. This was set against the backdrop of the impact of the Yugoslav Wars that occurred in the 1990s (Shaffrey in O'Connell 2020:3). Ireland has not ratified the Faro Convention. But whether a state adopts the convention or not does not guarantee that the Faro process is adopted (Council of Europe 2021:7). The Heritage Ireland 2030 Policy Document was adopted in 2022 and has as its first theme⁹: Communities and Heritage. It states that, "as enshrined in the Faro Convention, communities are at the frontline in caring for enjoying and sharing those things that are special about their places, their history and local traditions" (Heritage Ireland 2030, 2022:42).

Action number 156 of this policy, under the category of International co-operation and action in protection of heritage, states that the Irish Government will set out to enshrine the principles of the Faro Convention in Irish legislation. It acknowledges the benefits of "furtherance of our cultural heritage and particularly in the context of the European Union" (Heritage Ireland 2030, 2022:75). From the Faro Convention's Role in a Changing

Society document (Council of Europe, 2021:46-47), the critical message is centred on how to go about enacting "transformative social change" (Council of Europe, 2021:46. 16 years on from the publication of the Faro Convention, there is a renewed urgency to focus on "the regeneration of common assets and spaces, those on which survival and collective well-being depend, such as the climate of mutual trust, the perception of safe and healthy environments, diffuse skills, collective celebrations and equal access to the contributions of nature" (Council of Europe, 2021:48).

Reconciliation of conflict sites – Dark heritage

Cultural heritage has played a central role in the socialisation of ideological causes throughout history (Breen, 2023:4). Breen posits that the role of cultural heritage is often as a key player within the concept of ideologically based conflict cycles. This leads to his suggestion on the emergence of the 'othering' process where "competing or alternative societal narratives are constructed to justify and present a position" (Breen, 2023:5).

Moving forward from the idea of a 'protection paradigm' (Breen, 2023, p.5), where the cultural heritage objects, sites or statues transition from being "static repositories of things" (Breen, 2023:5) that memorialise a period of conflict and violence, to becoming instruments of peace and places of learning and interpretation. The way that heritage sites can form the basis for reconciliation is a "challenging and threatening process" due to the fact that "genuine reconciliation will mean some compromise, or at least the rehumanisation of old enemies" (Hamber and Kelly 2005 cited in Vos, 2015:726). Giblin (2014:515) argues that the perception that there is a "a lack or failure of healing" in a

⁹ Heritage Ireland 2030 has three themes, illustrated as Communities and Heritage, Leadership and Heritage and Heritage Partnerships (Heritage Ireland 2030, 2022, p. 9).

post-conflict site context, might mean that it should be redirected to ask the conflicted parties how to engage rather than whether to engage or not in post-conflict site-specific related healing (Hisari et al.:190). Hisari et al. (2022) further indicates that post-war recovery is usually driven by the intervention of international entities, “making the reconstruction and the project itself a complex matter” (Hisari et al.:190). This was the case in the brokering of the Good Friday Agreement, for example. Isakhan & Meskell (2019) are concerned that where there is not sufficient engagement in these instances, that the local community will be subject to “further waves of violence and iconoclasm” (Isakhan & Meskell, 2019:1193).

Contested history

Xiao defines ‘dark heritage’ as consisting of “sites and artefacts associated with tragedy, disaster, and death”, signalling “more than just a categorization of heritage sites” but profoundly representative of “a complex theoretical approach to understanding how societies engage with difficult aspects of their past” (Xiao, 2025, p.1). Within the dark heritage concept, further sub-categories of terminology emerge such as ‘dissonant heritage’, ‘contested heritage’, and ‘difficult heritage’, which are examined to assist in the analysis and understanding of “how societies preserve and interpret sites associated with trauma” (Xiao, 2025).

Brian Graham (1996) argued that during The Troubles from 1968 to 1998 in Northern Ireland¹⁰, cultural artefacts and heritage landscapes were invested with different meanings by socially opposing groups and communities. This embodied the meaning of contested history in the Irish context at that

time: it was multi-layered, divisive and controversial. Graham (1996) discusses this in the case of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, which he used as a case study 30 years ago. He described the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum as having a culturally complex role as “one medium of communication of identity in a contested society” that was undermined, in effect, by the “middle class bias” of those who interacted with it (Graham 1996:10). That article was written shortly before the Good Friday Agreement was brokered. At this period in the history of the island, relics of the past were being “selectively exploited in accordance with contemporary political and cultural demands” Graham (1996:10).

Fast forwarding to 2026 and the recent publication of the A New Era for Irish Tourism - National Tourism Policy Statement December 2025 (Government of Ireland: 2025:57). In Section 5.3, the policy identifies a number of collaborations underway since “Tourism is specifically designated as an area for North-South cooperation under the Good Friday Agreement”. Initiatives covering the next six years (Government of Ireland: 2025, p.9) include marketing the island as a tourist destination internationally, enhancing regional connectivity and supporting communities across the island through the jointly established All Ireland Strategic Tourist Group. Two-way flows of tourists are to be encouraged between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in the South of the island, with ways to develop other opportunities across the entire island to be identified.

There are already brand collaboration initiatives that are beneficiaries of the Shared Island Fund, set up by the Irish Government, namely: 1. The Wild Atlantic Way and The Causeway Coastal

¹⁰ During The Troubles in Northern Ireland (1968-1998) over 3,500 people died in the conflict; more than 50% of these were civilians.

Route; and 2. The Shared Destinations Programme, which includes the sites of Cuilcagh Lakelands, Carlingford Lough and Sliabh Beagh. One recent initiative called Across these Islands: A UK-Ireland Cultural Co-operation Programme partnership (launched in March 2026) is the incredible opportunity for sharing digital experiences, national collections and an ambitious programme of exhibitions and events by the National Libraries across Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England^{11,12}. This embodies the spirit of the Faro Convention Section III, Article 12.

Part 2. Analysis of sites of dark and contested heritage

Context

Cultural heritage and conflict have been intrinsically connected for thousands of years: "Human history is littered with incidents of identity erasure, contested ownership and control of special places and the deliberate destruction of the sacred" (Breen 2023: Introduction 3). One of the most prevalent themes in Ireland's history is that of the colonisation of the island, which began from 1169 CE, and is described as '*the breakpoint*'¹³ in Irish history (Graham & Proudfoot 1993:59). This was not an invasion as such since "The soldiers who came to Ireland in 1169 were not part of a systematic conquest but rather mercenaries enlisted by the deposed king of Leinster (...) in an attempt to regain his territories" (Martin in Graham & Proudfoot 1993: 62).

'Colonialism' is defined by Kiberd as "the planting of settlers, in the land thus seized, for the purpose of expropriating its wealth and for the promotion of the occupiers' trade and culture" Kiberd (1996:5). Kiberd goes on to state that, for the Irish, colonisation took various guises: political rule from London through a civil service administration based in Dublin Castle and economic expropriation by waves of settlers. Most significantly for this discussion was "an accompanying psychology of self-doubt and dependency (...) linked to the loss of economic and political power but also the decline of native language and culture" (Kiberd, 1996:6).

Kealy (2022:61) writes that "value conflicts" arose when many of Ireland's medieval monastic sites and churches became secular heritage objects in the latter half of the 19th century¹⁴. Kealy further makes the point that "in looking to historical events as they impacted on places of religious importance", (...) and how "its causes in the past were different from those of today", it is those very differences that "cast light on how value is ascribed to these inherited structures" and show how sacred space is perceived in the 21st century (Kealy 2022:61). The challenge in interpretation at many of the religious monastic ruins in Ireland is "to protect the territory in which so much human experience is stored" (Kealy 2022:61), and he concludes that this is "to acknowledge the continuity of tradition that animates this landscape" (Kealy 2022:61).

¹¹ Source: <http://bl.uk>

¹² Ironically the Historic Maps of Ireland from pre-1921 are out of copyright in the UK and can be accessed freely in the National Library of Scotland but the Ordnance Survey Maps pre-1921 in the Republic of Ireland are available for use only through payment of a fee and under restricted licencing rules.

¹³ Authors' italics (Graham & Proudfoot 1993: 59).

¹⁴ (Kealy:2022:71) "The Irish Church Act of 1869 was the legislation through which the "Church of Ireland was disestablished and partially disendowed. Some churches

were vested in an entity called the Representative Church Body. Other ecclesiastical sites of architectural and archaeological significance were vested in the Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland for which the category of National Monument was created. These vested sites and buildings could not be used for worship and were to remain ruinous. The first one, the Rock of Cashel in County Tipperary was a palimpsest, being at various times both a religious and secular site, dating from the earliest fortifications built there in the fourth century CE".

Two cases of dark history and two of contested heritage are considered in this section. This gives an insight into the nuances for interpretation that may prove necessary when considering the post-conflict site (Hisari et al.:190). For 21st century communities, that which was termed a “middle class bias” Graham (1996:10) in the 1980s to the 2000s is no longer appropriate in exhibition design or in how choices for objects to be interpreted are made. Xiao (2025) observes that by examining and comparing Western and Chinese “scholastic traditions”, a link can be made between the conceptualisation of the cultural understanding of dark heritage and its management. Xiao (2025) notes that approaching this area of dark heritage through academic research presents points of view that work well alongside the more theoretical concepts.



Figure 2. Boyle Abbey Interior East Postcard (1919)
 Author unknown (Image source: Wikimedia Commons available at:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Boyle_Abbey_Interior_East.jpg)

Case Study 1. Dark history at Boyle Abbey – An ecclesiastical site of conflict intersectionality

Conflict intersectionality is when cultural heritage abuse “is used to justify differing perspectives and political aspirations” (Breen, 2023:9). Cultural heritage is often weaponised

during war and is subject to both targeted destruction and looting. Here is an example in the Irish context that illustrates this fact in successive waves and over a period of over 800 years (Breen 2023: 13), where a long series of aggressors weaponised the Abbey.

Boyle Cistercian monastery was founded in the 12th century by monks from Mellifont Abbey as a daughter house, and under the patronage of the local ruling family, the MacDermots, Lords of Moylurg of Roscommon. It was one of the most powerful of the early Cistercian foundations in Ireland and among the foremost in Connaught. In 1202, it was sacked by the Anglo-Norman Lord, William de Burgh, and his armed forces. In the Annals of Loch Cé it was reported that “no structure in the monastery was left without breaking and burning” (OPW Visitors’ Guide, n.d.).

In 1235, it was raided by English forces. By the 15th century, the abbey was in decline, and in 1534, the Act of Suppression was passed during the reign of Henry VIII. It was to be the singular cause of the Dissolution of the Monasteries and the transfer of their property and assets to the Crown across Ireland. Boyle Abbey remained intact until 1584, due to its remoteness. In 1589, it transferred to William Usher and from 1599 it was under military occupation and was then known as Boyle Castle. Cromwellian forces wreaked devastation when they occupied the abbey in 1659. It was further mutilated during the following centuries, and it was used to accommodate a military garrison. It became a National Monument¹⁵ in 1892 and is open to the public every Summer. The Abbey is a well-preserved ruin and has an atmosphere as a place of reverence. But there is unequivocal evidence in its ruinous walls, of an extremely violent past. Boyle Abbey has a number of unusual

¹⁵ Boyle Abbey is National Monument No. 167 in the guardianship of the Irish State.

architectural features, which suggest that it was subject to less austerity than other Irish Cistercian churches of the Order. There is still evidence of this in the eccentric masonry carvings that survive in its walls to this day, a fact that in itself could be further explored as a theme related to this and other Irish Cistercian sites.



Figure 3. Illustration drawn by George Cruikshank (1792-1878), from History of the Irish Rebellion in 1798; with memoirs of the Union, and Emmett's insurrection in 1803, by Maxwell, William Hamilton. Original held and digitised by the British Library. (Image source: Wikimedia Commons. Available at: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MAXWELL\(1845\)_p184_Defeat_at_Vinegar_Hill.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MAXWELL(1845)_p184_Defeat_at_Vinegar_Hill.jpg))

Case Study 2. Dark history of the 1798 Rebellion Vinegar Hill Site¹⁶

For a haunting story of dark history, one example is Vinegar Hill Windmill, County Wexford. This is a site which embodies “how societies preserve and interpret sites associated with trauma” (Xiao, 2025). There is extreme brutality described on both sides in the unfolding action of the 1798 rebellion. At Vinegar Hill, which overlooks the town of Enniscorthy, Irish insurgents camped as a rendezvous point, not a stronghold. The rebels flew ‘green standards’ from the windmill

Pakenham (1978:293) to stand up for the cause for freedom from “tithes and taxes and an oppressive government” (Pakenham, 1969/1978:18). Following the battle, the standards were torn down by forces led by General Lake, who had attacked with an army of 13,000 men (Harbison (1992:339).

One fact that still limits interpretation at these sites of memory is the lack of written records on the rebel side in contrast to the availability of a profusion of records for the loyalist side. According to Pakenham (1969/1978:18), “...sources are embarrassingly rich on the loyalist side – ten thousand odd documents in the Rebellion Papers from Dublin Castle” but on the rebels’ side he notes that “lack of sources make it impossible to do justice to the movement”. Pakenham writes further of the tragedy of the rebellion, which in reality became “a ferocious civil war”¹⁷. With their illusions, the Irish peasantry were most tragically “intoxicated by the fumes of the French revolution” but “quite unprepared for war” (Pakenham 1969/1978:18). That site still bears witness to that event and interpretation should be mindful and cognisant of the nuances of the tragedy, misconceptions and violence that took place there, on both sides of the conflict¹⁸.

¹⁶ Vinegar Hill is National Monument No. 392, in State guardianship.

¹⁷ Italics are by the author (Pakenham, 1978).

¹⁸ Thomas Pakenham’s 1969 publication on this subject is meticulously researched.



Figure 4. Officers of the 5th (Service) Battalion, Connaught Rangers, at Gallipoli, 1915.

Author unknown. (Image source: Wikimedia Commons. Available at:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:5th_Connaught_Rangers_Gallipoli_1915.jpg)

Case Study 3. Contested heritage in 'othering' as defined by the case of the Connaught Rangers

In the interests of addressing the lack of perspective or 'otherness' associated with contested histories, should it not be our aim to achieve inclusiveness by recording and preserving their stories? The Connemara Heritage and History Centre near Clifden in County Galway did not feature the Connaught Rangers' stories, even though they were set up in Connaught in 1793 during the aftermath of the French Revolution (McCarthy 2005:82)¹⁹. McCarthy argues that there are complex reasons for this. But if their side of the story was not visible in sites of remembrance, like a local heritage and history centre, then they will not be encountered, understood or remembered by the community. Social and economic factors influenced Irish soldiers' decisions to fight in Irish Regiments of the British Army (McCarthy 2005:82). These individuals were not conscripted but had *volunteered*²⁰ (Jeffrey, 2000:9-10), which in itself illustrates that there were political and patriotic reasons, as well as the promise of

Home Rule, at play among the justifications made to enlist (Denman 1992:16).

McCarthy notes that these unspoken histories of the local population who fought in the First World War in the British Army and Navy, "disturb the simplified narratives of Irish history that are prioritised for consumption in the tourism and heritage industries in modern Ireland and more generally in popular culture" (McCarthy 2005:82). 1198 Connaught Rangers soldiers died in the Great War, of which 1,871 were enlisted men and some were from neighbouring provinces (Soldiers Died in the First World War Digital Database in McCarthy 2005:81). Overall, it is estimated that of the approximately 210,000 that had enlisted in Irish units fighting in the Great War, between 25,000 and 35,000 were killed in action (McCarthy 2005:80). Expressions of their Irish identity was recorded in the memoirs of survivors like Major Bryan Cooper in 1918. In the case of Gallipoli, for example, Major Cooper observed soldiers of the 5th Connaught Rangers of the 10th (Irish) Division attempting to, "emblazon their uniforms with 'shamrock badges', much like the Munster Fusiliers who 'went into action with a green shamrock on each arm just below the shoulder'" (Cooper, 1918/1993:35 in McCarthy 2005:80). The people of Galway also donated an ambulance to the 1st Connaught Rangers in 1915, which is a little-known fact (Public Record Office, Kew MS.WO95/3923 in McCarthy 2005:81). A stronger acknowledgement of the Irish soldiers that are buried in the Somme needs to be made for the achievement of 'inclusiveness' (Montague 1989:40-41), which is important in the social and historical cultural landscape of 21st century Ireland.

¹⁹ The Connaught Rangers were disbanded in 1922, along with four other Irish Infantry Regiments and One Cavalry Regiment (McCarthy 2005:84).

²⁰ Author's italics (Jeffrey, 2000:9-10).



Figure 5. Turlough Park Country Life Museum, County Mayo, showing Turlough House on the higher ground on the right, photographed on 21 August 2004 by Robert Bone Robert Bone / Country Life Museum / CC BY-SA 2.0 (Image: Country Life Museum - [geograph.org.uk - 113145](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Country_Life_Museum_-_geograph.org.uk_-_113145.jpg) Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Country_Life_Museum_-_geograph.org.uk_-_113145.jpg This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic license)

Case Study 4. Contested heritage at the Museum of Country Life, Turlough, County Mayo.

"Ideas regarding the role of the museum have become increasingly contentious. In the last fifteen years, scholars have pointed to ways in which states (especially imperialist states) use museums to showcase looted artefacts, to document their geographic expansion, to present themselves as the guardians of national treasure, and to educate citizens and subjects" (Ostow, 2014:abstract).

The siting of the first purpose-built folk-life museum in the Irish State, opening to the public in 2001, was an old aristocratic estate in County Mayo, previously owned by the Fitzgerald family. The brief included the restoration of the family home, a 19th century Victorian Gothic Mansion²¹, which was not planned to be opened entirely to the public, but instead two rooms on the ground floor were to be presented as Victorian era set pieces, with the rest of the house to be used as staff offices and meeting rooms. The estate had a chequered history of its

own, related to the local history of the family as landlords to their tenant farmers. The historical significance of the demesne was not included in the visitor offer, it being emphasised as not relevant or part of the story appropriate for the visitor. The stable building and courtyards were designated as support services areas and a café, and were not included as part of the exhibition. The National Museum of Ireland Folklife Collection was established in the 1930s in tandem with a Folklife Commission that was created by the Irish Free State to assess the disappearing ways of life across the country. Some specially commissioned examples of traditional crafts were preserved as part of that initiative. These included artefacts and clothing that had been kept in storage since the 1930s and had never been put on display to the public until this museum opened in the early 2000s. Throughout the interpretive design process, the brief required an emphasis on ways to interact with the visitor, a first for the National Museum of Ireland (MacCarthy 2005:212). Touchscreens and flip books were included to assist the visitor in understanding the context of the objects. Unbelievably, the exhibits were restricted to the period 1850 to 1950 (MacCarthy 2005:212) due to the limits of what was in the Folklife Collection at that time. The local community in Mayo was not consulted in any public forum when the exhibition was being designed (MacCarthy 2005:212). In addition, the National Museum of Ireland has since been accused of "failing to communicate an overall sense of Irish history" there and for a continued focus on the object per se while ignoring the interpretive framework which should be communicated to explain the prevailing historical context (MacCarthy 2005:213). "The political background to the period is isolated (...) and usually overlooked on the guided tours" (MacCarthy 2005:212).

project in the late 1990's and early 2000's focusing mainly on conservation and interventions to Turlough Park House and stable building renovation works.

²¹ Turlough Park House was designed by Thomas Newenham Deane in 1865 for the Fitzgerald family. This author was a member of the design team on the Museum

Part 3. The interpretive playbook

The outline structure of this section references the structure of the Myers and Hansen (2024) methodology for Inventorying and Surveying for Heritage Management. It is partly applicable here when considering ways of rethinking interpretation. Key considerations discussed here are: lifelong education and training outreach; digital preservation; and participatory governance of culture and cultural heritage (PGCH).

Key considerations:

1. Lifelong education and training outreach

Educational opportunities for “young people and the disadvantaged” are set out as aims for signatories to the Faro Convention (Article 12 d) in order to promote to them the value of their cultural heritage. One very innovative example from 2019 engages communities by employing digital storytelling mechanisms (Bonacini 2019). The idea is to use a participatory model to engage local groups and create new partnerships with cultural institutions in their locality. In the world of ‘Edu-communication’ (Rivero et al. 2019:450), technology has revolutionised the way museums and heritage sites are presented to the public and how they are perceived by the outside world.

The technologies are meant to provide “participation and empowerment” (Cabero & Barroso, 2015). In some examples highlighted in Romania and Morocco, cultural tourism projects have been funded in order to assist local groups to protect their heritage (Rivero et al. 2019:455). Local communities have also learned the power of ‘going viral’ (Rivero et al. 2019:455). Rivero makes the point that this is not so much as to be sensationalist, rather to “muster the force needed to keep an issue in focus for a period of time to accomplish a desired outcome” (Rivero et al. 2019:455). It could be argued that going to the social media platforms to highlight an issue

works even more effectively in the post-Covid-19 era, since that observation was made. This is definitely an effective iteration of a “community of place (linked by a shared geographical location) or of interest (connected by a shared interest in any given aspect of heritage)” (O’Connell 2020:3) that expanded in the years that followed during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Digital preservation

“(…) history is also malleable, easily bent and twisted to tell half a story, or a fully-fledged lie. In contrast, buildings, ruins and artefacts – the material remains of the past – are perceived to offer solid anchor points for history, yet they too can be as corruptible as the written word, either in their conception or their interpretation. The presence of fake heritage and the increasing opportunities for it to flourish in a technology-rich world are considerable” (Darlington 2020:23).

In relation to Section III Article 14 of the Faro Convention – Cultural Heritage and the information society, there is the issue of digital preservation of heritage. This should not mean just simply the uploading of material onto the internet, i.e. photographs, sound clips or reconstructions, for example. It should also involve the development of “heritage based cyber communities that seek to protect heritage, stress its value, make it approachable (...)” (Rivero et al. 2019:467), because they feel that their local heritage is in a poor state of conservation, or there are threats to it from third parties, or there is neglect (Rivero et al. 2019:467). It may also fall into the category of contested or dark heritage. There is an example concerning The Waterford Memories Project, in which an “oral history driven study in digital humanities, publicly documenting survivor narratives of the Magdalene Laundries and Industrial Schools in the South-East of Ireland”,

was conducted²² (O'Mahoney2022:949). In these instances, stories can become "fossilised and continue to perpetuate the silencing of survivors; it is, therefore, essential to consider how the openly available digital testimony contributes to the framing of cultural discourse around our history of coercive confinement in Ireland" (O'Mahoney 2022:949).

3. Participatory governance of culture and cultural heritage (PGCH)

The case for this model is increasingly discussed at European policy level by the Council of Europe and the European Union (Iaione et al. 2022). Ideally, there would be a multi-agency governance model that is sustainable and has the ability to respond to and be embedded in local and community needs (Iaione et al. 2022:1). The idea is that public and community participants would operate within a shared platform and create a framework that would focus on their joint governance of cultural heritage together (Iaione et al. 2022:1). The Faro Convention preamble refers to "rights relating to cultural heritage" being "inherent in the right to participate in cultural life"²³.

Participatory governance of cultural heritage can be undertaken in the structure of "commons-inspired partnerships" (Iaione et al. 2022:16) and multi-stakeholder involvement. The public interest would have to be maintained and embedded throughout this whole process. The framework of legal mechanisms and stakeholder membership could include, for example, a philanthropic Foundation, non-governmental organisations and institutional professionals with resources and dedication to conduct projects like the reuse of heritage buildings or the "valorization of underused cultural assets" (Iaione et al. 2022:16). This could assist community needs and contribute to local

economic stimuli. State and municipal support would be vital for the success of the PGCH mechanism and these agencies would be required to provide professional and technical support. This is described by Boniotti as a "P4; a public, private, people partnership for cultural heritage" (Boniotti 2021 in Iaione et al. 2022:16) where knowledge transfer and legal structures are built up for the benefit of all. This is in addition to the provision of management skills and a focus on the achievement of sustainability targets and "an entrepreneurial attitude within the organization (sic) itself" (Iaione et al. 2022:16).

Part 4. Conclusion

In order to develop inclusive approaches, four recommendations have been identified to create an easily adaptable interpretation playbook to be set out as follows:

6. review challenges;
7. seize opportunities;
8. incorporate community engagement; and,
- most importantly,
9. change the narrative.

It would be most effective to consider it on a site-specific basis.

Recommendation 1: Review challenges

Regarding cultural diversity, it is necessary to refer to the Stenou (2002) analysis of UNESCO's publication²⁴ on this subject, in order to appreciate the context of how this area has evolved over the last 25 years. In contrast to this, the 2005 Faro Convention acknowledges the relationship and connectivity between cultural heritage and diversity, but focuses more on how (author's italics) cultural heritage can form the basis of sustainable practices to generate economic and social platforms. This is to enable diverse communities to survive. Protection of

²² In Ireland, the last of the Magdalen Laundries only closed in 1996 (O'Mahoney 2022:949).

²³ Preamble in the Faro Convention.

²⁴ Stenou, K.(ed.): UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. Cultural Diversity Series No. 1, Paris: UNESCO, 2002.

cultural diversity is increasingly challenged, as globalisation takes an ever-tighter hold on the world's diverse cultural communities (Vicha 2014:33). This is in part due to the prevalence and increasing influence of the Information Society (Brown, 2005). In writing about the protection of Intangible Cultural Property, Brown reviews policy initiatives that include the call for intangible heritage to be inventoried, then following that process, to be removed for the public domain and given back to the "exclusive control of its putative creators" (Brown, 2005: Abstract).

Recommendation 2: Seize opportunities

In 2021, an initiative called Faro in a suitcase (Carroll, 2021) was notable in its innovation. Civil society was described as the public sphere where people develop agency in the presence of cultural diversity in co-existence (Ranson, 2014). This 'suitcase' concept included the staging of a cultural act with the potential for it to be "a creative expression of civil society" (Carroll 2021:82). This owes and acknowledges the inspiration of a Derrida and Malabou travelogue, referenced in Carroll (2021:81) from 1999 where "postcards, writings and thoughts were exchanged" between communities (Carroll (2021): 81). Carroll further suggests that, "community art dovetails with the Faro Convention's call for work at community level to create the conditions that address citizens' non-participation in, and alienation from, their cultural heritage". During the Covid-19 pandemic, this programme was central to discussions about the act of archiving as a way of "uncovering the genius loci, namely the unique and distinctive identity of a place that people call home" (Carroll 2021:83). It also owes its genesis to the 'Invisible Archives' research workshop held in Marseille, France, supported by the Council of Europe, Manifesta 13 and

Hotel du Nord (Carroll 2021:83) where early ideas of the 'suitcase' archiving featured. The idea was that participants would assemble material in a suitcase, including elements that are representative evidence of a meaningful or evocative cultural rights experience and send it to a recipient that was their partner under a participatory initiative, such as the United Cities Local Government Network's Rome Charter²⁵.

In the prototype example shared, under the theme of Urban Development, a day of protest in April 2019 was captured in maps, drawings, the score of an Opera (with translation into French), and other ephemera²⁶. This represented the community's action to safeguard a historic urban landscape along the river Nemunas, against a proposed road development project²⁷. It was sent to Marseille, France, to await a return suitcase from that community in 2021. Reading the subtext, the Lithuanian suitcase contents represented deeper realities, including a lack of consultation and undemocratic urbanisation practices in evidence there in 2019, as well as highlighting the need for more active participation by citizens in decision-making around their local environment. It also reflected the need to nurture a culture of "co-operation and responsible citizenship" (Carroll 2021:88).

In its essence, the suitcase proposal was trying to "access culturally, socially and environmentally diverse practices and networks" (Carroll 2021: 89). This concept could in time lead to the initiation of many other suitcase projects across Europe and beyond, to nurture a generation of new cultural interchanges where the community would be recognised as rights holders for access, consultation and participation and as contributors to cultural life in a continuously evolutionary way (Carroll 2021:90). If this idea was applied in the Irish

²⁵ The Rome Charter (2020).

²⁶ The full list of contents of the suitcase are on p.88 ((Carroll (2021): 88).

²⁷ This was planned for the district of Šančiai in Kaunas, Lithuania.

context, even contested cultural heritage could be explored and lead to mutual recognition of various rights holders for the same site, like the Oldbridge Estate, site of the Battle of the Boyne, which is a site still haunted by its past stories, even today.

Recommendation 3: Incorporate community engagement

One important example of community engagement was the Archaeological Investigations Project at Staleen and Oldbridge, Donore, County Meath (Wilkins, 2022). Although outside the core area of the World Heritage Site (Wilkins, 2022:12), this area is a microcosm of diversity of archaeology and a mirror of the Neolithic monumentality within the Newgrange floodplain core World Heritage area. It had as its Aim 5, an element of public engagement referencing in principle Article 12a of the Faro Convention. The project consisted of setting up a structured field school, with students and community members selected to take part in the excavations at a ratio of 1:4 of non-archaeologists to archaeologists on site. These participants were specially trained and mentored in archaeological techniques in excavation. In tandem, reflecting the intention of the project to involve the public as much as possible, a small-scale pilot scheme was set up to provide online social media information to explain progress on site as they worked (Wilkins, 2023:33). Following the completion of the project, the rate of public engagement online was measured, and found to have had a positive effect on participants, both nationally and internationally. From gathered survey data, it emerged that 29% of the participants from the online community stated that they had never participated in an archaeological activity beforehand (Wilkins, 2022:49-50). This led to an appetite for engagement with the World Heritage Site and an interest in being included on complex conservation questions, as well as an eagerness to be involved in accredited

training activities in the future, such as the way this one was structured (Wilkins, 2022:33).

Recommendation 4: Change the narrative

More in-depth historical analysis and research is needed. The Faro Convention sets out the criteria for addressing Shared responsibility for cultural heritage and public participation in Section III Article 13 - Cultural Heritage and Knowledge. Harvey argued 25 years ago that there was a need to “makes space for a longer historical analysis of the development of heritage as a process” (Harvey, 2001:319) and that a more in-depth analysis of sites and their histories would allow insights into how one interprets “identity, power and authority throughout society” (Harvey, 2001:319).

Making space for heritage analysis is even more important now with the advent of new, faster technologies and artificial intelligence advancements. Understanding the importance of gatekeepers and the gathering of oral histories is also very significant. The care and sensitivity needed to work with them cannot be underestimated, as there are often complexities around “inter subjectivity and positionality within gatekeeper relationships” (Mason, S. 2026), and Mason also concludes that in post-conflict research, “one must center an ethics of care when cultivating relationships within and beyond the interview space”.

The Faro Convention takes a wider view of cultural heritage than other conventions have previously done. Under Section II Article 7 d of the Faro Convention, it asserts that when contradictory values are placed on heritage, that processes for conciliation are set up to deal fairly with them. With regard to communication with the public on the significance of sites and monuments, heritage enhancement should be promoted more intensely (Faro Convention Section III, Article 12a). Activities centred on sites and monuments should be held and organised

to occur as part of heritage promotional schemes such as Museum Night, European Heritage Days organised by the Council of Europe and the European Commission, and the annual International Day for Monuments and Sites, organised through ICOMOS International (Florjanowicz (ed.), 2015:153).

As set out by Kath & Buzato, a place is not verified as being real by what visitors expect it to be, rather by going there and “giving it meaning from ‘inside’ here and now and across history” (Kath & Buzato 2023:33). Tuan (1979:387 in Kath & Buzato 2023) describes ‘place’ as a unique element with significance which “incarnates the experiences and aspirations” of a community and is a “reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning”. Recent focus on the culture of memory make it more challenging to present sites and their stories. Archaeological sites in particular, which are preserved in-situ, are witnesses to the past and act as “commemorations of symbolic and mythic associations which derive meaning from the aura of authenticity provided by material relics” (Ireland, 2012:26). They remain haunted by their past but now stand ready to be understood, shared and protected.

“Let us declare an end to all narrowness, in our thoughts at least. [We] should be able to accept, or listen to, the many voices, agreeable and disturbing, which haunt our land” (Montague, 1989).

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Historic wine cellars of eastern Croatia: Art-historical and architectural perspectives, and women as heritage mediators

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Abstract

Historic wine cellars in eastern Croatia represent an important, though often overlooked, segment of architectural and cultural heritage. This paper analyses selected cellars in Slavonia, Baranja and Syrmia from art-historical, architectural and spatial perspectives, with particular attention to their functionality, materiality, typology, position within the settlement, and links with manorial and ecclesiastical estates. The cellars are approached as functional spaces with layered meanings, shaped by long-term use and by the everyday practices of vine growing and winemaking.

The theoretical framework of the paper includes the Faro Convention, which understands heritage as a set of values recognised and transmitted by communities. Within this framework, the paper investigates the role of women as contemporary heritage mediators. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with five women who work in the historic wine cellars, the study examines how they recognise the values of these spaces and how they translate them into forms that can be understood by the public through promotion, guiding, education and communication with visitors.

The paper shows that changes in the meaning and function of historic wine cellars do not imply the loss of their heritage values. On the contrary, their architectural, historical, identity-related and experiential values continue in contemporary forms of interpretation. By comparing expert interpretations with the experiences of the interviewees, the paper confirms that historic wine cellars are at once built heritage and living spaces of cultural mediation.

Keywords

historic wine cellars, eastern Croatia, Faro Convention, heritage interpretation and mediation, women in the wine sector

1. Introduction

Historic wine cellars in eastern Croatia represent an important, though still insufficiently researched and interpreted, segment of built heritage. Although they were created in the 13-19th centuries as functional spaces intended for the processing, maturation and storage of wine, their value extends far beyond the utilitarian dimension. They are at the same time architectural and art-historical structures, parts of economic and manorial complexes, and important elements in the spatial organisation of settlements and in the cultural landscape of Slavonia, Baranja and Syrmia. Their position in relation to castles, churches, farm buildings, vineyards and transport routes shows that they played an important role not only in the history of winemaking but also in shaping rural and urban environments.

Starting from an understanding of the cellar as layered heritage, the paper analyses these spaces from art-historical, architectural and spatial perspectives, with particular emphasis on their contemporary interpretation. The theoretical framework includes the Faro Convention, which views heritage as a set of values recognised, sustained and transmitted by communities. In this sense, historic wine cellars are considered not merely as material remains of the past, but also as spaces in which meanings are continuously shaped through practice, use and interpretation.

The research examines the role of women in the interpretation of historic wine cellars and the values they communicate as heritage mediators. Based on an analysis of five selected cellars and interviews with five women working in the wine and cultural sectors, the paper explores how the historical, spatial and identity-related values of these places are conveyed to the public today and how wine, space, history and the experience of place are connected through everyday professional practice.

2. Theoretical and methodological framework

Most research that examines the role of women in the business world focuses on gender differences and representation. From Haslett (1941), who recorded a positive trend in women's labour from 1914 to 1941, to more recent data on gender statistics in leadership roles, we can trace a rise in the presence of women, although gender balance in leading positions has still not been achieved (Ko et al. 2015). Research in the wine industry has shown that women are least represented in leadership positions, while they are most strongly represented in marketing (Galbreath 2015). Alonso et al. (2021) emphasises that women in the wine industry demonstrate an ability to learn quickly, adapt and progress, while also highlighting professionalism, attention to detail, inclusiveness and stronger interpersonal skills. By contrast, Arena et al. (2015) warns that the mere presence of women in leading positions does not necessarily have a positive effect; more important is the so-called critical mass of women in management structures.

Previous research that connects wine tourism, heritage and visitor experience also contributes to this paper. Dawson et al. (2011) showed that the distinctiveness of wine regions arises not only from wine quality, but also from the region's reputation, environmental features, unique stories and the heritage of place, with consumers linking wine to their own experience of the winery. Particularly relevant is the study by Settimini (2020), which shows, in the case of the Langhe, Roero and Monferrato landscape in Italy, that women were not directly involved in the identification of heritage values but they "have their place within this landscape and they challenge gender stereotypes (and social injustices) through everyday practices". This wine-growing landscape in the Piedmont region was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2014 as evidence of the historical tradition

of grape cultivation and winemaking, which makes it a particularly suitable example for reflecting on the relationship between heritage, wine and gender representation (Settimini 2020; UNESCO 2014).

These studies show that, in the wine industry, questions of gender, professional roles, heritage qualities and modes of interpretation are variables on which the overall presentation of a wine destination depends. Therefore, this paper engages a theoretical framework that views heritage not merely as a material remnant of the past, but as a set of values recognised, interpreted and transmitted by communities and individuals. In this paper, the Faro Convention serves as an interpretive framework because it recognises heritage as a resource inherited from the past that people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions, whilst giving particular importance to the concept of the heritage community, that is, a group of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage and wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit them to future generations (Council of Europe 2005a; 2005b).

Such an approach is important for the theme of historic wine cellars because their value derives not only from age, structural preservation or original function, but also from the meanings attributed to them by communities, employees and visitors. Equally important is the participatory dimension of the Faro Convention, which emphasises the community's involvement in the identification, interpretation, preservation and presentation of heritage.

In accordance with this theoretical framework, mediation is understood here as the set of practices through which expert knowledge about heritage and the experience of heritage are conveyed to audiences. Interpretation,

therefore, is not only the provision of information, but also the shaping of a relationship between place, story and visitor; in other words, the shaping of the experience of place. In the case of historic wine cellars, such practices include storytelling, guiding, marketing, educational content and the experience of a visit. The ICOMOS Charter (2008) emphasises that interpretation and presentation should provide physical and intellectual access to the site, while Nowacki (2021) defines interpretation as an educational activity that uses various tools, such as guided tours, spoken explanation, interpretive panels and other forms of mediation. Frost et al. (2020) further shows that heritage, authenticity and storytelling are important tools in the presentation of a winery and in communication with visitors. In this sense, women employed in wineries may be viewed as heritage mediators, because through their work, they participate in transmitting the meanings of historic wine cellars to different audiences.

Women are relevant to this paper because they are professionally present in the wine sector and, in their work, connect the product, the place, history and the public. Their roles include marketing, oenology (the study of wine and wine making), management, tourism, presentation and communication with visitors, and it is through such activities that historic wine cellars enter the contemporary public sphere.

This paper analyses the experiences of five interviewees as five examples of contemporary heritage mediation. The expert component of the study consists of an architectural-spatial and art-historical analysis of five examples of historic wine cellars in eastern Croatia, specifically the sites at which the interviewees work and which, at the same time, illustrate spatial and cultural patterns. The analysis focuses on the architecture of the cellars — style, construction, age, interior, aesthetics and design — as well as

on the historical context of their origin and development, including prominent people connected with complexes and the interpretation of the space and its values.

The qualitative part of the research is based on semi-structured interviews with five women employed in wineries connected to historic wine cellars. The interview covered three thematic units: professional pathway, perceptions of the historical values of the cellars, and education and support. The questionnaire consisted of ten questions with twelve subsidiary questions (see Appendix I), and the estimated completion time was 30–45 minutes. Meetings with the participants were held in person during February 2026, and their answers were subsequently collected in written form by email. An appropriate contact person was identified at seven locations, and five women submitted their responses. This approach does not constitute representative or statistical research; rather, it offers an exploratory qualitative insight into patterns of meaning and mediation in specific professional experiences. Visits to wineries, informal conversations and situational observation further contributed to understanding the context. Such an approach makes it possible to analyse the cellars simultaneously as built and spatial heritage, as cultural heritage, and as spaces of contemporary interpretation.

3. Historic wine cellars of eastern Croatia as built and spatial heritage

Slavonia, Baranja and Syrmia are among the most important wine-growing areas in Croatia, with a tradition extending back almost 2,000 years. Viticulture and winemaking were of great importance to economic development, especially on the estates of Slavonian and European noble families such as the Janković, Mihalović, Pejačević and Adamović families, Prince Eugene of Savoy, the Eltz family, the Hillebrand von Prandau/Normann-Ehrenfels

family, the Odescalchi family and the Schaumburg-Lippe family, but also on ecclesiastical estates – episcopal, eparchial or those belonging to religious communities such as the Jesuit estate in Kutjevo (Najcer Sabljak & Lučevnjak 2020; Turkalj Podmanicki et al. 2022). This economic activity left a strong material trace, especially in the architecture of wine cellars and associated buildings used for grape processing and wine production. Historic wine cellars were built from the 13th to the 19th centuries, often as integral parts of aristocratic or ecclesiastical estates, and their value is not exhausted by their utilitarian function, but also includes aesthetic, historical, cultural, educational and scientific values (Vrbanus 2020; Najcer Sabljak & Lučevnjak 2020). Previous research has more often focused on castles and representative complexes, while farm buildings and wine cellars have remained less thoroughly studied, even though they played an important role in shaping the social, economic and cultural history of the area and its landscape (Turkalj Podmanicki et al. 2022).

Large estates include numerous utilitarian buildings on their properties — wine cellars, glasshouses, orangeries, manor houses, silos and farm buildings — which still mark the landscape of the region today. Since estates played a significant role in shaping settlements through organised colonisation, the establishment of vineyards, the clearing of forests and the parcelling of land (Damjanović 2021: 163), wine cellars cannot be understood in isolation, but only in relation to the settlement, the vineyard, the castle or other estate seat, as well as roads and distribution routes. It is for this reason that, before undertaking an individual art-historical and architectural analysis, it is necessary to briefly consider the urban characteristics of their locations within the settlement.

Urban position is not merely the physical location of a building, but also an indicator of the circumstances in which the settlement arose, of spatial relations, economic functions and traditions that directed its development. The central, peripheral or detached position of a building, its relationship to the street, to the terrain and to associated structures, shape both the perception and the significance of the building. A survey of historic wine cellars in Slavonia, Baranja and Syrmia has shown several types of urban layout that can be considered through three basic layers: the relationship to the settlement centre, the position in the street, and the relationship to associated buildings.

3.1. The Ilok wine cellar

Ilok is a linear settlement on the right bank of the Danube, developed on an elevated loess plateau, with an organic street network directly connected to the vineyard sites of Fruška Gora. The historic centre is formed by a fortified nucleus with the Franciscan church, monastery and Odescalchi Castle. The historic cellars are situated on the western edge of this centre, set back from and lower than the street. Their particularity lies in the fact that the cellar begins beneath the south wing of the castle and extends towards the western edge of the complex, ending in an entrance cut into the retaining wall, thereby linking the representative castle complex with the urban fabric.

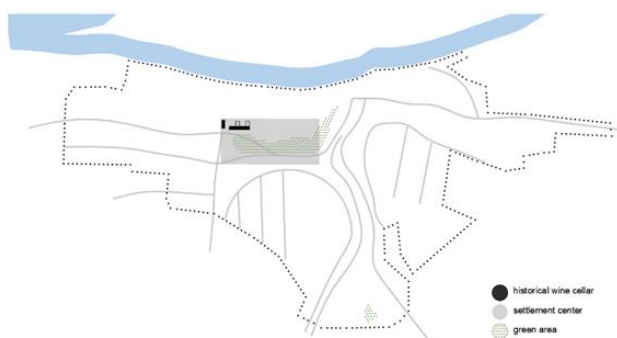


Figure 1. Ilok, based on the 1903 cadastral plan
(Image: Dina Stober interpretation)

The historic wine cellars of Ilok are a particularly valuable example of manorial wine architecture integrated into the Odescalchi castle complex. Their nucleus consists of a medieval cellar from the time of Nicholas of Ilok, situated beneath the south wing of the castle, the footprint of which determined the dimensions of the later south wing of the new castle (Marković et al. 2001: 33).

Typologically, the complex is distinctive because it combines a cellar beneath a building with later extensions that, from the 18th century onwards, continued beyond the castle footprint and, by the beginning of the 19th century, took the form of a brick-built structure embedded in the terrain (Mušura 1999: 55; Batorović 1988: 124). Its development culminated with the addition of an entrance designed in the historicist manner in 1890, while the stratified, multi-layered character of the complex constitutes one of its key values. Its art-historical significance is further underscored by its association with Nicholas of Ilok and the Odescalchi family, as well as by its inclusion in a wider economic complex with the vintner's house, the granary and the Small Cellar (Marković et al. 2001; Tomičić et al. 2007; Šćitaroci & Šćitaroci 1998: 172–173).



Figure 2. Ilok, wine cellar interior (Image: Dina Stober)

3.2. The Daruvar wine cellar beneath the castle

Daruvar is a town of compact form and a relatively regular street layout. Janković Castle, with the cellar beneath its south wing, is situated on an elevated site within a landscaped park complex outside the narrower town centre, so the cellar's significance is determined primarily by its relationship to the castle and the park, rather than to the street frontage.

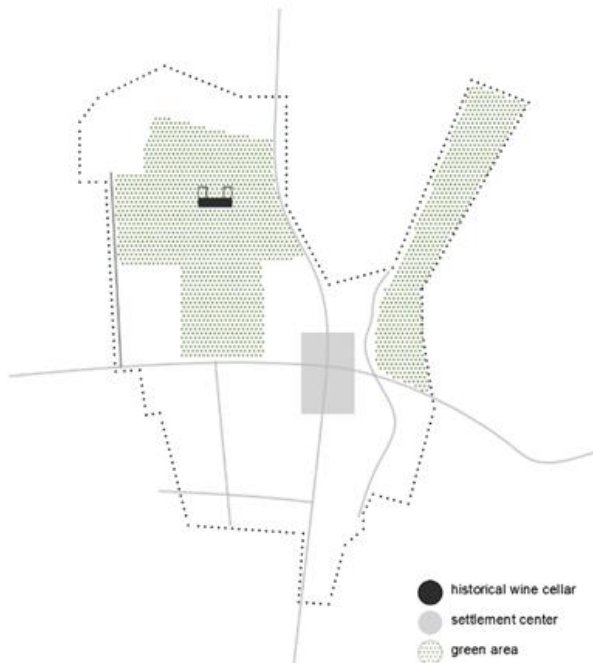


Figure 3. Daruvar, based on the 1861 cadastral plan (Image: Dina Stober interpretation)

The cellar of Janković Castle in Daruvar represents a classic type of manorial cellar located beneath the building itself, that is, an integral part of the representative late Baroque castle built between 1771-1777 and renovated in 1868-1870 in the spirit of Classicism (Šćitaroci & Šćitaroci 1998: 118; Popadić 2018). The internal organisation of the space, divided by piers into two parallel aisles with Bohemian cap and Prussian vaults, demonstrates the functional and structural thoughtfulness of a brick-built architecture intended for the production and maturation of wine. Despite later interventions, the space has retained the essential features of

its historic structure and the continuity of its wine-related function.



Figure 4. Daruvar, wine cellar interior (Image: Petar Puhmajer)

3.3. The Spahija Cellar in Pakrac

Pakrac is a linear settlement developed along the Pakra River, with the main street as its principal urban axis. The Spahija Cellar is situated in the very centre of the settlement, with its main volume aligned parallel to the main street, while the second wing extends beneath the terrain and the later building of the Hrvatski dom. The monumental nature of the building and its position on the building line make it an important feature of the main street and a landmark within the longitudinal centre of the town.



Figure 5. Pakrac, based on the 1862 cadastral plan (Image: Dina Stober interpretation)

The Spahija Cellar in Pakrac is a valuable example of manorial economic architecture shaped through several phases of development from the first half of the 18th century to the beginning of the 19th century. Situated in the centre of the settlement, it formed part of the Pakrac estate owned by the Janković counts of Daruvar (Popadić 2018: 123). The building probably acquired its L-shaped plan in the time of Antun Janković, and it was later connected to the cellar beneath today's Hrvatski dom (Papić & Valenčić n.d.). Typologically, it is a cellar integrated into a large multi-storey building with an attic, partially sunk into the hillside, with a clear vertical organisation: above the cellar there was a vat room, and on the highest floor a store for fruit (Vukić, n.d.: 100). The monumental nature of the building and the Janković family coat of arms on the portal further emphasise its representative value, while its contemporary conversion into the town library and museum demonstrates the possibility of new uses without losing the ability to read its original function.



Figure 6. Pakrac, wine cellar exterior
(Image: Petar Puhmajer)

3.4. The wine cellar in Slatina

Slatina is a town of longitudinal form at the transition between the Drava plain and the slopes of Papuk. The building with the cellar is situated on an elevation south of the town park and, together with the surrounding farm buildings, forms a detached complex that is

spatially close to the centre but buffered from the very centre by the denivelation and the park setting.

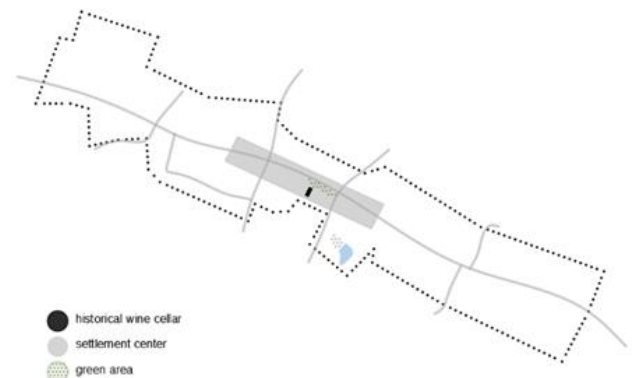


Figure 7. Slatina, based on the 1862 cadastral plan
(Image: Dina Stober interpretation)

The Slatina cellar is a particularly valuable example of 19th-century economic wine architecture, created within the Slatina estate of the Virovitica manorial property, where, in the second half of the 19th century, a modernised and market-oriented system of sparkling wine production developed. The cellar was built in 1855 beneath a free-standing multi-storey press-house building, within a complex of three buildings. Typologically, it is a cellar integrated into a separate production building with a clearly vertical organisation of the technological process. The ground floor of the press house is also of value, with its Prussian vault between steel I-beams, which bears witness to modern structural solutions and to the industrialisation of production. As part of the economic system of the Schaumburg-Lippe family, the Slatina cellar is linked to the development of the first production of sparkling wine in Croatia (1864) (Gavran et al. 2019).



Figure 8. Slatina, wine cellar exterior
(Image: Petar Puhmajer)

3.5. The Kutjevo wine cellars

Kutjevo was in development continuously from the 13th to the 20th centuries around an ecclesiastical, and later noble, estate, and the wine cellars are situated within the castle complex that includes farm buildings and a Baroque church. The main axis of the southern approach road to the settlement is oriented directly toward the cellar complex, making it one of the central features of the settlement, although individual cellar buildings are not strongly town-forming elements.

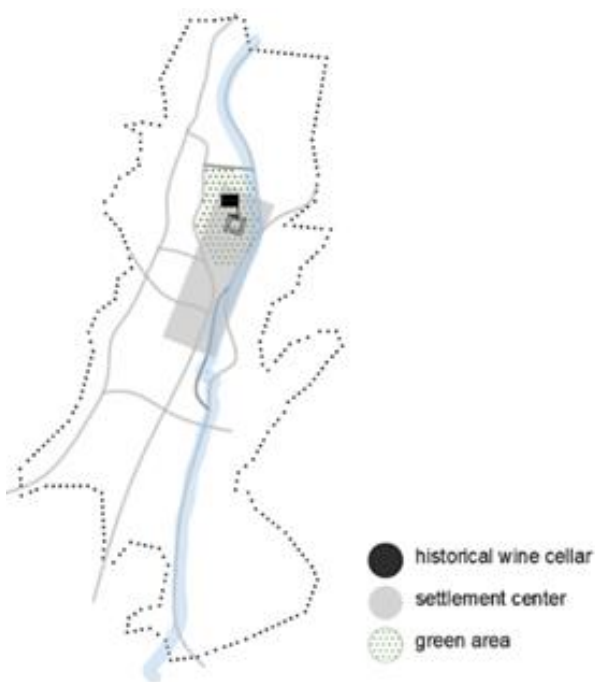


Figure 9. Kutjevo, based on the 1862 cadastral plan
(Image: Dina Stober interpretation)

The Kutjevo wine cellar complex is a layered example of monastic-manorial wine architecture in which medieval, Baroque and later phases of development intersect (Cvitanović et al. 1988: 54–59, 105–112). Its beginnings relate to the Cistercian abbey and the development of viticulture from the 13th century, while after 1700 the Jesuit renewal brought a Baroque reorganisation of the space (Šćitaroci & Šćitaroci 1998: 201). This is particularly visible in the main cellar beneath the former granary, where an older nucleus was reshaped into a two-aisled brick-built structure with columns and domed Bohemian cap vaults. The importance of the complex is further reinforced by the fact that it is not a single cellar, but a branched system of cellars connected with the church, farm buildings and the castle (See: 'Kuttyevoiensium aedificiorum dominalium...', 1797; 'XV. - No. 1/e...', 18th century). This developmental sequence also includes the cellar of 1896, built when the estate was owned by Baron Turković and was experiencing its strongest phase of development.



Figure 10. Kutjevo, wine cellar interior
(Image: Dina Stober)

4. Women as heritage mediators: Analysis of the interviews

The responses of the five interviewees were analysed thematically to show how the meanings of historic wine cellars are created and transmitted through the everyday professional practice of women directly connected with these spaces. To protect anonymity, personal quotations in the paper are included without attribution, merely to give a sense of the different responses. The sample includes four interviewees from the wine sector and one from the museum and cultural field, and their professional differences are presented in the analysis only at the level of broader functional profiles. This approach makes it possible to view historic cellars from the perspective of production, promotion, tourism and cultural interpretation.

At the outset, the participants briefly presented their basic professional characteristics, including their field and place of work. They are women of different generations who have related to historic wine cellars for a considerable period, whether through family ties, professional work or institutional engagement. Their responses are analysed below through four thematic units: professional pathway and role; understanding of the historical value of the cellars; practices of mediation; and education, obstacles and support. This approach shows that heritage is transmitted through everyday professional practice as well as formal institutions and scholarly texts.

Professional pathway and role

The first part of the interview explored the professional trajectories of the interviewees and their roles in relation to historic wine cellars. Most of the interviewees are professionally connected with the wine sector, although some are more deeply involved in wine production and others in promoting the product, the winery and the location of the historic cellar itself.

Alongside them, one interviewee works in the museum and cultural field and interprets the historic cellar through the work of a public cultural institution. The range of their work includes production, marketing, wine presentation, work with visitors, management, museum interpretation and participation in strategic decision-making. The responses show that women in these spaces perform both operational and interpretive roles: they participate in the everyday functioning of production, business or the cultural institution, and also in shaping the ways in which wine, space and its history are presented to the public.

The answers of the interviewees connected with production differ from those whose work is more focused on promotion, presentation and the interpretation of space. Interviewees associated with production emphasise the satisfaction that comes from applying specialist knowledge and working in a dynamic environment. One of them summarised this experience: "Work in winemaking is interesting; every year is different, you are never bored, and something is always happening". Another stressed that she was attracted by the fact that the work is not confined to the office, but also involves the vineyard, with the constant changes brought by each growing season.

Interviewees working in the fields of promotion, tourism or cultural interpretation emphasise the combination of tradition, work with people, and the possibility of presenting the place. One stated: "I was drawn by the combination of tradition, family ties and the possibility of creating an authentic experience for guests". Their answers also repeatedly reveal a personal connection with the place, whether through origin, a family link with wine production or long-term professional work in a historic setting.

Alongside professional motivation, emotional components are also present, such as pride, respect for the historic character of the place and an awareness of the aesthetic value of historic spaces. At the same time, the interviewees found administrative tasks, the management of people and the maintenance of buildings less attractive.

Challenges also emerged as an important segment of professional experience. The responses ranged from interpersonal relations, the unpredictability of the Covid-19 post-pandemic business environment and the seasonality of the offer, to insufficient visibility of the location and limited managerial influence. The problem of labour shortages and difficulties in retaining employees was particularly prominent. One interviewee from the wine sector stated: "After the coronavirus pandemic, it was very difficult to retain younger staff, organise them, train them and ensure that they stayed in the long term".

Two of the sites noted a specific challenge was the interruption of continuity in life and production during the Homeland War (1991-95), and the interviewees stressed that afterwards almost everything had to be rebuilt from the beginning — the space, the brand and the vision. One of them summarised this: "Branding the locality as a wine destination was a challenge, because we started quite late in comparison with other Croatian regions... we were displaced persons waiting to return to our town and our homes".

The historical value of wine cellars

The second thematic unit focused on understanding the historical value of wine cellars. All the interviewees work in or alongside highly valuable historic spaces, whether in active wineries or within a cultural institution housed in a former wine cellar. All recognise the multidimensional value of these spaces,

although the emphasis differs to some extent. Interviewees who are more directly involved in wine production and its presentation primarily stress the economic value and continuing functionality of the space, thereby further underlining its authenticity. The other interviewees place equal emphasis on historical, cultural and identity-related values.

One interviewee clearly stressed the economic and marketing importance of the space: "These cellar spaces are above all very well suited, in qualitative terms, to the production process and they are still highly functional. From a marketing perspective they are extremely valuable because there are very few spaces that are still in use for winemaking today". Another emphasised that, "historical facts have given additional value to the wine cellars" and that these are "the strongest tool in promoting the cellar as a cultural-historical and wine destination". In this sense, the cellars are perceived not merely as physical spaces for storing wine, but as places in which authenticity, history, identity and the quality of the product or cultural experience intersect.

The interviewees also highlighted values that enter into the meaning of the cellars from the wider context, such as the heraldry of estates, the regional significance of particular locations, or stories in which wine built the value of a place: a grape variety that became a recognisable wine in a specific location, a wine present at important events, or a local tradition that contributed to the reputation of the place. In their perception, historic cellars, therefore, function as spaces in which the product, the brand, local memory and the experience of place mutually reinforce one another.

Practices of mediation

The responses show that the interviewees not only recognise the values of historic cellars, but also actively participate in transmitting them.

These mediating practices are realised through stories about historical figures connected with the place, through linking wine with the symbols of estates, through presenting the authenticity of the space, and through education and communication with visitors. In this way, the cellar becomes a place in which heritage is experienced, explained and absorbed – much more than just an object of scholarly interest.

A particularly important finding is that the interviewees recognise the boundary between attractive presentation and the preservation of authenticity. We cite only one of several responses that speak to this point: “The restoration of the cellar through the project simply required this heritage story of the wine-growing area to be told within this restored historic building, and for the tradition of viticulture and wine processing to be revalued and perhaps revived”.

Their role is, therefore, not only to present the space, but also to filter and convey its meanings in a way that remains faithful to the historical facts while also being relatable for contemporary audiences. This is where their mediating role becomes visible. In terms of the Faro Convention approach, these practices reinforce the point above, that the historic cellar is a place in which heritage is reactivated in the public sphere through everyday practice, not merely an object of preservation.

Education, obstacles and support

The final part of the interview discussed education and support related to preserving and interpreting the history of wine cellars. The interviewees had not attended additional training specifically devoted to heritage interpretation, and their responses do not make it possible to determine whether such programmes are lacking or simply insufficiently available. At the same time, they very clearly recognise possibilities for support at different

levels — European, national and local — especially in the areas of wine promotion, digital marketing, the development of rural tourism and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Although they identified financial support for maintaining the physical fabric of historic wine cellars as the most pressing need, they were equally aware that other forms of assistance are also important for high-quality interpretation. A particularly strong emphasis was placed on the need for greater expert support in the fields of cultural heritage interpretation, marketing and the development of wine tourism. The interviewees’ answers show that personal motivation alone is not sufficient for interpretation; an appropriate support system is also needed, one that makes it possible to maintain the space and to develop the competences required for its high-quality presentation.

Based on the responses, we can conclude that the women in our sample are simultaneously professional participants in the wine and cultural sectors, bearers of narratives about the space, and intermediaries between heritage and contemporary audiences. Their roles are both operational and interpretive: they participate in production, promotion, museum interpretation, communication and the shaping of the experience of place. It is through such everyday professional practices that historic wine cellars enter the public sphere not merely as places for storing wine, but also as lived and interpreted heritage.

5. Discussion

The analysis of historic wine cellars in eastern Croatia has shown that this is a form of heritage that cannot be reduced to an architectural object or to an economic space. On the one hand, these are buildings whose value is clearly visible through their age, the layered character of their building phases, their spatial

organisation, structural solutions, typology and their connection with manorial or ecclesiastical complexes. On the other hand, the interviews showed that the full value of these spaces is realised today through practices of presentation, interpretation and incorporation into contemporary cultural and tourist life. It is at the intersection of expert and everyday interpretation that space opens for understanding historic wine cellars as living heritage.

In this context, the urban analysis played an important role in the research because it showed that the cellars should be understood as integral parts of broader spatial and social structures, not just as individual buildings. Their position within the settlement — in relation to the centre, the street, the castle, the church, the park, the economic complex and transport routes — shows that historic wine cellars were simultaneously production spaces and elements of an urban or rural order. In other words, the urban analysis was not merely an auxiliary description of the setting, but an important part of understanding how wine, the estate economy and settlement development shaped one another spatially.

The analysed sites clearly confirm this. In Ilok, the cellar is spatially and symbolically linked with the fortified nucleus and Odescalchi Castle, while its extension beneath the south wing of the castle and towards the edge of the urban fabric creates a connection between representative historic architecture and urban space. In Daruvar, the logic of the cellar is determined by the residential park complex of Janković Castle, so its relationship to the town is not directly street-oriented but mediated by the park and the elevated position of the castle. In Pakrac, the cellar acts differently: its monumental building shapes the main street and functions as an important landmark in the centre of the settlement. In Slatina, the cellar

forms part of a detached economic complex on an elevated site, spatially close to the centre but partly separated by the park setting. In Kutjevo, by contrast, the cellar complex acts as one of the organisational anchors of the settlement, not so much because of its individual monumental nature as its position within the ecclesiastical-manorial ensemble towards which the main road is directed. Such differences show that historic wine cellars must be read as elements of settlement structure, more than merely buildings of a specific function.

The art-historical and architectural analysis further showed that the cellars in Ilok, Kutjevo, Daruvar, Pakrac and Slatina belong to different types of economic and manorial architecture, but are connected by several fundamental features: functional adaptation to the production and storage of wine, a strong link with the estate economy, layered building development, and a high degree of spatial and historical legibility. In this sense, they are more than ancillary economic buildings; they are important bearers of the identity of place and region. Their value is not exhausted by the fact that they testify to the history of winemaking, since it also lies in showing how wine, landscape, noble and ecclesiastical estates, and settlement development were mutually interconnected. This finding corresponds with previous research, which has warned that the economic buildings of Slavonian estates, although often less represented in research than castles and representative complexes, play an important role in understanding the broader cultural and economic history of the area (Vrbanus 2020; Damjanović 2021; Najcer Sabljak & Lučevnjak 2020; Turkalj Podmanicki et al. 2022).

The interviews, however, showed that in contemporary practice, the cellars are important not only as historic buildings, but also as active spaces of meaning-making. The interviewees recognise them as spaces of authenticity,

continuity, local memory, work and the experience of place – more than just old and valuable structures. It is particularly interesting that participants from the production side of the wine sector placed continuous functionality and suitability for production in the foreground, whereas participants working in promotion, tourism or culture placed a stronger emphasis on the identity-related, communicative and experiential dimensions of these spaces. This confirms that the value of the cellars is shaped through several layers — economic, historical, cultural, tourist and symbolic.

This is precisely where an important connection with the Faro Convention emerges. The Convention does not define heritage exclusively as an object of protection, but as a set of values that people and communities recognise and transmit further (Council of Europe 2005a; 2005b). The interviewees' answers confirm such an approach because they show that historic wine cellars achieve contemporary relevance through their preserved material structure, and also through the practice of everyday work, storytelling, presentation and communication with different audiences. The cellar is, therefore, a place of production and object of expert interest, as well as a space in which heritage is experienced, explained and adopted. This finding also corresponds with Settimini's (2020) research, which shows that alongside officially and institutionally shaped heritage, a 'second' heritage develops simultaneously, one that emerges through women's everyday cultural and socio-economic practices.

The interview analysis showed in particular that the women included in this study have a double role. On the one hand, they are professional participants in the wine and cultural sectors, involved in production, marketing, work with visitors, management or museum-cultural activity. On the other hand, they are also bearers of narratives about the space, because through

guided tours, promotion, providing education and stories about historical figures, estate symbols and the authenticity of the space, they translate the complex historical and spatial values of the cellars into forms that are relatable to the public.

This is what is understood in this paper as heritage mediation. It becomes clear here that heritage is transmitted through everyday professional practice, in which wine, space, history and the experience of place relate to one another – as well as through the traditionally thought-of routes such as institutions of protection, museum displays and scholarly publications.

In this sense, the urban analysis also acquires an additional contemporary dimension. The position of the cellar within the settlement influences the way in which audiences perceive, use and interpret it today. A cellar in the centre of a settlement, such as the one in Pakrac, enters the public sphere differently from a cellar connected with a castle park, such as the one in Daruvar, or from a cellar that functions as part of an economic complex on a slope, such as the one in Slatina. Urban position is, therefore, more than a historical fact; it is also a contemporary framework of interpretation. It determines accessibility, visibility, connections with other facilities, and the way in which heritage becomes part of the everyday life of the community and of the visitor's experience.

This finding can also relate to research on wine tourism. Dawson et al. (2011) shows that although consumers associate wine with product quality, they also associate it with stories, regional identity and the experience of place. While Frost et al. (2020) emphasises the importance of heritage, authenticity and storytelling in communication with visitors. The responses of our interviewees show these dimensions to be just as crucial. The historical

value of the cellars contributes to the perception of wine quality, to the strengthening of the brand and to the recognition of the location, but not as a passive backdrop; rather, it acts as an active element of contemporary presentation and interpretation.

At the same time, the interviews also showed the limits of such processes. The interviewees clearly recognise the potential of historic cellars, but also highlight the lack of systematic support. Although they mention possibilities for financial and institutional support, especially in the areas of wine promotion, rural tourism and the preservation of cultural heritage, they stress that specialised training for heritage interpretation is lacking. This opens an important point for discussion: whilst the quality of heritage mediation depends on personal motivation and individual experience, it also requires the availability of expert support, training and sustainable models for managing historic spaces. In other words, everyday practice reveals great interpretive potential, but without an appropriate system of support, that potential cannot be fully realised.

This paper's contribution lies in linking three levels that are often considered separately: built and art-historical analysis, the urban context, and contemporary practices of heritage interpretation. The historic wine cellars of eastern Croatia can be understood not only as architectural and historical objects, but also as elements of the spatial structure of settlements and as spaces in which heritage is translated into the public sphere on an everyday basis. In this process, women play an important role, not because they are somehow 'natural' guardians of heritage, but because in concrete professional roles they appear as intermediaries between space, product, history and audience.

Nevertheless, the limitations of the research must also be recognised. A sample of five

interviewees does not allow statistical representation, nor should it be generalised or extrapolated to the entire wine sector. It does, however, provide an exploratory qualitative insight into patterns of meaning and mediation. Despite this limitation, the combination of analysing the cellars as built and spatial heritage with interviews proved useful because it made it possible to view the same spaces simultaneously as architectural structures, elements of settlement structure and spaces of contemporary interpretation.

6. Conclusion

Historic wine cellars in eastern Croatia constitute a valuable and layered segment of built spatial and cultural heritage. The analysis of examples from Ilok, Kutjevo, Daruvar, Pakrac and Slatina has shown that these are buildings with different typological and spatial solutions, but with common characteristics: a firm connection with manorial and ecclesiastical estates, a clear functional adaptation to the production and storage of wine, layered building phases, and a high degree of historical and identity-related value. The urban analysis further showed that the cellars cannot be understood in isolation, and should be viewed in relation to the settlement, the castle, the church, the economic complex and transport routes; that is, as important elements in the spatial organisation of historic settlements and towns. This confirms that their value derives from their integration into the wider cultural landscape, and is greater than just the architecture of the individual building.

The analysis of the interviews showed that the full value of these spaces is now realised through contemporary practices of interpretation and mediation. The interviewees from the wine and cultural sectors recognise historic wine cellars as spaces of multiple values — economic, historical, cultural and identity-related — and, through their everyday work,

translate them into narratives that are publicly intelligible and experientially powerful. In this sense, they emerge as important intermediaries between heritage and contemporary audiences. The role of women in the wine industry also proved to be crucial. Although the analysed sample is not representative, based on previous research findings (Settimini 2011; Galbreath 2015; Arena et al. 2015), the responses may indicate that the inclusion of women in production is just as important as their inclusion in promotion. The research results, therefore, confirm that the Faro Convention approach, which understands heritage as a set of values recognised and transmitted by the community, provides an appropriate framework for interpreting historic wine cellars. A change in their function does not necessarily mean a loss of heritage value; rather, it opens the possibility of new forms of activating that value and including it in contemporary cultural and tourist life.

Appendix – Questions used for the semi-structured interviews

First set of questions – Professional pathway and role

10. Could you briefly introduce yourself (age, place of residence, position)?
11. When did you begin working in the wine industry?
 - How did it all begin?
 - What attracted you to this field and what has kept you in it?
12. Which roles do you consider key in the work of the wine industry?
 - Which role or roles have you taken on?
 - Could you describe your responsibilities in more detail (e.g. marketing, oenology, presentation, human resources management, strategic decision-making, etc.)?
 - What prompted you to take on precisely those roles?
 - Are there any roles that did not appeal to you, and why?
13. What has your experience been like in these roles?
 - What is the main focus of your work?
 - Which personal and professional qualities are crucial for carrying out these tasks successfully?
 - What challenges or obstacles have you encountered?

Second set of questions – The historical value of wine cellars

1. How do you perceive the historical value of wine cellars?
 - Do you consider it to have cultural, identity-related or economic significance?
2. In what way does the historical value of the cellar contribute to product quality, marketing or brand perception?
 - Can you give a concrete example from practice in which the historical value itself played a decisive or significant role (e.g. in

promotion, sales, collaborations or tourism)?

Third set of questions – Education and support

1. What is your experience of education related to the promotion and interpretation of the history of wine cellars?
 - Have you attended any additional educational programmes?
 - Do you consider such education sufficient and accessible?
2. Which existing forms of support (institutional, financial, local, national, European, etc.) contribute to the preservation, development and promotion of historic wine cellars?
3. In your opinion, what additional forms of support would be desirable?
4. Is there anything we have not covered that you think is important?

Thank you once again for your participation, for the time you have given, and for your openness in sharing your experiences!

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Participatory heritage interpretation and place branding potential in Mudurnu

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Abstract

This study explores the potential of Mudurnu's cultural heritage through participatory interpretation and citizen-based place branding, grounded in the human-centred and value-based principles of the Council of Europe's Faro Convention. Based on the preliminary phase of an ongoing research process, the study discusses why Mudurnu provides a meaningful context for inclusive and ethically grounded heritage interpretation. Located in Bolu and included in the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List as the 'Historic Ahi Town: Mudurnu', the town embodies both tangible and intangible heritage elements and a living Ahi tradition, yet remains with relatively low visibility. Rather than treating this as a deficiency, the study frames it as an opportunity for collective meaning-making. Preliminary findings indicate that diverse local actors engage with heritage through differing values and experiences, revealing the potential for participatory place branding to be approached as an ethical and inclusive process of

interpretation rather than a promotion-oriented practice.

Keywords

place branding, participation, cultural heritage, participatory interpretation

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, heritage studies have undergone a significant conceptual transformation. Heritage is not limited to the preservation of elements inherited from the past; it is a dynamic field of production where these elements are re-selected, reinterpreted, and transmitted to the future in accordance with today's social, cultural, and symbolic values. Today, cultural heritage is no longer understood solely as a collection of monuments, artefacts, or architecturally significant sites—tangible cultural values—but rather as a dynamic realm of meaning-making shaped by social practices such as communities, values, stories, and collective consciousness – including the intangible values. “The real sense of heritage, and the moment when our emotions and sense of self are most deeply engaged, lies not so much in the possession of an object such as a necklace, but in the act of passing on and receiving memories and knowledge, and in the ways we use, reshape, and recreate them to make sense of not only who we are, but also who we want to be (Smith, 2006, s. 2).

From this perspective, heritage emerges as a much broader and more inclusive field, one that goes beyond material remains to embrace the many cultural practices, expressions, and knowledge systems through which societies sustain continuity and construct meaning. According to the classification established by UNESCO in 2002 as part of the United Nations Year of Cultural Heritage, cultural heritage encompasses a very wide range of areas, including cultural heritage sites, historical cities,

cultural landscapes, natural sanctuaries, underwater cultural heritage, museums, movable cultural heritage, handicrafts, documentary and digital heritage, cinematographic heritage, oral traditions and languages, festive events, rituals and beliefs, music and songs, performing arts, traditional medicine, literature, culinary traditions, and traditional sports and games (Harrison, 2013, s. 5-6).

A central milestone in this transformation is the Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention), adopted in 2005 by the Council of Europe. The Faro Convention reminds us of the concept of ‘community’, which existed in early texts such as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and gives renewed strength to this concept that has largely been relegated to the background in the development of international human rights law (Zagato, 2015, s. 141). Within this framework, heritage is considered not only as a subject of institutional protection, but also in the context of democratic participation and cultural rights.

This paper emerges from a TÜBİTAK-funded research project entitled, Developing a Communication Model to Support Place Branding through Citizen Participation in Mudurnu. Funded under the Social and Humanities Research Support Programme, the project aims to develop a scientifically grounded participatory communication model for small-scale historic settlements in Turkey. The project explicitly aligns itself with the human-centred and value-based principles articulated in the Faro Convention.

Rather than conceptualising place branding as a promotional strategy oriented toward external visibility, the project approaches it as a participatory heritage interpretation process. This perspective draws upon contemporary

place branding literature that emphasises identity formation, stakeholder engagement and internal legitimacy over purely external positioning (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013); (Zenker & Erfgen, 2014); (Donner & Fort, 2018).

Mudurnu, located in Bolu Province in northwestern Turkey, has been included in the Tentative List of UNESCO since 2015 under the title 'Historic Ahi Town: Mudurnu'. Ahi tradition was a Turkish guild system that emerged in Anatolia around 13 century, and included trade, ethical and social solidarity. It trained artisans not only in their trades, but also in honesty, generosity, discipline and community service. The town combines well-preserved Ottoman urban fabric with a living Ahi tradition rooted in ethical trade, solidarity and communal responsibility. Despite this cultural richness, Mudurnu remains relatively low in national and international visibility.

This condition raises a fundamental research question: Can participatory heritage interpretation provide the structural foundation for ethically grounded place branding potential in small-scale historic settlements such as Mudurnu?

This paper does not present completed empirical findings. Instead, it introduces the conceptual foundations of the TÜBİTAK-supported project and analyses why Mudurnu constitutes a meaningful field for participatory heritage interpretation in light of the Faro Convention. It argues that perception-based identity mapping is not merely methodological preference but structural necessity.

2. Heritage interpretation in the light of the Faro Convention

A central contribution of the Faro Convention is the concept of the heritage community. By defining heritage through the values attributed by communities, the Convention relocates

interpretive authority from institutions to people. Article 4 of the Faro Convention frames cultural heritage as both a right and a responsibility, affirming that everyone may benefit from and contribute to heritage while also respecting the heritage of others within the limits required by a democratic society (EUROPE, 2005).

This shift has direct implications for place branding. A place brand is defined as a network of associations in the minds of consumers, embodied through the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place's aims, communication, values, landscape, atmosphere, and overall character (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, s. 70). Participatory place branding, therefore, emphasises stakeholder involvement and internal identity formation before external communication (Zenker & Erfgen, 2014).

The Faro Convention provides a normative grounding for this participatory turn. Whereas branding literature often justifies participation for reasons of legitimacy or effectiveness, the Convention frames participation as intrinsic to heritage itself. Heritage interpretation becomes dialogic and value-based rather than instrumental.

The TÜBİTAK-funded project underlying this study seeks to put this principle into practice. It approaches Mudurnu not as a site requiring marketing enhancement, but as a heritage community whose internal value structures must first be understood. In this framework, branding potential emerges from collectively articulated meanings rather than from externally imposed narratives.

In small-scale settlements such as Mudurnu, where heritage remains embedded in everyday life rather than curated spectacle, this approach becomes particularly significant. The town's architectural heritage, ethical Ahi tradition and

local memory practices form a complex interpretive ecosystem. Yet these meanings remain dispersed unless systematically explored.

Thus, the Faro Convention functions not merely as a theoretical background but as a conceptual anchor. The project aims to translate the Convention's value-based understanding of heritage into a structured participatory communication model grounded in perception and cognitive mapping. The next section situates this approach within participatory place branding theory and examines how branding can be reframed as heritage interpretation.

3. Mudurnu's potential for participatory heritage interpretation

The nomination of Mudurnu as 'Historic Ahi Town' emphasises the town's well-preserved Ottoman urban fabric as well as its association with the Ahi tradition, a historical guild system combining professional ethics, solidarity and communal responsibility.

The Ahi system historically structured social and economic life through moral codes, apprenticeship hierarchies and collective accountability. Unlike purely architectural heritage sites, Mudurnu embodies both tangible and intangible heritage layers. Its historic houses, mosques and civic buildings coexist with ethical narratives, craft traditions and oral memory practices. This coexistence creates a multi-layered heritage environment where material and moral dimensions intersect.

However, despite this richness, Mudurnu remains relatively low in national and international visibility. Unlike metropolitan heritage destinations shaped by global tourism circuits, Mudurnu has not been fully integrated into dominant branding narratives. From a conventional marketing perspective, this condition might be framed as

underdevelopment. Yet from an interpretive perspective, low saturation may indicate an absence of fixed narrative closure.

In other words, Mudurnu's identity is neither fully institutionalised nor over-branded. This condition creates what may be described as interpretive openness. Interpretive openness refers to a situation in which heritage meanings remain fluid, locally embedded and negotiable rather than standardised into simplified external narratives. In such contexts, participatory interpretation becomes not only possible but necessary. Without structured engagement, meaning remains dispersed across individuals and informal networks.

Mudurnu's scale further strengthens this potential. Small-scale settlements allow for visible social networks and accessible stakeholder engagement. The concept of the heritage community, as articulated in the Faro Convention, becomes operationally meaningful in such contexts. Community is not an abstract category but a tangible social reality.

At the same time, Mudurnu is not devoid of governance frameworks. A Cultural Heritage Site Management Plan has been prepared, identifying both tangible and intangible heritage assets and emphasising sustainable development and participatory governance. However, while governance documents refer to participation, structured interpretive mechanisms that systematically explore local perception remain limited.

This gap between recognition and articulation is significant. Heritage is formally acknowledged at national and international levels, yet its internal meaning structures are not fully mapped. The Ahi tradition may symbolise ethical continuity, economic history, communal pride or nostalgic memory, depending on the interpreter. Historic mansions may be viewed as

tourism assets, inherited responsibilities or everyday spaces. Without understanding how these meanings circulate among residents, any branding initiative risks either oversimplification or external imposition. The participation of local residents in the branding process is necessary not only as a requirement of contemporary marketing, which seeks to generate long-term economic, social, and environmental value through strong relationships with broad stakeholder networks (Hankinson, 2007). Mudurnu's current condition suggests that this interplay remains largely implicit rather than collectively articulated. Thus, Mudurnu is not selected as a successful brand case, nor as a crisis site requiring urgent marketing intervention. It is selected because it embodies structural characteristics that make participatory heritage interpretation particularly meaningful, including:

- A layered tangible–intangible heritage ecosystem
- Ethical-cultural continuity through the Ahi tradition
- Recognised yet non-saturated heritage status
- Manageable social scale enabling dialogic engagement
- Governance frameworks referencing participation

These characteristics collectively position Mudurnu as a fertile field for exploring whether participatory interpretation can serve as the foundation for ethically grounded place branding potential.

4.1 A layered tangible–intangible heritage ecosystem

Mudurnu's heritage ecosystem is rich, layered and symbolically dense. Yet richness does not automatically translate into shared articulation. While the town embodies both tangible and intangible cultural assets, the meanings attached to these elements remain dispersed

across individual experiences rather than collectively structured.

It is Mudurnu's destiny to develop as a major stopping place for history's trade roads to Anatolia, serving various civilisations in the process. Mudurnu lay astride the Silk and Spice Roads, a rest and business centre for those going between regions. Before its absorption into the Ottoman state in 1307, this area experienced early and late periods of Roman and Byzantine rule. During the Ottoman period, Mudurnu became an important administrative and commercial centre in its region. Mudurnu was one of the larger settlements in the Bolu area in the 17th century and, along with many villages around it, played an important role both politically and economically.

Much of the urban form of Mudurnu has been preserved from earlier times. There are many traditional wooden houses, including bathhouses and mosques, which bear close resemblance to one another because they were built in the same period, probably between the 16th century and today, when brick construction of public buildings became popular. This we might call the main period. Due to its historical continuity and its well-preserved architectural character, Mudurnu represents a good example of an Ottoman townscape. The entire town has been declared an urban preservation area for this reason.

In addition to its historic architecture, Mudurnu also possesses a tradition of craftsperson culture, and has inherited and maintained the Ahilik system, or Ahi tradition, which once ruled its business life as well as its morality. This mix of historical, cultural and architectural characteristics is what constitutes the multilayered cultural heritage landscape of Mudurnu.

In small historic settlements such as Mudurnu, heritage is not primarily mediated through institutionalised narratives or curated interpretive panels. Instead, it is embedded in everyday life. Residents inhabit historic houses, move through preserved streets, recall family memories tied to local spaces and refer to the Ahi tradition as part of social discourse. In this sense, heritage is sustained not only through physical structures but also through lived experience, memory and storytelling.

An illustrative example of this living heritage environment is the Pertev Naili Boratav Culture House, located on Mudurnu's main Street (Figure 1). This historic building served as the district governor's office for approximately 20 years in Mudurnu's history. Its historical importance has also been emphasised in various newspaper reports. These newspaper reports are displayed inside the building (Figure 2). Therefore, some local volunteers are eager to share and narrate this history with visitors.

The building is also remembered locally as a place where significant decisions related to the national resistance movement were discussed during the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1922). The Kuvay-i Milliye (National Forces) refers to the irregular volunteer resistance groups that emerged across Anatolia during the Turkish War of Independence to oppose occupying forces. These locally organised groups later formed an important foundation for the national liberation struggle. In the first year of the Turkish Republic, the official celebrations of the Republic Day in Mudurnu were held in this building, Kuvay-i Milliye.



Figure 1. Pertev Naili Boratav Culture House
(Image: Uralman/Balci)



Figure 2. Newspaper reports exhibited inside the building that emphasise its historical significance as the former district governor's office of Mudurnu
(Image: Uralman/Balci)

Today, the Pertev Naili Boratav Culture House functions not only as a historical structure but also as a repository of local memory (Figure 3). The building contains ethnographic objects, photographs and personal documents such as diplomas donated by residents (Figure 4). These materials were collected largely through

voluntary contributions from local people, reflecting a form of community-driven heritage preservation.



Figure 3. The Pertev Naili Boratav Culture House, which today functions as a space preserving and representing local memory in Mudurnu (Image: Uralman/Balci)



Figure 4. Ethnographic objects, photographs and personal documents donated by residents and displayed within the Pertev Naili Boratav Culture House (Image: Uralman/Balci)

For many years, one of Mudurnu's elderly residents, Necdet Bey, played an important role in transmitting the stories associated with the building (Figure 5). As long as his health permitted, he shared the historical significance and his personal memories of the site with visitors. Such individual narratives illustrate how local heritage is continuously reproduced through oral storytelling and lived engagement.



Figure 5. Necdet Bey, one of Mudurnu's elderly residents, who played an important role for many years in transmitting the stories and memories associated with the building to visitors and the local community (Image: Uralman/Balci)

Another example of this multilayered transmission of heritage can be seen in the initiative of a young entrepreneur from Mudurnu who transformed a historic building into a café without damaging the original architectural fabric. By opening the space to public use whilst preserving its historical character, the building has been both conserved and economically revitalised. Today, the venue is also preferred as a setting for academic gatherings and meetings.

A classical example of this layered (tangible–intangible) heritage ecosystem is represented by the traditional Mudurnu Fair. Historically, fairs in Anatolia were not simply places for

commerce but socio-cultural spaces where economic exchange, social interaction and cultural practices converged. The Mudurnu Fair retains this multipurpose feature by gathering local producers, tradesmen and visitors from nearby regions. Selling agricultural products, handicrafts and regional foods during the fair activates public spaces with cultural events like parades, concerts and festivities. This fair exemplifies how tangible heritage settings, like marketplaces and urban gathering areas, intertwine with intangible cultural practices as well as social relationships and collective memory. Instead of signalling a fixed cultural artefact, this event showcases the way in which Mudurnu's heritage is continually produced through lived experience and participation by members of the community, thus solidifying the town's multilayered heritage matrix. But lived proximity does not automatically yield interpretive coherence.

These variations suggest that heritage identity is plural and relational rather than singular and stable. Without understanding these layered perceptions, any attempt at identity articulation risks oversimplification. This condition makes a perception-based and cognitive mapping approach not merely a methodological preference but a structural necessity.

4.2 Ethical-cultural continuity through the Ahi tradition

An important dimension of Mudurnu's heritage potential lies in the continuity of the Ahi tradition. Historically, the Ahi system structured social and economic life through moral codes, apprenticeship hierarchies and collective accountability. It combined craftsmanship with ethical responsibility, creating a value-based social framework that extended beyond economic activity.

Today, references to the Ahi tradition continue to appear in local narratives and community discourse. However, the meanings attributed to

this tradition vary between different actors. For some residents, it represents ethical continuity and communal solidarity; for others, it evokes economic nostalgia or functions primarily as a symbolic cultural reference.

In this context, every Friday after the Friday prayer, local shopkeepers line up along the marketplace street facing one another. Together, they offer prayers of gratitude and express wishes for abundance and prosperity in their work. At the end of this ritual, one of the shopkeepers voluntarily distributes food to the community, which may include rice, meat dishes or traditional sweets such as lokum. (Figures 6 and 7).



Figures 6 & 7. Shopkeepers form lines facing each other along the marketplace street after the Friday prayer, a continuing local tradition in Mudurnu (Images: Uralman/Balci)

The presence of the Ahi tradition is also visible in everyday spaces such as local restaurants, where verses reflecting the ethical values of Ahi culture appear either printed on the paper placemats used during meals or displayed on the walls of stores. 'Merchant's Prayer' is mostly seen in some walls (Figure 8).

These differing interpretations illustrate that the Ahi tradition operates not only as historical heritage but also as a living interpretive resource. Its ethical dimensions provide a

framework through which heritage can be connected to contemporary social values, making it a significant component of Mudurnu's participatory interpretation potential.

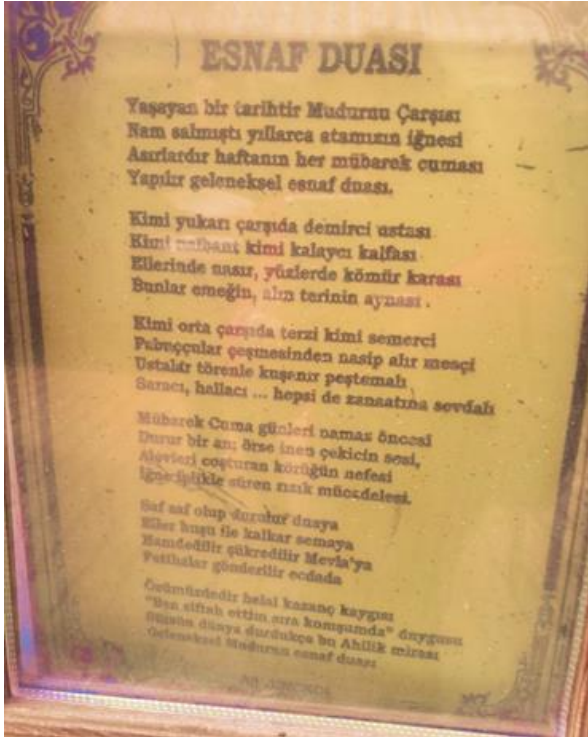


Figure 8. Examples of verses reflecting the ethical values of Ahi culture displayed in everyday settings, printed on restaurant placemats or hung on the walls of local shops (Image: Uralman/Balci)

Translation of the first verse from Turkish to English:
MERCHANT'S PRAYER

Mudurnu Bazaar is a living history,
The craft of its tradesmen has been renowned for years.
For centuries, on every blessed Friday of the week,
The traditional merchants' prayer is performed.

4.3 Recognised yet non-saturated heritage status

Mudurnu's relatively low visibility is often interpreted as a branding deficiency. However, this condition may instead signal the absence of narrative standardisation. Unlike heavily branded heritage destinations, Mudurnu does not operate under a dominant external identity framework.

The town's inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List provides international recognition, yet this recognition has not resulted in intensive tourism-driven branding or narrative saturation. Observations conducted during the preliminary phase of the project revealed that several accommodation providers in Mudurnu expressed concerns regarding the relatively low number of visitors. Moreover, the fact that Mudurnu is widely associated with poultry farming indicates that many of the town's cultural and historical assets have not yet developed into recognisable tourism image values.

Although tourism in Mudurnu is not yet highly developed, the town's cultural heritage has been addressed within the framework of a site management plan. In the Cultural Heritage Site Management Plan prepared for Mudurnu for the period 2014–2018, the main heritage components of the area were identified as natural heritage, archaeological heritage, saints' tombs, late Ottoman–Republican public buildings, Ottoman–Republican civil architecture, the urban conservation fabric, and intangible cultural heritage (Mudurnu Belediyesi & Yildirim, 2014–2018: 9).

In this context, informational signboards have been placed throughout the town's marketplace, and a shop has been designated as the Ahi Museum, although it does not yet function as a fully developed museum institution (Figures 9, 10, 11).



Figure 9. Interior view of the Ahi Museum in Mudurnu, displaying elements related to the Ahi culture (Image: Uralman/Balci)

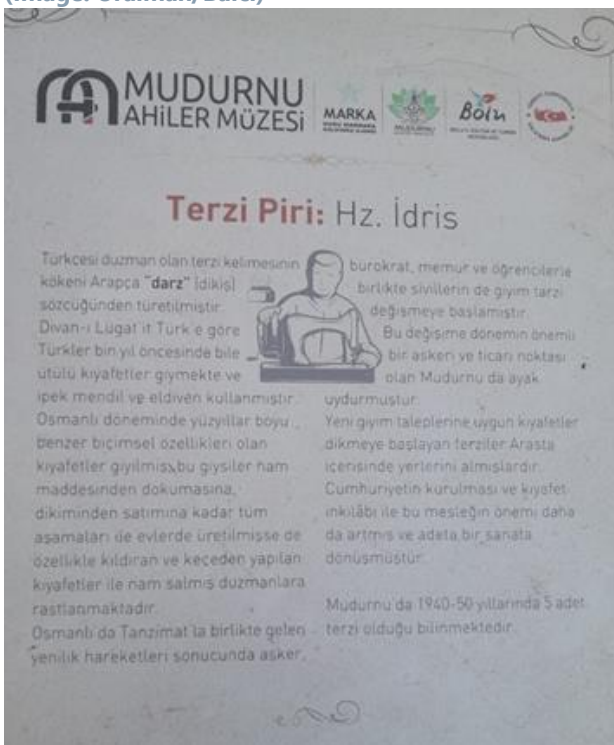


Figure 10. Illustration of the meslek piri, meaning the patron or founding master of a profession, depicted here in relation to the craft of tailoring in the Ahi tradition (Image: Uralman/Balci)



Figure 11. A street panel displaying a historical photograph of Pertev Naili Boratav, the son of the district governor (kaymakam), sitting in a tailor's shop in 1925 (Image: Uralman/Balci)

Accordingly, during the initial phase of the project, the existing site management plan prepared for Mudurnu was examined. The fact that Mudurnu possesses a site management plan places the project at an advantageous position in terms of its preparation, implementation and communication. In this respect, the presence of a site management plan provides an important framework for understanding Mudurnu's heritage assets and guiding participatory place branding efforts.

Another example illustrating Mudurnu's recognised yet non-saturated heritage status is the Bengüboz Archive, an important visual record of the town's social and cultural life. The archive consists of photographs taken by Ahmet İzzet Bengüboz, a local photographer who documented Mudurnu during the late Ottoman and early Republican periods. The Mudurnu Photographs Collection consists of 1,018 photographs taken by Ahmet İzzet Bengüboz between 1923 and 1939. They were preserved by his grandson and donated to the Mudurnu Public Education Centre in the early 1980s, since when the archive has contributed to the promotion of Mudurnu through exhibitions and its display in various public venues (Özdemir, 2022). The collection includes numerous images

capturing everyday life, public celebrations, local trades and urban spaces, providing a rare visual testimony of the town's social transformation during the early 20th century.

Despite its documentary and cultural value, the Bengüboz Archive remains relatively little known outside academic and local heritage circles. This situation reflects Mudurnu's broader heritage condition: although the town possesses significant cultural assets and historical documentation, many of these resources have not yet been fully integrated into dominant tourism narratives or place branding representations. In this sense, the archive exemplifies how Mudurnu's heritage remains recognised yet not fully saturated by external heritage narratives, leaving space for participatory interpretation and new forms of cultural storytelling.

This situation creates what may be described as interpretive openness. Interpretive openness refers to contexts in which heritage meanings remain fluid and negotiable rather than institutionalised into fixed promotional narratives. In such environments, heritage identity is not yet consolidated into a simplified external image. Mudurnu's current condition offers an opportunity for interpretive dialogue to precede promotional communication.

4.4 A manageable social scale enabling dialogic engagement

Mudurnu's relatively small scale also contributes to its suitability for participatory heritage interpretation. In smaller settlements, social networks remain visible and relational ties between residents, institutions and heritage sites are more easily traceable. Mudurnu, located in Bolu Province in northwestern Türkiye, has a district area of approximately 1,314 sqkm. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute's Address-Based Population Registration System, the district had a total

population of 18,360 in 2024, of which 5,202 people live in the town centre, while the remaining population resides in surrounding villages and settlements.

This condition makes the concept of the heritage community, introduced by the Faro Convention, particularly meaningful. Community is not an abstract category but a tangible social reality shaped through everyday interaction.

Such environments facilitate dialogic engagement between different local actors. Residents, municipal authorities, tourism stakeholders and cultural practitioners interact within overlapping social spaces. These interactions create opportunities for participatory processes in which heritage meanings can be discussed, negotiated and articulated collectively.

This project proposes a model tailored as a small-scale settlement. However, the interpretive route designed as part of this project will be implemented relying on cognitive map making and allowing local populations to share their experiences and work as guides during tours.

5. Conclusion

This paper and the research project on which it is based offer a conceptual perspective on Mudurnu, proposing a framework through which the town's cultural heritage can be interpreted and communicated through participatory approaches. During the study, Mudurnu has been evaluated as a field that can develop participatory heritage interpretation with regard to the framework set by the Faro Convention. Instead of treating the town as a pre-established tourism place or an entirely established place brand, the analysis has framed Mudurnu as an acknowledged but not saturated heritage context where cultural meanings can

be negotiated and collectively articulated. In this regard, the town is a test case for understanding how participatory heritage interpretation can support the processes of place branding that are rooted in community values rather than externally driven marketing narratives.

The analysis shows that Mudurnu, in fact, has a multi-layered heritage ecosystem where tangible and intangible elements intersect. Places of architectural heritage, like traditional houses, mosques and wahhabi structures, remain in the same space with living cultural practices, including the Ahi culture, community rituals, local storytelling and routine social relations. The Pertev Naili Boratav Culture House, the Bengüboz photographic archive, the Mudurnu Fair and adaptive reuse of historic buildings are examples of how heritage is still reproduced in lived experience as well as by community dedication. The relatively low level of tourism in Mudurnu, however, suggests that such cultural resources have not yet entered into dominant and hegemonic discourses among stakeholders engaged with place branding narratives. This condition may not be a limitation but an interpretive openness that can give rise to participatory processes of meaning-making.

Underlying the research is, therefore, a project that sets out to propose a participatory communication model for small-scale historic settlements. By employing perception-based methodology and quantitative semantic mapping, the project aims to illuminate how local residents perceive and interpret their heritage landscapes, as well as how these perceptions might be translated into a collectively expressed place identity. In light of these findings, the project strives to create a local knowledge and experience-based interpretive route that structurally allows for the residents themselves to take an active role in

directing visitors and expressing their heritage narratives.

Apart from contributing to academic knowledge, the project will contribute the development of citizen participation in local governance and communication on heritage for Mudurnu Municipality. Via the project, the municipality will have the chance to display Mudurnu's identity on its digital channels, with local inhabitants taking an active part. The development of interpretive routes and guidance practices will also allow the municipality to collect feedback from residents and visitors. Besides, the project aims to create a digital communication channel that can be sustainable throughout the long-term process of Mudurnu's place identity building. It will establish a platform for communication with various tools and feedback mechanisms that facilitate constant contact between the municipality and residents.

The project should create opportunities for engagement in local processes associated with the place identity and heritage communication of Mudurnu, yet will approach it from a group perspective to create more integrated connections among residents. People from the town will be able to share, express and discuss their knowledge, experiences and ideas based on the cultural values. Thus, the project seeks to foster local recognition and social value of heritage by encouraging residents not to remain as passive recipients but rather active actors interpreting and transmitting their legacy.

At the next scale up, the aim for this project is that it should contribute to a model of participative place branding that could suit other small-scale settlements in Türkiye. Such a model could be a powerful reference, especially for historic towns with comparable cultural heritage indicators. Nationally, the project will provide more diverse and sustainable

alternatives for tourism by promoting a culturally-rooted and community-based interpretation of heritage.

In the end, Mudurnu is an essential case for comprehending how participatory heritage interpretation can play a role in place identity articulation, community participation and sustainable heritage communication in small historic settlements. Subsequent stages of the project will develop fieldwork and participatory research to better understand these relationships towards a more inclusive model for communication that promotes heritage interpretation, citizen participation and place branding.

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Disappearing heritage – Dissonant heritage? Upper Silesia and its mining voices: incorporating a female perspective into the region's narrative and interpretation of its heritage

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Abstract

The Upper Silesia region in Poland was built on coal and heavy industry. This area is currently undergoing a process of transformation: everything that shaped it for over 200 years is set to change – not only the economy, but also the cultural landscape and its very traditions. That is why it is so important to preserve for future generations the story of what shaped Upper Silesia and influenced the lives of entire families. Over the years, coal has shaped everyday life, influenced the environment and regulated daily rhythms, but the situation is changing and will soon look very different. If we want to influence the memory of our roots, now is the time to do so. Mining culture is passing away, and it is up to us how we remember it. That is why it is necessary to collect not only material evidence of a disappearing world, but also, and perhaps above all, the intangible – people's memories. It is up to all of us how we tell this story, how others will remember it and benefit from the tradition. We cannot miss this moment: the material currently collected will not only allow us to remember, but also to research, learn and reinterpret. And that's what we're trying to do.

Keywords

women, mining, coal, Silesian, remembrance, heritage

Introduction

"Although Upper Silesia is not an island that emerged from the ocean two hundred years ago, all things important to the region have occurred there during the last two centuries. This coincides with the time when the civilisational, cultural, and artistic foundations of modern Europe were formed. As we can see, the prosperity of Upper Silesia was coupled with

that great adventure we call modernity.”
(Galusek, 2016)²⁸

The Upper Silesia region in Poland is an area that developed thanks to its coal deposits and heavy industry. It is multifaceted and diverse; it feels familiar, yet stands out from the rest of Poland. It is difficult to define it unequivocally or to fit it into any easily defined framework. The region's development has been shaped by Catholic and Protestant traditions, and it is here that Polish, Czech and German influences have intersected and continue to do so.

This region is currently undergoing a process of transformation. Everything that has shaped it over the past 200 years is set to change. At a time when the whole of Europe has set itself the goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, regions such as the Silesian conurbation, which historically developed around coal mining, face the enormous challenge of meeting this target whilst preserving regional identity and protecting heritage. The conversion of industrial heritage sites presents a difficult challenge – the negative press surrounding an industry that contributed to environmental pollution, and the rush for change, often turn transformation processes into processes of destruction. The same applies to intangible heritage, to the historical memory of generations, which is all the more likely to fade away without the physical buildings.



Image 1. Rybnik view of the Ignacy coal mine from the tower (2008) (Image: Karolina Jonderko)



Image 2. Rybnik view of the Ignacy coal mine from the tower (2008) (Image: Karolina Jonderko)

People were shaped by this culture, their traditions and customs. Cities here were established and developed on the wave of the industrial revolution, which gave a huge impulse to the construction of the region. Today, Silesia is undergoing a dynamic process of transformation. In the economic sphere, this is related to the departure from the monoculture of fossil fuels and energy-intensive industry in a region where coal shaped not only the landscape but also the culture and customs. In the social sphere, transformation means a loss of roots, tradition and identity.

The history of mining in Silesia illustrates the impact that heavy industry has had on the development of towns and entire regions. In the

²⁸ Galusek, Łukasz (2016). Górny Śląsk. Przygoda z nowoczesnością / Upper Silesia. The Modern adventure

“HERITO: dziedzictwo, kultura, współczesność / heritage, culture & the present. Śląsk / Silesia” 25(4), 13

face of the restructuring of the mining industry, and the resulting socio-economic changes, the need to preserve this heritage for future generations and promote Silesian mining heritage is important. The key task is to foster informed audiences and guardians of this heritage, and to explore the broadest possible perspective on the region's history and identity.

For years, coal shaped daily life, influenced the environment and dictated the rhythm of the day. But in the near future, the situation will change completely. If we wish to influence the memory of our roots, now is the time to do so. Mining culture is becoming a thing of the past, and it is up to us how we remember it. That is why it is essential to collect not only the material traces of a vanishing world, but also, and perhaps above all, the intangible – human memories. It is up to all of us how we tell this story, how others will remember it, and how they will benefit from this tradition. We must not miss this moment. The materials currently being collected will allow us not only to remember, but also to research, learn and reinterpret. What is particularly important is to gather as wide a range of memories as possible, not only those directly associated with the mining tradition—that is, men's voices—but also those of a group of women who have often been overlooked until now, yet whose role and significance were considerable, though overlooked for decades, and which significantly shaped the culture associated with hard coal mines.

The role of women in mining

Women are deeply involved in sustaining mining communities yet are still rarely

recognised as historical agents. The erasure of women from Upper Silesian cultural memory is not an isolated regional anomaly; rather, it reflects a broader transnational pattern in which industrial history is represented primarily through masculine narratives. The dynamic is visible not only in historiography focused on mining but also in the broader cultural remembrance of mining families and communities. This pattern seems to be transnational, transindustrial and transgenerational; regardless of region, industrial sector, or historical period, women's contributions have been consistently rendered supplementary or erased altogether.

The role of women in mining and in mining families has, of course, been the subject of discussion and research; however, in most coal mining museums around the world, there is no permanent exhibition dedicated to women in the culture, traditions and everyday life of mining. Some institutions have organised temporary exhibitions, and a review of these initiatives suggests that the greatest concentration of such museum and artistic initiatives has taken place in the British Isles. Some of these British initiatives include: 'Breaking Ground – Women of the Northern Coalfields' at the Mining Art Gallery (2018-2019)²⁹; 'From the Earth Comes Light: Women, Creativity, and Mining in 20th Century Britain' at the National Coal Mining Museum (organised in 2025), curated by Jennifer Jasmine White³⁰; an exhibition and publication both presented in 2023 called 'Striking Women: Communities & Coal' in Tom Hopkin's Room - The Photographers' Gallery in Londynie, dedicated

²⁹ More: Challenging notions of womanhood: The Pit Brow Lasses of the Northern Coalfields – Museum Crush [accessed: 21.04.2026].

³⁰ The exhibition showcases works of art that highlight the significant role of women and their contribution to the mining industry. The narrative is told by the women themselves. For the first time, their artistic influence on the history of mining culture has been recognised, offering

fresh and relevant perspectives that resonate today; see more: <https://www.ncm.org.uk/whats-on/from-the-earth-comes-light/> [accessed: 02.05.2026]. In Upper Silesia, research into Anglo-Saxon amateur mining art, including that by women, is being conducted by Agata Stronciwilk. The researcher's academic project also concerns the curatorial work of Jennifer Jasmine White.

to the role of women in the British miners' strikes 1984–1985³¹; 'Shifted: women's contribution to mining life, culture and politics' in the EDAN Gallery Durham (2024)³²; and the 'Pit Girl Powerhouse' workshops organised in 2022 at the Wales Museum by Abigail Fraser in co-operation with Amgueddfa Cymru³³.

An exhibition was also organised as part of the Mozambican-German cooperation, 'Women in Mining', presented in 2022 and 2023, realised by the photographer Yassmin Forte. In Spain in 2023, the HUNOSA Group organised a presentation, 'Pioneras, las mujeres del carbon' (Pioneers, women in coal) in Centro de Experiencias y Memoria de la Minería³⁴, operating in the now-closed Sotón mine in Asturias. An exhibition commemorating the vital role of women in the coal mining industry in 2025 was also on display in Mieres³⁵, another of Asturias' mining towns. In 2018, to mark International Women's Day, the Centre also opened a permanent exhibition—part of a display on the history of mining in Spain—simply titled 'Mujeres' (Women)³⁶. Behind this seemingly mundane and vague title, however, lies a reference to women working in the mine, regardless of their job category. The exhibition commemorates their work and, as the organisers themselves put it, pays tribute to them³⁷. Lynn Dunning, director of the National Mining Museum in England, speaks similarly: "This exhibition is a tribute to the perseverance

and creativity of women inspired by the mining industry. Their stories deserve to be told and shared, which is why I feel honoured that their voices and talents will be showcased in this museum."³⁸

Exhibitions have also taken place in Poland, although they did not draw on archival collections and took the form of photographic projects; nevertheless, they addressed the theme of the (non)presence of women in the world of coal mining.



Image 3. Halemba Coal Mine (Ruda Śląska, Poland)
(Image: Arek Gola)

It may not be entirely accurate to say that women were completely invisible, as artistic projects have occasionally addressed them (for examples, see: during the communist era,

³¹ More: <https://thephotographersgallery.org.uk/whats-on/striking-women-communities-coal> [accessed: 01.05.2026].

³² More: <https://www.edanart.co.uk/womens-anniversary> [accessed: 21.04.2026].

³³ More: <https://museum.wales/bigpit/whatson/11681/Summer-of-fun-Pit-Girl-Powerhouse/> [accessed: 21.04.2026].

³⁴ Further information about the exhibition can be found on the website of the state-owned company HUNOSA, which was established to restructure the mining industry in Spain and now encompasses energy companies and safeguards mining heritage, see: <https://www.hunosa.es/2023/03/02/pioneras-las-mujeres-del-carbon-un-tributo-a-la-memoria-femenina-de-la-mineria-asturiana/> [accessed: 20.04.2026].

³⁵ About the exhibition in El Pozo San José in Mieres, see: <https://www.hunosa.es/2025/01/16/el-pozo-san-jose-se-estrena->

[como-sala-de-exposiciones-con-pioneras-las-mujeres-del-carbon/](https://www.hunosa.es/2025/01/16/el-pozo-san-jose-se-estrena-como-sala-de-exposiciones-con-pioneras-las-mujeres-del-carbon/) [accessed: 20.04.2026].

³⁶ More about the permanent exhibition in Centro de Experiencias y Memoria de la Minería w Langreo zob. <https://patrimoniuiindustrial.com/fichas/pozo-soton-centro-de-experiencias/> [accessed: 10.04.2026].

³⁷ B. Suárez, Las mujeres mineras asturianas, <https://www.nosotroslosmayores.es/2018/03/15/las-mujeres-mineras-asturianas/> [accessed: 20.04.2026], see also: Irene Díaz Martínez, Las mujeres en las cuencas mineras de Asturias: entre la reivindicación laboral y la movilización social, w: Desindustrialización: memoria, patrimonio y representaciones, ed. Rubén Vega, I. Díaz, Oviedo 2022, s. 171–188.

³⁸ Taken from the Museum's website: <https://www.ncm.org.uk/news/from-earth-comes-light/> [accessed: 22.01.2026].

Joanna Helander³⁹, and in recent decades, photographers such as Arkadiusz Gola, Katarzyna Zaremba-Majcher⁴⁰ or Karolina Jonderko), but this was not, and still is not, a continuous process. It is significant that it was women who took care of preserving the heritage of hard coal mining; it was they, through Maria Żwirska and later Krystyna Barszczewska, who established the Coal Mining Museums in Poland (first in Sosnowiec and then in Zabrze). One could say that today, in the era of transformation, Upper Silesia is discovering its women, getting to know their perspective, and incorporating them into the broader current of historiography. This is extremely important, especially now that hard coal and the region built upon it, as we know it, are becoming a thing of the past; hard work is needed to preserve this mining heritage. Without preserving on film, on paper, or other media, the memory of what is passing away—of what has shaped this region and its inhabitants—it will not be possible to create a strong and proud Upper Silesian man or woman in the future.



Image 4. Bielszowice Coal Mine (Ruda Śląska, Poland)
(Image: Arek Gola)

³⁹ See: Helander, Joanna (2016). "Frele. Górnośląskie portrety / Frele. Upper Silesian portraits", HERITO – dziedzictwo, kultura, współczesność / heritage, culture, the present 25(4), 72-87

⁴⁰ The Polish Mining Group's project comprised over 60 portraits of the company's employees, both men and women. The exhibition was also showcased at various external events in which the Polish Mining Group acted as a partner or co-organiser. More on the Polish Mining Group website: <https://www.pgg.pl/strefa->

"Mines aren't just about men; they're largely about women. I thought I wanted to portray a woman from the perspective of a granny who tackles both work and life head-on. It was this extremely harsh environment that played into all of this, because at first glance it doesn't fit at all with the image of women created by the media." Arek Gola on the concept behind his exhibition about women⁴¹.



Image 5. Bielszowice Coal Mine (Ruda Śląska, Poland)
(Image: Arek Gola)

Our project: Memories of Women from Mining Families

'Memories of Women from Mining Families'⁴² is a research project aimed at collecting the stories of women from mining families (including female miners!) from various mining regions around the world. These include both oral accounts and written memoirs, as well as archival photographs and personal artefacts. In this way, we can trace multi-generational stories about the identities of mining communities, environmental changes, and the emotional

korporacyjna/aktualnosci/1952/Kobiece-Portrety-z-kopalni-na-gali-plebiscytu-Kobieca-Twarz-Regionu [accessed: 14.05.2026].

⁴¹ Śliwa, Marcin, Kobiety na kopalni!, <https://zywiec.naszemiasto.pl/kobiety-na-kopalni-ta-galeria-zdjec-mogla-powstac-tylko-na-slasku-przez-20-lat-fotografowal-gorniczki-efekt-jest-niesamowity/ar/c1p2-27371991> [accessed: 26.04.2026].

⁴² More: www.pamietniki.com.pl [accessed: 15.05.2026]

labour that is often overlooked in official histories of mining, inviting reflection on memory, care, and the social consequences of shifts in economic systems underpinned by the extractive industry. The moment in which we are calling for these forms of commemoration is a special one. And this is causing far-reaching changes in everyday life.

The aim of the project is to document, archive and compile the memories of women from mining families – mothers, daughters, partners and female workers alike. What is particularly evident in these stories – and what recurs most frequently – is, of course, professional work, strategies for coping with loss and trauma, building resilience, and everyday life set against industrial landscapes, as the project's initiator, Dr Monika Glosowicz, writes: "Through various forms of community engagement (workshops and competitions), we collect and present the stories entrusted to us in a variety of formats. These include both oral accounts and written diaries, as well as archival photographs and personal artefacts, which we showcase in the form of participatory exhibitions and within a digital archive. In this way, we can trace multi-generational narratives about the identities of mining communities, environmental changes, and the emotional labour that is often overlooked in official histories of mining, inviting reflection on memory, care, and the social consequences of shifts in economic systems underpinned by the extractive industry."⁴³

We are calling for the recognition, commemoration and appreciation of women's roles during times of crisis, change and transformation.

By collecting memories, we are not only preserving the cultural heritage of the region, but also fostering integration and strengthening intergenerational and intercultural bonds. Stories, particularly those of women, have long been undervalued and overlooked; we are now filling that gap. The collection is growing and becoming increasingly diverse, with the perspectives of the region's inhabitants shining through. It seems that this is an unexplored aspect in many countries that once boasted thriving coalfields. That is why what is happening in Upper Silesia resonates so strongly, and why our work and our message about mining heritage can help to develop the story of hard coal, which, whether we wish to remember it or not, has shaped the world as we know it today.

The project, 'Memoirs of Women from Mining Families' is a multi-faceted and multi-threaded initiative aimed at taking on the challenge of restoring these women to the region's collective cultural memory.



Image 6. Ms Celina Bluszcz in her cellar
(Image: Karolina Jonderko)

⁴³ See: *Opowieści kobiet z rodzin górniczych* | Europeana [accessed: 15.05.2026]



Image 7. Ms Gabriela Gizdon in Dębieńsko Coal Mine (Rybnik, Poland) (Image: Karolina Jonderko)



Image 8. Ms. Józefa Szubert (Image: Karolina Jonderko)



Image 9. Ms Eugenia Roskoszek (Image: Karolina Jonderko)

Our project is addressing several questions. How to nurture shared memory. How to describe the past in the future. How to talk about tradition and culture, which were the basis of the region's identity.

In places where cultural heritage is disappearing, we need to consider what direction is right, how to tell stories, and whether this is important for the sustainable development of a region that for years was shaped exclusively by heavy industry.

In 2022, a pilot project was carried out in Czerwionka-Leszczyny, a small municipality in the Upper Silesian Industrial Region, where the Dębieńsko Coal Mine closed in 2000, despite the fact that significant reserves of coking coal remain there. Around the same time, Poland approved a plan to implement a Just Transition, which also provides for the gradual closure of mines⁴⁴.

The project has so far included:

- Organisation of 5 editions of the memoirs competition;
- Recording of more than 100 stories (written memoirs, oral histories, video recording);
- 16 workshops in Upper Silesia (Czerwionka-Leszczyny, Smolnica, Rokitnica, Czeladź, Rybnik, Bytom, Koniaków, Katowice, Zabrze);
- Publishing of 2 book editions (2023⁴⁵ and 2024⁴⁶);
- More than 35 meetings presenting the project in Poland and 2 in Spain⁴⁷.

The memoirs competition which brings together women from the surrounding mines in the Katowice conurbation, as well as those who look after mining families on a daily basis, so that

⁴⁴ About the Just Transition Plan for Silesian Voivodeship: www.transformacja.slaskie.pl/pl/ [accessed: 15.05.2026]

⁴⁵ Pamiętniki kobiet z rodzin górniczych, Glosowicz, Monika (ed.) (2023): Czerwionka-Leszczyny

⁴⁶ Opowieści kobiet z rodzin górniczych, Glosowicz, Monika (ed.) (2024): Katowice: Wydawnictwo Biblioteki Śląskiej

⁴⁷ The list of places can be found in Further information, below.

they can share their stories⁴⁸, is extremely important and clearly demonstrates the growing significance of this project in the region; since 2025, it has been organised (officially) under the auspices of the Coal Mining Museum in Zabrze, with the following organisations involved: Poland's largest coal company – Polska Grupa Górnicza (Polish Mining Group) – and the Fundacja Rodzin Górniczych (Miners' Families Foundation), which brings together all those whose families have been affected by accidents in the mines. Such institutional support seems to guarantee the success and long-term sustainability of the initiative, and also gives us reason to believe that we will be able to reach the widest possible group of women. Nevertheless, the five editions held so far have shown us just how broad and multifaceted this topic is, and how diverse and rich in content the women's stories are.

It turns out that it is not only those women who lived in close proximity to the mines, coming from families who had lived in Upper Silesia for generations, and who traditionally looked after the home and children, but also those women who came here at various times in history (mainly after the Second World War) 'in search of a living'. They also include those who lived in the foothills, far from the mines, tending to their farms day in, day out, whilst their husbands commuted long distances to work in the mines. Among them is also a sizeable group of women who, after their mine closed, returned to their home regions in other parts of Poland, yet the memory of the mine remains vivid within them.



Images 10 and 11. Awards ceremony for the winners of the 5th edition of the memoirs competition (Images: Guido Coal Mine, Coal Mining Museum in Zabrze, 2025)

Conclusion

All these women experienced, and continue to experience, memories that are often similar, yet at the same time so very different. This alone makes this project, which aims to collect as much herstory as possible, extremely important. All the more so because, during our various international meetings, it has become clear that in many countries with coalfields of varying sizes, the figures of women have gone almost unnoticed.

Remembering tradition defines our identity and community. Even if it concerns a heritage as ambiguous today as hard coal. We cannot erase its role because it has shaped the world we live

⁴⁸ We meet not only female miners but also housewives, as well as the daughters, sisters and granddaughters of miners, and finally women who have careers of their own

whilst also being the wives or partners of miners. Families in Upper Silesia are, in many cases, still very traditional in nature.

in today. Even if it was not entirely positive in every respect. We must allow these people to be proud of their past and let them cherish this memory, passing it on to future generations. This is particularly important in regions such as Upper Silesia, which has virtually no history prior to the discovery of coal.

Restoring the memory of women in mining families—or, more accurately, weaving their stories into the broader history of the Upper Silesia region and mining culture as a whole from the very beginning—is an extremely important process. It is becoming increasingly clear that one cannot fully understand coal mines and the traditions associated with them without women; without their memory, their understanding and their perception of the world, it is impossible to tell the full story of Upper Silesia.

Referring to the Faro Convention (2005), it is worth emphasising that the use of heritage – both on an individual and community level – contributes to its enrichment, and also increases its value through identification, research, interpretation, protection, and presentation.

One of the principles of quality heritage interpretation set out by Freeman Tilden in his magnum opus, 'Heritage Interpretation'⁴⁹ states that its aim is to present the whole, rather than just parts, of history.

We need to exchange views and consider how the interpretation of cultural heritage can foster connections rather than divisions. Whose voices and values shape the stories we tell about heritage? How can those involved in heritage interpretation strengthen democracy, dialogue and sustainable development through their work?

More than 20 years after the adoption of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (the Faro Convention), its call for a people-centred and values-based approach to heritage remains highly relevant. The Convention emphasises that everyone has both the right to engage with heritage and the duty to respect the diversity of meanings that others attribute to it.

Further information

The participating places in the project meetings in Poland and Spain include:

In Poland: Teatr Śląski w Katowicach, Instytut Korfantego w Katowicach x 2, Śląska Manifa Benefit, Biblioteka Śląska w Katowicach, Halo!Rybnik, Śląski Czwortek DURŚ, Targi Książki w Katowicach, Śląski Festiwal Nauki, Stacja Biblioteka w Rudzie Śląskiej, Powiatowa i Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Raciborzu, Powiatowa i Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Rybniku, Biblioteka w Przyszowicach, Stowarzyszenie Miłośników Ziemi Tarnogórskiej, Szttygarka w Dąbrowie Górniczej, Biuro Dźwięku w Katowicach, Black Woolf, Scena Literacka w Katowicach, Powiatowa i Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna w Opolu, Fundacja Eduarte w Radlinie, Muzeum Miejskie w Tychach, Pod Globusem Kraków, CK Zamek Poznań, Biblioteka w Świdziewni, Biblioteka w Izbicy Kujawskiej, Biblioteka w Jastrzębiu-Zdroju, Biblioteka w Barcinie, Biblioteka w Czerwionce, Uniwersytet Śląski, DK Jutrzenka w Bieruniu, et al.

In Spain: Pola de Laviana 2025 and Langreo 2026

⁴⁹ See: Tilden, Freeman (2019): Interpretacja dziedzictwa; Poznań: Centrum Turystyki Kulturowej TRAKT

Abstracts of other presentations, workshops & posters

Memory work with forgotten Jewish heritage. The case study of the Grodzka Gate – Theatre NN from Poland

Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs
(Poland)

The presentation focused on the Grodzka Gate – Theatre NN Centre, in Lublin, an institution rooted in the underground theatre of communist times in Poland. The case study demonstrated how facts and events repressed or dismissed from individual and collective memory can be reintegrated into the collective consciousness through engagement in activities at historic sites and public spaces. The initials NN – Nomen Nescio ('Name unknown') – are symbolically intended to draw attention away from the artists themselves and direct it toward the creative process of artistic performances aimed at educating about and preserving the cultural heritage of the city. After the fall of communism, such artistic performances have educated about the fate of the Jewish inhabitants of Lublin. The many projects of the Grodzka Gate – Theatre NN Centre have changed the landscape of memory of Polish Jewry, expanding beyond regional practice.

Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs teaches about collective memory and trauma. She has published: 'Islands of Memory: The Landscape of the (Non)Memory of the Holocaust in Polish Education from 1989 to 2015' (2020); 'Me Us Them: Ethnic Prejudices Among Youth and Alternative Methods of Education. The Case of Poland' (2003); and many articles on cultural dialogue beyond borders.

THE BIG GREEN Game – A common exploration

Sylvia Amann (Austria)

Interactive workshop

The future dreams and good practices of the The Big Green – a large-scale Creative Europe project – are translated into a collaborative, role-play and serious game. A beta version of the game was available to play with cultural stakeholders. 16 players were invited to take on different roles for sustainable transformation in and with culture. Participants could assist and comment on the game sessions. A fun deep dive into The Big Green world.

Sylvia Amann is a cultural expert & game developer.

deProfundis: Interpreting the heritage of mofetts and mineral waters as a shared community responsibility

Mojca Bedjanič et al (Slovenia)

Poster

The deProfundis – Preserving Heritage ‘From the Depths’ project is based on the principles of the Faro Convention, which recognises heritage as a shared responsibility of people and communities, grounded in values, dialogue and shared governance. In the past, mineral waters were an integral part of daily life, while mofettes (or, fumaroles) were mainly known through stories and oral tradition. Today, this heritage is rapidly disappearing as the number of living witnesses declines and the natural phenomena themselves are increasingly threatened by harmful human activity. The project addresses these challenges through documentation, research and interpretation in close cooperation with experts and local communities. Interpretation is seen as a process of connecting perspectives and values, supporting participation, intergenerational knowledge transfer and a responsible relationship with nature. Heritage thus becomes a space for learning, dialogue and sustainable coexistence.

Mojca Bedjanič has experience in interpretation of geological and other natural heritage, including interpretation points, information centres, educational trails, children's books, leaflets, school programmes, project ideas, conducting interpretive workshops for educators and tourist guides. She is an Interpret Europe Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG), Planner (CIP), and Writer (CIW).

Lenka Stermecki has experience in interpretation of natural heritage, including interpretation points, information centres, educational trails, children's books, leaflets, school programmes, project ideas, interpretive guided tours and workshops. She is an Interpret Europe Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) and Planner (CIP).

Simon Veberič contributes to the interpretation of natural heritage, including interpretation points, educational trails, project ideas, and participation in interpretive workshops for various target groups. He is an Interpret Europe Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG).

Janja Sivec is experienced in interpretation of cultural and ethnological heritage, community-based interpretation, intangible heritage, storytelling, interpretive guided tours, workshops, educational programmes, and heritage project development. Janja has studied ethnography and cultural anthropology, and is an Interpret Europe Certified Interpretive Trainer for delivering IE courses.

Nastja Fekonja delivers programmes in circus pedagogy and circus skills, facilitating Scout workshops on wilderness skills and outdoor survival. She is trained in circus education, training programmes for Scout leaders, and pedagogical delivery of geography education within the formal education system.

Barbara Stupan is a nature conservationist dedicated to the protection of natural heritage through interpretation points, information centres, booklets, leaflets, school programmes, interpretive guided tours and workshops for schoolchildren, teachers and the general public. She is an Interpret Europe Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG).

Uroš Kur is an ecologist working in natural heritage interpretation, including interpretation

points, information centres, educational trails, and educational programmes, with experience in conducting interpretive workshops and training sessions for children and educators.

The Faro Convention as a ‘limping treaty’? An international lawyer’s perspective

Wojciech Burek (Poland)

This presentation looked at the Faro Convention (2005) as an instrument of international law rather than as a heritage policy document. It asked whether the Convention should be described as a ‘limping treaty’, a term used by Anthony Aust to describe treaties that have entered into force but have had limited practical impact.

The presentation examined the legal nature of the Faro Convention, focusing on the character of its obligations, its framework structure, and the absence of strong implementation or enforcement mechanisms. It also placed the Convention in a broader context by comparing it with other Council of Europe instruments and international agreements on cultural heritage.

Finally, there was a brief discussion regarding the Convention’s ratification record and uneven acceptance among Council of Europe member states, and what this may tell us about its legal and political appeal. It was argued that while the Faro Convention is innovative in its people-centred approach to heritage, its effectiveness as a binding international treaty remains open to question.

Wojciech Burek is an international lawyer and academic at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland. His research focuses on public international law, international organisations and treaty law. During 2021–24 he was an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow at the University of Potsdam.

Interpreting contested heritage: Iconoclasm, decolonisation, and memory wars in Ukraine

Katia Dianina (USA)

During the Soviet period, hundreds of monuments to Alexander Pushkin, the Russian national poet, were installed all over the world, with the majority concentrated in Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova. Today, Pushkin's statues are falling in Ukraine. The campaign of dismantling Pushkin's monuments, with its spontaneous origins, was quickly christened the 'Pushkin-fall'. It gained momentum in the first year of the war in 2022, which saw the removal of some 30 memorials to the great poet. This iconoclasm under the banner of decolonisation was accompanied by a mass re-christening of streets bearing the name of Pushkin.

The drive to decolonise Ukrainian heritage yielded remarkable results: more than half of the Pushkin streets were renamed by 2024, and only a few Pushkin monuments remain in situ. And yet, along with this success comes a noticeable resistance, with some of the population claiming Pushkin as key to their identity. How do the interpreters of heritage address this divisive issue?

Katia Dianina is a researcher at the University of Virginia, USA. Her experience with heritage interpretation ranges from guided tours to academic publications. The topic of safeguarding and negotiating heritage has a long history, and studying how different communities in the past and present have approached the issue provides invaluable insights into understanding our common future. It also offers pathways toward practical steps that we can undertake today, when the

preservation of heritage as a sustainable tradition is more urgent than ever.

The Bakić House: Reviving cultural heritage through memory and contemporary art

Marijana Dragičević (Croatia)

The Bakić House project reimagines the birthplace of sculptor Vojin Bakić in Bjelovar as a living, participatory cultural space rather than a static memorial. Drawing on the concept of 'memotopia', a place shaped by memory rather than fixed history, the project connects Bakić's modernist legacy with contemporary artistic, social, and community practices. Through changing exhibitions, artist residencies, workshops, and participatory programmes, The Bakić House explores the meaning of home, memory, and identity in today's world. It transforms personal and collective remembrance into an open, dynamic dialogue between past and present, local and global, art and everyday life.

Marijana Dragičević is an archaeologist and historian, Director of the City Museum of Bjelovar, and a doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. Her research explores narrative memory and cultural topography in the prose of Goran Tribuson. She is also the author of several fiction books for adults and children.

Faro Convention in Serbia: 15 years later

Marija Dragišić (Serbia)

If one were to single out the convention that has proposed the greatest changes in the field of cultural heritage protection in recent times, it would certainly be the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society – the Faro Convention. However, precisely because of its innovative character, twenty years is a short period for the Faro Convention to fully permeate heritage protection practice. This is also the case in Serbia, which formally accepted this extremely important document fifteen years ago, yet still so little has changed in this field. This observation applies equally to professionals—often trapped in their own conservative conservation worlds—and to society as a whole, which is not sufficiently familiar with the idea of the Faro Convention.

Nevertheless, from both directions there are small, sporadic attempts which, consciously or unconsciously, respect the principles of this international instrument. By examining these activities, we aim to reconsider what has so far been done in Serbia by professionals and non-professionals alike that can be interpreted as placing people and human values at the centre of the concept of heritage protection. Such an overview gives us insight into how far we have come in the real acceptance of the Faro Convention—where it has been best received, as well as what obstacles prevent it from being valued in places where it has not yet been embraced.

Marija Dragišić graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Belgrade, in the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology. She works as a conservator-researcher at the

Republic Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments in Belgrade. Her professional focus is on the preservation of vernacular architecture, with a particular interest in heritage interpretation. Marija is an Interpret Europe Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) and she designs and organises educational programmes for children and teachers and works in various ways to raise awareness of the importance of cultural heritage. She created a handbook on the relationship between climate change and heritage, is the author of several published papers, has made a documentary film, and is co-curator and collaborator on several exhibitions.

SD-WISHEES: Innovation pathways for the uptake of heritage and climate risks research

**Marta Ducci, Roger Street
& Boniface Ushie (Italy)**

Interactive workshop

This interactive workshop explored how research and innovation (R&I) on heritage and climate risks can be meaningfully taken up and used in practice through people-centred approaches inspired by the Faro Convention. Building on results from the SD-WISHEES project (<https://sd-wishees.irs.cnr.it/>), the session introduced an innovation pathway framework that examines how research outcomes move from knowledge generation to practical use, and how learning and capacity-building, tools and methods, co-creation and engagement, and governance choices shape this transition.

Participants were invited to reflect on enablers and barriers to the uptake of heritage and climate risk research, based on their own experience of interpreting, communicating, or engaging with heritage. Through guided discussion and group exchange, the workshop explored how Faro-inspired, people-centred interpretive practices—such as framing knowledge for diverse audiences, acknowledging contested values, and creating spaces for dialogue—can strengthen shared understanding, democratic engagement, learning, and long-term impact. Participant insights directly contributed to refining a set of actionable recommendations aimed at improving the social relevance and sustainability of heritage and climate risks related R&I.

Marta Ducci is a spatial planner and researcher at the CMCC Foundation (Euro-Mediterranean Center on Climate Change) with expertise in participatory and critical heritage, landscape planning, and disaster risk reduction. She holds a PhD in Heritage Studies from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, where her research focused on community engagement, co-design methods, and interpretive approaches to heritage and cultural landscape valorisation. She contributes to SD-WISHEES on heritage resilience and R&I uptake.

Roger Street is a senior researcher specialising in climate adaptation, sustainability, and research & innovation (R&I) uptake. He has extensive experience in co-production, stakeholder engagement, and translating research into policy and practice. He contributes to SD-WISHEES on enabling the practical use and impact of heritage and climate risks related to R&I.

Talking about Empire: Dual-voice interpretation in 'Hew Locke: What have we here?' at the British Museum

**Billie Duch Giménez
& Isabel Seligman (UK)**

Isabel Seligman is Curator of Modern and Contemporary Drawings in the Department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum. She was Lead Curator of the exhibition 'Hew Locke: What have we here?' and co-author of the accompanying book.

Hew Locke: What have we here? (October 2024 – February 2025) was the result of a two-year collaboration between Guyanese-British contemporary artist Hew Locke and the British Museum. Locke examined the legacies of empire through the museum collection in dialogue with his own artworks, tackling often-polarising questions surrounding colonial legacies and historical collecting practices.

To do this, two interpretation strands complemented each other: while traditional museum labels provided historical context, Locke's personal commentary on separate yellow labels went below the surface.

How did collaborating with a contemporary artist enable an open discussion about the legacies of empire at the British Museum? How did his voice allow for dialogue on such polarising themes? This presentation will cover the development process, from object selection to the dual-voice interpretation.

Billie Duch Giménez was Project Curator of the exhibition 'Hew Locke: What have we here?' at the British Museum, which saw them working in close collaboration with a contemporary artist. Having focused on colonial contexts and provenance research at an academic level, they continue to research inclusive and transparent interpretation as an Interpretation Manager at the British Museum since 2025.

Where have all the soldiers gone? Interpretation of a former military hospital

Barbora Dvorakova
(Czech Republic)

How to interpret a 'vanished city within a city'? An educational trail in Pardubice responds to a completely vanished historical site, now obscured by communist urbanism. The former Karanténa military hospital, once consisting of 365 buildings, has disappeared entirely – not a single structure survives. Yet it was the largest military hospital in central Europe during World War I, with a capacity of 10,000 beds and its own railway stations, bakeries, laboratories and extensive infrastructure. Through panels, photographs, interactives and visualisations, the trail restores the collective memory of this place. It reveals its historical and social layers and shows how interpretation can bring a completely vanished urban complex back to life. Let's explore sensitive heritage. We consider, How can such lost worlds be made meaningful for contemporary audiences? and, When will we ever learn?

Barbora Dvorakova is an educational professional, trainer and heritage interpreter who has been working for more than 20 years in various fields. She has co-created more than 50 interpretation and educational projects, teaches place-based and environmental learning, and is the Interpret Europe Country Coordinator Czech Republic. One of her passions is lighthouses at the end of the world.

The moving mirrors workshop: Cracking inner codes for heritage, dignity and peace

Max Dubravko Fijacko (Croatia)
& **Patrick Lehnies (Germany)**

Interactive workshop

Forget passive listening. This is a live, collaborative lab where you become the catalyst. In just 90 minutes, you'll embark on a fast-paced journey to crack your inner code and learn to renegotiate reality with others. You'll physically build a shared 'mirror' from fragments of personal memory and value, then use it to collectively reinterpret a heritage challenge. This isn't just theory, it's the core skill of building peace, practiced in real-time. Participants were ready to move, create, and discover how their unique perspective, combined with others', becomes the most powerful tool we have to defend dignity and transform heritage into a force for cohesion. No prep needed - just an open mind.

Max Dubravko Fijačko is Interpret Europe's Outreach Coordinator and is a seasoned trainer, practitioner, and facilitator in heritage interpretation. He specialises in translating the principles of value-based interpretation into dynamic, participatory experiences, empowering professionals and communities to connect heritage with contemporary relevance.

Patrick Lehnies currently serves as Interpret Europe's Cultural Heritage Coordinator. He works as a researcher for Interpret Europe's 'HI People' project. He has been active in the field of heritage interpretation for 30 years as a freelancer, researcher and expert advisor. From 2010-15 he served as Director of Interpret Europe.

Reconstructing ancient settlement systems: How surface archaeology reveals cultural landscapes in Tahtay Koraro, Northern Ethiopia

Gidey Gebreegziabher Gebrekrstos (Poland)

Poster

Tahtay Koraro in northwestern Tigray remains one of the least systematically studied yet culturally significant regions of northern Ethiopia. This poster presented research that reconstructs ancient settlement systems through an extensive surface-based archaeological investigation integrating pedestrian survey, artefact documentation, oral traditions, archival sources, and GIS-supported spatial recording. The survey identified a wide spectrum of archaeological sites, including prehistoric lithic scatters, Aksumite period settlements, stelae fields, numismatic finds, and medieval monastic complexes. Their distribution demonstrates a deep history of occupation and reveals the region's incorporation into broader Aksumite cultural, political, and economic spheres.

By synthesising material, spatial, and historical data, the study highlights how surface archaeology can effectively reconstruct cultural landscapes in areas where excavation remains limited. The findings significantly expand the archaeological record of Tigray and underscore the region's role as a dynamic frontier of interaction, belief, and settlement continuity. However, the research also exposes the increasing vulnerability of these heritage resources to environmental degradation, agricultural expansion, conflict-related disturbances, and unregulated development.

The study therefore emphasises the urgent need for integrated heritage management, including targeted excavations, community-centred stewardship, and planning frameworks that prioritise site preservation. Protecting these landscapes is essential not only for safeguarding cultural heritage but also for enabling future scholarship to further illuminate the historical trajectories of northern Ethiopia.

Gidey Gebreegziabher has a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Archaeology from Ethiopian institutions; Aksum University and Mekelle University, respectively. He is currently an archaeologist at the Tigray Culture and Tourism Bureau in northern Ethiopia. Gidey has more than ten years of experience working with both national and international scholars, and he has authored or co-authored several publications in international journals. He is presently pursuing his second Master's degree in Archaeology at the University of Warsaw.

Expanding the interpretation of military cemeteries to include women's perspectives

Charlotte Giraudo (France)

This paper discussed how women's perspectives can be incorporated in the interpretation of military cemeteries, illustrated by a case study from the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery (Belleau, France).

During the World Wars, women were confined to non-combat roles, therefore, most service members buried and commemorated in military cemeteries are men. How can we expand the narrative, giving a voice to the experiences of women at the time, particularly the ones who gave their loved ones to the war effort? How might we recognise the important role they played in military commemoration? The new self-guided tour offered at the Aisne-Marne American cemetery offers an innovative, engaging and emotional experience by inviting visitors to discover the site through the eyes of grieving mothers who visited their son's graves shortly after the War.

Charlotte Giraudo has worked in the field of Interpretation for the last 13 years; first as a guide, then as a coach and now as the Interpretation Program Manager for the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC). The ABMC is a federal agency which administers American military cemeteries overseas. As the Interpretation Program Manager, she manages agency-wide interpretive projects and planning efforts and defines standards.

Engaging dispersed heritage communities: Opportunities and challenges

Barbara Gołębiowska (Poland)

The Faro Convention recognises heritage communities as potentially non-local, dispersed and transnational, formed around shared values rather than only territorial proximity. This is the case of the Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw, that engages with a global community that identifies with her legacy.

Born in Poland and professionally rooted in France, Maria embodies a truly international heritage, reflected in schools, streets and institutions named after her worldwide, the Museum's stamp collection from all countries, and the fact that most visitors are international. They share values symbolised by Maria: belief in science as a universal tool, gender equality, service, determination, courage and overcoming adversity – that offer fertile ground for value-based heritage interpretation. Using the Museum's and international examples, the presentation explores how transnational, value-based heritage communities are crucial for connecting today's divided world and how heritage institutions can become spaces where such communities recognise themselves as exactly that: communities.

Barbara Gołębiowska is a museum professional, educator and heritage interpreter, and is director of the Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw. Working with the Museum team on a new permanent exhibition and a new programme for the institution, she seeks to use heritage interpretation methodology to engage museum audiences and to build diverse communities around the museum. Barbara is an Interpret Europe Certified Interpretive Trainer (CIT) to deliver IE training courses.

Learning Landscapes initiative – The road we walked and the road forward

Lucija Gudlin (Germany), Vanessa Vaio (Italy), Valya Stergioti (Greece) & Thorsten Ludwig (Germany)

Developed by Interpret Europe in collaboration with UNESCO, the Learning Landscapes initiative (LLI) has established a clear, transferable framework for transforming heritage areas into places where interpretation connects people, strengthens communities, and inspires shared responsibility for the future.

Capacity building was focused on, so that local interpretive agents in each learning landscape, together with diverse stakeholders, formed networks to co-create interpretive strategies, with the support of IE experts. In parallel, IE's courses equipped local professionals with the skills to translate these strategies into coherent interpretive plans and services.

As the initiative reaches its conclusion, we presented some key benefits of co-creating interpretive strategies for the interpretive profession, concrete outcomes from the pilot areas, and some practical examples showing how ideas move from strategy to site planning and finally to implementation.

Lucija Gudlin (MA Art History/Pedagogy; MA World Heritage Studies) has worked as curator, programme, event and project coordinator (in production and implementation of educational materials). She monitored cultural investment projects from the post-pandemic cultural fund. She is employed as a consultant for socio-cultural centres and is IE's Financial Officer and

Coordinator of the Learning Landscapes initiative.

Valya Stergioti (MSc Environmental Decision Making) is the founder of Alli Meria, an interpretive consultancy agency. As an interpretive planner, writer and certified IE trainer, she works around the world, empowering local communities to create their own interpretive content and services. She was Interpret Europe's first training coordinator, a position she served for eight years.

Vanessa Vaio is a heritage interpretation consultant with more than 30 years of experience and the founder of ViVaio, an interpretive planning practice based in Italy. She specialises in the development of interpretive plans and narratives that help places, heritage and people grow meaningful connections. She trains interpretive guides and professionals and is IE's Country Coordinator Italy.

Thorsten Ludwig (MSc Interpretation) studied archaeology and worked at a German national park until 1993. He founded his own consultancy, Bildungswerk Interpretation, and was on the Board of the German Association for Natural and Environmental Education for 12 years. He chaired the Board of a foundation running a medieval castle and was Director of IE from 2015-21.

The method of musical-dramatical story-telling in the interpretation of natural and cultural heritage

Anna Gulyas (Hungary)

Interactive workshop

Participants got acquainted with and gained first-hand experience of a complex, multi-sensory form of mediating cultural and natural heritage, as interpreted by Anna Gulyás — singer, storyteller, cultural anthropologist, music educator at the House of Hungarian Music, and artist of The Big Green project. The music-and-story-based dramatic method helps us interpret stories in a way that deeply involves the audience: they can experience, act out, and embody the events of myths, allowing the lessons to sink in more profoundly — drawing somewhat closer to the knowledge-transmission methods of tribal rituals.

During the workshop, through two archaic environmental education myths — a Hungarian folk tale (The Story of Green Peter) and an African Mbaka myth (The Story of the Bird Who Sang the World's Most Beautiful Song) — we experienced how deep a connection this complex method can create with the life-world of our own culture and that of a distant one.

Anna also touched on how she has integrated this method into her work within The Big Green project: the goal of their Green Forest Festival is to create a symbolic festive occasion for (re)connecting with nature, which includes the enactment of a Hungarian folk tale using this method. At the end of the workshop, participants had an opportunity to ask questions.

Anna Gulyas is a singer, storyteller, cultural anthropologist and music educator. She is an artist on The Big Green project.

Sensory re-interpretation of heritage buildings

Katarzyna Jagodzinska (Poland)

A visit to a museum usually focuses on sight, as visitors discover the space and acquire knowledge through texts. Departing from this model and in line with the suggestion from the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention) that, parties “encourage everyone to participate in the identification, study, interpretation, protection, conservation and presentation of cultural heritage” (Article 12), I propose that museums in historic spaces utilise their buildings’ features, collections and furnishings to inspire visitors to reinterpret museums through experiencing an authentic place. Experiencing does not necessarily mean acquiring knowledge; however, it is a form of learning in a more organic way.

How about going to a museum to experience it, not just to see it? Concentrate on the feeling of being within historic walls instead of on accumulating information. Even though many museums don’t pursue sound or active listening at their exhibitions, every museum is nonetheless filled with sounds of all sorts.

A study was presented on how the museum’s aural architecture and sonic interplay with its immediate urban surroundings may be curated to provide a sound-centric visitor format. The case study is the Jagiellonian University Collegium Maius Museum in Kraków, where a new curated trail was installed to test on groups of visitors. The museum is housed within the first university complex dating back to the 14th century, and was opened to the public in the 1960s after renovations that created theatrical scenography-like interiors telling the story of the grand past of the university.

Participants in the empirical study appreciated the refocusing of the museum visit towards sensory experiences, which enabled them to view heritage from an unexpected, new angle. This approach, which encourages interpretation based on non-obvious elements, is grounded in the text of the Faro Convention, which states that parties should “encourage reflection on the ethics and methods of presentation of cultural heritage, as well as respect for the diversity of interpretations” (Article 7).

Katarzyna Jagodzinska works as Assistant Professor at the Institute of European Studies, Jagiellonian University, is head of Public Programmes at the MOCAR Museum of Contemporary Art in Kraków, and also head of the Europa Nostra Heritage Hub for Central and Eastern Europe. She is an art historian, museologist, heritage practitioner, and journalist. Her research interests encompass the participation in and democratisation of museums, museums and wellbeing, and sensory aspects of heritage.

On the timeline: How the past comments on the present. Debate and critical thinking as tools for interpreting heritage

Julia Janowska (Poland)

Interactive workshop

The workshop drew on the experience of a series of meetings held in Józef Piłsudski Museum in Sulejówek, where interpretation of historical heritage becomes a tool for reflecting on contemporary realities. The project demonstrates how the past can help us understand current political, social and cultural developments without falling into simplification or the instrumentalisation of history. A central focus is placed on the critical reading of sources, the analysis of media narratives, and the development of fact-checking skills in the face of simplified narratives and disinformation. During the workshop, participants were invited to reflect on how similar approaches can be adapted to different interpretive contexts. The workshop developed key competences for contemporary interpreters, including the ability to analyse information from multiple sources, recognise manipulation, assess arguments and evidence, formulate well-grounded opinions, and understand diverse perspectives and values.

Julia Janowska is head of the Education Department of the Józef Piłsudski Museum in Sulejówek. For many years, she conducted workshops as part of the family programme. In her daily work, she draws on heritage interpretation methodology as an IE Certified Interpretive Writer (CIW) and Trainer (CIT). She holds degrees in Art History and Polish Philology, which drives her growing interest in critical work with sources and language as interpretive tools.

Empowering custodians and heritage communities at holocaust sites

Aleksandra Kumala (Poland/Belgium)

[A full paper for this presentation was published in Interpret Europe (2026), Online symposium: The role of narratives in 21st century heritage interpretation – Proceedings]

Holocaust sites are among Europe's most challenging heritage spaces: geographically dispersed, ethically charged, and vulnerable to distortion and instrumentalisation. They are often cared for by dedicated custodians working with diverse stakeholder communities who shape how these places are understood, protected, and interpreted.

This presentation drew on the vision of the European Commission's new initiative, European Sites of Holocaust Memory (ESHEM). Inspired by the Faro Convention, ESHEM approaches Holocaust sites as shared spaces of responsibility and material evidence. By connecting well-known and lesser-known sites within a European framework, fostering peer-to-peer exchange, and strengthening site-specific interpretation, ESHEM supports custodians as mediators between past and present, and between local, European, and global histories. The presentation explores how this empowerment can strengthen community engagement and Holocaust heritage interpretation across Europe.

Aleksandra Kumala (PhD) is a cultural studies researcher specialising in Holocaust heritage and memory. She is Head of Research in FestivALT, Research and Documentation Officer in European Sites of Holocaust Memory, and a

member of the Research Centre for Memory Cultures (Jagiellonian University).

Social life and death of post-Soviet monuments in central Europe: On the applicability of a normative ethics of dialogue and inclusive interpretation

Jacek Kołodziej (Poland)

Monuments are rarely innocent: they materialise contested decisions about commemoration and act as 'public commands of interpretation', condensing values (mourning, warning, honour, triumph) into durable signs in space. This presentation proposed a typology based on (1) agency of installation (locally grounded vs externally imposed), and (2) mnemonic mode (mourning vs triumph/entitlement). It applies the model to Red Army monuments erected in Central Europe after World War II, widely read as symbols of Soviet, and later Russian, hegemonic victory and thus targets for removal. Since Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, at least 30 have been dismantled and nearly 50 desecrated across the region, including in Vienna and Berlin. Both their life and 'life after life' become a compelling object of inquiry. The key question concerns whether, and if so to what extent, the dialogic and inclusive normative sense of the Faro Convention is helpful in interpreting the situation.

Jacek Kołodziej is a professor at the Jagiellonian University's Institute of European Studies, conducting extensive research on European heritage and Holocaust memory. In his work, he focuses on the interpretation of symbolic meanings, social communication, and the methodology of social research. He participated in the previous IE conference in Sulejów and co-organised the IE conference in Kraków in 2015.

Inter-ethnic relations, historical traditions and a future of ethnocracy in the Western Balkans (the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Tadeusz Karol Kopyś (Poland)

Poster

The Dayton Peace Agreement, which ended the Bosnian War in 1995, granted significant autonomy to the Republika Srpska, one of the constituent entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although officially part of the country, it operates independently in many ways. This autonomy was an acceptable compromise for the Serbs, as it allowed them to preserve their own political and cultural identity. Bosnia and Herzegovina's survival depends largely on the work of the United Nations-appointed International High Commissioner, who oversees the country's operations. However, there have recently been growing signs that the country's political situation is becoming unstable and the crisis is deepening.

The situation in the Balkans remains volatile and requires the attention of the international community to preserve peace and stability. The future of Bosnia and Herzegovina depends on political wisdom and the search for diplomatic solutions to avoid another war and the threat of ethnic cleansing.

Tadeusz Kopyś, PhD, is a Historian at the Institute of European Studies, Jagiellonian University. He specialises in the history of Central Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries, national issues and nationalism in this region. His main publications concern matters of federation in Central Europe as well as the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and Polish-

Hungarian relations in the 20th century. He has held multiple scholarships at several research institutes in Hungary and in Great Britain. His studies on nationality include: *Nationality Issue in the Lands of Saint Stephen's Crown in the Years 1867-1918* (Krakow 2001), *Polish-Hungarian relations in the years 1945-1970* (Krakow 2015), and *History of Hungary 1526-1989* (Krakow 2014).

Urban heritage in the process of shaping and transmitting European identity

Paweł Kubicki (Poland)

Poster

The poster presentation was dedicated to the results of the research project, 'European Cities in the Process of Constructing and Transmitting European Cultural Heritage', implemented under the Erasmus+ programme. The project was carried out as part of a consortium of four universities: Jagiellonian University (Poland), Università degli Studi dell'Aquila (Italy), Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (Slovakia), and University of Deusto in Bilbao (Spain).

The project was aimed at both students and academic staff. It was concerned with shaping and transmitting European cultural heritage, understood in terms of its multicultural character and transnational dimensions, which form the basis for fostering social and cultural cohesion among Europeans and for strengthening European identity and active citizenship. The city was conceptualised as a tool for identifying a shared cultural space between the national heritage of the partner countries and the broader cultural heritage of Europe.

Paweł Kubicki is an associate professor (Sociology) at the Institute of European Studies of the Jagiellonian University. His primary research interests are: urban sociology and anthropology, social and urban movements, sociology of ethnicity and nation, European identities. He is a member of the Committee on Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and Co-Head of the Section of Urban Sociology at the Polish Sociological Association.

Shelter, significance & ecosystem – Historic mountain lodges as living spaces for multiple narratives

Lucia Leca (Romania)

The topic of historic mountain lodges has gained momentum through proactive civil society engagement in response to the inappropriate condition of this lesser-known type of built heritage in Romania. A series of initiatives, which opened the space for public debate on the cultural and natural values of the historic lodges, revealed their significance for the heritage communities as well as key aspects of 'heritage as living practice'. In addition, further projects – focused on preliminary building mapping, scientific research, identification of meanings for diverse stakeholders, interpretation practices embedded in the salvage campaigns of buildings, and performative storytelling – generated the framework for understanding the contexts that allow narratives to co-exist. The presentation explored key considerations regarding the contribution of heritage interpretation to strengthening public engagement by using co-creative interpretive methods, promoting diversity through layered, community-valued meanings, and approaching and stimulating youth-led actions for the research and enhancement of historic mountain lodges.

Lucia Leca is an architect at the National Institute of Heritage, Romania. Among her responsibilities in the preservation and enhancement of UNESCO sites, she has contributed to the Interpretive Strategy of the Roșia Montană Mining Landscape, to the field research for the Interpretive Framework of the Frontiers of the Roman Empire – Dacia, and has

supported projects for the Historic Center of Sighișoara and other initiatives. Lucia was involved in the process of Romania's Faro Convention ratification, and her recent work focuses on co-creative heritage interpretation to foster a deeper, authentic understanding of places and communities.

Interpretation skills are crucial for defending humanity and peace

Patrick Lehnés (Germany)

We live in a time of challenging changes. Democratic institutions, once constituted as safeguards of human dignity and peace, are at risk. The defences of peace in many people's minds are crumbling. Long-established meanings and moral standards are increasingly twisted, reversed and voided at will. The Faro Convention introduced a new heritage paradigm in relation to people. It embraces cultural diversity and development based on mutual respect and universal human rights. But the strategic importance of this new paradigm for Europe is still grossly underestimated. It cannot be fully grasped without a more comprehensive understanding of 'interpretation' and 'culture' as defining characteristics of being human. Culture, heritage and interpretation are interrelated aspects of 'meaning-making' – the human capacity of making sense of new encounters and events against the background of already preconceived meaning-systems that may trigger reflection, new insights and personal development.

Everybody can interpret intuitively. But hardly anybody is aware of how they do it. And interpretation is prone to many flaws and subsequent misjudgements. Every person can enhance their interpretation skills if ready to

observe and reflect on their mental processing. This requires leaving one's comfort zone to engage with complexity, with bias, with reflexive and dynamic, relative and interrelated aspects and with the paradoxes of human life. Advanced interpretation skills are key to overcoming stereotypes and enhancing mutual understanding, to developing the power of judgement and to orienting oneself in a dynamically changing environment. Value-based and people-centred heritage interpretation in the spirit of Faro requires humbleness, and courage to enter a house of moving mirrors.

Patrick Lehnés currently serves as Interpret Europe's Cultural Heritage Coordinator. He works as a researcher for Interpret Europe's 'HI People' project. He has been active in the field of heritage interpretation for 30 years as a freelancer, researcher and expert advisor. From 2010-15, he served as Director of Interpret Europe.

Taking care of our own – Supporting heritage interpreters in challenging settings

Chuck Lennox (USA)

Heritage interpreters are the public face of a ministry or organisation when they share the story of a site or a landscape with or without controversy or challenges. Often interpreters are not prepared for what the public's reaction might be to a given walk, talk or tour and react based on their level of experience, background or personal values. What support should interpreters be given to address controversy at a site before and after programming? How should we train guides to respond to audiences? What are the best practices? This presentation discussed some controversies at United States heritage interpretation sites and what is being done (or not) to support interpreters in their important work.

Chuck Lennox is the owner of Lennox Insites, a freelance consultancy focused on interpretive planning and training based in Seattle, Washington, USA, but with projects around the world. He also coordinates the Global Alliance for Heritage Interpretation, which includes Interpret Europe as a member.

Shared memory, shared humanity

Django Maekelberg (UK)

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) cares for 1.7 million Commonwealth servicemen and women across 23,000 sites worldwide—places where former enemies lie side by side, commemorated with equal dignity. This principle of equality in burial reflects democratic values and offers a powerful lens for heritage interpretation. Now, 20 years after the Faro Convention, CWGC's approach resonates with its call for a people-centred, value-based heritage practice. In a Europe facing polarisation, CWGC interpretation fosters connection rather than division through dialogue, inclusivity, and co-creation. Initiatives such as CWGC Forevermore, community engagement, and multilingual storytelling invite diverse voices to shape narratives, transforming cemeteries into spaces for lifelong learning. This presentation showed how CWGC operationalises the Faro principles, why discussing different views of conflict—past and present—is vital for democracy, and how equality in burial promotes mutual respect and sustainability.

Django Maekelberg is the Business Development Director at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, leveraging 10+ years of international operations and partnerships leadership to drive organisational growth and optimisation.

Building a heritage community around a former shtetl: Experience from the Polish-Ukrainian borderland

Emil Majuk (Poland)

In Yiddish, shtetl means town and was the term used by Jewish inhabitants of Central and Eastern Europe to describe multicultural towns where Jews lived alongside Christians of various denominations and nationalities, and sometimes Muslims. These towns shaped the region's cultural landscape for centuries.

World War II, the Holocaust, ethnic cleansings and forced resettlements destroyed the shtetls as living communities. Yet the legacy of multicultural coexistence still matters to today's residents and to the descendants of former neighbours. It can inspire dialogue, but also recall trauma and conflict. The Shtetl Heritage Interpretation Lab strives to build a heritage community around the multicultural traditions of the borderland through cultural and educational activities, a cultural tourism trail and a networking programme for local activists.

Emil Majuk is a political scientist, cultural expert and social activities facilitator. He runs the Shtetl Heritage Interpretation Lab at the Brama Grodzka – Theater NN Centre in Lublin (Poland), lectures at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, and has over 20 years of experience in cultural animation focused on the multicultural heritage of the Polish-Ukrainian borderland, including Jewish heritage.

Tourist experience of the national parks in Poland

Adela Malak (Poland)

Understanding tourist experiences in Polish national parks is key for proper management and value co-creation. These protected areas are preserving natural and very often cultural heritage as well (both tangible and intangible), and they are ideal places to learn about it. The research was conducted in selected national parks in Poland. Based on the in-depth interviews with tourists, the study examines their individual experiences through undertaking tourist activities, mainly, but not exclusively, related to nature. Tourist experiences can vary in sensory, cognitive, affective, behavioural and relationship aspects, according to Pearce (and Mohammadi, 2021). The study focused on those five components, with exploration of what lived experiences in national parks mean to visitors, how they are described, and which components are salient in their statements. The implications of such experiences for the future were also investigated. Results suggest that the sensory component of tourist experiences is dominant, while the whole experience is also linked to nostalgia and the 'tourist biography' of individuals. Recognising tourist experiences in national parks plays a key role in creating narratives about this priceless heritage and co-existence with nature, and it can lead to the co-design of such experiences for future visitors, i.e. encouraging more sustainable behaviour.

Adela Malak is a beginner in studying interpretation, but it is related to her PhD research project about tourist experiences in national parks in Poland.

Practising democracy, dialogue and sustainability through interpretive guidance

Evarist March Sarlat
(Spain, Catalonia)

Interactive workshop

[This workshop was accepted to the programme but the presenter was unable to deliver]

The activity put into practice in a lively and interactive way the principles of democracy, dialogue, and sustainability as the pillars on which Interpret Europe is based. It was a guided outing, using the structure and different techniques that are taught as for guides in an outdoor space, with these three topics as the common thread.

The activity showed a possible use of the methodology while generating a subsequent debate that allowed for a deeper understanding of the relationship between heritage interpretation and the topics covered, and joint learning.

Evarist March Sarlat has been an Interpret Europe Certified Interpretive Trainer (CIT) for the Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) course since 2014. He has a long experience in diverse natural and cultural contexts in Europe and Latin América. Evarist is a nature guide and trainer, and is the Director of Naturalwalks.

Architectural heritage in defence against corruption: Dealings over the military headquarters site in Belgrade, Serbia

Suncica Milosavljevic (Serbia)

Since 2024, the monumental Modernist architectural complex known as Generalštab, built after WWII for the Yugoslav Army Command and Defence Ministry, and much damaged in the 1999 NATO bombing, has become the centre of the anti-corruption fight in Serbia. This came about when the government started pushing for the removal of its protected cultural property status, so that commercial real estate could be developed at the site by the company of Jared Kushner, son-in-law of US President Donald Trump. In February 2024, an Investment Agreement was signed for this deal, provoking large-scale protests by heritage experts and CSOs in Serbia.

Although the Serbian Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime found a series of criminal offences had been committed throughout the process, in November 2025, a special law (lex specialis) was passed, allowing for the removal of the site from the register of cultural properties. However, following the indictment against the Minister of Culture for "illegality in the removal of the cultural property" and three more persons for abuse of official position and forgery, and in light of the US Western Balkans Democracy and Prosperity Act pointing to corruption among political leaders in Serbia, the US partner withdrew from the deal. This opens a possibility for starting an inclusive public dialogue on a future redevelopment project, in consultation with experts and citizens, as advocated by Europa Nostra.

Sunčica Milosavljević is an experienced theatre and TV director and cultural project manager. Holding a PhD in Theatre Studies from the Belgrade University of Arts, Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Sunčica developed interests in material and immaterial heritage interpretation in both theatre and television creativity. She has directed a highly noted series of broadcasts on Modernist architecture in Serbia and explored urban settings as poetic semiotics in both video and site-specific theatre media. She has initiated several projects focused on the culture and politics of remembrance, engaging artists and young people in processes exploring family histories through creative ethnographic and participatory approaches. Sunčica speaks on these topics and disseminates original methodologies in workshops, conferences and symposia Europe-wide.

Interpreting architecture as cultural dialogue: Planning the future Gottereau house hub

Florentina Murea-Matache
(Romania)

The House of Paul Gottereau in Bucharest – the historic residence of the French-trained architect who helped define Romania's modern architectural identity at the end of the 19th century – has recently secured funding for restoration. In parallel, an interpretive plan is now being developed to guide how the site will be understood, experienced and used as a future cultural hub.

This presentation shared the early-stage process of creating that plan within the National Institute of Heritage in Romania, exploring how interpretation can be embedded from the very beginning of design and conservation planning. The plan proposes the overarching theme, Architecture as a Language of Modern Identity, connecting biography, craftsmanship, and urban transformation. It also introduces participatory elements involving students, NGOs and community partners.

Rather than presenting a finished product, the presentation reflected on opportunities and challenges in co-designing interpretation during restoration – aiming to transform a neglected historic house into a living platform for cultural dialogue.

Florentina Murea-Matache is an architect and heritage specialist at the Romanian National Institute of Heritage. She has contributed to research and heritage recognition projects and has, in recent years, deepened her focus on heritage interpretation through Interpret Europe training. She is currently developing the

interpretive plan for the House of Architect Paul Gottereau, while also preparing a PhD monograph tracing the architect's life and work.

Little heroes – How can we encourage children to become responsible citizens of tomorrow?

Monika Nethe (Germany)

This case study presentation showed how interpretation for children can encourage them to engage with diversity, coexistence and respectful interaction. The project area presents five major landscapes of Baden-Württemberg as culturally and ecologically diverse spaces. These spaces are shaped by multiple histories and the relationships between people and nature. Using innovative analogue and digital media, and guided by two child characters, it encourages children to explore different perspectives and consider how landscapes can be experienced and valued in various ways.

Storytelling and participatory methods encourage children to listen to different viewpoints, fostering empathy and openness while promoting critical thinking. Involving pupils from a partner school in the development process from the outset ensures that the interpretation remains dialogue-oriented and responsive to young audiences.

Overall, the project demonstrates how interpretation can create spaces for respectful dialogue, nurture appreciation for diversity, and encourage sustainable and socially responsible action. In doing so, it supports children in becoming thoughtful citizens.

Monika Nethe works for the University of Education, Freiburg (Germany) and is also a freelancer with her own company, GEONE. Coming from a geography background, she has 25 years of experience in the field of heritage interpretation with local and international projects, research and teaching.

Who interprets heritage today? Learning from grassroots digital memory practices

Daniela Peresso (Malta)

This session explored how heritage interpretation increasingly takes place beyond formal institutions, within grassroots digital communities such as Facebook nostalgia and heritage groups. Grounded in the participatory ethos of the Faro Convention, the session opened with a concise overview of the shift from object-centred to process-based, people-centred interpretation. Drawing on examples of photo-sharing and collective memory-building in online communities, it highlighted how interpretation emerges through dialogue, emotion, and multivocal storytelling, alongside challenges such as misinformation, exclusion, and AI-generated imagery. Participants will then work in small groups with anonymised case examples to reflect on questions of authority, authenticity, and facilitation. The session concludes by considering what institutional and professional interpreters can learn from these grassroots practices about facilitation, dialogue, and shared authority, and how they might meaningfully support or collaborate with such communities while respecting their autonomy.

Daniela Peresso is a communications graduate and Master's student in Heritage Interpretation. Her earlier research explored tensions and mutual learning between digital citizens and professionals in online news production. Her current work examines how social media platforms enable communities to participate in heritage-making and interpretation alongside institutions, with a strong interest in memory, storytelling, and people-centred practice inspired by the Faro Convention.

Is there an invisible hand of Europe? Museums as civilising agents

Lucja Piekarska (Poland)

The presentation looked at the concept of the Europeanisation of heritage by referring to research conducted across museums in Poland and Sweden which use HI approaches. The main argument is that the Europeanisation of heritage goes beyond the selection of topics presented as core to 'European-ness' and can also be recognised as particular ways of narrating the past (not only 'what' is communicated, but also 'how'). Referring to civilisational values, many of which are expressed in the Faro Convention, I demonstrate that European museums, supported by new museology, can be analysed as 'civilising agents' taking part in the construction of collective identity by offering ways of organising reality – not only that of the past, but also of the present and the future. In order to analyse the values applied to situations as they become museum-worthy, I propose a newly developed interpretive framework where the concepts of democracy, progress and narrative, among others, reflect the sense of Europe as a community of values. The main overarching finding is that the Europeanisation of heritage in museums has a goal of strengthening the sense of individual agency and responsibility for communities.

The civilisational process, a concept currently mostly absent in museology, could potentially be useful and meaningful in heritage interpretation, especially to address the controversies surrounding the notion of civilisation and Eurocentrism.

This presentation was mainly based on my book, 'The Invisible Hand of Europe. The Museum as a Civilising Tool' (Peter Lang, 2020), which has not yet been shared with heritage interpreters, but I hope it will contribute to the exchanges around the core ideas of the Faro Convention as well as practices of HI.

Lucja Piekarska has worked in HI both as a practitioner and academic. She has been an expert at the Council of Europe, where she worked on inclusivity and democratisation in the Cultural Routes initiative, and she also devoted 15 years to working in public service trying to make regional and local museums more relevant. She currently teaches HI at university level, but remains in contact with diverse-heritage related institutions.

Memorial pillar from Kostiuchnówka. Interpreting Polish-Ukrainian heritage in the shadow of war

Anna Postek (Poland)

Kostiuchnówka is a village in the Volhynia region in Ukraine, where the Polish Legions (part of the Austro-Hungarian Army) under the command of Piłsudski fought with the Russian Army in 1916. During the Second Polish Republic, nine Memorial Pillars were raised on the battlefield to honour the Commander who fought for Polish freedom. They fell into ruin after World War II under the rule of the Soviet Union, which tried to erase traces of our history. In 2017, with the consent of the local government in Volhynia, the last surviving Pillar was brought to Poland by the Józef Piłsudski Museum in Sulejów and put on display in the core exhibition. The Museum also placed a copy of the Pillar in its original spot.

In Sulejów, the Pillar receives interpretation consistent with the Faro Convention values: preserving and interpreting common heritage, fostering dialogue between countries, connecting societies separated by wars, and strengthening foundations for a peaceful future in Europe. The current war in Ukraine renders the above values more essential than ever.

Anna Postek is an art historian and is co-curator of temporary exhibitions at the Józef Piłsudski Museum in Sulejów, Poland. She is a member of Interpret Europe and is an IE Certified Interpretative Writer (CIW).

Synergistic approaches in the protection and interpretation of immovable cultural heritage: A case study of Perlez village

Ana Radovanac Živanov (Serbia)

The protection of immovable cultural heritage in Serbia has been actively pursued for nearly eight decades through various institutional frameworks. The ratification of the Faro Convention in 2010 marked a significant advancement in fostering collaboration between institutions and local communities, as well as enhancing the interpretation and presentation of heritage with a focus on sustainability. This presentation explored a case study of exemplary practice, which was achieved through partnership between a cultural institution (Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia) and the local community (local NGO association, 'Baštinar'), and was centred on the preservation, interpretation, and presentation of the Vojvodina village of Perlez.

Additionally, an interpretive plan for the area is currently being developed, contributing to the identification of optimal strategies for sustainability. The presentation clarified the ongoing endeavours stemming from this partnership. Specific strategies for the interpretation of various phenomena are proposed, thereby reinforcing the notion of cultural heritage interpretation as an integral component of contemporary conservation practice. It is imperative to define the role of the local community in formulating interpretive services aimed at promoting the village and facilitating a path to sustainability. Emphasis will be placed on engaging children and the youth as interpreters of their own heritage.

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, in the Department for Research, Protection and Documentation. She is also finishing a PhD thesis at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Department of Art History, at the Seminar for Museology and Heritage studies. Ana participates in several projects related to the interpretation of cultural heritage in Serbia. Her fields of interest are: interpretation of cultural heritage, architectural history of Serbia between the two wars, conservation of cultural heritage, interpretative methodologies and concepts, memory studies, the history of private life. Ana is an Interpret Europe Certified Interpretive Planner (CIP) and Guide (CIG) and is currently Interpret Europe's Country Coordinator Serbia. She is also a member of ICOMOS and the Society of Conservators of Serbia.

Re-interpreting difficult heritage: A framework for dialogue, care and shared responsibility

**Magda Rubinfeld Koralewska et al
(Poland)**

Across Europe, sites shaped by violence, genocide and exclusion challenge heritage interpretation. Often neglected or contested, such 'difficult heritage' can either deepen divisions or foster understanding.

Based on long-term work with complex Jewish heritage in Central and Eastern Europe and aligned with the Faro Convention, the Engaged Memory Consortium has developed a practice-oriented framework combining arts, activism, and academic research. It views heritage as a shared, ongoing process and heritage communities as communities of responsibility, including those without direct ties to the past.

The presentation introduced a flexible framework integrating research, stakeholder mapping, participatory co-creation, artistic and non-invasive interventions, and practices of care. Examples were shown of how interpretation can address complexity, respect cultural and religious contexts, challenge overly-simplifying narratives of the past, and foster learning, empathy, and civic engagement.

Magda Rubinfeld Koralewska is a project manager, social entrepreneur, and cultural activist. She is co-founder of FestivALT, a Jewish organisation using contemporary art and activism to engage with difficult Jewish heritage in Poland, co-founder of the Engaged Memory Consortium, and Network Engagement Officer for European Sites of Holocaust Memory.

Aleksandra Janus (PhD) is an anthropologist and researcher, Director of the Zapomniane Foundation, identifying and locating uncommemorated graves of Holocaust victims, Director of the European Sites of Holocaust Memory project, and co-founder of the Engaged Memory Consortium.

Agnieszka Jabłońska is a manager, political scientist, memory activist, and independent researcher. She is co-founder and Director of the Urban Memory Foundation in Wrocław, focused on public history and memory studies, and co-founder of the Engaged Memory Consortium.

Aleksandra Kumala (PhD) is a cultural studies researcher specialising in Holocaust heritage and memory, Head of Research in FestivALT, Research and Documentation Officer in European Sites of Holocaust Memory, and member of the Research Centre for Memory Cultures (Jagiellonian University).

Water-wise societies - How interpretation can contribute to dialogue, engagement and support for river and wetland restoration processes

Eva Sandberg (Sweden)

Interactive workshop

From 2027, the EU nature restoration law will be put into practice all over Europe. Now all EU countries are working on their action plans. Degraded areas will be restored to enable more biological diversity. Communication, participation, and dialogue will be the keys to success. How can interpretation contribute?

The Swedish Centre for Nature Interpretation at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences is working together with two water management associations and one County administration to develop and describe how interpretation, including dialogue processes, along rivers, streams and in wetland restoration processes can be planned to engage interest and support from local actors and residents. A toolbox for interpretation and dialogue in restoration projects will result.

The workshop shared and discussed examples of interpretation and dialogues with landowners, local residents, schools and NGOs that can be involved in and take ownership of water and nature restoration processes. We asked the question, What is needed in a toolbox for communication for nature restoration planners and facilitators?

Eva Sandberg is head of the Centre for Nature Interpretation at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. She is engaged in education and development of interpretation

and is particularly interested in how nature interpretation might contribute to well-informed commitment to nature conservation and sustainable development. Eva is chair of the Interpret Europe Supervisory Committee.

Heritage education through the interpretation of high-value nature conservation areas in the Pohorje Regional Park, Slovenia

Andreja Senegačnik et al
(Slovenia)

Poster

The diverse geological structure of the largest silicate mountain range in Slovenia, its varied terrain, and a rich network of surface waters form the foundation of the well-preserved nature and landscape of Pohorje. This includes extensive centuries-old forests, colourful meadows, and valuable wetlands—peat bogs, lakes, and streams. As one of the most valuable nature conservation areas in Slovenia and Europe, Pohorje is part of the family of Slovenian regional parks.

Within an area of 52 sqkm, interpretation centres, learning polygons, and interpretive points have been established, where visitors can explore the area's rich natural and cultural heritage. The Network of Schools of the Pohorje Regional Park was established with the aim of raising awareness among primary and secondary school students about the importance of conservation. Young participants spend a day in the park during their primary education and, through experiential interpretation—both in the centres and in nature—discover its invaluable heritage.

Andreja Senegačnik is a university-educated forestry engineer and nature conservation specialist. She believes that effective protection and preservation of natural heritage stem from understanding it; therefore, both professionally and in her free time, she dedicates her attention

to the interpretation and popularisation of natural heritage.

Mojca Bedjanič, MSc in Geology, works in the interpretation of geological and natural heritage. She believes understanding is the basis of conservation and develops interpretation points, educational programmes, and workshops for diverse audiences, including training for educators and guides.

Andrej Grmovšek is a graduate geographer employed at the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation, where he serves as Head of the Management Group of the Pohorje Regional Park. He has contributed to the establishment of the park and to projects on nature restoration and conservation.

Mag. Peter Zajc is a geographer with a Master's in environmental protection. Employed at the regional development agency, he is involved in the management of the Pohorje Hills Regional Park with a focus on outdoor sports management and understanding the complex relationships between humankind and nature.

Jana Jeglič is a tourism animator in Slovenska Bistrica who uses theatre and puppetry to connect local narratives with the landscapes they originated from, reflecting the long-standing role of nature and its phenomena in shaping human imagination across generations.

Reading European cultural heritage in a digital landscape: Imagological tools for using Europeana in the Faro spirit

Marija Sniečkutė
(The Netherlands)

Europeana, as a digital gateway to European cultural heritage, curates a particular picture of what counts as heritage and as European. This presentation used imagology to analyse how Europeana's exhibitions and digital materials construct images of Europe, a shared 'we', and different 'others', including marginalised internal communities and external others. A few concrete Europeana examples, showed that these heritage meanings are framed rather than neutral and can shape how complex, even contested, stories appear in digital form. Three simple, practical tools were then introduced that interpreters, educators and heritage professionals can use to support critical thinking and work critically and dialogically with digital heritage collections in the Faro spirit, moving from consuming pre-packaged narratives to co-creating more inclusive meanings with heritage communities.

Marija Sniečkutė is a senior researcher on Digital Transformation in Cultural Tourism and is a senior R&D advisor for European research policy and strategic partnerships at Breda UAS. She works at the interface of research, cultural heritage and policy. With a background in sociology, argumentation and philosophy, she is finalising her PhD research on cultural identities in 19th-century imperial borderlands and leading BUAS's role in the emerging European partnership for resilient cultural heritage.

Interpreting nature's wonders and human absurdity

Valya Stergioti et al (Greece)

Gyaros is an uninhabited, seemingly inhospitable Aegean island. With a rich history dating back to antiquity, it was recently used as a prison for political exiles until 1974. Today, its natural wonders have flourished and together with its sensitive history, provide contradicting but equally fascinating narratives.

WWF Greece used the case of Gyaros as a prototype for all Greek Marine Protected Areas to show how co-creation can lead to specific interpretive services that shed light on different perspectives. The presentation explained the participatory techniques used, the challenges faced, and introduced a roadmap for those wishing to co-create interpretation in their own protected areas.

Valya Stergioti (MSc Environmental Decision Making) is founder of Alli Meria, an interpretive consultancy agency based in Greece. As an interpretive planner, writer and Interpret Europe Certified Interpretive Trainer (CIT), she works in countries around the world, empowering local communities to create their own interpretive content and services. She was Interpret Europe's first training coordinator, a position she served for eight years.

Spyros Kotomatas is a biologist with a PhD in population biology. His early work was on endangered species conservation and he later joined WWF Greece to lead the development of a model MPA in the Aegean Sea. He has several publications on marine conservation. He has been a member of the Greek National Committee for Protected Areas and the International Committee for Marine Mammal Protected Areas.

Vasiliki Denaxa is a fisheries biologist working with WWF Greece. She leads local awareness and engagement activities in Syros and the surrounding islands. She collaborates with various stakeholders and users of the Gyaros Marine Protected Area.

Ioannis Prevedouros is a geologist and environmental scientist working with WWF Greece as coordinator of local conservation actions in Syros. His work focuses on the management of the Gyaros Marine Protected Area, linking environmental protection with collaboration among local stakeholders and users of the area.

Organising IE's Certified Interpretive Planner (CIP) course: Why and how

Valya Stergioti (Greece)

There is a reason why in just four years, IE's CIP course has been successfully implemented in nine European countries, with more than 100 participants. Meeting the needs of interpretive professionals, including curators, architects, museologists, etc., it offers practical tools on how to co-develop interpretive plans together with stakeholders, based on the most up-to-date principles of heritage interpretation.

This highly interactive presentation demonstrated why this course is a necessary asset for everyone dealing with heritage planning, and participants were offered ideas on how to organise and promote IE's CIP courses for their own site or institution.

Valya Stergioti (MSc Environmental Decision Making) is founder of Alli Meria, an interpretive consultancy agency based in Greece. As an interpretive planner, writer and Interpret Europe Certified Interpretive Trainer (CIT), she works in countries around the world, empowering local communities to create their own interpretive content and services. She was Interpret Europe's first training coordinator, a position she served for eight years.

Can interpretive writing be taught?

Valya Stergioti (Greece)

IE's Certified Interpretive Writer (CIW) course aims to improve the skills required by those who communicate natural and cultural heritage in writing. Recently updated to follow the principles of value-based heritage interpretation, the course takes place at heritage sites and consists of multiple hands-on activities. This interactive presentation tested participants' own ideas about quality interpretive writing, in order to discover the benefits this course can offer. As well as an understanding about IE's CIW course, participants were given information on how to organise such courses at their own site or institution.

Valya Stergioti (MSc Environmental Decision Making) is founder of Alli Meria, an interpretive consultancy agency based in Greece. As an interpretive planner, writer and Interpret Europe Certified Interpretive Trainer (CIT), she works in countries around the world, empowering local communities to create their own interpretive content and services. She was Interpret Europe's first training coordinator, a position she served for eight years.

People, values and social processes in the protection of geological heritage of the Karavanke UNESCO Global Geopark

Lenka Stermecki, Jasmina Kotnik & Mojca Bedjanič (Slovenia)

Poster

In the Karavanke Geopark, geological heritage protection is based on the understanding that heritage arises from the relationship between people, values, and place, in accordance with the Faro Convention. Visitors are regarded as active co-creators and stewards of heritage rather than passive observers. Through both live and non-live interpretation, we communicate the significance, formation, and vulnerability of geological phenomena, involving visitors in exploring solutions for their long-term conservation. This approach is embedded in the Geopark's management, supported by strong local engagement, expert input from competent institutions, and a cross-border identity connecting two nationalities. Sustainable geotourism is defined as responsible interaction with nature. Within the GreenTour project, we develop sustainably planned interpretive programmes and centres adapted to natural constraints, while emphasising education for responsible behaviour and long-term heritage preservation.

Lenka Stermecki is a geographer and translator, working on interpretation of natural heritage, including interpretation points, info centres, educational trails, animation plans, touch screens, children's books, leaflets, school programmes, guided tours and workshops for schoolchildren, teachers and tourist guides.

Lenka is an Interpret Europe Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) and Planner (CIP).

Jasmina Kotnik is an ecologist who works on interpretation of natural heritage through children's books and giving guided tours and workshops for schoolchildren, teachers and the public, focusing on clear, tangible and connected interpretation of natural heritage.

Mojca Bedjanič has experience of interpretation of geological and other natural heritage, including interpretation points, information centres, educational trails, children's books, leaflets, school programmes, and conducting interpretive workshops for educators and tourist guides. She is an Interpret Europe Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG), Planner (CIP) and Writer (CIW).

Interpreting the uncomfortable: Art as a catalyst for dialogue across divides

Barbara Struys (Belgium)

How can museums create spaces where difficult histories are not avoided, but approached with care? How do we honour diverse perspectives while still challenging narratives that harm or exclude? And how can interpretation help audiences engage with themes such as conflict, inequality or responsibility—without telling them what to think?

This session explored these questions through the conversation pieces of the M Leuven museum in Belgium: artworks in the permanent collection at the museum, intentionally activated as starting points for public dialogue. Rather than treating objects as isolated stories from the past, we position them within broader societal conversations.

We zoomed in on M Leuven's early experiences with this approach: what has worked, what has surprised us, and where we have encountered friction. Participants helped to reflect on possible next steps and how museums might continue to develop honest, inclusive and participatory forms of dialogue across divides.

Barbara Struys, Team Coordinator Public Engagement at the M Leuven museum, Belgium, brings extensive experience in heritage interpretation. As an Interpret Europe Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) and seasoned facilitator, she helps organisations develop clear, meaningful and audience-centered interpretive approaches that strengthen visitor connection.

The world above the world: Towards Socratic heritage interpretation

Philipp P. Thapa (Germany)

The concern for modes of communication that support diverse views and open dialogue is not unique to heritage interpretation. As I have argued before, heritage interpreters belong to a larger family of professionals, including teachers and journalists, who face similar questions. Hence, to develop a contemporary ethics and methodology of heritage interpretation, it is practical to learn from related fields. This presentation considered some examples of this.

It is also useful to choose role models and ideals that go beyond the immediate professional scope. When it comes to the joint search for knowledge and meaning among equals, we do well to consider the foundational example of the ancient philosopher, Socrates. Like heritage interpreters, he had conversations with people to make sense of the world. Socratic conversations create a “world above the world” that is the “proper home of equality and respect” (Agnes Callard, 'Open Socrates'). Let us find out together what this means for heritage interpretation.

Philipp P. Thapa is an ecologist, philosopher, and writer who is training to become a heritage interpreter. As a researcher with the Sustainable Europe Research Institute (SERI), Germany, under the EU project The Big Green (2023–27), he currently focuses on understanding the relationship between arts, culture, and sustainable development.

Green Academy: What can culture do for nature conservation?

**Philipp P. Thapa (Germany)
with Vasco Guia de Abreu
& Nicolas Blanc (Portugal)**

Panel discussion

Sciaena is a Portuguese non-governmental organisation working to promote a healthy marine environment through sustainable practices, public engagement, and political intervention. Yet alongside scientific advocacy and policy work, Sciaena has increasingly turned to arts and culture as tools for advancing their cause — from community events to international creative collaborations.

Drawing on conversations with the team and their involvement in projects like The Big Green, we reflect on what the arts can offer that science communication alone cannot: emotional connection, broadened imagination, and active social engagement.

This session was part of the Green Academy, Pro Progressione's learning programme offering an open platform for the cultural and creative sectors to engage with sustainability and critical environmental issue.

Philipp P. Thapa is an ecologist, philosopher, and writer who is training to become a heritage interpreter. As a researcher with the Sustainable Europe Research Institute (SERI), Germany, under the EU project The Big Green (2023–27), he currently focuses on understanding the relationship between arts, culture, and sustainable development.

Vasco Guia de Abreu is Sciaena's communication and awareness coordinator.

Nicolas Blanc is Sciaena's fisheries and biodiversity coordinator.

Whose voice speaks for geoheritage? Negotiating science, community and authority in early-stage interpretation

Cristina Toma (Romania)

Heritage interpretation is never neutral, as it involves decisions about whose voices are heard, whose values are emphasised, and how meaning is communicated to the public. In emerging geopark initiatives, these choices are particularly delicate, as interpretation must simultaneously build trust, legitimacy, and local relevance. This presentation explored the negotiation of voices and values through the development of The Treasures of Agighiol, the first thematic interpretive trail of the Cimmerian Dobrogea Geopark Initiative (Romania).

Starting from geosites of international scientific value, the interpretive process aimed to give voice to otherwise silent geological heritage by translating complex geoscientific information into accessible stories. The narrative was anchored in the figure of the geologist Ion Simionescu, whose presence humanised geology, strengthened public trust in science, and facilitated emotional engagement with deep time. This scientific perspective was complemented by local community stories and shaped through collaboration with local authorities and tourism stakeholders.

Although interpretive panels are often considered a traditional medium, they proved to be a strategic solution in a context marked by the lack of trained guides and the need for visible results. The case illustrates interpretation

as a negotiated practice that balances scientific integrity, community involvement, and institutional expectations, laying the groundwork for long-term heritage stewardship.

Cristina Toma is a PhD candidate in territorial management and has been a heritage interpreter since 2015. Her experience is rooted in geopark initiatives, with a strong foundation in Hațeg Country UNESCO Global Geopark and six years of work in Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark. Through interpretation, she facilitates dialogue between science, local communities, and public authorities.

The woman behind the novel, Dracula – Reviving Emily Gerard, the Scottish writer who coined the term ‘Nosferatu’ and influenced Bram Stoker

Gloria Vintila Andersson & Nora Vintila (Romania)

Our interpretive project, *The Woman Behind Dracula: Reviving Emily Gerard*, is a theatrical and academic recovery. Featuring an impersonation by one of our expert guides, the presentation grants long-overdue credit to the brave Scottish writer. We celebrate Gerard (1849–1905) as an astute cultural scout of the late 1800s who first coined the iconic term ‘Nosferatu’ in her Transylvanian travelogue. As a daring lady of her time, she provided Bram Stoker with the crucial source material for *Dracula*—from names to geographic detail—all while subtly infusing her writings with a sharp, feminist humour. This session interpreted her detailed ethnographic observations and tenacious spirit, revealing her as the uncredited, foundational voice that shaped the 19th century’s most enduring vampire mythology.

Gloria Vintila Andersson has specialised in cultural and heritage travel since 2004. Her history and politics studies (Romania & Sweden) fuel a passion for historical details. As an experienced guide and tour manager, she focuses on crafting deeply immersive experiences for her visitors, ensuring every historical detail brings the past to life.

Nora Vintila is an experienced guide and tour manager, having worked in the field since 2007. She is known for her work on European cruise and shore excursions. She currently leverages this expertise in Sibiu, Romania, where she

brings history to life by creating a persona of the writer Emily Gerard.

The ‘living heritage’ of World Heritage Sites – Re-interpreting the land walls of Istanbul

Aysegul Yilmaz (Turkey)

At World Heritage Sites, inclusive heritage interpretation has the potential to draw attention to the less visible, often overlooked, ignored or, in some cases, even unknown intangible aspects associated with these sites. This can provide rich complementary meaning to their outstanding universal value, thus counterbalancing authorised understandings of heritage. This presentation drew on walking ethnographies and the co-production of interpretive videos conducted with neighbourhood residents as part of the collaborative research project, ‘Plural Heritages of Istanbul – The Case of the Land Walls’ at the Istanbul Land Walls Component Area of World Heritage Site, alongside an analysis of official interpretive materials at the site. Current official interpretations omitting significant intangible dimensions represent a missed opportunity for the World Heritage Site to play a more transformative role in the future development of a city undergoing rapid and profound change.

Ayşegül Yılmaz PhD has practical experience in inclusive heritage interpretation, having worked on two international projects that involved collaboration with urban and rural communities in and around Istanbul to interpret and present their lesser-known heritage. She has also participated in the training course, *Writing for Natural and Cultural Heritage Interpretation*, delivered by the Heritage Management Organisation.