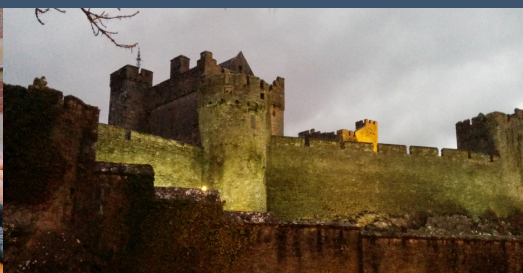




interpret europe
European Association for Heritage Interpretation

Newsletter

Autumn 2026



www.interpret-europe.net

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Dear members and friends of Interpret Europe,

Whilst much of Europe has suffered what is undoubtedly the increasing effects of our human-induced climate crisis this summer, and without wishing to make light of the seriousness of the situation, I wonder if it was because you have all been so furiously busy, which has whipped up a lot of heat! In fact, this time we even have a report from southern Africa so our heritage interpretation ethos is going sub-Saharan.

Seriously, though, I hope that your summers have been pleasant and/or productive, depending on whether you took time to relax or have been keeping busy with enterprising projects. Maybe you ventured on a slow tourism tour and experienced some new heritage interpretation around Europe? If so, why not tell us all about how it inspired you in our next issue!

In this issue, we firstly bring some important news on two fronts: changes to our management structure and the cancellation (or postponement) of our next conference, which was initially planned for next spring. Don't despair – stay tuned for further updates and there will still be plenty of opportunities to join together with colleagues in our network.

You will also find further updates on some of the other projects and initiatives that IE colleagues have been working on, including an important piece of work – a Framework of reference for the future of our profession, with opportunity for your input to help finalise it – along with some inspiring outcomes of some of our training courses.

As mentioned, we travel to southern Africa where a CIP course is inspiring change for local communities in six countries. We also hop to Germany to hear about a CIW course, and find out how a CIG course is influencing the visitor experience to a town in Croatia through the eyes of the local residents – who are not human!

The inspiring tales of projects in action continue with reports from members in Greece who each take us on a beautiful interpretive mental journey, which should keep you in the gorgeous Grecian sunshine for a little longer if the days where you are have already started to darken.

Some big debates are also started (or continued). We hear some thoughts to challenge our vocabulary when thinking about heritage interpretation in an article that was presented during our online symposium in February 2026; we are asked to consider the implications and challenges of ongoing funding for visitor centre or heritage projects; and the hugely current issue of AI is raised with a call for heritage interpretation to play a role in helping to manage this beast for the safety of us all. Heritage interpretation can and does have the ability to effect positive change when we help people reach deeper meanings, so together we should all be able to tackle the climate crisis – and world peace along with it!

Wishing you a season full of the fruits of autumn, both literal and metaphorical, and I look forward to receiving your news, stories and thoughts ready for the winter edition.

Marie Banks, IE News Coordinator

Should we rethink heritage interpretation as mental modelling?

Philipp P. Thapa (Germany)

Should we rethink heritage interpretation as mental modelling?

The work that heritage interpreters may be expected to do is growing broader and more complex. For example, in the past century it was usually left to them to come up with interpretations and ways to engage visitors. Today, interpretations of any given heritage are often publicly contested. To develop or revise interpretive offerings, heritage professionals may find themselves working with local communities, special stakeholders, political representatives, and a wider public.

The core skills of the heritage interpreter, as taught in Interpret Europe's certification courses, remain valid. But to stay on top of the ongoing expansion of their field, heritage interpreters need to grow their skill set. They also need to develop an adequate theoretical understanding of their professional practice in this century. I don't mean theory for theory's sake, or for scoring status points with academic snobs. I mean the kind of theory that helps you be good at what you do, just like a good hiking map makes it easier for you to navigate the terrain.

Between practical skills and theoretical understanding, developing the latter could turn out to be the greater challenge, given that we may still lack any adequate theory of heritage interpretation, for this century or the last. To provoke ideas and responses, in the spirit of brainstorming, let me make an easy fresh start based on a connective concept, specifically the concept of mental modelling. It captures the notion that we understand the world by creating models of it in our minds, including models of heritage phenomena.

A connective concept, as I understand the term, is a concept that connects an initially disparate set of concepts, theories, or conversations. One thing that a good connective concept for heritage interpretation would do is to help us make coherent sense of the growing professional vocabulary. We would be able to define most of our terms with reference to such a connective concept. This has the useful effect of making it quite obvious how our terms, concepts, and perhaps even existing theoretical approaches relate to each other.

As a small test, let us consider some terms highlighted by the Interpret Europe online symposium held in February 2026. The symposium reflected on the role of 'narratives' in current heritage interpretation practice. A number of other relevant terms were collected in the symposium materials and Thorsten Ludwig's introductory talk. Below I define some of them with reference to the concept of mental modelling:

Frame. Mental model that acts as a mould for other mental models.

Interpretive theme. Mental model that an interpreter uses as a mould to shape the mental model of a given phenomenon; in other words, a kind of frame.

Narrative. A large frame [mental model that acts as a mould for other mental models]; also, specifically, a large-scale story [mental model that describes a process] that acts as a frame.

Story. Mental model that describes a process.

Brain script. Mental model of how to act in a given situation; in other words, a template story [mental model that describes a process].

Take a moment to let this test example sink in. When you have, I hope you can agree that the concept of mental modelling lends itself quite easily to defining at least some of the vocabulary of heritage interpretation. What is more, with mental models as a common denominator, connections immediately begin to appear between individual terms, binding them together in a crisscrossing web of meanings. This is a promising start for the development of a new working theory.

Where do we go from here? Staying with the concept of mental modelling, a first step to develop it for heritage interpretation could be to move beyond its focus on individual minds or people (i.e. 'subjects') and think about what it means to engage in intersubjective mental modelling. Because subjects need to communicate to do that, this step leads to a chance to integrate parts of existing conceptions of heritage interpretation that focus on communication. And so on.

Or do you think we should start from another connective concept? Or use an entirely different approach to understanding heritage interpretation and guiding what interpreters do? Let's keep the discussion going and model this together.

The full article, Heritage interpretation as mental modelling: A connective concept for an expanding vocabulary, is available in the proceedings of the Interpret Europe online symposium 2026. There you can also find Thorsten Ludwig's introductory paper referred to above. https://interpret-europe.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/ie_online_symposium_2026_proceedings_2nd_ed_compressed.pdf

Philipp P. Thapa is an ecologist, philosopher, and writer based in Germany. He can be contacted at: philipp.thapa@elfenbeynturm.de.



Making mental models of heritage phenomena, intersubjectively
(Image montage: Philipp P. Thapa; Illustration of the heritage interpretation triangle: Philip Rutt; Model icon: [alfanz via Flaticon](#))

The heart of the cultural facility, after Conrad

Juan José Trujillo Reyes (Spain)

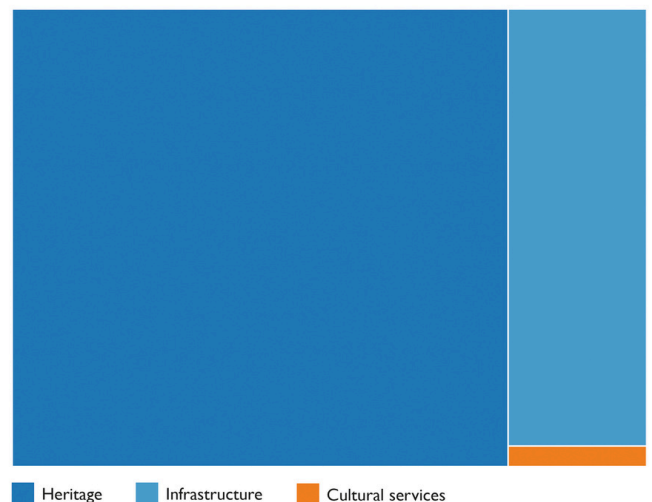
What happens when heritage centres are built for inauguration day, while interpretation, staffing and long-term care are left for later?

I have always been fascinated by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and during those years I often thought of Charles Marlow. Eventually I began to suspect he had been lucky: he only had to travel up the Congo. I entered newly opened buildings presented as models of modernity only to find, a few metres further in, situations whose logic was harder to accept. Working in design direction and exhibition design, I moved through budgets, contracts, architectural decisions and content commissioned far too late, increasingly aware that every project seemed to contain its own Kurtz hidden behind an explanatory memorandum.

I experienced at first hand Spain's boom in interpretation centres from the late 20th century into the first decade of the 21st. European funding accelerated their spread, while heritage offered an almost unassailable justification under the language of culture and conservation. Yet visitors too often occupied a secondary place. It is difficult to separate this proliferation from Spain's wider construction boom. Alongside housing developments, auditoria and conference centres, cultural facilities multiplied within the same political ecosystem. Not every centre was unnecessary, nor every project speculative, but public works had become a privileged form of intervention. A building could be measured, budgeted and inaugurated; interpretive strategy and sustained relationships with audiences were less comfortable territory for an administration accustomed to square metres and technical specifications.

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) cultural categories for 2007–2013 reveal the imbalance. Spain programmed €346.6 million across three specifically cultural

categories: 78.2% for heritage protection and conservation, 20.9% for cultural infrastructure and barely 1% for improving cultural services. Rounded figures may, therefore, total slightly above or below 100%. The material dimension absorbed almost the entire allocation.



Distribution of the specifically cultural ERDF categories in Spain, 2007–2013 (Image: Juan José Trujillo)

That imbalance was visible in practice. Buildings were often designed as autonomous objects, with exhibition requirements considered later. The consequences were familiar: costly alterations to technical floors, insufficient power and data connections, spaces that could not be properly darkened, fragmented routes and lighting fit for cleaning but almost useless for controlling reflections or creating atmosphere. Exhibition design arrived afterwards and had to survive inside a building that had already decided almost everything without it.

The central questions should have come first: what are we trying to say, to whom, and what should visitors understand or discover? Instead, the container existed first, then came screens, showcases, models and projectors, and only afterwards the search for content capable of justifying them. It was rather like shooting the film first and trusting someone to write the script afterwards.

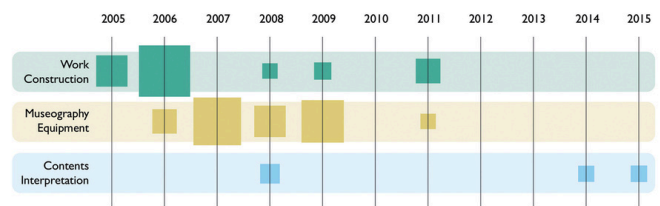
Carolina Martín-Piñol's 2013 *Manual del centro de interpretación* (Manual of the Interpretation Centre) later gave systematic form to many of these concerns: conceptual ambiguity, weak regulation, inconsistent models and

management problems. Bureaucracy reinforced them by commissioning communication through procedures designed for works and supplies, specifying panels and projectors while leaving audiences, narrative hierarchies and interpretive objectives unresolved.

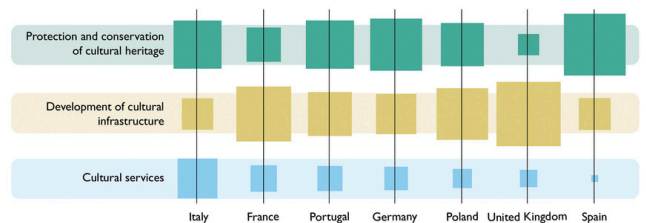
Freeman Tilden's 1957 principles remain valuable, particularly his insistence on revealing relationships rather than merely supplying information. Problems arose when they became a self-sufficient theory. Communication had changed: visual narrative, spatial argument, audiovisual culture, interaction and digital environments demanded more than a linear transfer of knowledge. Too many centres filled walls with information while offering few reasons to want to understand it. The system's weakness became clearest after inauguration. In Huerta Grande, Vejer, Tarifa, Pujerra, Chiclana, Jimena and Casares I encountered variations of the same pattern: centres opened "to see who turns up", restricted hours, intermittent closures, changing management, incomplete documentation, outdated content and equipment left out of service. Some have become an involuntary archaeology of that policy, with decaying panels, dead projectors, obsolete computers and broken furniture.

A sample of 21 Andalusian projects between 2005 and 2015 totals about €11.66 million in documented expenditure: 50.9% for exhibition design and equipment, 41.1% for construction and barely 8% for content and interpretation. Cádiz Prehistórico was tendered at €1 million with 75% ERDF co-funding; the Baelo Claudia contract was awarded for €1.3 million (€1,301,000), also with 75% ERDF co-funding; and the Vía Verde de la Sierra Interpretation Centre was awarded €239,834 within a programme co-financed at 70%.

The European comparison is equally revealing. Cultural services represented 32.5% of the three cultural categories in Italy, 14.3% in France, 13% in Portugal, 11.4% in Germany, 7.5% in Poland and 6.2% in the United Kingdom. Spain stood at 1%, while allocating 78.2% to heritage protection. This does not measure interpretive quality, but it shows that Spain's material emphasis was not inevitable.



Documented investment in interpretation centres and cultural facilities in Andalusia, 2005–2015 (Image: Juan José Trujillo)



Distribution of ERDF cultural categories in seven European countries, 2007–2013 (Image: Juan José Trujillo)

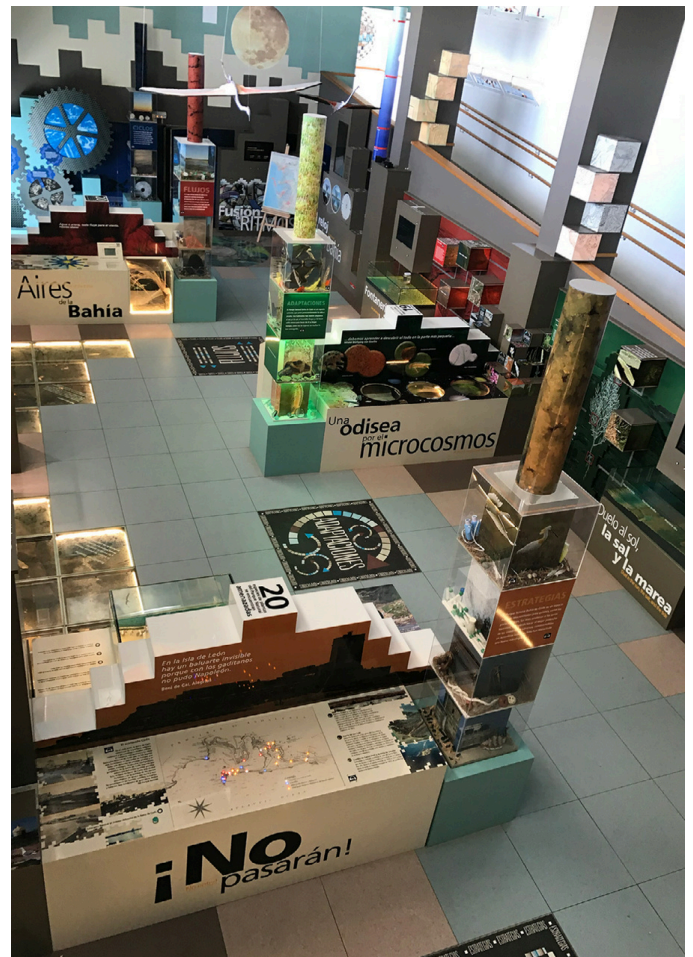
The deeper problem was an administrative culture that found it easier to finance objects than processes and too often confused infrastructure with a cultural project. Some centres remain open; others struggle or have closed. Their empty rooms and silent machines now offer an interpretation nobody designed.

Perhaps the real measure of this neglect lies not in closed centres or millions spent, but in what we failed to explain while pretending to interpret it: environmental degradation hidden beneath reassuring language; the technocratic emptiness of terms such as Natural Park or 'sustainable', whose ambiguity José Manuel Naredo has long exposed; the consequences of the 1977 Amnesty Law for investigating grave human rights violations; or the fact that many Andalusians know Blas Infante only as a ceremonial name, without knowing what he defended, why he was dangerous to those who rose in 1936, or why he was shot beside the road to Carmona.

A territory can fill itself with centres devoted to its heritage while forgetting where it came from, what happened there and who paid with their lives for imagining another Andalusia. While the stars wept.

The full version of this article, in English and Spanish, is available on My Lazaretto: <https://mylazaretto.blogspot.com>.

Juan José Trujillo Reyes is a Spanish creative and editorial director specialising in exhibition design, heritage interpretation, visual communication and data visualisation. He is Creative and Editorial Director of OTWO magazine dedicated to sustainable travel and nature (www.otwomag.com), and is the author of My Lazaretto, a blog dedicated to design and contemporary thought. He can be contacted at: juanjo.trujillo@gmail.com.



Visitor Centre, Bahía de Cádiz Natural Park, designed by the author
(Image: Juan José Trujillo)

Changes to IE management

IE Supervisory Committee

Two important changes in Interpret Europe's management.

As members have already been informed by direct newsmail, there are two important changes in Interpret Europe's management to be aware of.

Gerald Wagenhofer's engagement with Interpret Europe came to an end on 15 September 2026. Gerald joined the Management for a limited period to support Interpret Europe with a number of important financial and legal matters. We are very grateful for the expertise and support he has provided during this period and we thank him for his contribution.

Helena Vičič's current service agreement ends on 31 January 2027 and she will not continue as IE Director after this date. Helena will remain in her role until then and will support the organisation in preparing for a smooth handover. The Supervisory Committee warmly thanks Helena for her outstanding commitment to Interpret Europe and for her professional and personal contribution to the organisation over the past seven years. She has transitioned IE to an organisation well-embedded with UNESCO and EU programmes, and has substantially increased IE's visibility and impact in the natural and cultural heritage sector in Europe.

The Supervisory Committee is now preparing the next steps for the recruitment of a new Director and members will be kept informed about the recruitment process and other relevant developments in the coming months. We thank Gerald and Helena for their work for Interpret Europe and look forward to continuing our work during this period of change.



Setting a course for management changes (Image: Thorsten Ludwig)

Developing a 'Framework of reference' for heritage interpretation

Patrick Lehnés (Germany) & Max Dubravko Fijacko (Croatia)

Clarifying and supporting value-based and people-centred heritage interpretation for our profession.

Interpret Europe is developing a Framework of reference (FoR) through the EU-supported HI-People project. It will clarify and support value-based and people-centred heritage interpretation.

The approach begins with people's diverse relationships with heritage, one another and nature. It supports learning and openness to new insights rather than prescribed personal conclusions, while recognising interpreters' educational and ethical responsibilities towards people, societies and the natural world.

Four interrelated elements will connect the approach's conceptual foundations with guidance for practice within and beyond IE.

These are:

- a code of professional ethics
- defining principles
- a glossary of key concepts
- practical guidelines

Building on exchanges including the New paradigm café which took place during the IE conference in Faro in April, development of the FoR will involve a gradually widening group of contributors from within and beyond IE, working towards a coherent draft before wider consultation.



Group discussions during the Paradigm Café at the IE conference in Faro (April 2026) (Image: Dubravko Fijacko)

Alongside this, an online New Paradigm Café on professional ethics is being planned for the second half of November as part of the GAHI webinar series, offering an opportunity to share experiences and questions that inform the FoR. Details on participation will follow once arrangements are confirmed so keep an eye out for that if you would like to take part.

Patrick Lehnés is IE's Cultural Heritage Coordinator. He can be contacted at: patrick.lehnes@interpret-europe.net.

Max Dubravko Fijacko is IE's Outreach Coordinator. He can be contacted at: dubravko.fijacko@interpret-europe.net.

Empaths community lab

Alexander (Sandy) Colvine (France)

Testing out participatory practices between heritage professionals and community stakeholders on the Austrian/Slovenia border.

The Empaths project is in its final phase, piloting an experimental training programme on participatory heritage interpretation. This began in June with three online training sessions for heritage professionals based in Greece, Italy and Austria/Slovenia on the principles of participatory heritage interpretation. Sandy Colvine delivered the online training for IE to its piloting partner, UNESCO Global Geopark Karawanken/Karavanke, which straddles part of the border between Austria and Slovenia.

The online training is complemented by on-site 'community labs' in the three pilot countries. These give heritage professionals the opportunity to experience participatory and facilitation techniques with local community members.

This all sounds very logical and straightforward, but it is not! Heritage interpretation and participatory practices are two big concepts. Together, they require heritage professionals to change their mindset and way of working by loosening traditional controls over the meaning-making process.

Firstly, inviting other voices into the conversation can obviously bring unforeseen opinions and ideas, with unexpected consequences. This can be unsettling for those heritage professionals who are used to setting the agenda and directing activities towards intended objectives. These concerns came through very clearly when Empaths partners consulted experienced interpretive planning consultants last year.

Secondly, six online training sessions and a five-day community lab are not enough to make anyone fully comfortable with heritage interpretation and participatory practices.

Similarly, completing a five-day IE Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) course does not instantly make you an accomplished interpreter. It is the start of a learning journey.

The community labs were, therefore, intended as 'real-life experiments', partly based on a design thinking process. This provided a roadmap: from empathising by understanding each other and what people value, to defining challenges, exploring deeper meanings, developing themes and narratives, and considering formats for interpretive experiences. The process ended by reflecting on what participants had learned and what had changed as a result.

Yet, no planned outcome can be guaranteed, and each step may take more or less time than expected. The aim was, therefore, to facilitate a 'big conversation' among participants, help them experience the power of working together and, where possible, reach a shared understanding of ideas for interpretive services that could promote shared heritage narratives.

This was exactly the experience of the community lab in UNESCO Global Geopark Karawanken/Karavanke, run by Claudia Grünberg on behalf of IE. The lab involved Geopark staff, heritage professionals and representatives of local community institutions from both sides of the border. It was initially prepared around the topic of how Austrian and Slovenian cross-border communities relate to the heritage managed by the Geopark in which they live.



Community lab exchanges (Image: Piko)

For all participants, Geopark staff, heritage professionals and representatives of local community institutions from both sides of the border, the lab provided an opportunity to experience the power of working with people outside their usual circles of interaction. Hopefully, this is the beginning of the change in mindset and way of working needed for genuinely co-creative meaning-making.

The EMPATHS project is co-funded by the European Union Erasmus+ programme.
More details: <https://empaths-project.eu>

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



Community lab scrapbook canvas (Image: Piko)

Searching for synergies

Alexander (Sandy) Colvine (France)

A new working group is meeting to make the most of the HI-People EU network grant for IE.

Following a motion adopted at the IE General Assembly on 25 May 2026, a working group has been established to analyse the opportunities that the EU-funded 'HI-People' network grant offers to strengthen IE's ongoing work. More specifically, this involves:

- Realigning tasks supported by the network grant with IE's strategic or shorter-term priorities
- Integrating network grant tasks to better support regular IE activities that might also sustain those network grant tasks after the EU grant ends
- Creating opportunities where possible to partially compensate the work of managing, subject and country coordinators

The network grant is not a typical EU project. Instead, it is designed to support and strengthen IE's structure and activities.

What does that mean, exactly? Well, within HI-People there are many new and existing work package tasks that the working group must consider.

For each work package, the working group examines each of the deliverables and agrees on ways to relate them closely to existing IE structures and activities. Here are two examples:

Firstly, IE must produce a toolkit that heritage organisations may use to measure how effective their interpretive efforts are at fostering visitor or audience awareness and even action about sustainability.

The working group discussed the deliverable and identified the opportunity for the toolkit to focus on the values that put people's well-being and the interests of the wider world first. This would help heritage organisations think about



IE coordinator meeting (Image: Daniela Ruci)

how their work can contribute to changing mindsets through value-based heritage experiences that underpin sustainability. The toolkit will be developed in consultation with IE members and other heritage interpretation stakeholders.

Secondly, IE must run a new cycle of Learning Landscapes. The working group agreed that any new cycle should build on lessons learned from the first UNESCO-backed initiative. IE will, therefore, develop a revised training curriculum for the new cycle with a stronger focus on participation and facilitation for people with experience in heritage interpretation.

The working group concluded that integrating this new training material into our existing training and certification programme was a priority, so that our training sector benefits from developing and testing concepts for the practical application of the participatory and co-creative methods to meaning making as part of the new paradigm. This helps maximise the value of the new training material, extending its benefits beyond the requirements of the HI-People network grant.

The network grant is, therefore, an opportunity that we should make the most of for IE, using it to support and strengthen what we already do

and bring real benefits to our members and heritage stakeholders.

At the time of writing, the working group currently comprises Managing Directors Helena Vičič and Gerald Wagenhofer, Valya Stergioti, Thorsten Ludwig, HI-People Project Manager and Project Assistant, Sandy Colvine and Ilaria Scarmagnan. So far, the group has met five times between July and September to discuss how to more closely align different tasks to IE's needs.

Finally, the General Assembly also tasked the working group with ensuring transparency. The group has drafted a set of rules of procedure and there will also be a dedicated space in our online members' area to share information about the original HI-People network grant proposals, the working group proposals for better synergies, and records of its meetings. The intention is to enable members to get involved whether this is following progress, sharing ideas, or joining the working group's efforts.

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

Could you reach out to your national commission for UNESCO?

Thorsten Ludwig (Germany)

They are great partners for implementing heritage interpretation in all countries and offer some prospects for cooperation.

In 2024, IE had the opportunity to conduct a two-day in-person workshop for the Austrian Commission for UNESCO in Vienna. The focus was on World Heritage interpretation. The German Commission for UNESCO took up this format, and since then IE has conducted three more workshops of this kind.

The workshops were prompted by the five recommendations on value-based heritage interpretation issued by the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe after its 2019 workshop in Bamberg, Germany. These recommendations were included in the regular reviews of the IE training programme, which culminated in the joint Learning Landscapes initiative between IE and the Regional Bureau.

Beyond presenting facts and meanings, the aim is to foster interpretive literacy among people. Visitors and local people around heritage sites are encouraged to share their own interpretations and the underlying values associated with them, while also ensuring that such processes are properly facilitated. Local stakeholders are supported in developing interpretive strategies together, and local guides, writers, and planners are to be given the opportunity to undergo relevant training and obtain certification.

During the workshop, we conducted exercises aimed at initiating whole interpretive experiences, linking heritage with values at varying levels, and identifying phenomena particularly suited to addressing sustainability in a way that opens access for people who are perhaps not initially interested in the topic.

As with all German UNESCO workshops, the event was initiated by Carolin Kolhoff, Head of the Division of World Heritage at the German Commission for UNESCO. This particular workshop was organised by Katharina Jesswein, Project Manager for Education and Mediation at the serial German-Czech World Heritage property Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří Mining Region. Hence, it also included a memorable descent into a mine shaft, where our hosts introduced us to an interpretive trail at a depth of 150 metres.

As a next step, heritage interpretation will now be the subject of the German Federal Foreign Office's regular online World Heritage Exchange. IE has just been invited to present the latest developments there, and participants from the previous in-person workshops will contribute by sharing activities resulting from them.

Furthermore, the Regional Bureau in Venice has initiated a two-day online symposium, scheduled for February, to familiarise all serial World Heritage properties in Europe with the new developments.



Workshop group on mining spoil heap above town and in a converted former machine hall (Image: Tom Fischer)

What can you do now?

National Commissions for UNESCO exist in all countries, serving as platforms between the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, the respective national government, and the civil society. You can find the contact details at <https://pax.unesco.org/countries/NationalCommissions.html>.

It would be highly desirable to reach out to commissions in more countries. Of course, this primarily calls for action from country coordinators and their teams, but also from other IE members, especially institutional ones, who may already have good contacts. Perhaps you might then be able to report on a workshop held in your country in a future newsletter.

Thorsten Ludwig founded his company, Bildungswerk Interpretation, in 1993. He holds an MSc in Interpretation: Management and Practice, was awarded for the ParcInterp training project as part of the UNESCO Decade of Education for Sustainable Development and, in his former role as IE Managing Director, received the EU Altiero Spinelli Prize for the initiative Engaging citizens with Europe's cultural heritage. You can contact him at: ludwig@interp.de.



The mine is still operated for study by the oldest mining university in the world (Image: Thorsten Ludwig)



Underground mining tour (Image: Thorsten Ludwig)

Free interactive online training sessions for the youth

Iva Silla and Samia Zitouni (Croatia)

Registration is open – Sign up or spread the word!

In the last issue of the Interpret Europe newsletter, we wrote an extensive article about IE's involvement in an Erasmus+ project called Liberation Route, Europe's Youth Ambassadors Network – all about creating the storytellers of the future to deal with difficult or sensitive heritage.

Now we're bringing a short update about an opportunity to get involved. If you are no longer youthful, please help to spread the word and share this news with any colleagues who have contacts with youth organisations.

The first cycle of our online training sessions starts in November. The exact dates are 26 November, 3 December, and 10 December 2026, from 17.00 to 19.00 CET.

The three sessions form a cycle, and participants should attend all three.

Participation is free. Details of how to apply can be found here: <https://www.lre-youth.eu/sign-up-online-training-series/>



The sessions encourage participation, (self)reflection, research of your own environment, observation of the patterns that create different narratives, and creating digital stories. We will explore what war stories mean today, how to tell them effectively and how they can strengthen engagement, leadership and citizenship. The training will introduce techniques for sharing the stories and fostering understanding. The value-based heritage interpretation theory is an underlying pillar of these sessions.

If you can't make it this time, stay tuned. We will organise at least two more cycles. This cycle is reserved for young adults, people over 18. However, one of the next cycles could be for high school students. We would love to hear from you. Would you (or someone you know) like to join as a whole class? Is English a problem for you or your students? We may also be able to organise them in different languages and for particular age groups.

Over the next two years, the project will build a European network of storytellers and interpreters for difficult-heritage, centred on World War 2. Together, we will create new tales that connect heritage with contemporary democratic values – and leave a digital footprint for the future.

More information:

LRE Youth Ambassadors website: <https://www.lre-youth.eu/>

LRE Youth Ambassadors Network application form: <https://www.lre-youth.eu/sign-up-youth-ambassadors/>

LRE Youth Ambassadors on Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/lre_youth/

Iva Silla and Samia Zitouni are Interpret Europe certified interpretive trainers from Croatia. They are working with experts from Studio Globo to develop a set of interactive and reflective online sessions for the LRE Youth Ambassadors project. Contact Iva at iva@questoftales.com, and Samia at samiaztn@gmail.com.

Five days of interpretation in Greifswald

Annika Lenz (Germany)

A recap of our Certified Interpretive Writer (CIW) course in Germany.

The Tourism Association of Vorpommern is working to develop our region as a place where people can experience nature deeply and responsibly. High-quality visitor experience is a key part of this vision. In June, we had the opportunity to host an Interpret Europe Certified Interpretive Writer (CIW) course in the Hanseatic city of Greifswald – five intense days fully dedicated to interpretive writing.

Nine participants from different professional backgrounds – guiding, nature conservation and tourism – came together with one shared goal: to create visitor texts that truly touch people and make them think. Under the guidance of our IE trainer, the course offered a well-balanced mix of theory, reflection and hands-on practice.

A central element was the development of an individual interpretive panel. Instead of simply informing, these panels are designed to speak directly to the reader. They invite emotional engagement and offer the reader new perspectives on a place, an object or a landscape. Step by step, participants transformed initial ideas into concise texts with a clear theme, meaningful links to the site and tangible relevance for visitors.

Greifswald provided the ideal open-air classroom. After short inputs inside, we moved outside whenever possible – to the cathedral, the market square, the harbour, and the ruins of Eldena Abbey. Concepts were tested immediately on real locations, re-worked, and then transferred back into the design of the panels. By the end of the week, we were all impressed by how diverse and creative the final results were, even though everyone had followed the same structured method.



CIW course exercise (Image: Reimann)

Despite the intensive programme, there was plenty of time for exchange and networking. Discussions continued over coffee and during short walks through town; experiences from different regions and institutions were shared generously. This collegial atmosphere was one of the course's great strengths and will, we are sure, continue in future cooperation.

For us as a Tourism Association, the CIW course is more than a training opportunity. It is part of a broader effort to professionalise our Nature Guide offers within the project 'Gemeinsam Mee(h)r Natur in Vorpommern wagen' (Daring more nature together in Vorpommern), also known as Lebenslandschaft Vorpommern (<https://lebenslandschaft-vorpommern.de/>). By investing in interpretive writing skills, we want to ensure that new trails, guided tours and visitor infrastructure in our region do not just show beautiful places, but also help residents and guests understand why these landscapes matter – for biodiversity, for local livelihoods and for a sustainable future.

We warmly thank all participants for their openness and commitment, and we wish them every success as they apply their new skills in daily practice. Our sincere thanks also go to Interpret Europe for the professional facilitation and inspiring guidance throughout the week.

Annika Lenz works as project manager at the Tourism Association of Vorpommern, where she brings three years' experience to the role. Her main interest is in sustainable tourism. Annika can be contacted at: lenz@vorpommern.de.

Cats of Cres: Seeing the town through feline eyes

Dunja Sladić (Croatia)

What if cats could teach us to look at a town differently? In Cres, they lead us to small details we see every day but rarely stop to think about.

The idea for Cats of Cres was created during an IE Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) course organised by the town of Cres in Croatia. The course included a lot of practical fieldwork, where each participant developed and explored their own interpretive ideas.

The IE trainers noticed something else: I seemed to know almost every cat in the old town by name. One of them asked me, "Why don't you create a tour about the cats of Cres?" Something immediately clicked.

With their guidance, I developed the idea further, and Cats of Cres became my final course project. This summer, it also became a real interpretive walk in Cres.

But Cats of Cres is not really a tour about cats. The cats are our guides. They experience the town differently from us. They see details we often pass without noticing, hear things we do not hear, and disappear into narrow passages and hidden corners we rarely explore. During the walk, I invite participants to imagine seeing Cres through their eyes.

Instead of focusing on the town's most obvious landmarks, we stop at small details that are always there, but that we rarely consider important. A fragment of old street paving tells us how people once moved through the town. A symbol on a façade introduces a noble family. Even the terrace of a café reveals a piece of the town's history.

At the beginning of the walk, participants receive cat ears. It is a playful invitation to become cats themselves for a while: to slow down, observe, listen and look more carefully. Participation is an important part of the experience. We observe,



Bili keeping an eye on Cres harbour (Image: Dunja Sladić)

exchange ideas and discover the stories together.

The real cats of Cres are an important part of the experience too. They are friendly, used to people and regularly spend time around the old town, so we often meet them during the walk. Guests also receive a few cat treats, which makes these encounters especially fun for children. They can offer the cats a treat, pet them and get to know some of their names and personalities. Some cats have owners and some do not, but they are all part of everyday life in the town. Of course, there is never a guarantee that a particular cat will appear – they are cats, after all.

My hope is that after the walk participants will continue looking differently – not only at Cres, but at other places they visit. Perhaps they will notice a small detail they would previously have passed by, or see a cat disappearing around a corner and wonder: What would that cat show me if I followed it?

I would love Cats of Cres to inspire interpreters elsewhere to find their own cats, small details and local stories. Every town has a different story to tell.

Dunja Sladić is a licensed tourist and hiking guide and heritage interpreter from Cres, Croatia. Through her tour agency, Cres Fun & More, she creates local experiences connecting visitors with the island's heritage, traditions and everyday life. She can be contacted at: info@cres-fun.com.

From heritage to human connection

Rodney Bunhiko (Zimbabwe)

Preparing Southern Africa's heritage sites to tell stories that matter

A heritage site can preserve extraordinary places, traditions and memories, but its significance becomes more meaningful when people can understand, connect with, and appreciate the stories behind it.

For six heritage destinations across Southern Africa, this means going beyond presenting facts to visitors. It means asking deeper questions:

- What should visitors understand?
- Whose voices should they hear?
- How can communities participate?
- How can stories contribute to conservation, education and sustainable tourism?

These questions were at the centre of a regional training on interpretation and storytelling held from 27 to 31 July 2026 at Matobo Hills, in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, which brought together participants from Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Supported by the European Union and implemented by UNESCO through the Africa-Europe Partnerships for Culture: Promoting Culture and Heritage-based Sustainable Tourism in Southern Africa project, the training was delivered in collaboration with Interpret Europe and technical support from the African World Heritage Fund.

Moving from planning to visitor experience

The training marked an important step in the project's journey from planning towards implementation. Across the six participating sites, Tsodilo Hills World Heirtage Site, Matsanjeni North, Morija Cultural Precinct, Twyfelfontein / Ui-//aes World Heritage Site, †Khomani Cultural Landscape World Heritage Site and Matobo Hills World Heritage Sites, work is underway to strengthen how heritage is managed, interpreted and connected to sustainable tourism development.



Group work outside (Image: UNESCO ROSA)

Interpretation is a critical part of this process. Rather than producing interpretation frameworks that remain as planning documents, the project aims to translate them into experiences that visitors can see, hear and participate in, including guided experiences, heritage trails, exhibitions, community storytelling and appropriate digital interpretation.

Through the Interpret Europe Certified Interpretive Planner (CIP) training course, participants explored practical methods for identifying the significance of heritage, understanding different audiences, developing meaningful themes and connecting tangible places with the stories, memories and values associated with them.

The learning extended beyond the training room, with practical exercises encouraging participants to consider how interpretive principles can be applied in real heritage settings.

"The training challenged us to think beyond simply giving visitors information about our sites. Good interpretation is about creating a connection, helping visitors understand why a place matters, whose stories it carries and what they should take away from the experience."

Corera Links, Socio-Economic Transformation Officer - †Khomani Cultural Landscape World Heritage Site, South Africa.

Putting people and multiple voices at the centre

At the heart of effective interpretation is people. Heritage sites hold different histories, memories, meanings and perspectives. The objective is, therefore, not to develop one standard story across the six destinations, but to equip each site team to develop an interpretation framework grounded in its own heritage values, communities and visitor context.

Community participation will be particularly important as this work moves forward. Local communities are not only beneficiaries of heritage tourism. They are knowledge holders, custodians and storytellers whose perspectives can help shape how places are understood and presented.

Bringing these voices into interpretation can also create opportunities for local guides, creatives, cultural practitioners, entrepreneurs, women and young people to participate more meaningfully in the visitor economy.

“As local guides, we are not only showing visitors places; we are sharing stories that come from our communities and our lived experiences. It is important that local people are involved in deciding how those stories are told, so that visitors hear the voices of the people connected to the heritage.”

Sipho Khoza, Local Community Guide - Matsanjeni North, Eswatini

This reflects a broader shift towards interpretation that is inclusive and multivocal, recognising that heritage can carry different meanings for different people and that these perspectives are part of what makes a place significant.

Learning by doing

The training was designed not simply to introduce interpretation theory, but to prepare participants for the work that follows.

Through facilitated sessions, group exercises, practical activities and reflection, participants considered how interpretation can provoke curiosity, encourage participation, create deeper meaning and ultimately strengthen stewardship of heritage.

One question captured this approach throughout the training: What story should every visitor remember after leaving your heritage site?

The question moves interpretation beyond signs, information panels and guided commentary. It asks site teams to think about the lasting connection between the visitor and the place, and what understanding that comes from emotion or curiosity a visitor should carry with them afterwards.

“Interpretation is not simply about providing more information. It is about creating meaningful connections between people and heritage. When visitors are encouraged to think, participate and discover meaning for themselves, interpretation can contribute to a deeper appreciation of a place and its values.”

Michal Medek, Interpret Europe trainer



Looking at one of the sites (Image: UNESCO ROSA)

From training to site-level action

The conclusion of the regional training is, therefore, a beginning rather than an end. Participants will take the knowledge and methods developed during the programme back to their respective sites, where the next stage will involve working with site teams, communities and other stakeholders to develop site-specific interpretation and storytelling frameworks.

These frameworks will help identify the stories each site wants to communicate, the audiences it seeks to reach, whose perspectives need to be represented, and the most appropriate ways of turning those narratives into visitor experiences.

This site-level process is particularly important because the six destinations are very different. Tsodilo Hills WHS, Matsanjeni North, Morija Cultural Precinct, Twyfelfontein / U-i//aes WHS, #Khomani Cultural Landscape WHS and Matobo Hills WHS each have distinct histories, landscapes, communities, heritage values and tourism contexts.

Their interpretation should reflect those differences.

“This training is not an end in itself. What matters now is how the learning is taken back to each of the six sites and translated into interpretation and storytelling frameworks developed with communities and other stakeholders. Ultimately, we want to see those frameworks move from paper into real visitor experiences that strengthen people’s connection with heritage while creating opportunities for communities.”

Rodney Bunhiko, Project Coordinator – UNESCO

Turning stories into sustainable futures

The ambition extends beyond improving how stories are told. Strong interpretation can contribute to more meaningful visitor experiences, diversified tourism products, opportunities for local livelihoods and greater understanding of why heritage needs to be protected.



Looking at one of the sites (Image: UNESCO ROSA)

For the Africa–Europe Partnerships for Culture project, this connects interpretation directly to the wider objective of developing sustainable culture and heritage-based tourism across Southern Africa.

The measure of success will, therefore, not be the completion of the training itself, or even the production of six interpretation frameworks. It will be seen in what happens afterwards: whether guides are better equipped to engage visitors; whether communities have stronger voices in how their heritage is presented; whether new experiences and opportunities emerge around heritage; and whether visitors leave with a deeper understanding of the places and people they have encountered.

The training provided the participating site teams with a common foundation. The next step is to turn that learning into locally grounded interpretation frameworks and those frameworks into experiences that connect people with heritage. Because ultimately, the most powerful heritage stories are not simply the ones that are told. They are the ones people understand, feel connected to and carry with them long after they leave.

Rodney Bunhiko is a culture and heritage professional the Project Coordinator for the UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa (ROSA). He has coordinated significant cultural initiatives, including restoration and storytelling development projects at the Great Zimbabwe National Monument and regional heritage preservation programmes. Rodney can be contacted at: r.bunhiko@unesco.org

Congratulations to our newly certified members

Certified Interpretive Guides (CIG)

Željko Anđelković, Serbia
Renate De Backere, Netherlands
Alegra Jenkins, Croatia
Marija Meašić, Croatia
Martina Opačak, Croatia
Robert Outram, Greece
Ivana Paušić, Croatia
Sanja Prijatelj, Croatia
Jelena Škrabe, Croatia
Natalija Tomić, Croatia

Certified Interpretive Writers (CIW)

Richard Arseneault, UK
Chrysoula Athanasiou, Greece
Jasminka Najcer, Croatia

IE training courses and webinars

Certification courses and modules

Would you enjoy an enriching course with like-minded people and to gain an IE certification? Keep an eye on the training pages of the IE website for up-to-date information on the next courses available near you: <https://interpret-europe.net/training/ie-courses/ie-training-courses/> or email training@interpret-europe.net.

We also now offer a scholarship scheme! Find out more and check your eligibility here: <https://interpret-europe.net/training/ie-courses/scholarship-scheme/>

Date	Language	Location	Trainer
Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) course			
2-13/11/2026	French	Salvan/ Rossinière, Switzerland	Sandy Colvine
9-13/11/2026	Croatian	Split, Croatia	Max Dubravko Fijacko
16-20/11/2026	Swedish	Koster, Sweden	Per Sonnvik
TBC/01/2027	English	Glasgow, UK	Thorsten Ludwig
Certified Interpretive Writer (CIW) course			
7-13/10/2026	English	Bergen, Norway	Sandy Colvine
Module on Live Interpretation (MLI)			
7-8/11/2026	Slovenian	Šmarje pri Jelšah, Slovenia	Bojana Čibej

Upcoming IE webinars

10 November 2026 at 15.00 CET

Camps in the Kruger National Park for differently abled children and interpretation around those experiences for different disabilities

Chris Patton (South Africa)

15 December 2026 at 15.00 CET

Community consultation reveals many different perspectives, both within and between communities

Nigel Mills (UK)

IE webinars are free for members and are conducted in English. Keep an eye on the website for upcoming webinars, which are usually offered monthly:

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

Email webinar@interpret-europe.net for more information or if you would like to present a topic yourself.

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

There is no silence in nature

Penelope Gkini (Greece)

Interpreting the familiar is a challenge, especially when it comes to soundscapes.

Do you think that living in the countryside is quiet? What would London be without the melodious sound of Big Ben? What would Mediterranean summers be without the chorus of cicadas?

In heritage interpretation, we often talk about multisensory experiences: smell, taste, touch – and, of course, sound. Sound can be particularly powerful. Music has always played an important role in intangible cultural heritage, and today technology gives us new ways to bring sounds, songs and stories into heritage experiences. Folklore songs, for example, can be reproduced during a tour, or incorporated into living heritage experiences, adding another layer to the visitor's sensory journey.

But recently, I encountered a type of sound that made me think differently about what we consider heritage. The sounds we don't notice. I often remember someone saying to me, "Wow, you can still hear hawks around your house!" For me, this was almost surprising. Not because I couldn't hear them, but because I had never really thought about them.

In cities, we often talk about urban white noise. We become accustomed to it and eventually stop consciously noticing it. The same can happen in nature. Depending on where we live, the sounds of birds, bees, insects, sheep and goat bells, cats, rustling leaves and the wind can become part of our everyday acoustic environment. They are so familiar that we stop listening to them.

Yet these sounds can also be references to place. They tell us where we are, who inhabits this place. They can evoke memories, seasons, landscapes and ways of life. And, just like smells or tastes, they can carry cultural meaning.



Lemon Walks logo (Image: Andros Research)
<https://androsresearchcenter.org/en/>

This question became particularly relevant to me during a recent project on Andros Island in Greece, where we developed two interpretive walks exploring the heritage of the lemon. As part of the project, a large library of soundscapes was created.

At first glance, these might seem like ordinary recordings. But perhaps that is exactly the point. How should heritage interpreters deal with sounds that are so familiar that we hardly notice them? How can we transform an everyday sound into an element of interpretation? And, more importantly, how can we use sound to make visitors listen differently?

Digital interpretation gives us some exciting possibilities. A sound does not necessarily have to be the main attraction. It can work subtly in the background, create an atmosphere, accompany a story, or become the story itself.

For example, in an audio tour or digital interpretive app, we could use familiar sounds in several ways:

- A sound carpet – A natural soundscape playing quietly underneath the interpretive guide's narration, creating a stronger sense of place.
- A phenomenon to be interpreted – Instead of simply using a bird sound as background, why not invite visitors to stop and listen? And consider what its presence tells us about the landscape?

- An interactive sound game – Visitors could be challenged to identify sounds around them, match recordings with places, animals or elements of the landscape, or even distinguish between sounds that belong to different places or seasons.

These approaches turn listening from something passive into something active.

Learning to listen again: Perhaps the most interesting opportunity is not to introduce visitors to sounds they have never heard before. Perhaps it is to make them notice sounds they have heard all their life. And once we start listening, the landscape changes. We begin to realise that sound is not simply an accompaniment to a heritage experience. It can be a way of understanding place.

So perhaps the question for heritage interpreters is not simply: What can visitors see here? But also, What can visitors hear? And, What have they stopped noticing? Because there is no silence in nature. We just need to learn how to listen.

Penelope Gkini works as an interpretive guide and mountain leader. She is an Interpret Europe certified interpretive trainer. You can contact her at: porizocrete@gmail.com.

[The first draft of this article was written with AI support before being edited and proofread.]

Where the pines still hold their voices

Georgia Pyriovoli (Greece)

Place, dialogue, encounter, and the continuation of ideas through heritage.

Have you ever visited a place that stayed with you long after you had left? Not simply because it was beautiful. Not simply because it was old or picturesque. But because you felt that something invisible was still there, perhaps a memory, an idea, a conversation that had never really ended.

In Sykia, on the northern coast of the Peloponnese, Greece, there is a house that invites precisely this kind of encounter. Hidden among the pine trees of Pefkias forest, beside the Corinthian Gulf, stands the villa of the Greek poet Angelos Sikelianos and his wife, Eva Palmer. Completed in 1916, the villa is one of the distinctive literary and cultural landmarks of the area. Its architecture brings together references from different layers of the Greek past, including classical, Byzantine and Ionian/Venetian influences. Yet the building itself is not the most interesting story. The first thing an interpretive visitor encounters is not the villa. It is the landscape.

Pefkias is a coastal pine forest where the trees grow just beside the Corinthian Gulf, creating a striking meeting of land and sea, enclosure and openness. The villa stands within this landscape, and its setting is essential to understanding the atmosphere in which Sikelianos and Palmer lived and created.

This immediately raises a simple question: Why there?

Instead of beginning with dates and architectural details, the question invites us to look: the pine trees, the sea, the light, the sounds. So, the landscape becomes part of the story.



The landscape is part of the story (Image: Georgia Pyriovoli)

For Sikelianos, nature was not merely scenery. His relationship with the natural world was deeply connected with his artistic and philosophical outlook. The house, therefore, becomes more than a residence; it becomes part of a particular environment of thought and creativity.

Then we can look at the building itself. Its architectural language is equally layered. Classical references coexist with Byzantine elements and influences from the Ionian and Venetian traditions. Rather than belonging entirely to one historical period, the villa brings different cultural layers into conversation. In a sense, the house is already expressing an idea that was central to Sikelianos and Palmer: that the Greek past could be revisited, reimagined and brought into dialogue with the present.

Furthermore, the villa became a meeting place for people connected with the intellectual and artistic life of the period. Historical sources associate Sykia and the villa with famous poets, including Nikos Kazantzakis, Kostis Palamas and Kostas Karyotakis, among others.

It would be easy to turn these names into a list of famous visitors, but a list of names does not necessarily create an interpretive experience. So instead, imagine them as voices. A poet. A novelist. An artist. A composer.

Different personalities, different ideas, different visions of Greece, sharing a physical and intellectual space. What might they have discussed? What did they disagree about? What ideas were born from these encounters? And, perhaps the most important question, What would you have asked them if you had been there?

This question changes the visitor's role. We are no longer simply looking at a historic house or receiving information about the people who lived there. We are imagining their voices and becoming participants in a conversation that began long ago.

This is what makes the villa particularly interesting as a place of heritage interpretation, a place where literature could meet music, ancient Greece could meet modern artistic experimentation, nature could become a source of inspiration, personal relationships could develop into cultural projects.

The relationship between Sikelianos and Eva Palmer is especially important in this respect. Palmer was not simply the poet's wife. An American by birth and deeply engaged with Greek culture, music, theatre and traditional arts, she was an artist and cultural figure in her own right. The Delphic vision that emerged from the world of Sikelianos and Palmer eventually took form in the Delphic Festivals of 1927 and 1930.

Therefore, we do not simply interpret what survives. We interpret what connects the surviving place with questions that still matter.

Today, the villa exists in a very different context from the world of Sikelianos and Palmer. Its surroundings and use have changed, and the people who filled the house with conversation are long gone. Yet the place can still provoke questions.

Standing among the pines, looking towards the house and the sea, we can imagine the conversations that once took place here and, for a moment, create a new one. That is where interpretation can begin. Not with just an instruction to admire a historic building, but with an invitation to enter into a relationship with it. A heritage place does not necessarily have to give us every answer. Sometimes it gives us better questions.

How can the past become a source for creating something new? How can encounters among people shape cultural ideas? What happens when different perspectives meet in the same



The villa nestled in the landscape (Image: Georgia Pyriovoli)

place? And finally, What conversations deserve to continue today?

Perhaps this is what makes the Villa of Angelos Sikelianos more than a historic residence. Its walls preserve a past. Its landscape preserves traces of a particular way of life. But its greatest potential may lie in the questions it can still inspire. Because heritage is not only what survives... It is what continues to speak!

There is also a more personal reason why this place continues to speak to me. I spent my childhood summers in Sykia, growing up with memories of Pefkias — its pine trees, the sea, the paths through the forest, and the quiet presence of this particular house. Long before I approached it as a heritage site, I knew it simply as part of the landscape of my childhood. Perhaps this is why, when I return to the villa today, I find myself thinking not only about the people who lived there a century ago, but also about the way places become part of our own stories. A landscape can hold memories that are deeply personal, while at the same time carrying memories that belong to a much wider cultural past. The two can meet in the same place. And perhaps this is where my own encounter with the villa begins.

Georgia Pyriovolis is an English teacher, certified tour leader and mountain guide, as well as a pioneer of Forest Bathing practice in Greece, recognising the profound link that nature plays in cultivating health and wellness. She facilitates nature-based experiences that foster reflection, dialogue and meaningful connection with place. She can be contacted at: gpyriov@gmail.com.

Why strong themes still matter

Vanessa Vaio (Italy)

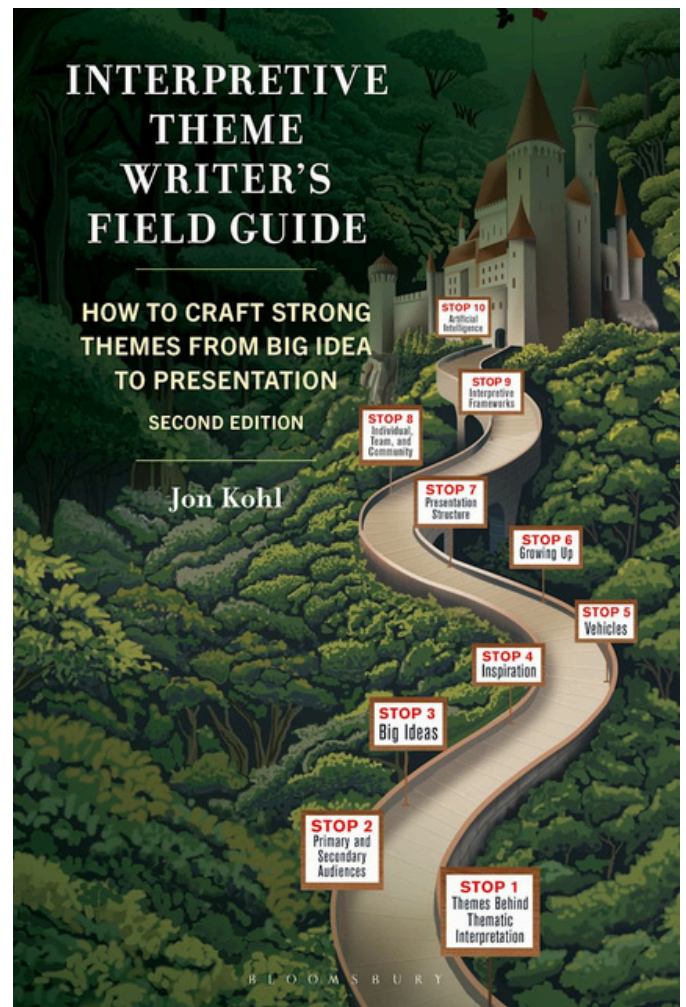
A practical guide that reopens the debate on themes, expertise and AI, while offering tools every interpretive planner can use.

Jon Kohl's *Interpretive Theme Writer's Field Guide*, now in its second edition, is not just a book explaining why interpretation should be thematic. Subtitled, *How to craft strong themes from big idea to presentation*, it tackles a more practical question: How do we actually craft and deploy a strong interpretive theme?

Designed as a field guide rather than a theoretical text though it still offers extensive references from the interpretation and writing craft literatures, it combines concise explanations with exercises, worksheets, famous writing quotes, examples and critiques of real-world themes. It also features contributions from practitioners worldwide in the 'Voices from the Field' sections. You can find essays by IE members Thorsten Ludwig, Angela Pfenniger and Michael Hamish Glen.

For members of Interpret Europe, the timing is telling. Our professional conversations have shifted in recent years toward narratives, participation and co-creation, a shift explored at length during our online symposium in February this year on the role of narratives in 21st century heritage interpretation, which asked how narratives shape meaning, dialogue and responsibility, and why working with them has become a central task for interpretation today.

Kohl's book arrives in the middle of that reflection, not outside it. He advocates that narratives do not exist without a theme structure, but that both can be the starting point for storytelling. Kohl embraces participatory approaches; in fact, he argues for 'theme teams' and community-based interpretive frameworks to help develop the 'Big Idea'. But he insists participation does not replace professional expertise, and that a smaller professional group or individual still needs to shape the words that carry a shared idea.



Interpretive Theme Writer's Field Guide second edition book cover
(Image: Jon Kohl/ Bloomsbury)

Whether a theme ever truly left the centre of planning, or only its authorship became contested, is itself part of the debate this book reopens.

One of its most valuable ideas is the distinction between primary and secondary audiences: a theme should first inspire those who create it, before being adapted for different kinds of visitors. It is a convincing defence of the interpretive planner's role, not someone who imposes meaning, but someone who facilitates dialogue to identify a compelling 'Big Idea' and then refines it into a theme sentence. The book is process-driven and this idea was already in the first edition.

What the second edition genuinely adds are two new chapters: one on deriving presentation structures from themes, another on developmental psychology, a reminder that

interpreters grow and change too which affects both the kinds of themes that they write and the kinds of themes different audiences can relate to.

The chapter on artificial intelligence (AI) deserves attention for its balance. Kohl treats AI as neither threat nor miracle, but as a tool that still demands critical professional judgement.

The question resonates well beyond this book: it ran through this year's Interpret Europe trainers' summer school, where Michal Medek facilitated an exchange ranging from skepticism to cautious optimism, alongside real ethical and sustainability concerns. Kohl has also conducted a separate study on the use of AI in interpretive theme writing, which will be the subject of a webinar on 13 October 2026.

Readers will not agree with every argument here, nor should they. Perhaps the book's greatest contribution is that it keeps a debate alive rather than closing it, pushing us to keep refining both our thinking and our tools.

The book is available from the US National Association for Interpretation (NAI) and Bloomsbury Academic.

Vanessa Vaio is an IE certified interpretive planner and trainer and is IE's Country Coordinator Italy. She has worked in heritage interpretation for more than 30 years, supporting museums, protected areas and UNESCO World Heritage sites across Europe. She can be contacted at:
vanessa.vaio@interpret-europe.net.

What's going on elsewhere

Have your say on AHI's Best Practice Guides

Association for Heritage Interpretation (UK)

AHI is inviting members, non-members and wider interpretation professionals to share their views on our Best Practice Guides.

Whether you've used the guides regularly, dipped into them occasionally, shared them with colleagues, or haven't yet explored them, we'd really value your feedback.

The survey is anonymous and takes around five minutes to complete. Responses will help shape the future direction of the Best Practice Guides and will also be discussed at the AHI Conference 2026 in Newcastle this October.

Complete the survey here:

<https://forms.cloud.microsoft/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=LVbl49TfZkGa3TlcJel2Bb8C2S3UJGdGtuZnuSjFH31UQUY3TTVaSVNSMlpHSDVYNTIZQII1TD A5SC4u&origin=Invitation&channel=0>

You can explore AHI's Best Practice Guides on our website. A selection of guides are open access for non-members, while AHI members can access the full archive of guides, webinar recordings and resources.

<https://ahi.org.uk/resource-type/best-practice-guides/>



Best practice guides - Have your say (Image: AHI)

Making 'Public AI' reality: How cultural heritage can lead the way

Europeana Foundation

A joint policy contribution from Europeana and the European Heritage Hub.

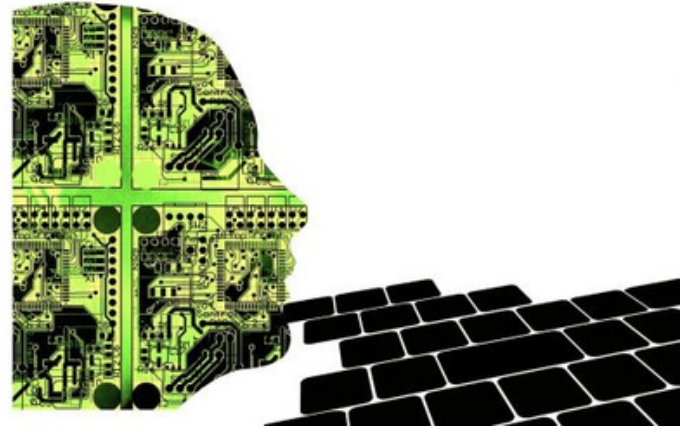
AI is changing how knowledge, culture and history are shaped, accessed and understood. This has profound implications for the cultural heritage sector, which has long served as a trusted and accountable interface to public knowledge and culture. At the same time, the growing influence of AI raises important social, cultural, geopolitical and geoeconomic questions, particularly as technological power becomes increasingly concentrated in the hands of a small number of private actors outside Europe.

Against this backdrop, a recent online Policy Talk explored the vision of a distinctly European approach to AI – Public AI – and the role that the cultural heritage sector can play in shaping it. The discussion built on a recently published paper by Europeana, titled 'Making Public AI reality: How cultural heritage can lead the way' (2026), and an upcoming policy paper from the European Heritage Hub, outlining concrete recommendations to build Public AI in Europe.

European and international policymakers, innovators and leaders from across the cultural heritage and AI communities came together for discussion with the aim to catalyse a coordinated advocacy movement around shared policy priorities and a common vision for Public AI.

A joint policy contribution

As part of the Hub's mission to contribute to shaping EU policies relevant to cultural heritage, we have been following with great interest the development of the forthcoming AI Strategy for the Cultural and Creative Sectors (CCS), which will be released by the European Commission next year, as announced in the Culture Compass for Europe. We are committed to supporting, informing and inspiring this important Strategy and stand ready to mobilise



AI intelligent person (Image: Geralt on Pixabay_artificial-intelligence-intelligent-person 503588)

our expertise for this purpose. The recent Policy Talk was part of this effort.

The cultural heritage sector can help to shape a more diverse, fair and sustainable AI ecosystem in Europe – one that is grounded in the public interest.

Together, the European Heritage Hub and the European Heritage Alliance can make a difference by articulating the policies, partnerships and collective vision needed to make Public AI a reality in Europe. Find the recent papers online to learn more.

Harry Verwayen, General Director of the Europeana Foundation, European Heritage Hub beneficiary and partner, also in its role as the coordinator of the European Heritage Hub – European Heritage Alliance Digital Task Force and steward of the common European data space for cultural heritage.

Sneška Quaedvlieg-Mihailovic, Secretary General of Europa Nostra, Project Leader of the European Heritage Hub and coordinator of the European Heritage Alliance.

[This article has been taken from a newsmail for members and followers of the European Heritage Hub.]

The paper is available to view here: https://www.dataspace-culturalheritage.eu/en/news/making-public-ai-reality-how-cultural-heritage-can-lead-the-way?cf_chl_f tk=scroB7TyH7G9SgfCUTO0IPE5eFI2YjHbRISjXg4 cCg-1783407985-1.0.1.1-mIxYvpKWik rXxTjTdtjIMJrHCfQsDLOTHReKXd5G70

Funding opportunities

Funding opportunities to prepare for in 2027

It's best to plan well ahead and develop your ideas with potential partners in time to apply for funding.

The list of funding calls below might provide some ideas to get you going. Don't forget to check official websites for the full details and keep an eye on any deadlines.

The Horizon list is particularly strong for projects in HI. The Commission's work programme confirms the eight heritage topics opening 13 May 2027 and closing 23 September 2027, while the two-stage heritage topic opens in March and has its first deadline on 4 May 2027.

It's always worth keeping an eye on the websites for Erasmus+ and Creative Europe. These two funding programmes have provided support for our members in the past. Both websites currently still show the 2026 programme, but the 2027 offer should be available to view soon. Interreg consists of numerous programmes, each with its own calls and eligibility rules. The central Interreg site currently lists open/forthcoming calls, while the Commission specifically identifies Interreg as one of the major EU sources for cultural-heritage projects.

Good luck - and don't forget to use the IE members' network if you are searching for potential project partners to work with.



300 euros (Image: Lionel Allorge, CC BY-SA 3.0)

See the list below for some ideas.

Horizon Europe – Impact-driven research on cultural heritage, arts & CCIs

4 May 2027 (1st stage)

Research and innovation using heritage, arts and creative industries to drive sustainable innovation and/or European belonging.

Creative Europe – European Cooperation Projects

expected spring 2027

Transnational cultural cooperation, audience development, capacity-building, innovation and internationalisation.

Erasmus+ – Cooperation Partnerships / Small-scale Partnerships

expected 2027

Cooperation, training, professional development, new learning methods and organisational capacity.

Horizon Europe – Sustainable cultural tourism

23 Sep 2027

Sustainable, inclusive and resilient cultural tourism, including community participation, less-developed destinations and new tourism models.

Horizon Europe – Societal impact of cultural heritage

23 Sep 2027

Demonstrating and strengthening the social value and impact of cultural heritage.

Horizon Europe – Safeguarding & transmission of intangible cultural heritage

23 Sep 2027

New approaches to preserving, transmitting and revitalising intangible cultural heritage.

Horizon Europe – Culture, heritage & creative industries for health and well-being

23 Sep 2027

Research on how culture and heritage can contribute to health and well-being.

Horizon Europe – Culture/creativity and the social economy

23 Sep 2027

Strengthening the relationship between cultural/creative sectors and the social economy.

Horizon Europe – Circular economy & crafts

23 Sep 2027

Crafts and cultural/creative practices contributing to circular-economy transitions.

Horizon Europe – European culture & creativity innovation ecosystem

23 Sep 2027

Strengthening innovation ecosystems and cooperation across cultural and creative sectors.

Horizon Europe – AI4Creatives

23 Sep 2027

Fair and responsible AI applications for cultural and creative sectors.

CERV – relevant 2027 calls

2027 dates vary

European citizenship, memory, participation and shared European history/values; relevant where heritage has a civic/remembrance dimension.

Interreg programme-specific

Cross-border/transnational cooperation, including cultural and natural heritage, sustainable tourism and regional development.

Some funding calls are made of two parts. March 2027 will see the deadline for LIFE projects, which is for the second stage of the 2026 two-stage call. You would not be able to enter the programme at that point as the concept-stage deadline was 3 September 2026. But this is an illustration of why planning to join a LIFE funded project needs to start very early.

LIFE – Strategic Nature Projects (SNaP)

4 Mar 2027*

Large-scale projects implementing nature/biodiversity strategies and action plans.

LIFE – Strategic Integrated Projects (SIP)

4 Mar 2027*

Large-scale environmental/climate projects implementing strategies and plans.

IE announcements

Change of priorities: iecon27 cancelled

IE Management

Update your diaries! Sadly, we will not be meeting in Nuremburg in spring as planned.

With regret, we must update you all not to plan your journey to Germany for next spring, as was previously communicated.

Due to some shifts in priorities and funding options, the proposed conference for next year – iecon27 – needs to be cancelled. Well, let's call it postponed, as we hope to re-instate the concept of our fantastic in-person meeting and chance for lively debate among our network of heritage interpretation professionals in future.

For now, keep an eye on our announcements as we hope to find other engaging ways of keeping the fire alive between us.



We will meet again (Image: IE Coordinators)

Welcome to our new members

Individual members

Barbara Amorosini Dalessandro, Portugal
Rita Andrade, Portugal
Juan Bonpland, Portugal
Narimane Zina Bouhara Belounis, Spain
Sven Capan, Croatia
Dolores Dragan, Croatia
Hillevi Eriksson, Sweden
Mia Frleta, Croatia
Nicole Hyslop, Sweden
Alegra Jenkins, Croatia
Torfi Jónsson, Iceland
Walaa Kord, UK
Lorena Kreuger, Portugal
Erik Larsson, Sweden
Marija Meašić, Croatia
Tamara Nikolic Deric, Croatia
Marcus Olsson, Sweden
Ivana Pacolová, Slovakia
Ivana Paušić, Croatia
Anna Petri, Sweden
Lucija Radenić, Croatia
Dušan Ralić, Croatia
Isidora Ralić, Croatia
Samuel Ribeiro, Portugal
Astrid Silla, Croatia
Milan Vukas, Croatia

Welcome to our new coordinators

Welcome and thanks for joining the IE team to one new coordinator this time.

Stephanie Baehler
Country Coordinator Switzerland



Switzerland is a small country that has a big treasure: its diversity. A diversity that can be found in its mountains and valleys, its languages and dialects, and its many different cultural and natural heritages. We want to embrace this diversity and build bridges between different regions, perspectives and fields by creating a strong network of Swiss heritage professionals.

I grew up in Basel, being immersed from a very young age in the cultural heritage tradition, Basler Fasnacht, that fostered my love for music, creative expression, poetry and art. My curiosity, my sense of observation, and my passion for learning and discovering allowed me to dive into many different topics, to discover the world and to meet a lot of wonderful people.

Transmitting this knowledge, fostering curiosity and enabling others to learn gradually became an important part of my life.

Studying Geosciences in Basel, I discovered the German Wadden Sea by working as a volunteer

and I was deeply touched by this incredible landscape. This experience introduced me to the art of guiding through the mudflats, Education for Sustainable Development and the work within an environmental NGO and a National Park.

At the age of 22, an accident resulting in a brain injury has not only changed my life, but has also profoundly changed my way of teaching, educating, and guiding. As I experienced the visible and invisible barriers that persist for many people in daily life, as well as in learning facilities and interpretive services, I came to deeply understand the importance of inclusion and accessibility for everyone. This has also changed my focus from transmitting facts, which were often much too complicated, to creating meaningful learning experiences.

Being part of the management of a visitor centre at the Nationalpark Niedersächsisches Wattenmeer (Lower Saxon Wadden Sea National Park), I joined the network of the International Wadden Sea School, where I was introduced to Interpret Europe. Meeting so many other people passionate about heritage interpretation and joining this valuable international network was a revelation. Today, I live in Switzerland, and my experience has expanded to working at Chillon Castle, a cultural heritage site with a large international audience.

For me, heritage interpretation is about the world, the values and the stories that everyone chooses to pass on to future generations. By creating connections and opening perspectives, I help people to develop their own understanding and relationship with heritage and to reflect on what it means to them and what they want to carry forward.

You can read about our whole team of coordinators here:

<https://interpret-europe.net/our-structure-and-bodies/country-coordinators/>

Upcoming events

Keep an eye on the IE website for details of international heritage interpretation events that we are aware of: <https://interpret-europe.net/ie-events-calendar/category/other-events/>

Youth Heritage Days #2

22-24 October 2026

Palermo, Italy

<https://www.youth-heritage-europe.org/youth-heritage-days-2.html>

18th World Congress of the Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC)

26-29 October 2026

Marrakech, Morocco

<https://www.ovpmmarrakech2026.com/>

2027 International Officina for the Culture of Dialogue: Heritage practices in dialogue

11-12 March 2027 (Deadline for registration: 31 August 2026)

Florence, Italy

<https://www.lifebeyondtourism.org/officina-2027/>

And finally...

Thank you for your contributions.

Warm autumnal greetings from your IE News Team!

Marie Banks (UK) – News Coordinator, supported by Abby McSherry (Ireland) and Elisabeth Núbel-Reidbach (Germany).

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

www.interpret-europe.net/news/guidelines-for-authors/

Deadline for contributions for the Winter 2026 edition: Monday 30 November 2026.

The articles, news items and event announcements reflect the views and opinions of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent those of Interpret Europe or other organisations.

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<https://www.facebook.com/interpreteurope>

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/1227939/>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDbwyl-o-tjugfsKXIEl21fQ>

As a member you can also join our closed Facebook group or our Facebook country groups for more regular, informal interpretation chat.

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

