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European Association for  
Heritage Interpretation



## Bringing **Heritage and Nature** to life

How to use the interpretive  
approach for the 2017  
European Heritage Days

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## Bringing 'Heritage and Nature' to life: How to use the interpretive approach for the 2017 European Heritage Days

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## Abstract

As the topic for the 2017 European Heritage Days, the 50 member states have chosen 'Heritage and Nature'. Interpret Europe has been asked for recommendations how to use heritage interpretation's principles and techniques in support of that topic.

In this paper, heritage interpretation is introduced as a tried and tested way of:

- linking culture and nature
- widening the circle of the stakeholders of cultural heritage sites
- helping to meet some of the key trends of European development
- insuring that learning at heritage sites is up-to-date.

The paper includes examples from different European countries that show how to link nature to a cultural heritage site as well as ideas for ways in which cooperation of sites in different countries can be launched to turn heritage days in single European countries into real European Heritage Days.

To suggest how quality heritage interpretation can be achieved in the implementation of such examples and ideas, some basic principles of heritage interpretation are introduced and the role of Interpret Europe is explained.

A concluding list of references and a short bibliography give guidance about to dig deeper.

## Abbreviations

CBD	United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity
EHA	European Heritage Alliance
EHD	European Heritage Days
EHL	European Heritage Label
ELC	European Landscape Convention
EU	European Union
IE	Interpret Europe
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

## Picture credits

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## Introduction

Our European heritage is as immense as it is all-embracing. It encompasses enduring classical philosophies and majestic northern fjords; the biodiversity of great rivers and coasts; mysterious stone circles overlooking the Atlantic and primeval eastern forests; soaring temples of people's beliefs and triumphs; the mountains of nature and the peaks of human creativity. This is a legacy we share. It helps us to know from where we come from and to discover where we are heading. Europe is not about its institutions; it is about a heritage that has evolved over thousands of years. We now must establish a new narrative that pays homage to the outstanding natural inheritance and tribute to the incomparable cultural heritage from which we Europeans benefit in many ways.

In 2014, the EU Council acknowledged cultural heritage as “an important component of the European project” and as “a strategic choice for the 21st century” (EU Council 2014). The European Commission echoed this sentiment by proclaiming Europe as “a laboratory for heritage-based innovation” (EC 2014). To stimulate reflection on the importance of cultural heritage for the European project, the European Heritage Label (EHL) has gained momentum. A European Year of Cultural Heritage will take place in 2018 and, within the European Heritage Alliance (EHA), 38 networks dedicated to cultural heritage are supporting this goal.

Exceptional – often vulnerable – natural heritage, on the other hand, is recognised by declarations and legal concords that are separate from cultural heritage policy. This is true in European policy and in most national policies. Natural heritage is largely protected in areas classified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). Well-known categories of protection in most European countries are national parks and protected landscapes. International agreements relevant to natural heritage are, for example, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the European Landscape Convention (ELC) and the Bern Convention.

If we seek to combine our recognition, celebration and understanding of natural and cultural heritage, one significant avenue is the World Heritage Convention, and UNESCO is the most influential international organisation in that context. A landscape-based category that protects the links between nature and culture are UNESCO biosphere reserves. UNESCO is calling for “respect for cultural and biological diversity as a whole” and advocating for “an inclusive approach, considering environmental, cultural and socio-economic needs“, stressing the role of heritage for transformational change towards sustainability (UNESCO 2012). A recent European publication underlining this “four domain approach” – of ecological, social, economic and cultural concerns – resulted from the project Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe (CHCfE 2015).

***As a joint initiative of the Council of Europe and the European Commission, European Heritage Days are the annual cultural event which will involve most citizens in Europe. As their topic for 2017, the 50 European member states have chosen ‘Heritage and Nature’. Subject priorities will be heritage and landscape, heritage and sustainable development, heritage and climate change, and heritage and major hazards.***

Heritage interpretation is an established approach that connects people with tangible heritage sites and objects and with intangible experiences that define our culture. Interpret Europe has been asked to support the European Heritage Days programme by recommending how to use heritage interpretation's principles and techniques in support of the 2017 theme. Interpret Europe, as author of this study, hopes that our thoughts will be discussed and that we can contribute to making the 2017 Heritage Days really European and to engaging fully the citizens of Europe.

We shall be grateful and pleased to be part of that endeavour.

## 1. Why should the European Heritage Days use interpretation?

From its very beginning heritage interpretation intended to connect culture and nature in communicating heritage to people. Every interpretive activity has one prominent goal: to encourage people to appreciate either a tangible heritage site or object (such as a castle or a painting) or an intangible heritage experience (such as a dance or a song) as something inspiring for their own lives.

Since the mid-20th century, heritage interpretation has been introduced at cultural as well as at natural heritage sites. It can be found where something has been set aside to be conserved for future generations: in historic buildings and protected landscapes, or at heritage-based collections such as museums, zoos or botanical gardens.

Heritage interpretation is spread in many countries around the world and can be studied at universities up to masters level. This assures comprehensive empirical research on the success of the concept.

The value of heritage interpretation is highlighted by organisations as different as the International Council on Monuments and Sites (e.g. within its Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites, ICOMOS 2008) or as Europarc (e.g. within its European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas).

Although the concept of heritage interpretation was first developed for visitors to natural heritage sites, today's potential of the interpretive approach reaches much further. As Tibor Navracsics, European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, wrote:

“Through interpretation, I believe heritage can contribute to the building of communities, not just at local level, but also on national and European levels. Bringing citizens closer to their heritage is about bringing them closer to each other, and this is an important step towards a more inclusive society” (Navracsics 2016).

Indeed, heritage interpretation can be a way of building citizenship, including what could be appealing to future generations. This includes neighbourhoods in which diverse heritage is a part, but it also includes sensitive heritage sites such as battlefields or concentration camps set against the background of complex subjects on the European agenda such as human rights, sustainability or peace.

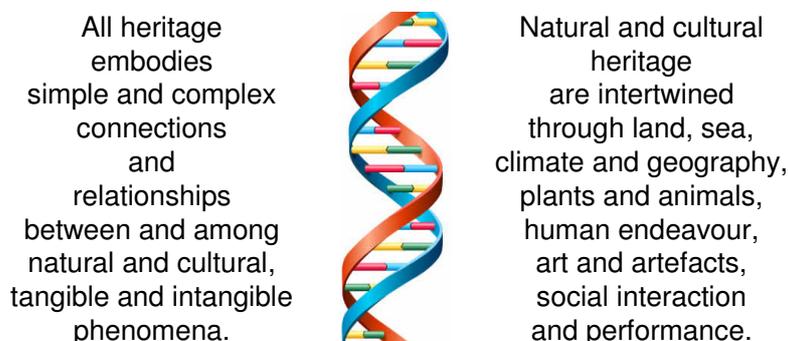
### **Heritage interpretation is a tried and tested way of linking culture and nature**

Heritage interpretation is storytelling in its best sense – and good stories thrive by bringing different elements together. This technique enables people to find relevance and meaning especially in objects and sites that are not directly related to their own lives. We all know the difference between being captivated by an inspiring story and being forced to absorb bare information. The latter is harder work when most people visiting heritage sites are looking for whole experiences.

Freeman Tilden, who first defined heritage interpretation, wrote:

“Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase” (Tilden 1957:9).

Interpreting culture and nature as a whole is a core matter of interpretation at many heritage sites and a prominent plea of many interpreters. For example, Glen (2014) compares the relationship of nature and culture to a double helix in what he calls his 'heritage genome':



## Heritage interpretation widens the circle of your stakeholders

Across Europe, stakeholder organisations often are either dedicated to nature or to culture – and they are sometimes hardly aware of the other. Heritage interpretation is relevant to stakeholders in both natural and cultural heritage not least because of their integral inter-relationships.

Embracing these relationships will help you to open your site to different target groups and encourage them to widen their horizons. Many people dedicated to natural heritage respond to valuable places that need their support – an echo of many people's interest in cultural heritage.

So, here is a list of European organisations and networks that are dedicated to natural heritage and would be happy for you to contact them:

Stakeholder	Website
Alpine Network of Protected Areas (ALPARC)	<a href="http://www.alparc.org">www.alparc.org</a>
Association of Zoo and Aquarium Docents and Volunteers (AZADV)	<a href="http://azadocents.org/wordpress">http://azadocents.org/wordpress</a>
Birdlife Europe	<a href="http://www.birdlife.org/europe-and-central-asia">www.birdlife.org/europe-and-central-asia</a>
Commission Internationale pour la Protection des Alpes (CIPRA)	<a href="http://www.cipra.org/en">www.cipra.org/en</a>
Conservation Capital	<a href="http://www.conservation-capital.com">www.conservation-capital.com</a>
Council of Europe HEREIN: Observatory on the Policies and Values of the European Heritage	<a href="http://www.coe.int/HEREIN">www.coe.int/HEREIN</a>
Educ'Alpes	<a href="http://www.educalpes.fr">www.educalpes.fr</a>
Expertise Centre for Biodiversity and Sustainable Development (ECNC)	<a href="http://www.ecnc.org">www.ecnc.org</a>
EuroNatur	<a href="http://www.euronatur.org">www.euronatur.org</a>
Europäische Tier- und Naturschutzstiftung	<a href="http://etn-stiftung.de">etn-stiftung.de</a>
EUROPARC Federation	<a href="http://www.europarc.org">www.europarc.org</a>
European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA)	<a href="http://www.eaza.net">www.eaza.net</a>
European Botanic Gardens Consortium	<a href="http://www.botanicgardens.eu">www.botanicgardens.eu</a>
European Geoparks Network	<a href="http://www.europeangeoparks.org">www.europeangeoparks.org</a>
European Wilderness Society	<a href="http://wilderness-society.org">wilderness-society.org</a>
EUROSITE	<a href="http://www.eurosite.org/">www.eurosite.org/</a>
Greenpeace European Unit	<a href="http://www.greenpeace.org/eu-unit/en">www.greenpeace.org/eu-unit/en</a>
Greenpeace International	<a href="http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en">www.greenpeace.org/international/en</a>
Institute of European Environmental Policy (IEEP)	<a href="http://www.ieep.eu">www.ieep.eu</a>
International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)	<a href="http://iucn.org">http://iucn.org</a>

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) / Regional Office for Europe	<a href="http://www.iucn.org/about/union/secretariat/offices/europe/european_union/european_regional_office">www.iucn.org/about/union/secretariat/offices/europe/european_union/european_regional_office</a>
IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA)	<a href="http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/gpap_home">www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/gpap_home</a>
John Muir Trust	<a href="http://www.jmt.org">www.jmt.org</a>
Mountain Wilderness	<a href="http://www.mountainwilderness.org/">www.mountainwilderness.org/</a>
NABU – Naturschutzbund: NABU International Naturschutzstiftung	<a href="http://www.nabu.de/landingpages/17600.html">www.nabu.de/landingpages/17600.html</a>
The European Nature Trust (TENT)	<a href="http://www.theeuropeannaturetrust.com/en">www.theeuropeannaturetrust.com/en</a>
Wild Europe	<a href="http://www.wildeurope.org">www.wildeurope.org</a>
Wild Foundation	<a href="http://www.wild.org/">www.wild.org/</a>
Wildland Research Institute	<a href="http://www.wildlandresearch.org/">www.wildlandresearch.org/</a>
World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)	<a href="http://wwf.org">http://wwf.org</a>
Zoologische Gesellschaft	<a href="https://fzs.org/de/">https://fzs.org/de/</a>

## Heritage interpretation can help you to meet key trends of development

Interpret Europe defined more than 60 European trends that are relevant for the interpretation of heritage. Three out of the five trends that had been valued as being most prominent are:

- Increased emphasis on people and heritage communities
- The search for authenticity, quality and value
- Increased purpose-driven activities (IE 2016:3)

Heritage communities are a thriving topic of common interest that calls for participatory approaches. These are at the core of the interpretive methodology set out in Chapter 4.

Business ethics increasingly tend to follow a 'culture of purpose' as a bold, inspirational ideal, relating economic objectives to social and cultural values. As a value-based approach, heritage interpretation is driven by such a culture – as is the field of heritage in itself. Against the background of decreasing means, there are also economic opportunities resulting from this trend and from the current search for purpose-driven activities. Again, the search for meaning is at the very heart of quality heritage interpretation (see Chapter 4).

Additionally, the growing interest for citizen science, especially in the nature field, can open opportunities for cultural heritage sites to attract people to sites that are surrounded by significant biodiversity as it is often the case with built heritage in parks and in rural landscapes.

## Heritage interpretation is your insurance that learning at your site is up-to-date

Key terms of contemporary learning in democratic societies are

- respect
- empowerment
- facilitation
- participation.

UNESCO (2016) highlights the following teaching and learning approaches in terms of learning for sustainable development:

- Experiential learning
- Storytelling
- Values education
- Enquiry learning
- Appropriate assessment
- Future problem solving
- Learning outside the classroom
- Community problem solving.

Interpret Europe's training and certification plans rely on these approaches. Following these requirements, some of which are explained in Chapter 4, will assure cultural heritage sites that their activities in the field of communication and learning through first-hand experience are up to date.

## 2. Examples of how to link nature to your cultural heritage site

Heritage has different stories to narrate. We often tell only those directly related to our cultural heritage sites. Some questions that open the field to nature:

- Are there any remarkable natural features such as plants, gardens, animals, rivers, lakes, rocks etc. around your site that could be part of your visitor programme?
- Is there a significant link to the natural surroundings through built materials – or can you enhance the experience visitors can enjoy close to your site?
- Are there any public figures from the history of your site linked to a natural history topic in your interpretive programmes?
- Are you dealing with intangible heritage, such as legends or culinary delights, that are connected to nature on or close to your cultural heritage site?

Interpret Europe asked its members for some examples to underpin these and other opportunities, and you will find suggestions from their own experience on the following pages.

### Do you have a garden at your cultural heritage site? An easy link to nature...

By Monica Conrad, Switzerland

**Gardens are an excellent medium for linking many cultural heritage sites to nature – and not only the formal gardens or landscaped parks of the 18th century that were spread all over Europe. Monastic herb gardens are earlier examples of working gardens in Europe.**



In its most eastern town, Switzerland has hosted since 1983, a unique World Heritage Site. The Benedictine Convent of St John at Müstair is one of just a few built testimonies to the Carolingian period. Founded in the 8th century, it is a living piece of cultural heritage. Since then, life in the monastery has followed Benedictine rules. From the beginning, these were characterised by a sequence of praying and working (*ora et labora*), but also by respect for nature and its produce.

According to legend, Charlemagne himself founded St John Abbey. After conquering what is now Northern Italy, he returned by the Umbrail Pass. The monastery was erected at the crossroads of some important trading and military routes, mainly for strategic and political reasons. Besides exercising many powers, the monasteries had to fulfil essential tasks in education, culture and science, in order to shape Europe as the Christian Occident.

By learning and practising mindfulness, concentration, meditation and conscious perception, the Benedictines aimed to live in accordance with the ideals of their order. One important part of Charlemagne's legacy was the instruction to create and maintain monastic gardens with a prescribed inventory. This is evidenced by the St. Gallen monastery plan, the gardens in Aachen and other monasteries – and the quiet green oasis in the northern court of St John at Müstair. The Benedictine nuns who took over the monastery from monks in the 12th century spread their

wisdom about healing through herbs as well as about healthy and conscious nutrition. To the monasteries we owe much of our knowledge of medicinal plants as well as the enrichment of many farmhouse gardens by growing a broad variety of herbs and flowers from all parts of Europe.

The Benedictine way of life has no sympathy for a world full of profligate waste that seems to be characterising our own times. It teaches sustainable use of the resources of nature and living adapted to life cycles – even for people in leading positions. Many countries in Europe share the heritage of monastic gardens. Networking of cultural heritage sites could trigger questions that go further than just classifying different plants or types of gardens.

The future of our European culture depends on how we will live our lives in harmony with nature. Historic gardens can help to raise – and answer – the questions that need to be asked.

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## **Have you a chance of reaching out to an 18th century landscaped park? We do!**

Nataliia Gudkova and Tetiana Karpiuk, Ukraine

**We must confess that we will not offer a cultural heritage site which reaches out into nature. However, Sofijivka Park at Uman represents a culture of shaping nature; a culture of which traces can be found all over Europe.**

If you would like to see one of the most impressive examples of 18th century landscaped parks, you need to come to Ukraine. Sofijivka Park was founded in 1796 and got its name Sofijivka because it was a birthday present from the Polish owner to his Greek wife Sofia.

Many castles, palaces and manor houses in Europe that were flourishing during that time have traces of the landscape architecture that you can admire here in its completeness – spiced up with numerous sculptures of Greek mythology (of course).



The builders of the park were instructed by the former Polish military engineer, Ludwig Metzel. They embodied myths in reality and changed the natural scene at their will. Thus they created not only unique historical sites but also natural ones. The park was laid out on the almost treeless area divided by the river Kamenka, with gullies and canyons cut into the granite. Metzel imported a lot of rare plants from all over Europe and beyond and realized his imagination with assistance from the German gardener Oliva. The park impresses its visitors with chaotic heaps of rocks over the Kamyanka and with woods and picturesque glades, grottos and fountains, terraces and alleys. Boats float from the Dead Lake into the underground river Acheron whose name turned a man to philosophic meditations and reminds us of the transience of life.

Sofijivka is a unique romantic landscaped park as well as a crafted monument to human genius. Situated in Ukraine and built by a Polish engineer, supported by a German gardener, for the Greek wife of the Polish owner, it is indeed a European project which now welcomes 500,000

visitors a year. In 2004 it became the National Dendrological Park and seat of a scientific research institution and since 2000 it has been on the UNESCO Tentative List for World Heritage Sites.

We think that the landscaped parks of the 18th century offer excellent opportunities for European cooperation in terms of cultural heritage sites reaching out into nature. Where is your closest example?

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## Is there a significant type of surrounding landscape related to your site?

Lucy Walker and Allan Brigham, UK

**This example is about how the Museum of Cambridge opens a window on to nearly lost natural landscapes and cultures in and around the East Anglian Black Fens in England, with pointers to where else to explore.**

The East Anglian Black Fens are part of Cambridge's hinterland, and the importance of the juxtaposition of these two contrasting but inter-related worlds still resonates today. The medieval university town of Cambridge has exploded into the modern digital age of biotech research and the area is now known as Silicon Fen. A fens is an area of low-lying marshland.

The museum has a room devoted to the lives of people in the watery black peat fens, including tools for cutting peat and reeds and managing the drainage, boots for wading through water and marsh, traps for catching eels, guns for shooting waterfowl, skates for fun on the frozen waterways, and objects relating to the rich folklore and customs of the fenland people.

The natural fens, with their own particular ecosystems, once spread for miles across East Anglia. It was, to some extent, a managed wilderness, with small canalisation and drainage projects from Roman times, if not earlier. But in the 17th century, major engineering schemes were developed to drain the land for farming and more than 99% of this habitat, with many rare species of plants and animals, disappeared. Records show that locals, known as fen tigers, fought hard, but largely unsuccessfully, to save their way of life.



The Museum of Cambridge is a great place to begin to explore these worlds and from which to go out into the landscape of the fens, making connections between cultural heritage and nature. A new research project 'Tracing Traditions' will be developing these threads; it is also home to an

annual local history festival which includes walking tours. We hold talks and also occasional culinary events sourcing local ingredients including fen eels.

Cambridge itself, on the edge of the fens, dates from the Roman period and developed in medieval times as an important economic, religious and educational hub. Waterways through the fens linked the communities with the world around the North Sea. This was also one of the routes taken by the Anglo Saxons who came from Northern Europe to settle in England in the 5th to 7th centuries. Some of the earliest recorded colonisation of the fens was carried out by Saxon and medieval monks seeking both isolation and wealth: this will resonate with the story of many early monastic foundations.

More themes linking culture and nature focus on factors relating to wider European contexts like living in, and managing, fenland as its own ecosystem. This will resonate with other similar landscapes, for example in Holland and in Germany as well as land drainage and reclamation, including engineering skills, and the organisation of capital and labour.

*Lucy Walker is an archaeologist and landscape historian with a particular interest in how museums can be the focus for exploring contemporary issues. She is a trustee of the Museum of Cambridge, and can be contacted on [lucywalker1@gmail.com](mailto:lucywalker1@gmail.com). Allan Bringham is a local historian with extensive knowledge of the landscapes of Cambridge and the East Anglian Fens. He is a trustee of the Museum of Cambridge and organises walking tours in Cambridge. He may be contacted on [townnotgown@btinternet.com](mailto:townnotgown@btinternet.com).*

## **Animals invading your cultural heritage site don't need to be nuisance**

Thorsten Ludwig, Germany

**Animals around built heritage do not usually feature as the curator's best friend. At Ludwigstein Castle in Germany, jackdaws are not only subject of several learning activities, they also seem to complement the historic site.**



If you are in charge of a cultural heritage site such as an old landlord's house and it happens that an iconic animal is part of the scene, you should be pleased. Animals fill historic buildings with life – if they are not reduced to 'the last bear' in the entrance hall or to the largest stag ever shot, proudly placed by past noblemen above the fire place.

In our case, the monument is a 15th century castle, classically placed on a hilltop above a river and restored as a 'youth castle' by youth groups in the 1920s. It now houses a youth hostel, a youth learning centre and the State

Archive of the German Youth Movement. The iconic animal is the European jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*). But these birds appear as uncultured invaders when they suddenly dive down, with tremendous croaking, from the roofs into the courtyard.

As it happens, the jackdaws alternate from year to year with European kestrels (*Falco tinnunculus*) which – as birds of prey – seem to behave much more nobly. They are more

colourful and nicer to look as they hover above the fields and then swiftly and silently swoop down after spotting their prey. However, when the jackdaws invade the castle, in a large noisy crowd like a class of children entering the courtyard, the falcons immediately move out – it is no longer their place.

Because the jackdaws at Ludwigstein Castle stay for the whole year and because the hostel is mainly occupied by school classes, it made sense to develop some activities for children about the jackdaw. The learning centre at Ludwigstein Castle produced a booklet about the birds which is mainly interesting for teachers and an interpretive programme that can be booked. As the castle is in a remote place surrounded by forests, fields and orchards, it has several activities bringing its guests out into nature. The advantage of the activities around the jackdaws is that guests do not need to leave the castle, and that they realise the old castle and the wild birds encircling the tower as something that obviously belongs together.

As almost all wild creatures – starting with insects and ending at wild boars – the jackdaws do not really support the preservation of the monument. They inhabit the open attic and the volume of twigs which they manage to carry up within one year is impressive. However, they don't do any serious harm to the historic fabric of the building, and every now and then it is subject to debate whether they actually belong to the built heritage. No doubt: the place would be much more sterile without them.

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## How a museum can manage to cultivate insects

Marc van Hasselt, Netherlands

**Bees are in trouble. Populations have been dwindling in recent years. While awareness is spreading, regional efforts to help the bees are needed to address the problem. Archeon in Alphen aan den Rijn is doing just that.**



Alphen aan den Rijn in the Netherlands launched a programme in 2015 to increase populations of pollinating insects such as bees. Twice a year, the biodiversity centre/museum Naturalis undertook measurements to determine the current population and impact of the project.

Archeon, the open-air museum in Alphen aan den Rijn, is ideally placed to be the link between urban and rural surroundings. It has been designated the ideal 'bed and breakfast' for pollinating insects.

Archeon's main concern is cultural heritage interpretation. However, as part of this project, efforts have been made to make the museum more attractive to bees. The 'medieval' beekeeper has several hives with bee populations in his yard; the Bronze-age farm has a hollow log used as another hive. Besides these populations, wild bees are encouraged to nest in the daub walls of the reconstructed houses; trees and plants, the wattle fences and other appropriate areas. A

number of 'bee hotels' have been set up in the Roman section to support research done by Leiden University. The museum and heritage centre Archeon is the hub for research into bee populations, but it also provides a stepping stone to reconstituting those populations in the local area.

Of course, a wider impact is that visitors to the museum – some 300,000 per year, including 100,000 school children – are exposed to this aspect of heritage. The story of pre-industrial beekeeping and the changes that have occurred in recent years are interpreted for the public by the museum's interpretive staff. There are also informative signs around the museum and packets of 'bee-friendly' seeds can be bought on leaving the museum for spreading on visitors' own gardens. Meanwhile, the interpreters who work in the museum are invited to increase their own knowledge of beekeeping.

The project is expected to run for a number of years, with new measurements and research being done every year. For the visitors of the museum, the buzz of the bees can add to their experience of how life was for our ancestors. Hopefully it will also encourage them to preserve an important part of that life.

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## **Traditional crafts are necessarily linked to nature. What has your site to offer?**

Helena Vičič, Slovenia

**Heritage House, run by the PAJN Institute for Sustainable Living in Slovenia, is a place where culture and nature are naturally interwoven and coexist with one another in interpretive programmes. Traditional crafts are one of our favourite ways to link to nature.**

For centuries, humans had to adapt to the conditions of the surrounding land and in the case of the largest intermittent karst lake – Cerknica Lake – it is even more true. The ever-changing land and scarce karst soil forced people to develop various survival techniques, which are interpreted in a Heritage House in Cerknica. Heritage House is a place where intangible cultural heritage is safeguarded.

Programmes mainly combine traditional crafts with the natural environment from where it derived. Among all traditions kept in the 'treasure chest' there are two specifically intrinsic to the site of the lake area: log boat (Drevak) production and coniferous essential oil distillery. There are programmes for guiding tourists by boat whilst telling stories of a life by a lake or teaching them basic carpentry techniques. Special programmes enable groups to be taken to the forest and first recognise the fir tree and then to collect the material needed to produce a few drops of oil.



Another tradition, widely spread throughout the country – flax production – is also a subject which is interpreted in connection to the natural environment. Flax is sown in a village every year so that

visitors have a chance to see live plants. Occasionally, there are outdoor events when people come for flax sowing, pulling or breaking.

The PAJN Institute has educated Young Guardians of Heritage who are trained to demonstrate and to explain the crafts to the visitors.

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## **Built heritage often depends on wise use of renewables. How about your site?**

By Elisabeth Selvaggi and Maurizia Moglioni, Italy

**The smart skills of the Romans in using natural resources are well-known. Domitian's Villa in the Circeo National Park, situated about 100 km south of Rome and directly on the coast, is an extraordinary example of this.**

The most important resource for life is water. Nowadays, we don't often think from where and how our tap water comes; but 2000 years ago Romans had to care about it. Although they hadn't engines and pumps they were able to enjoy fresh water, thermal baths and fountains. In the area where the villa is situated, there were no springs, and no hot springs. However, the Roman engineers, through sophisticated building techniques and the knowledge of the principles of physics, found ways of collecting drinkable water in tanks by draining ground water from the sand. They regulated the water pressure using the weight of the water column, they fed fountains and the spa, they heated the water for the baths using wood from the forest surrounding the site and they used rain water to clean the *forica*.

The site itself is magnificent. It is located on the wooded banks of the Sabaudia lake in a strictly-protected nature reserve within the park and only accessible with a guide. However, to understand fully how the Romans did all these things and how they used the natural resources, a good heritage interpreter is key. We interact with our visitors using creative and funny props, making them experience directly some daily activities of Roman life.

For example, during the visit we ask the participants to do a puzzle reproducing the *sectilia* of a marble floor. We then invite them to think from where a single piece of the *sectilia* comes from and to imagine how many scraps remain from the original marble panel. To experience this directly, we invite the participants to cut geometrical shapes as *sectilia* on a piece of paper and to think how these are not waste but could be re-used. At the end, we reveal 'the mystery' by inviting them to look under their feet where they can observe the *opus spicatum*.



To introduce the rational use of the water, we use a model to show how running rain water (not the drinkable supply) collected in tanks and was used to clean the *forica*. A sponge stick, another provocative prop, is shown as the ancient toilet paper used for personal hygiene. Close to the

*calidarium* of the spa we introduce the *hypocaustum* (the underfloor heating system), explaining how it was possible to heat air and water using timber from the surrounding woods instead of a modern boiler.

When describing the building techniques of the spa, we give the recipe for the screed which covered the *hypocaustum*. Like all good recipes, it contains a special and secret ingredient: the pozzolana, a volcanic stone used by Romans for its water-absorption qualities. We then give a participant a common rock and a small quantity of pozzolana, inviting him or her to pour water on both and to observe the different reaction: only the pozzolana absorbs the water as a sponge.

These are just a few examples of how a visit to an archaeological site could be set up along the idea of the use of renewable energy sources. It is a fascinating and challenging experience for our visitors to be directly involved in many activities. In this way they feel more closely connected to the ancient culture and they learn valuable things from the past to better face the present.

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## Can you link your site to a challenging subject such as biodiversity?

By Margarita Kaisheva, Bulgaria

**Some subjects seem to be abstract and far away from a cultural heritage site; but in fact they are not. Biodiversity is not just taking place in protected areas but in every domestic garden. Think how easy it is to link this to your site.**

New ideas often result from extraordinary partnerships. Together with NIBIO, the Norwegian Institute of Bioeconomy Research, we ran two projects on biodiversity. They were supported by the European Economic Area (EEA) Programme and within these projects we advised several heritage sites and communities, at awareness meetings and seminars, how to combine cultural and natural heritage. The sites we chose were quite different, such as the Strandja National Park, Coastal Black Sea, the Pirin Mountains community of Bansko, and the farmers of Belogradchik.

We focused on seeds growing in home gardens and other valuable but sensitive ecosystems. Not everybody knows that home gardens represent the richest agro-ecosystems in Europe in terms of plants' variety and genetic diversity, such as local varieties of bean, rhubarb, nettle, wild cherry, wild pear, rose hip etc. We established a Bulgarian network of 'seed savers' – farmers, gardeners, hobby growers – for biodiversity, agri-biodiversity and cultural diversity. Throughout the country, farmers of this network came together on agreed days to sell their goods jointly on the markets.

However, all these plants mentioned above are not only part of our genetic and agricultural heritage, they are also important representatives of indigenous knowledge as an expression of diverse cultural heritage – and this makes them appealing for cooperation with cultural heritage sites.

One of these sites is Rila Monastery, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the largest and most famous Eastern Orthodox monastery in Bulgaria. For centuries, monasteries played an important role in many parts of Europe as cultural centres. Rila Monastery is especially interesting as a cultural heritage site reaching out into nature because it is surrounded by the Rila Monastery

Nature Park, an IUCN protected landscape which is mostly owned by the monastery and houses an outstanding variety of plant species. Many of the wild species that are growing there became the origin of cultivated plants and until today, wild and cultivated plants are used in balance for the health diet and nutrition of people as medicinal plants and as edibles. The richness of local food could not be sustained, if we would lose some of the basic ingredients of local dishes, being it a herb, or a local vegetable and many of these plans play also a critical role in the festivities of local people around the year which often attract tourists from far away.

In the Rila Monastery Nature Park we built awareness for this among decision makers, branch organisations, communities, farmers, gardeners etc. and our plan is now to develop a network of home gardens at this site.

The seeds of plants, both cultivated and wild, are the heritage seeds for biodiversity and culture at the same time.

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## Maybe some historic person at your site was really passionate about nature?

By Markus Blank, Austria

**If you assume your cultural heritage site doesn't offer a link to nature, did you ever check the archives for someone who had this relationship? Admont Abbey located such a person – and an interesting cooperation started.**



The Benedictine monastery, Admont Abbey, was founded in 1074 in Admont, Austria. It is still home for 27 monks and houses the largest monastic library in the world, a museum for historical and modern art and a natural history museum. It is therefore not too difficult to build bridges between cultural and natural heritage, past and present, historical and contemporary art and architecture. Like many other monasteries, Admont Abbey was already built at a place of breathtaking natural beauty. In 1074, the Archbishop of Salzburg wisely selected this spot on the river Enns and at the gateway to the scenic Gesäuse mountains.

Besides the primary and most important duty of every monk to seek God, some of the brothers are specialized in various fields – like Father Gabriel Strobl, who joined Admont Abbey in 1866 at the age of 20. During the first 12 years of his work, Strobl was very much into botany, in the following 32 years he devoted himself completely to entomology. During this time he collected about 252,000 insects. To get to such an impressive total, Strobl exchanged and purchased specimens but most of all he loved being outdoors and climbing the mountains to collect new plants and animals. By doing so, he often got in dangerous situations. On one occasion, when he tried to pick a special plant, he climbed up a mountain until he wasn't able to move either forward or backward. Luckily he escaped from this precarious situation to continue his work as museum curator and build up the natural history museum in the Abbey – the ultimate link between natural and cultural heritage.

At the entrance to the Gesäuse National Park exhibit room, right in the centre of Gabriel Strobl's collection of animals, in the natural history museum of Admont Abbey, you can listen to a phone talk. A graduate student starts to call the park administration. She recognizes a strange crackling in the phone and all of a sudden there is a man on the line saying: "Admont Monastery, Father Gabriel Strobl..." – but this man died almost 100 years ago! After a moment of confusion they immediately start chatting about animals and nature in general. Strobl is excited to hear about the creation of the Gesäuse National Park and it seems as if they could talk forever.

The telephone installation is part of the national park exhibition "Passion for Nature". In a cultural hotspot like Admont Abbey, Father Gabriel is the link between the monastery and its clerical life with nature and natural sciences. Through the ages, scientists and researchers, like Alexander von Humboldt, Fridtjof Nansen, Gabriel Strobl and even researchers nowadays have risked their lives for their passion for nature. This exhibit honours scientists from the past and from present times and offers a bridge to the beauty of the national park close to the monastery.

The Gesäuse National Park is very grateful for having got such an opportunity in a place like Admont Abbey and for having such a passionate intermediary as Father Gabriel Strobl.

So, is there a person in the history of your own cultural heritage site who was dedicated to nature?

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## **Nature through Shakespeare – or what famous author was related to your site?**

By Anna Wilson, UK

**The subject of flowers provided a great opportunity to interpret new parts of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's collections at Anne Hathaway's Cottage, the Trust's most romantic property.**

Most of my career has been spent working at sites or with collections that have both natural and cultural significance and so I am more than comfortable interpreting the two together. However, heritage organisations that are predominantly cultural can still gain from making links to nature.



This is something that I put into practice whilst working for The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. The Trust cares for a number of properties around Stratford-upon-Avon that were owned or lived in by William Shakespeare and his family and it promotes the enjoyment and understanding of Shakespeare's works, life and time. The Trust holds the world's largest Shakespeare-related library, museum and archives open to the public, with over one million documents, 55,000 books and 12,000 museum objects. Part of my role as Access and Interpretation

Coordinator was to deliver temporary exhibitions at the different properties that raised access to and awareness of these collections.

In 2012 we chose the subject of flowers for the exhibition and associated events at Anne Hathaway's Cottage, which was the childhood home of Shakespeare's wife. The subject of flowers linked to the romance of the cottage; this is where young Shakespeare would have wooed his bride-to-be. It also made a connection to the property's gorgeous cottage gardens, orchards and woodland. Most importantly it provided the opportunity to display objects from the collections that weren't normally on display, including beautiful example of Tudor embroidery that used flower motifs in their design.

The exhibition, Say it with Flowers, ran from February, where it opened just in time for St Valentine's Day, until the end of December. It attracted many visitors who particularly loved leaving their personal love messages and tributes on a floral message board, which ranged from "To my Katie who loves Shakespeare almost as much as I love her." to "You are a smelly dog. But you're my smelly dog".

The exhibition was supported by a series of blogs on the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's Collections blog site (see <http://findingshakespeare.co.uk/category/say-it-with-flowers>). The purpose of these blogs, as well as reaching audiences that could not visit the exhibition in person, was to highlight different stories about the collections items. The guides from Anne Hathaway's Cottage filmed short videos introducing objects on display in the cottage, such as 19th century Willow Pattern plates and an unusual Tudor watering can.

As well as a series of blogs, the Trust's main website hosted an online forum, where three flower experts were invited to host discussions about the meaning and interpretation of flowers. This included professional florist Lynda Owen, whose insight included wedding flowers and the history of flower giving, as well as staff from the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum who discussed historical and medical uses for a range of flowers.

In September 2012 Anne Hathaway's Cottage hosted a Garden and Allotment Festival to continue the theme of flowers. It included horticultural experts, local produce, craft stalls and children in vegetable themed fancy dress.

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## Is there a legend linked to your site where nature played a key role?

By Patricia Duff, Croatia

**Persephone's Garden, inspired by the plants and flowers mentioned in the Hymn to Demeter will be a new point of interest in the town of Elefsina, nominated as European City of Culture 2021, complementing its fascinating archaeological site of Eleusis.**

The archaeological site of Eleusis, in Elefsina, Greece, gives us a view of some 2000 years of antiquity. It is the site of the most important shrine to Demeter, goddess of cereals, fruits, flowers and agriculture, and her daughter Persephone. Also, before such worship was forbidden in 391CE, it was the site of the Eleusinian Mysteries which drew people from all over the then

known world to become initiates. Among many walls, foundations, buildings, fountains, wells and gateways, one can see the column bases and stone seats of the Telesterion, in its time, the largest place of indoor worship, in which much of the Mysteries took place.

At around 700BCE, a time when many oral traditions were being transcribed, the Hymn to Demeter was written. This epic poem tells how Persephone, gathering flowers in the fields with her friends, was abducted by Hades, god of the underworld. It describes Demeter's distress and how she wanders the world as an old woman searching for her daughter. In Eleusis she is treated kindly and employed as a nurse to the chief's son. In return she covertly begins the process of his deification, only to be interrupted by his mother. Revealing herself as a goddess, she orders a shrine to be built and inhabits it, still pining for her daughter. She permits no fertility: seeds do not ripen, plants do not grow, no animals are born and human-beings face starvation and death. If humans become extinct, there would be no one to offer gifts to the gods. Thus Zeus sent a number of his entourage to try to placate her, and encourage her return to Olympus; but she refused all entreaties. Finally Zeus has to relent and commands Hades to release Persephone. Mother and daughter reunite joyfully, but as Persephone had eaten some pomegranate seeds, she was bound to return to the underworld for three months of each year. It is this time, when Demeter mourns and nothing grows, we call winter.

One of the goals of the community of Elefsina included encouraging more visitors to their site, and so we recommended the creation of an additional point of interest: Persephone's Garden. This would feature each of the plants and flowers mentioned in the Hymn to Demeter as well as cereals and plants linked to the Mysteries and the veneration of the goddesses. The project is being organised by Chorus, an Elefsina-based, non-profit organisation committed to upgrade and promote the cultural and touristic development of Eleusis and Western Attica. They have brought together: the Municipality of Elefsina which donated land next to the archaeological site and will carry out the initial garden preparation and planting together with the Laboratory of Floriculture and Landscape Architecture of the Agricultural University in Athens which will design and plant the garden. Chorus will be responsible for carrying out relevant educational programmes, as well as for the continued maintenance of the garden, which is expected to be open to the public in 2017.

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## **There is often more than one way to connect a cultural heritage site to nature**

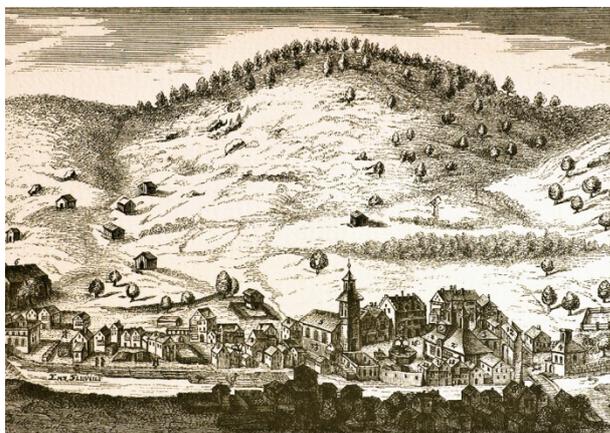
By Patrick Lehnes, Germany

**For centuries, Bad Wildbad was a famous spa town in Germany's Black Forest, visited by dukes and kings. Today, hiking is as important as spa tourism. Three interpretive walks demonstrate different ways of linking cultural heritage with nature.**

The, literally, most basic connection between culture and nature is revealed during a town walk through the historic centre and the spa park. It leads to the place where the original thermal water spring was tapped in mediaeval times – 12 metres below today's surface. The interpretation explains the journey of the rain water through geological layers down to a great depth where it is heated before it reappears after several thousands of years. Without this special natural heritage,

all the Belle Epoch spa buildings, hotels, theatres and the Romantic park would not exist, and the famous people would never have come to this remote valley.

The second trail connects two historical places by a 17-km hike. In 1367 the Duke of Württemberg, Eberhard, was attacked by two knights and their followers while he stayed unarmed in the spa. A shepherd guided his escape over the mountains and through remote valleys to one of his castles which is a well preserved ruin today. The trail follows this route, and interpretation helps hikers to immerse themselves in the Black Forest nature of medieval times. Wolves and bears were still abundant but, surprisingly for most visitors, some sections were more intensely cultivated than today. Since the 15th century, an entire village and its farmlands have been reclaimed by forests. But areas that have always been covered by forest also looked very different in the times of Eberhard: there was more open space among the trees because shepherds drove their herds into the woods where old oak trees were much more common than today.



The third trail looks into what forests meant to people in past centuries. It begins on the top of a mountain which had been developed for leisure walks more than a century ago. Earlier, farmers had used to bring their pigs and let them eat acorns – but foresters banned this practice as a pig was as devastating for the forest as a full grown, much heavier, ox. Then in the late 19th century, wealthy people from the cities discovered the beauty of nature. Nature trails connected picturesque old trees and outlooks on rocks overseeing the town with its Romantic style spa buildings.

Tourism discovered nature and visitors enjoyed not only the healing power of the thermal waters but also the admiration of nature's wonders. At the same time foresters began to change old woodlands to forests managed for efficient timber production, before they discovered more recently the multiple functions of forests and sustainable forest management. A historic image reveals devastated pastures and soil erosion above the town where well-kept mixed forests protect the soil today. Thus the walk on the historic footpath reflects the history and diversity of man's relationships to nature.

The different approaches to connect cultural heritage and history with nature through interpretive stories may inspire you for your heritage day: Does your cultural heritage owe a debt to a special feature of nature? Does a trail or an event connect two heritage sites that offer opportunities to bring alive nature of a former time? Have there been different views towards nature by different people linked to your cultural heritage site?

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### 3. From heritage days in individual countries to European Heritage Days

In order to celebrate real European Heritage Days, we should think how we can cooperate with sites in other countries on the subject of 'Heritage and Nature' Two convictions can help to do this:

1. People living at historic sites were people like you and me.
2. People in different parts of Europe share similar experiences.

#### People living at historic sites were people like you and me

At cultural heritage sites, we sometimes tend to explain the life of the people in former times in a way that is clearly separated from our own lives. In reality, it is not. At any time, people's experience of the natural world, in particular, is a constant stimulus and an important contributor to the development of intellect and knowledge. This was, arguably, more intense in earlier times and it remains more intense the closer people's culture grows from their links with nature.

For example, the Sami people's lives are completely controlled by the transhumance of the reindeer and their clothes, music, homes etc all result from this too. For a facility interpreting the Sami culture, it is very easy to relate both tangible and intangible elements to nature.

However, even aspects of cultural heritage in our modern cities can often be traced back to one or more associations with natural heritage if we start to think about it. Some examples:

- Settlements are built near fresh water for sustaining life
- Most settlements are built near rivers and seas for communication and transportation
- Buildings are constructed from natural materials found locally including mud, clay/ brick, stone and timber, or from materials manufactured from natural materials
- The need for, style and location of buildings is determined or at least influenced by geography and climate
- Artefacts are made from natural materials in their raw state or by virtue of manufacturing and/ or chemical processes
- The need for and style of artefacts is determined or at least influenced by geography and climate
- The way of life and forms of employment of people is largely determined by geography and climate
- The food and drink consumed by people (and their livestock) is largely determined by geography, climate, water supply and fertility of soil
- The nature of plants and animals hunted or reared for food is largely determined by geography, climate, water supply and fertility of soil
- The interaction of different peoples is (still) largely determined by geography
- The practical intangible aspects of human life – the professions, crafts and trades – are heavily influenced by geography and climate and the needs of people living in any location
- The creative and intangible aspects of human life – story, song, music, drama, decorative and visual arts – are heavily influenced by experience and perceptions of geography and climate, plant and animal life and people's endeavours in pursuing their existence

It is not too difficult to find such connections if we do not focus on facts about our site or object alone but more focus on the lives of the people who were dealing with the artefacts to be found in our museums or within our cultural heritage sites.

## People in different parts of Europe share similar experiences

We collected some more specific ideas where it might be useful to include nature in the work of cultural heritage sites and to link with cultural heritage sites in other European countries at the same time:

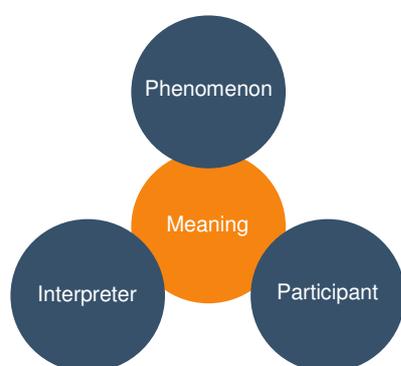
- Migratory birds, especially, but also other animals don't know borders between states – and species such as white storks can often be found around cultural heritage estates which makes them a good subject to be covered by sites in different countries.
- In many countries, old trees at cultural heritage sites have special meanings. Trees around churches remain untouched because they are dedicated to the saint for whom the church was consecrated, or lime trees are related to castles or placed in old village centres.
- The use of plants, either in cooking or in medicine, is often similar at cultural heritage sites in neighbouring countries – or in countries that in former times were united under the same realm.
- Cultural heritage sites sharing one important natural feature (for example a river or a lake) are often linked to variations of similar folk stories and customs, as they often share similar crafts and techniques (e.g. in fishing, hunting, agriculture).
- Specific gardening cultures around cultural heritage sites spread all over Europe; e.g. monastery herb gardens, formal gardening of the 18th century, landscape parks (influencing parks and green spaces in cities), or even the spread of home gardening.
- Many cultural heritage sites all over Europe have deer parks or grounds designated specifically for hunting game, deer and other animals, a culture related to nature (including horses and dogs) which can be found especially around castles and palaces.
- Medieval master builders often travelled through different European countries where they left impressive traces (such as their work at cathedrals). This way distinctive floral and other elements of decoration were spread all over Europe.
- The same is true for artists and philosophers (e.g. in the 18th century) who thought about natural processes and concepts and what they meant to people – which can be found in their work in different European countries at the same time.

## 4. How does quality heritage interpretation actually work?

In Chapter 2, we showed you some examples how cultural heritage sites could reach out into nature: Now we should like to suggest how heritage interpretation can be achieved in the implementation of such examples.

### The interpretive triangle

Heritage interpretation is a learning process which follows a set of tried and tested principles and can be understood through the so-called interpretive triangle.



Qualities assigned to the four elements in the diagram include:

- to turn heritage phenomena into experiences
- to offer paths to deeper meaning
- to provoke resonance in participants
- to foster respect for all heritage.

The last quality is represented by the interpreter (or the interpretive media), facilitating the process within the triangle in a way that the experience becomes meaningful.

To decide upon the appropriate method or medium (guided walk, panel, smartphone app etc.) is usually the very last step in an interpretive planning process. The first step is compiling facts and impressions and checking them for meaning.

### The search for meaning

People have always tried to get intellectual access to places and objects in whose development they themselves had no part; and at all times they have taken advantage of individuals who can support them in their search for meaning.

Key questions you could ask, if people would like to access your own cultural heritage site, are:

- When participants have an encounter with my heritage site, and when they then return to their day-to-day business, did my heritage site become more meaningful to them?
- Do they feel more connected to it and do they realise it has to do with their own lives and with their decisions for the future?
- What defines that 'magic field' between:
  - the actual phenomenon (site, object, performance etc.)
  - myself or my agency (as the interpreter)
  - the participants in my interpretive activities?

Compared to many other methods of learning from first-hand experiences, the most significant characteristic of heritage interpretation is that it actively encourages participants to interpret their experiences, to search for their own meaningful context or larger truth behind the facts. This is what is meant by the 'magic field' in the centre of the interpretive triangle.

## Why good stories matter

Storytelling has been booming for many years now and there are good reasons for this:

- Stories help to organise and to contextualise experiences and information; neuroscience found that people learn more through narratives than through facts (Spitzer 2009).
- People tend to think metaphorically, connecting facts to whole images – images that touch them and that make sense for them. Therefore stories support meaning-making.
- Stories activate frames which are connected to values. Values and frames suggest how heritage phenomena are perceived and whether and in what way individuals relate to them.

The degree to which ideas or products are accepted by people mainly depends on how they are framed (Entman 1993). What does this mean?

Lakoff (2008) explains the process of framing in a notable way. In 2001, after the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, the President of the USA claimed that the world should now be at war against terror. 'War' is a strong frame which implies armies, battles, victims and maybe victory. Until today, this frame guided the policy of many states. An alternate frame to 'war' could have been 'crime'. This frame implies courts, trials, culprits and maybe justice. World policy since 2001 might have developed differently if it had followed this other frame.

Some outstanding work on values and frames has been done by the Common Cause Network (Holmes et al. 2011). Framing interpretation requires some awareness of responsibility, towards the heritage resource as well as towards the individual participant. Meaning needs to be transparent and also, if required, subject to debate. The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction but provocation, and the interaction of participants with phenomena and interpretive media can also result in meaning that is different from that an interpreter suggested. The aim of the interpreter is to reveal a larger truth and not the larger truth and to encourage participants to reflect upon this because phenomena can be seen in different ways.

This becomes more relevant the more heritage interpretation intends to connect heritage to the daily lives and decision-making of people. Especially at heritage sites which are sensitive because they can obviously be interpreted in differing ways, framing can easily get a political dimension. Such sensitive sites, especially, require sensitive interpretation.

How to deal with meaning might be the most controversial debate in heritage interpretation. However, the IE trend study mentioned in Chapter 1 suggests that two out of the five current key trends defined in the study are linked to the search for purpose – and this is what meaning is all about.

## Themes versus topics

All phenomena include stories, and theme statements help to express the essence of such stories. In order to reveal meaningful contexts, interpreters give great attention on the distillation of such theme statements.

An important piece of advice is that, in interpretation, themes need to be clearly distinguished from topics. While themes extract meaning, topics are simply factual classifications.

For example:

Site	Museum in an abandoned railway station
Topic	The railway network in the mid-19th century
Theme	To the people of the village, this railway station became the gateway to a new world.

As we can see, the theme goes beyond a factual statement. It is the answer to the question: what made some of the facts linked to the topic meaningful to people? The exhibition in the museum (objects and information) would be selected according to the theme rather than in a chronological or typological way. For many of us, this is really challenging because if we are working scientifically, chronology and typology are key while we don't care too much about meaning.

Your interpretive themes are offers or suggestions to your participants. Not every visitor of a historic railway station is a railway buff. Often, people visit a cultural heritage site with their family or group of friends – and visiting your site is just one good way to have a pleasurable group experience. To encourage participants to deal with our subjects, themes are often based on 'human universals' (Brown 1991), ideas that concern almost everybody, no matter their geographical or cultural background.

In the example in the table, where a railway station became the gateway into a new world to the people of the village, the idea of liberation could be seen as universal concept behind the suggested theme statement. Examples for other universal concepts that are frequently used because they are relevant to almost all people are birth and death, change, hope, shame or care.

Themes are at the core of the stories that can be derived from a phenomenon, such as an old railway station. A story, skilfully linked to a phenomenon, will result in a learning experience which is perceived as 'a whole'. It is not as exact as a scientific analysis of a subject for experts but it relates the subject to people who will therefore include it into their own thinking and decision-making.

## Experiencing the real thing

The word 'phenomenon' had been used by Plato, Kant and other philosophers for the sensually experientiable (Kant 2007). It has been introduced in interpretation to summarise tangible and intangible heritage representations that can all be subject to first-hand experience. In different languages, the word is also used for something which is of significant relevance.

If possible, phenomena are pointed out as individual items. For instance, good interpreters don't deal with Gothic churches in a generic way by looking at one of them just as a single representative of a period of architecture. They always relate to the particular example that participants can see, to its specific history and specific qualities, and they aim to reveal its hidden secrets in an exciting way.

Experiencing a phenomenon at first-hand is an individual and emotional event, involving the whole person. What people can empathise with, and what they say and do by themselves, helps them to absorb the experience more deeply than when they just hear or see. A panel text which does not touch a participant will hardly trigger such an experience, even if it is placed directly in front of a heritage object. Additionally to the outer (sensory) experience there is an inner (psychological) experience needed.

Several 20th century authors supporting progressive education underline the value of involving such personal experiences (e.g. Dewey, Neill, Freinet, Decroly, Hahn, Montessori, Korczak), underpinned by findings from researchers such as Vygotsky, Maslow and Csikszentmihalyi. Compared to formal learning, non-formal learning at heritage sites has significant advantages in achieving these demands.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, experiential learning is also part of the requirements set for the 21st century by UNESCO. According to these requirements, it “involves direct and active personal experience combined with reflection and feedback” and it engages participants “in critical thinking, problem solving and decision making in contexts that are personally relevant to them” (UNESCO 2008).

## Provoking participation

An early principle of heritage interpretation says that phenomena need to be related to the personality of participants. Participation is also one key word in the current debate on education and learning. It requires particular skills if it shall be transferred to all interpretive media because real participants should also have the opportunity to determine the progress of an activity. At its best, participants are successfully encouraged to interpret heritage on their own and the interpretive media are mainly aimed to trigger and to facilitate that process – as Tilden said: interpretation should “capitalize mere curiosity for the enrichment of the human mind and spirit” (Tilden 1957:9).

If individuals participate, they are fully involved. For instance, visitors to the ruins of a Roman villa show their interest in a particular aspect of the life of a family, and the guide immediately introduces them to the facilities related to it. Participation provokes resonance. It is more effective in personal than in non-personal interpretive services. However, one challenge of participation is that neither the course nor the actual outcome of an interpretive activity can be predicted. Themes (see above) can act as ‘lighthouses’ to make sure that interpreters don’t lose track.

European heritage sites are rarely isolated from their social surroundings. Contemporary interpretive planning therefore needs to involve heritage stakeholders who are not just visitors, forming a receptive audience. They might also appear as informed expert groups with controversial points of view. In contemporary heritage policies, local residents, who might have their own view on the particular heritage, also play an important role within the ‘heritage community’ (CoE 2005).

## Fostering respect for all heritage

One key term in heritage interpretation is ‘stewardship’ and one corner of the interpretive triangle is dedicated to the role of ‘the interpreter’ which is often the organisation behind the different interpretive media and therefore an advocate for the appreciation of heritage.

Obviously heritage has to do with what people want to protect and save, what they have inherited from past generations and wish to pass on to future generations. It is therefore something that they value. Different people can attach different values to heritage according, for example, to their age or their cultural and social background; and the value of heritage can change through time. Heritage can be defined as such by a single person, by a family, by a local community, by a state or even by a community of states. World Heritage means that the United Nations have agreed

that it is in the interest of the whole of humankind that specific features and phenomena should be preserved for future generations.

Against the background of European Heritage Days, the question of how far we can talk about 'our European heritage' is of significant interest. The community of European states is facing a considerable number of challenges. Terrorism, extremism, Euroscepticism, nationalism and protectionism seem to be on the increase; and this puts democratic rule, freedom of speech, the independence of the judicial system and the right to privacy into question. We recently became aware that the future of Europe is not something that can be taken for granted. It becomes necessary to reflect upon who we Europeans are and what it is that really matters to our lives.

While young people, especially, start to think about a new narrative for Europe, Europe is about to put its rich heritage to the forefront, in order to reflect upon its strengths and weaknesses, upon its values and upon its cultural forces; and in order to define itself and to give sense to its future so that it may provide the best of worlds for its citizens and for its visitors. The 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage offers a real opportunity to proceed in that direction.

Interpreting the extraordinary and all-embracing heritage of Europe is an essential means of supporting this process.

## 5. Interpret Europe

Interpret Europe, the European Association for Heritage Interpretation, is a network organisation which was established in 2010 to serve all who use first-hand experiences to give natural and cultural heritage a deeper meaning.

Interpret Europe currently has more than 400 members from more than 40 countries. It brings together associations, charitable trusts, public sector bodies, university departments, parks, museums, zoos, botanical gardens, etc. as well as consultants, suppliers and practitioners from exhibit designers to on-site guides. For its members, Interpret Europe provides networking opportunities and information, on the latest news and developments, through frequent newsmails and comprehensive quarterly newsletters. Members can register for training courses and pay reduced fees at conferences. To also allow interested individuals all over Europe to join, Interpret Europe offers membership at a comparatively low annual fee.

Interpret Europe's annual conferences are open to everyone. Our sixth and most recent conference, "Heritage interpretation – for the future of Europe", included more than 100 presentations, workshops and study visits and was dedicated to the question of how the experience of historic sites can contribute to learning about the more challenging subjects on the European agenda such as human rights, active citizenship and peace.

Interpret Europe also runs an own training and certification programme for members of the network. Relying on shared quality criteria, IE-certified trainers run courses in several languages. So far, Interpret Europe's 40-hour certification course for interpretive guides (CIG) is the most requested offer.

Interpret Europe is involved with several European projects. It recently joined the European Heritage Alliance and over the last five years it has been a partner in initiatives focusing on quality criteria for interpretation, quality vocational training, working with specific audiences and competence-based learning approaches.

Interpret Europe is building up its own network of country coordinators but also welcomes the involvement of national organisations for heritage interpretation. To find out more about Interpret Europe, visit [www.interpret-europe.net](http://www.interpret-europe.net) or Interpret Europe's LinkedIn and Facebook sites.

You can contact us any time at [mail@interpret-europe.net](mailto:mail@interpret-europe.net).

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