

Training Course Warsaw November 2019 – Heritage Interpretation

“How to overcome the gap? Sharing heritage through interpretation”

Visiting heritage sites is one of the most popular forms of participation in culture for many citizens. Museums, monuments, and historical cities are not only attractions within the growing tourism industry, but an environment for lifelong learning. For the heritage sites hosts and management the challenge is to create rich cultural and educational experiences for their audience, despite the issues which make the communication with them more and more difficult. These “gaps” to overcome are i.e. cultural diversity, overwhelming effect of the digital world and crisis of public trust. Within the ongoing process of globalisation and migration, heritage sharing practices demand inclusive attitude and the high level of intercultural communication capacities. Information buzz, habits of interconnectivity and online distractors are cutting the attention span to its edge. Contemporary society experienced a dispersion of trust and growing conflicts around values formerly considered as common. Science has to compete with conspiratorial theories: people are likely to believe stories from Youtube, rather than complex and proved academic explanations. How can we overcome these gaps? What tools can we use in the heritage sector to tell our stories? What could be the role of cultural heritage in stabilizing our world?

These questions are part of the ongoing global discussion and there are many efforts undertaken to find the solutions. One - particularly interesting - answer came to us from the misty valleys and wild plateaus of the American national parks. In 1957, an expert hired by National Park Service, Freeman Tilden, formed the guidelines for park rangers. He himself was an experienced ranger, devoted to the protection of the park`s areas, but he understood the role of parks broader than just preserving wild nature. In his book *Interpreting our heritage*, he described the park`s as a “treasure” that promotes the “enrichment of the human mind and spirit”. In order to use the park`s potential to “enrich” the visitors, Tilden proposed a set of communication techniques and a methodological toolbox. In this approach, the guide`s role is to create enriching experiences rather than just giving explanations. S/he should invite the participants to discover the phenomenon by themselves and support them through that process. Guiding in this way is more like a lively discussion or exciting exploration, rather than a serious lecture. To inspire participants, interpretive guides use various techniques, i.e. storytelling or provoking discussion by asking open - ended questions.

But the most important shift is in the guides` objective, which is to establish an emotional and spiritual link between visitors and heritage phenomena. Tilden named this method as **The Heritage Interpretation** and was convinced that it is the best way to achieve successful heritage protection. Conrad Wirth, the director of NPS summarizes the idea in these words: “Through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection”. Because of the universal character, Tilden`s guidelines are now used not only in nature and national parks, but also within wide areas of cultural heritage and non-formal culture education. The Interpretation methodology is still developing and adapting to the new fields. One of the modern approaches to the issue has been formulated within European network of interpretation - Interpret Europe. From this point of view Interpretation does four things:

- it provokes visitors' curiosity and interest in what may be an unfamiliar topic or theme
- it relates the site or objects to visitors' own knowledge, experience, background and values,
- it reveals the significance of the site or objects which visitors can understand and appreciate,
- it helps people to enjoy a satisfying experience and it fosters respect for heritage.

Heritage interpretation tools help museums and historic monuments to tell stories relevant to the visitor's perception, needs and contemporary trends. That's why the method could be useful to overcome some of the "gaps" - to discuss with our audience the issues they find personally important and to search for meaningful and life changing experiences, which, in the end, will perhaps change the world a bit.

There are many ways for heritage professionals to learn about interpretation concepts and tools. The below described workshop has been conducted during the 2019 OWHC Seminar in Warsaw, by the trainers from Małopolska Institute of Culture. Its programme was inspired by the methodology developed by Interpret Europe - a leading organisation in delivering such activities in Europe. A basic course focused on communication and interpretive techniques, useful for professionals working with groups on site (personal interpretation). It was about how to discuss with participants universal values and deeper meanings that the heritage is conveying and how to foster their relations with the phenomena. Both for the guides and professionals from other fields of heritage protection it is an opportunity to rethink the way their heritage site is being communicated and to find new ideas. As IE trainers we also provide courses developing interpretive skills in guiding or creating interpretive texts. More detailed courses are targeting the interpretative writing and planning competences. These activities are meant to train techniques, useful in a wide range of heritage sharing projects, i.e. designing exhibitions, creating paths, writing texts for panels, labels and other printed materials (non personal interpretation). Besides other outcomes, the courses are designed to be enjoyable and provide a team building value. For the heritage sites teams it's a support in the process of discussing what really matters in their job, what crucial issues they have to cope with and how to overcome the obstacles in the communication with their audiences.

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Interpretation of Heritage

DOCUMENTATION

The workshop was divided into 3 working days. Sessions were conducted with the use of activating methods, including group activities and creative processes. The venue of the Museum of Warsaw was used as a space to train and apply the interpretive methodology. Workshop focused not only on providing participants with theoretical knowledge, but also on practicing newly learned skills, discussions and individual creative work.

Day 1

Theme: invitation to the interpretation

1. Introductory Session – participants met each other and had a short presentation about themselves
2. Creative exercise - preparing exposition, and playing the role of a guide
3. Discussion: group reflection about the experience – what can be remembered from the sightseeing ? What makes the guides story? What could be the role of thematic approach in heritage presentation?



4. Presentation: the basic terms of Heritage Interpretation
5. Group work: my perfect guided tour. Participants in teams created the list of factors, making a guided tour the perfect experience for them



Day 2

Theme: techniques of Heritage Interpretation

1. Introductory exercise – participants described one thing or place important for them personally or important for their families/communities. Together they have created subjective map of the world



2. Creative exercise at the Museum of Warsaw exhibition – part one. “meaning in the nut shell”. Participants created their personal messages about chosen artefacts



3. Presentation: interpretation of heritage as tradition of the holistic approach to discovering and experiencing heritage; introduction into the concept's history and theoretical assumptions and the basic theme creating techniques
4. Creative exercise at the Museum of Warsaw exhibition – part two. Participants used interpretive techniques to prepare theme statements around chosen exhibits



5. Presentation with exercises: basic techniques of interpretation: stepping stones & open ended questions



6. Creative exercise at the Museum of Warsaw exhibition – part three. Participants create open-ended questions and stepping stones activities around chosen exhibits
7. Creative exercise at the Museum of Warsaw exhibition – part four. Participants prepared their presentations
8. Team work presentations at the Museum of Warsaw exhibition (groups guide each other)

Day 3

Theme: interpretation of heritage and the values – new ideas

1. Introductory exercise: achievement, vision, challenge – participants shared experiences from their heritage sites, using multilateral discussion technique



2. Group discussion session: values in my site – participants were defining the most important values in their organisations / sites. They have described where and how the values are most visible, “touchable” within the sites or phenomenon’s



3. Creative session: how interpretive techniques can be applied to heritage sites management, in order to promote their key values? Participants in groups were brainstorming around the issue and prepare a description of the ideas as a short draft, poster or mind map



4. Presentation of ideas and reflection: how could we use interpretation in our sites? What are the benefits of it? What obstacles can we see?

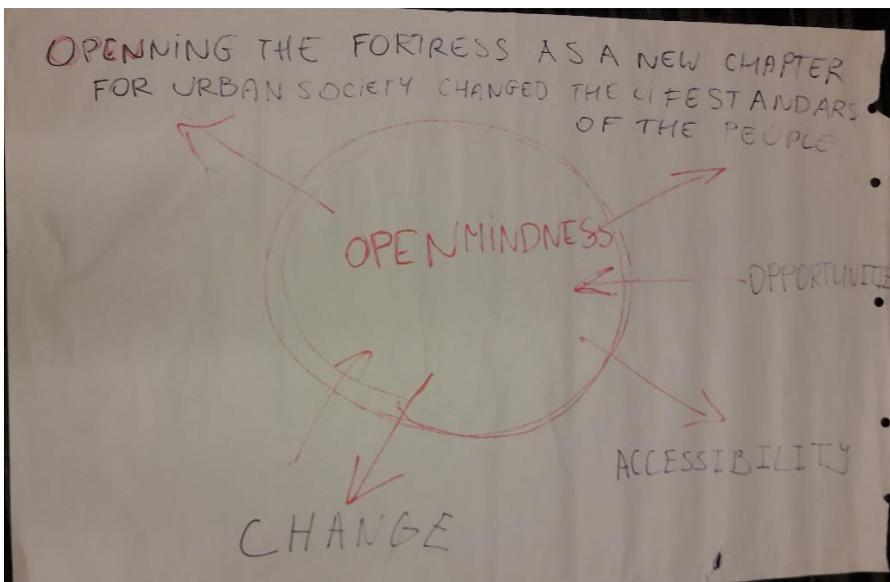


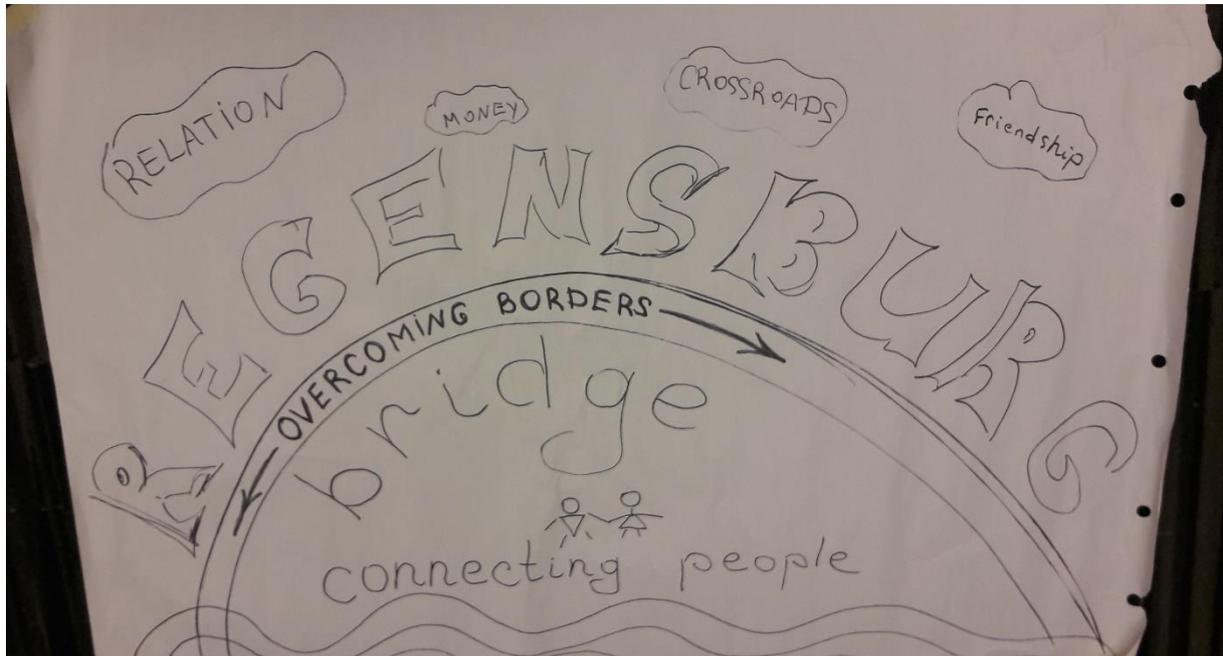
5. Road mapping session: what has to be done to implement the ideas in my site/ institution ? – case studies :

Group 1 : Kutna Hora – between silver mines and two Cathedrals

Group 2: Regensburg – as a “bridge city”

Group 3: Luxembourg – story of the opened fortress





Workshop preparation & documentation – Museum of Warsaw and The Malopolska Institute of Culture in Krakow