Concept paper

Pilot regional course on Interpretative Planning at World Heritage properties in Europe

Introduction

Values, participation, and sustainability are some of the buzzwords in the contemporary heritage management discourse. In the context of World Heritage, how can these concepts be combined to improve the site experience of people? How can local communities and other stakeholders be meaningfully engaged in the management of World Heritage properties? The present course will approach such issues from the perspective of heritage interpretation, intended as a structured approach to non-formal learning specialized in communicating significant ideas about a place to people.

The course on interpretive planning at World Heritage properties is a pilot initiative developed by UNESCO, through its Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, with the technical support of Interpret Europe and other experts in the field of World Heritage, in order to develop and test a methodology on this increasingly relevant subject.

Drawing on the experience of Interpret Europe’s Interpretive Planner course, this pilot training is tailored to suit the specific World Heritage context and processes, with a view at encouraging greater integration of a sustainable development perspective into the management of World Heritage properties through more effective and community-based heritage interpretation.

Objectives

The pilot course aims to provide participants with increased competences in planning heritage interpretation more effectively at their respective World Heritage (WH) properties/sites, in line with the priorities of the World Heritage capacity building strategy and other relevant documents. Specifically, the course envisions:

- Providing a general understanding of the heritage interpretation discipline, its principles and practice;
- Promote understanding of how interpretation planning can help presenting the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of a World Heritage property, while at the same time revealing how it can be linked to the broader values underpinning UNESCO’s mission, such as building peace and fostering sustainable development;
• Demonstrating how interpretation of heritage can play a role at World Heritage properties in support of their overall management systems/plans;

• Encouraging and facilitating interpretation planning at World Heritage properties by engaging their connected communities, thereby establishing better models of visitation and participation;

• Serving as a forum for participants to share their experiences, learn from each other and reinforce networking and cooperation at regional level.

Target groups

The course will address all three areas where heritage capacities reside as defined by the World Heritage Capacity Building Strategy (2011) that is among practitioners, within institutional frameworks, and among communities and networks. More specifically, the course is addressed to individuals whose professional or societal role put them in a position to concretely apply the knowledge and skills they have gained during the course, as part of specific site management strategies/plans.

Accordingly, participants will be selected through a call for applications, open to:

• **Staff of World Heritage site managing authorities**

• **Private practitioners** (e.g. individuals or companies active in heritage presentation/interpretation, such as tour guides, publishing industries, property owners, etc.)

• **Civil society organizations** (local associations, NGOs, etc.)

Methodology

The whole course will be delivered through three phases blending different modalities (presentations, exercises on real cases, group and individual work, discussions, etc.), to ensure effective learning and facilitate the application of the newly gained knowledge and skills:

1. Introductory webinars

2. Face-to-face workshop (compatibly with COVID-19 pandemic restrictions)

3. Post-workshop assignments

Accordingly, the tentative programme will include:
Phase 1. World Heritage knowledge framework

This module will ensure that participants have an essential understanding of the World Heritage aspirations, obligations and processes. Through a series of online, interactive webinars, presentation of case studies and critical reading of relevant material, the World Heritage system will be presented to ensure that the interpretation content of the course will directly tie into such context.

More specifically, the following questions will be discussed with participants:

- What are the main objectives, players and procedures of the World Heritage system?
- What is an Outstanding Universal Value and why is it relevant to World Heritage?
- How can we highlight the interlinkages between nature and culture (tangible and intangible) in a heritage property?
- What are the interdependencies between the OUV, other heritage values within the property and in its wider setting, and the broader values underpinning World Heritage and the overall mission of UNESCO? How can we detect them and make good use of them?
- What is the role of communities in the management of World Heritage sites, and how can we effectively engage and empower local stakeholders?
- How can heritage interpretation support the full integration of all these themes into World Heritage processes?

Phase 2. Interpretive planning process
In this module, which is mainly presented throughout a 5-day face-to-face workshop in a selected World Heritage property that will serve as a case study, participants will familiarize with the main stages of interpretive planning:

1. Reviewing heritage
2. Reviewing interpretive services
3. Developing interpretive services
4. Developing resilience

Through facilitated group work and discussions, combined with site visits, participants will explore four interpretive qualities in the four overlapping planning phases, through a framework of 16 questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpretive qualities</th>
<th>Reviewing</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Resilience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turning phenomena into experiences</td>
<td>What heritage phenomena can be experienced and how?</td>
<td>How do interpretive services support the heritage experience?</td>
<td>What first-hand experiences does the new plan facilitate?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provoking resonance and participation</td>
<td>How are stakeholders related to the heritage and to each other?</td>
<td>How do interpretive services on site involve people?</td>
<td>How does the plan help stakeholders relate to the heritage and inspire participation?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offering paths to deeper meaning</td>
<td>What does the local heritage mean to different people?</td>
<td>Which viewpoints and stories do the interpretive services emphasise (or not)?</td>
<td>How is meaning-making facilitated by the plan?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostering stewardship for all heritage</td>
<td>What are the threats to local heritage and its forms of stewardship?</td>
<td>How do interpretive services encourage stewardship for the heritage?</td>
<td>How does the plan support stewardship of the heritage?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Day 1  
Day 2  
Day 3  
Day 4
Grouped in smaller teams and following informed inputs and exercises, participants will use these questions to develop interpretive planning proposals for the heritage site where the course is taking place.

At the end of each of the first four days, planning teams will have time to work independently on their interpretive planning proposals, delivering answers to the 16 questions. Since interpretive planning is not a linear process, planning teams will also review and add to key questions from previous days or improve their previous assessments.

On the last day, all groups will present their final work and receive feedback.

**Phase 3. Interpretive Plan on one’s own case**

In the third and final part, participants will be tasked with sketching an interpretive plan for their respective World Heritage properties or components, implementing the competences acquired during the course into real-life circumstances in a way to propose interpretive ideas and solutions that can be possibly applied as a concrete outcome of the training.

**Trainers**

Trainers and facilitators of the course will include staff from UNESCO and Interpret Europe, as well as other international experts in the field of World Heritage.

**When and Where**

The face-to-face workshop of the pilot course is tentatively scheduled for 11-15 October 2021, in Kotor, Montenegro, COVID-19 pandemic restrictions allowing (if need be, the activity will be rescheduled).

The Natural and Culturo-Historical Region of Kotor was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1979. More recently (2017), the Venetian Works of Defence between the 16th and 17th Centuries: *Stato da Terra – Western Stato da Mar* were inscribed on the World Heritage List as a serial transnational property which consists of 6 components in Italy, Croatia and Montenegro, including the fortified city of Kotor.
Annex

Why this course?

This course assumes that:

- heritage interpretation, intended as a structured approach to non-formal learning specialized in communicating significant ideas about a place to people, can contribute significantly to the sustainable development agenda;

- bringing a sustainable development perspective to the practice of interpretation in all areas (e.g. planning, content, implementation) will allow greater results for both heritage and society.

Rooting interpretation more strongly into sustainable development has also the potential to open heritage management systems to more inclusive approaches. For example, the participatory dialogue that is created in the context of good interpretation planning can help heritage authorities to truly engage with other stakeholders and discuss wider societal issues, which in turn can result in participatory approaches adopted for other management processes, while simultaneously increasing awareness of sustainable development within the site management team.

Finally, the adoption of such approaches at World Heritage properties can prove a model for other heritage places and other UNESCO designated sites.

What should contemporary interpretation at World Heritage properties include?

State Parties to the World Heritage Convention shall endeavour to, *inter alia*:

- adopt a general policy that aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community (UNESCO 1972, Article 5);

- set up specialized services and take appropriate measures to also ensure the presentation of heritage (ibid.);

- strengthen appreciation and respect by their peoples of the cultural and natural heritage as defined by the Convention (UNESCO 1972, Article 27).

As part of their activities in support of the World Heritage Convention, the Parties are also encouraged to increase equitable, inclusive and effective participation of local and national populations, including indigenous peoples, in the protection and presentation of heritage (UNESCO 2019, Par. 211).

Overall, the World Heritage Convention shall be seen as an integral part of UNESCO’s overarching mandate to foster equitable sustainable development and to promote peace and security, with a view to ensuring policy coherence with the UN sustainable development agenda as enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNESCO 2015, Art. 1).

Accordingly, State Parties to the Convention should “recognise the close links and interdependence of biological diversity and local cultures within the socio-ecological systems of many World Heritage properties” (UNESCO 2015, Art. 8). They should offer space to reflect fundamental values that underpin
dignity, peace and sustainable development, reduce inequalities and foster participation of all stakeholders and rights holders. They should strengthen social cohesion and contribute to inclusion and to the resilience of communities. In other words, “World Heritage properties [are seen] as exemplary places for the application of the highest standards for the respect and realization of human rights” (UNESCO 2015, Art. 20.i).

World Heritage site managing bodies, while often coping with multiple pressures and limited resources, rightfully ask how all those comprehensive demands could be met and how theory could be brought ‘down to earth’. Heritage interpretation can contribute to this, if people are encouraged to reflect upon “the roles that the natural, social and technical environments have had in building their identity and culture” (UNESCO 2017:32). This requires going beyond understanding the significance of a heritage place in its historic, cultural or ecological context, by actively supporting two conditions:

- **Mindfulness** towards heritage, including the heritage of other cultures;
- **Meaningfulness** of heritage for the individuals to shape the own life as well as our common future.

**Heritage interpretation** has been developed over many decades as a non-formal learning approach that helps people to relate to heritage. It follows a set of tried and tested principles that can be explained through the so-called interpretive triangle (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Interpretive triangle (IE 2017:10)](image)

Qualities assigned to the 4 elements in the triangle include:
- Offering paths to deeper meaning;
- Turning phenomena into experiences;
- Provoking resonance and participation;
- Fostering stewardship for all heritage.

The general idea of contemporary heritage interpretation is not only to interpret heritage for people, but to encourage and to enable local people as well as visitors to interpret heritage on their own. In addition, heritage places need to “adopt cross-culturally sensitive approaches to the interpretation of World Heritage properties that are of significance to various local communities and other stakeholders” (UNESCO 2015, Art. 30.iv).

Interpretive encounters can often be rather short, especially for tourists at crowded World Heritage sites. At some places, the average visitor hardly catches any information that goes beyond the obvious. Interpretive planning needs to consider this, but also to open ‘thinking spaces’ and to point the way towards more intense commitment in order to foster more sustainable experiences.
Against the requirements of the World Heritage Convention and the background of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, heritage interpretation at World Heritage properties should integrate multiple value layers (Figure 2). The concept of Outstanding Universal Value and other heritage values of the property are the foundation for all World Heritage processes, including management and interpretation. On this basis, interpretation can help making links to the wider network of significant assets in a natural, cultural or urban landscape, and to non-heritage values of the property in the contemporary society, including its economic or social values. Through a participatory planning process, relevant stakeholders are also able to select which values are to be included in the interpretation plan of the property, and how to present and interpret them.

Finally, interpreting World Heritage should relate to all different dimensions of sustainable development, so that heritage interpretation at WH sites can raise awareness on the values of sustainability and help converting site experience into a transformative experience with an impact on consciousness and behaviours.

Figure 2. Value layers to be interpreted at World Heritage properties

World Heritage is an integral part of UNESCO’s overarching mandate to promote peace and security and to foster equitable sustainable development in its environmental, social and economic dimensions

A heritage place can be significant to its broader territory and contemporary society for other reasons too, including its economic and/or social values

Values are the reason a heritage place is special. Heritage values at any World Heritage property are not limited to its OUV, and can include other natural or cultural assets (tangible and intangible) that are specific to that place

The World Heritage status of a property and all related processes are based on its Statement of Outstanding Universal Value, which expresses the reasons for which it was inscribed on the World Heritage List
List of References


UNESCO (2014) Global Citizenship Education


UNESCO (2010) Teaching and learning for a sustainable future [online]


UNESCO (1972) Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage
