

EU Lifelong Learning Programme 2007- 2013 (2012/C 232/04)  
Subprogramme Leonardo da Vinci. Call for proposal 2013 EAC/S07/12  
Action "Transfer of Innovation"  
Project number: 2013-1-ES1-LEO05-66707

# **“INTERPRETING OUR EUROPEAN HERITAGE”**

ECVET for transparency and recognition of learning outcomes and  
qualification in European Tourism Sector

---

## ***What is Interpretation?***

---

Glossary of terms and Bibliography on Heritage  
Interpretation

---

---

*By Koan Consulting*

---

## INDEX

|  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. What is interpretation?.....  | 3 |
| 2. Interpretation principles.....  | 5 |
| 3. Glossary of terms.....  | 5 |
| 4. Associations, entities and website of reference on heritage interpretation..... | 9 |
| 5. Bibliographical Reference .....   | 9 |

## 1. What is interpretation?

There are several definitions of interpretation:

*"Interpretation is an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information."* By Freeman Tilden for the US National Parks Service in 1957

"Interpretation is the art of explaining man's place in his environment, for the purpose of enhancing visitor awareness of the importance of this interaction and awakening the desire to contribute to the conservation of the environment. (Aldridge, 1973)

*"Interpretation is a communication process, designed to reveal meanings and relationships of our cultural and natural heritage, through involvement with objects, artifacts, landscapes and sites."* - *Interpretation Canada (1976)*

"Interpretation is an approach to communication. It is separated from other forms of information transfer in that it is pleasurable, relevant, organized, and has a theme" (Sam Ham, 1992).



Veverka (1994) *emphasizes the fact that interpretive communications do not only consist of presenting a series of coherent data, but in developing a specific communication strategy for translating this information for other people, thus converting specialist technical language into the ordinary language of the visitor.*

The National Park Service (NPS) defines interpretation as "a catalyst in creating an opportunity for the audience to form their own intellectual and emotional connections with the meanings and significance inherent in the resource (National Park Service, 2001)

The National Association for Interpretation (NAI) defines interpretation as a "communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource." (Brochu and Merriman, 2002).

*Heritage interpretation is a means of communicating ideas and feelings which help people understand more about themselves and their environment."* (Interpretation Australia Association, 2003)

Interpret Europe use the term 'heritage interpretation' to identify broadly the educational and communications discipline practised by our members to distinguish it from other meanings of the word 'interpretation', such as linguistic interpretation. However, "heritage interpretation" can also help to explain contemporary issues and topics that are not usually considered as heritage, such as climate change and sustainable development, which are equally important matters.

AIP (The Spanish association for the Interpretation of Heritage) considers it as “The art of revealing the meaning of natural and cultural heritage on the spot to an audience that visits a given place in their leisure time”

*Interpretation enriches our lives through engaging emotions, enhancing experiences and deepening understanding of people, places, events and objects from past and present.— (Association for Heritage Interpretation AHI, 2005)*



*Interpretation refers to the full range of potential activities intended to heighten public awareness and enhance understanding of cultural heritage site. These can include print and electronic publications, public lectures, on-site and directly related off-site installations, educational programmes, community activities, and ongoing research, training, and evaluation of the interpretation process itself.*

(ICOMOS Enane Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites, 2008)

## 2. Interpretation principles

Freeman Tilden (1957) formulated the following principles:

- Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
- Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
- Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical, or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
- The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
- Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
- Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program.

There are three words that can effectively sum up the principles outlined above:

**Provoke + Relate+ Reveal**

## 3. Glossary of terms

**Audience** *A person or group of persons for whom messages and/or services are designed or delivered. Synonymous terms might include: visitors, learners, customers, users, recreationists, stakeholders, guests, buyers, consumers, clients, patrons (NAI)*

**Cultural Heritage Site** *refers to a place, locality, natural landscape, settlement area, architectural complex, archaeological site, or standing structure that is recognized and often legally protected as a place of historical and cultural significance. (ICOMOS)*

**Cultural Resource** *a general term used to refer to archaeological sites, historic structures, monuments, artifacts, traditional cultural properties, and/or other human expressions of ethnic or national identity. They are places or objects of local or national heritage. Related Terms: Historic preservation; Cultural landscape; Cultural resource management; Heritage resource (NAI)*

**Evaluation** is about measuring how well you are doing. It is a “systematic examination of activities where objectives are defined and performance in meeting objectives is measured” (Centre for Environmental Interpretation)

**Guide** is a person who is knowledgeable about a resource and is skilled in teaching others about that resource, and often accompanies visitors from place to place in the area of the resource. Related Terms: Docent, Explainer (NAI)

**Heritage Interpreter:** is someone able to use Interpretation as a communicational tool through which visitors of an area, site or element of heritage interest get interested in what they are visiting and thus develop attitudes of appreciation and safe-keeping for it. (Fernández Casal, T et al. Propuesta de Cualificación profesional “Intérprete del Patrimonio Natural y cultural”, Seminario de Interpretación del Patrimonio. Centro Nacional de Educación Ambiental- CENEAM 2011)

**Intepreter:** A person who employs a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and meanings inherent in the resource (NAI)

**Interpretive Center** is a facility where opportunities are provided for people to forge emotional and intellectual connections between their interests and the meanings that arise from learning about the resource. The facility may or may not be staffed, and can range in scale from a kiosk to a complex of buildings and natural sites, but always provides information about the natural and cultural resources (NAI)

**Interpretive guide** is the professional devoted to receive and guide individuals or groups, normally within a leisure or tourism context, in any kind of space, who uses on purpose interpretive techniques to enhance and enrich the visitor experience. The interpretive guide works namely in heritage sites and spaces, that can be related to nature or culture in a very broad sense.

**Interpretive host** is the professional devoted in the welcome, information and orientation to visitors and tourists in any kind of heritage sites. This activity can be performed under a context of tourism, leisure or education. The interpretive host develops normally his work in heritage spaces or sites, interpretive center, visitor centers, heritage centers and trails that can be related to both natural and cultural heritage, in a very broad sense.

**Interpretive Infrastructure** refers to physical installations, facilities, and areas at, or connected with a cultural heritage site that may be specifically utilised for the purposes of interpretation and presentation including those supporting interpretation via new and existing technologies. (ICOMOS)

**Interpretive media:** are the channels used by the interpreter to communicate with the audience to send them the message.

**Interpretive Message:** represents the link between the visitor and the resource that is under interpretation. In addition, the message should reveal an idea to which most audiences have never been exposed, something truly revelatory. Sam Ham states that interpretive messages should be strong, provocative and revelatory. Interpretive messages are all those contents and concepts that we want visitors to apprehend, understand and embrace through an interpretative programme, in order to reach a certain attitude. They are not slogans or mottos, but just information which is transmitted by using interpretative techniques. The interpretative message has a theme, tangible elements and universal concepts; it creates intellectual and emotional connections in the visitor, provokes thinking and arouses an attitude of respect and safe-keeping. (Jorge Morales)

**Interpretive organization** is considered an agency or organization that manages a site or company that employs methods of interpretation in their daily business. Examples might be national parks, county parks, community nature centers, zoos, aquariums, botanical gardens, theme parks, tour companies, cruise lines, or museums (NAI)

**Interpretive plan** is considered the documentation of a thoughtful decision-making process that blends management needs and resource considerations with visitor desire and ability to pay to determine the most effective way to communicate the message to targeted markets (NAI)

**Interpretive Planning** The decision-making process that blends management needs and resource considerations with visitor desire and ability to pay to determine the most effective way to communicate the message to targeted markets. (National Association for Interpretation)

**Interpretive Program** Activities, presentations, publications, audio-visual media, signs, and exhibits that convey key heritage resource messages to audiences. (Adapted from US Fish & Wildlife Service)

**Interpretive Services** Any personal or non-personal media delivered to audiences. (NAI)

**Interpretive Theme** *A succinct, central message about a topic of interest that a communicator wants to get across to an audience. (NAI)*

**Museum** *A permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment. (Adapted from International Council on Museums)*

**Museums and historic properties/sites:** *This is a project that is based upon a collection, building or property. A museum is defined as a collection-based organisation rather than the display of objects at a visitor centre. Museum-led projects that take parts of their collection off-site to places that are not visitor centres are eligible. An historic property/site could be a house, castle, industrial or archaeological site. Projects about extensive historic landscapes should be entered here/in the Landscapes, Forests, Nature Reserves, Parks and Gardens category, while more discrete sites, such as battlefields, could be entered in either. (<http://www.ahi.org.uk/>)*

**Natural Resources** *Physical properties, materials, and on-going ecological processes that include but are not limited to air and water atmospheric resources, marine and freshwater systems; geologic features and processes; biological entities and systems; natural sound; day and night sky features and relationships; seasonal and celestial fluctuations; and natural interactive processes. (NAI)*

**Presentation** *more specifically denotes the carefully planned communication of interpretive content through the arrangement of interpretive information, physical access, and interpretive infrastructure at a cultural heritage site. It can be conveyed through a variety of technical means, including, yet not requiring, such elements as informational panels, museum-type displays, formalized walking tours, lectures and guided tours, and multimedia applications and websites. (ICOMOS)*

**Site Interpreters** *refers to staff or volunteers at a cultural heritage site who are permanently or temporarily engaged in the public communication of information relating to the values and significance of the site. (ICOMOS)*

**Thematic interpretation** *is when information presented is all related to a key idea and gives a central message. This type of presentation is easier to follow and people find it more meaningful than non-thematic presentations. Interpretation is not only giving of information. A good interpretative theme should not just express a fact. It should rather affect visitors' mind and capture their attention by achieving some combination of knowing, feeling or doing objectives. A theme is not the same as a topic*

**Topic** *is just a subject matter for a presentation, whereas a theme is a specific message an interpreter wants to communicate to the audience*

**Visitor / Interpretation Centres:** *This category includes new visitor centres as well as established centres producing new interpretation. A centre may be linked to a property, site, landscape or whole region. It may*

*be a standalone building or set within a larger building, such as a tourist information centre. You will be judged on how you use the built space of a centre to tell the cultural or natural heritage story of the property, site, landscape or region. (<http://www.ahi.org.uk/>)*

**Visitor Center** *A facility, open to the public that provides information about the area's natural and cultural resources. A visitor center may contain exhibits, visitor facilities, and interpretive information (NAI)*

#### **4. Associations, entities and website of reference on heritage interpretation**

INTERPRET EUROPE- European Association for Heritage Interpretation <http://www.interpret-europe.net/>

NAI- National Association for Interpretation <http://www.interpnet.com/>

Association for Heritage Interpretation: [www.ahi.org.uk/](http://www.ahi.org.uk/)

Interpret Scottish: <http://www.interpretscotland.org.uk>

Interpretation Australia Association: <http://www.interpretationaustralia.asn.au>

Interpretation Canada, <http://www.interpscan.ca/>

AIP (Spanish association for the Interpretation of Heritage) <http://www.interpretaciondelpatrimonio.com>

Heritage Destination Consulting: <http://www.heritagedestination.com/freeman-tilden.aspx>

EMA, the European Museum Academy, <http://www.europeanmuseumacademy.eu/>

ICOMOS International Committee on Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites: <http://icip.icomos.org/>

John Veverka & Associates: [www.heritageinterp.com](http://www.heritageinterp.com)

Centro Nacional de Educación Ambiental – CENEAM y recorridos naturales <http://www.magrama.gob.es/es/ceneam/quienes-somos/>

US National Park Service <http://www.nps.gov/index.htm>

#### **5. Bibliographical Reference**

Tilden, Freeman. 1957. *Interpreting Our Heritage*. The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.

Aldridge, Don. 1973. *Upgrading Park Interpretation and Communication with the Public*. IUCN (ed.), Second World Conference on National Parks; Yellowstone and Grand Teton, USA, September 18-27 1972. Report No. 25.

Aldridge, Don *Heritage Interpretation: the natural and built environment* Bellhaven, London, 1984

Ham, S. (1992): *Environmental Interpretation: A Practical Guide for People with Big Ideas and Small Budgets*, Forest Wildlife and Range Experiment Station, University of Idaho, USA. 437 p.

Ham, Sam H. 1992. Interpretación Ambiental, Una Guía Práctica para gente con grandes ideas y pequeños presupuestos. North American Press, Colorado. *(Versión editada en castellano por la AIP)*

Veverka, J.A. 1994. Interpretive Master Planning. Falcon Press Publishing Co., Inc., Helena, Montana, USA.

Morales, Jorge (2001). *Guía práctica para la Interpretación del Patrimonio. El arte de acercar el legado natural y cultural al público visitante.*

CENEAM (2011) *“Propuesta de cualificación profesional de Intérprete del Patrimonio natural y cultural”*.

Ham, Sam (2013) *“ Interpretation-Making a Difference on Purpose”*.

Ham, Sam (2013) *“ Interpretación. Para marcar la diferencia intencionadamente.” (Versión editada en castellano por la AIP)*