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European Association for Heritage Interpretation

Online symposium 26-27 February 2026



The role of narratives in 21st century heritage interpretation

Abstracts



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Interpret Europe

**Online symposium
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in 21st century
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To cite this document:

Interpret Europe (2026)
Online symposium: The role of narratives in 21st century heritage interpretation – Abstracts
(First edition)

Potsdam: Interpret Europe

Interpret Europe's online symposium 2026, **The role of narratives in 21st century heritage interpretation**, will be held online on 26-27 February 2026. It will explore how narratives shape meaning, dialogue and responsibility in heritage interpretation today.

Developed by Interpret Europe in collaboration with UNESCO, the Learning Landscapes initiative supports heritage areas in becoming places where interpretation connects people, strengthens communities, and fosters shared responsibility for the future. Within this framework, the online symposium invites heritage professionals, practitioners, researchers and educators to reflect on the role of narratives in contemporary interpretation. Moving beyond single stories and fixed messages, the symposium will explore narratives as spaces for dialogue, learning and shared meaning-making.

Why narratives? Why now?

Narratives shape how heritage is understood, experienced and valued. They influence identities, relationships and public debate. In a time marked by social change, environmental challenges and contested histories, working with narratives has become a central task for interpretation. The symposium offers a space to reflect on how narratives can connect, question and open dialogue — including when they are multiple, emerging or in tension with one another.

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Cover image: Thorsten Ludwig

Copy editing and proofreading: Marie Banks.

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Abstracts of presentations

Continuous acts of beginning: Descendant healing, a U.S. Confederate Memorial, and lessons learned from collaborating on interpretation

Cassie Anderson et al (USA)



What happens when a U.S. national park responsible for interpreting a plantation and confederate memorial admits its mistakes, prioritises healing, redesigns its storytelling to uplift descendant voices, and then gets censored by its own agency? We'll explore recent years of dialogue, trust, and interpretation between descendant families and the National Park Service at Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial, in Virginia, U.S.A.

In 2021, enslaved and enslaver descendants came together through dialogue and formed the Arlington House Family Circle. They've built skills, and nurtured trust and familiarity both among descendant family members and between descendants and the park service. These learnings have necessitated bold, new interpretive approaches in order for the park to honour descendant voices and help park rangers share this complex story with the public. We will reflect on the journey and the challenges ahead as we continue moving forward together.

Cassie Anderson is the former interpretive manager of Arlington House. Together with Stephen E. Hammond and Custis Glover

(Arlington House Descendants' Family Circle Members) and Dr. Susan M. Glisson, founder of the Welcome Table Collaborative, the team brings perspectives of enslaved and enslaver family descendants, a racial healing facilitator, and site interpretive manager.

A new narrative for the interpretation of archaeological heritage: Family histories through digital photo archives at Tell Tayinat in Antakya, Turkey

**Nilüfer Baturayoğlu Yöney
(Turkey)**



Archaeological heritage is one of the hardest subjects to interpret. Their multi-layered context presents interwoven stories but the thousands of years of separation from today's societies challenges narrative interpretations, making their stewardship incomprehensible. This presentation focuses on a socio-cultural association generated through the interaction of archaeological research. Early 20th century

photographs from archaeological sites provides a source documenting people as well as finds. This new narrative for co-creation and association through a social history of former and present workers at Tell Tayinat from the surrounding villages, utilises the University of Chicago ISAC digital archive of the 1930s expeditions. The individual and family (hi)stories produced could become a frame that provides the connection and stewardship of surrounding communities. The narrative also has the potential to be combined with continuing practices such as building, cooking and farming.

Nilüfer Baturayoğlu Yöney is a professor of architectural history and preservation. Her research areas include architectural and archaeological survey, documentation and preservation, building materials and technologies, and modern and industrial heritage, and has designed adaptive reuse and archaeological conservation projects in Turkey. She is a member of Docomomo International and ICOMOS.

Sculpting stories: The role of heritage interpretation in shaping the Mont'e Prama narrative

Andrea Berettera (Italy)



Over the past two decades, Italy's archaeological heritage has become a contested space where local identity and political power intersect, exemplified by the Mont'e Prama Giants—Bronze Age statues discovered near Cabras, Sardinia, in 1974. Their split display between the National Archaeological Museum of Cagliari and the Civic Museum of Cabras sparked debates on cultural ownership, revealing tensions between regional identity, national policies, and global museology. This study uses multimodal storytelling analysis, drawing on Roppola's exhibition design, Hein's educational theories, and Ferguson's literary museology, expanded by Sitzia, to examine how heritage interpretation shapes narratives. It shows how interpretive practices embed the statues in ongoing struggles over identity, legitimacy, and territorial claims, highlighting the role of heritage interpretation in mediating power through narrative.

Andrea Berettera is an Italian public archaeologist and critical heritage researcher with an MA in Archaeology (University of Padua). He's currently pursuing a PhD in Analysis and Management of Cultural Heritage at IMT School for Advanced Studies Lucca (Italy). His research interests are in the socio-political aspects of archaeological heritage, focusing on its role in public discourse.

The potential of networking for heritage interpretation

Alicia Castillo Mena (Spain)



Within the framework of the project Care, People and Archaeology in a Resilient World: Innovating through Community-Based Processes and Networked Work in Cultural Heritage and Museums for the Latin Context (PID2021-127248OB-I00), this presentation reflects on heritage networks as caring and living spaces. It will discuss heritage networks as essential connections for building relationships, as well as strategies for heritage interpretation grounded in the co-creation of multivocal and glocal narratives. We will question collaborative practices and explore the benefits, tensions, and opportunities of networked alliances. Finally, the discussion will address how networks can serve as a future-oriented strategy for heritage interpretation, capable of redefining roles and contributing to more holistic and sustainable practices among institutions, professionals, communities, and stakeholders engaged in cultural heritage.

Alicia Castillo Mena PhD is Full Professor in the Department of Prehistory, Ancient History and Archaeology at the Faculty of Geography and History, Complutense University of Madrid

(UCM). She is Co-Director of the Research Group on Cultural Heritage Management, her main area of expertise, and Principal Investigator of the CIPAMUR project.

Combining natural and historical heritage: Co-creating interpretive narratives for the Gyaros Marine Protected Area

Vasiliki Denaxa *et al* (Greece)



Gyaros is an Aegean island, uninhabited for most of its long history, with a multifaceted identity shaped by high natural values and a challenging past as a place of political exile until 1974. Today, as a strictly protected Marine Protected Area, it raises key questions about how nature conservation and historical memory can coexist within a shared interpretive approach. This contribution presents the participatory process used to co-create an interpretive narrative for Gyaros, involving multiple stakeholders and perspectives. The process resulted in a mosaic of narratives integrating natural, cultural and historical aspects of the site. Through a short digital, video-based interpretive piece combining

insights from this process with visual material from the site, the presentation will explore how multiple narratives can be translated into interpretive practice and serve as a basis for discussion.

Vasiliki Denaxa is a fisheries biologist working with WWF Greece. She leads local awareness and engagement activities in Syros and the surrounding islands. She collaborates with various stakeholders and users of the Gyaros Marine Protected Area.

Heritage Remix: Who controls the playlist of the past?

Dubravko Fijacko (Croatia)



Heritage is not a record to play but a track to produce. In this session we become architects of resonance. Through a live shared interface we will negotiate contested voices, amplifying some and layering others, leaving space in between. The outcome is not consensus it is a collective audio composition where tension remains audible. You will depart with both a shared artifact and a practice for turning places of memory into spaces of democratic encounter.

Interpretation becomes not what we say but what we choose to hear together.

Dubravko Fijacko is a heritage transformation strategist and licensed interpretive trainer bridging participatory design and digital innovation. He empowers guides and communities to co-create meaning from contested pasts, moving institutions from storytelling to civic sense-making. He is the founder of Heritage-ID, and is a passionate advocate for heritage as a living dialogue for peace.

Altervia Multivox in Croatia: Heritage interpretation through multiple narratives and performative practice

Norma Fressel (Croatia) & Gentiane Désveaux (France)



Altervia Multivox is an Erasmus+ transnational project that explores heritage interpretation through itinerant, bicycle-based residencies combining ethnographic research, performative art, and informal learning. Across rural and protected landscapes in France, Belgium, and Croatia, young European participants collect oral histories from local residents and transform them into site-specific performance-walks. By embodying multiple narratives within the landscape itself, the project highlights heritage

as a plural, lived, and dialogic process, fostering ecological awareness, intercultural exchange, and critical reflection on identity, belonging, and sustainable relationships between people, place, and environment.

Norma Fressel holds an MSc in Biology (Ecology) and has more than 13 years of experience in nature conservation and heritage interpretation. As Senior Professional Advisor–Educator at Vransko Lake Nature Park, she designs educational programmes that translate ecological research and traditional knowledge into meaningful narratives. Her work engages local communities in interpreting natural and cultural heritage and sustaining traditional practices.

Gentiane Désveaux is a landscape designer who graduated from ENSAP Lille and holds a PhD in spatial planning from Université Grenoble Alpes. Her research focuses on landscape mediation as a participatory tool, bringing together inhabitants, farmers, and decision-makers. Convinced that knowledge emerges through experience and art, she develops Erasmus+ projects with the Théâtre des Chemins, combining research, training, and artistic creation around landscapes and territories.

Narratives of dissonant heritage: Practices and problems

Stephen Gundle (UK)



The Atrium (Architecture of Totalitarianism in European Urban Memory) association (www.atriumroute.ed) is an EU cultural route composed of numerous municipalities of varying sizes across seven countries. Each municipality presents remains of architecture or urban development strongly related to their origins in fascist or communist regimes. Atrium, therefore, is continually dealing with narratives and counter-narratives, viewpoints and practical heritage issues. It also coordinates projects, including a current one (EUrbAnDeco) dealing with the heritage of colonialism which draws in cultural associations and universities. The presentation will focus on this project and the problems and issues it has brought to light in terms of the memorialisation of colonialism and decolonisation, museum culture and urban spaces. It will shed light on the variety of ways in which problematic heritage can be harnessed to practices of awareness-raising, education,

community organisation, the reconfiguration of public spaces and cultural and artistic projects. While narratives remain important, and controversies often revolve around them, it will be argued that diverse creative practices can bring important new dimensions to present-day responses to negative pasts.

Stephen Gundle is a member of Atrium scientific committee. A professor at Warwick University, UK, he is a specialist in film, media and cultural history with specialist interests in fascism and communism.

From silent inheritance to shared responsibility: Adult education as a space for working with contested narratives (thematic table)

Miljenko Hajdarović (Croatia)



Adults are often treated as 'already educated' regarding history and heritage—an assumption that overlooks how formal education is frequently shaped by ideological framing or selective silences. This thematic table will

explore adult education as a vital landscape for engaging with contested narratives in heritage interpretation. Moving beyond mere correction or confrontation, the discussion will focus on practices that cultivate narrative awareness, reflection, and ethical responsibility while mitigating defensive reactions. Drawing on experiences from post-socialist and post-conflict contexts, this session will investigate how adult learning spaces can disrupt the persistence of exclusionary or simplified narratives. Through dialogue, interpretive literacy, and co-creation, participants will share methods that promote democratic engagement. The goal is to develop the capacity to navigate narrative complexity and foster a more nuanced, shared understanding of heritage.

Miljenko Hajdarović is a Croatian historian and sociologist, PhD candidate and educator at POU Čakovec. He designs teacher training and digital learning materials, supports EU-funded projects, and researches AI pedagogy and media literacy. His work also focuses on Holocaust education, memory studies, and countering historical revisionism.

Broadening interpretation of Athelhampton, a 500-year old house, beyond the rich male property-owners, to the lives of women and the broader community

Giles Keating (UK)



This presentation will give an insight into our work, which encompasses five strands:

1. Review of existing research. For example, the founding family's ownership didn't end in 1596; it continued another 250 years via female descent after the male line ended.
2. Widening the scope of new research, including the fact that Lady Frances Hyde came to the house to escape an abusive husband.
3. Look at opening once-closed spaces to contrast with grander rooms, including the Tudor Kitchen, a servant's room, a chapel for expectant mothers.

4. Write novels that add fictional colour to historical fact. For example, the Anne of Athelhampton trilogy.
5. Provide re-enactments and recreations with accurate detail, including Damask fabrics woven by traditional methods and costumed historical re-enactors in clothing with no zips and using no artificial dyes.

Giles Keating is the custodian of Athelhampton House in Dorset, UK. It is one of England's finest Tudor manor houses and receives 30,000 visitors annually.

Beyond competing narratives: Vertical storytelling in heritage interpretation

Jon Kohl (Costa Rica)



Interpreters deploy narratives horizontally: multiple human narratives coexist or compete in the same space. While promoting inclusivity, it also leads to interpretive paralysis, relativism, or unresolved conflict when narratives occupy the same structural level but diverge in meaning. I propose that narratives can operate vertically across the chain of being—from physical and biological processes, through individual and collective human stories, to civilisational and cosmic narratives. By defining narrative as actors

in processes over time under tension or change, storytelling is inherent not only to humanity but to matter, life, and universe. Interpreters can then situate contested human narratives within larger non-human frames—lower (ecological, material) and higher (societal, galactic)—that reveal shared conditions, values, and plots. Vertical narration transcends conflict, fosters dialogue, and invites audiences to reflect on the past and futures still open to collective choice.

Jon Kohl is an interpretive planner, author, and researcher whose work explores how narratives shape meaning, decision-making, and collective futures in natural-cultural heritage contexts. He has written multiple books on heritage interpretation as well as a science-fiction romance novel, bridging professional interpretive practice with deep experience in story craft.

Interpreting difficult heritage through multiple narratives: A soundwalk at the former KL Plaszow site in Kraków

Aleksandra Kumala (Poland)



'In This Place' is a location-based sound walk on the former KL Plaszow site in Kraków, developed by FestivALT with artists Marcin Dymiter and Ludomir Franczak. Drawing on interviews with diverse stakeholders—residents, researchers, descendants, decision-makers—and incorporating nature's perspective, it captures multiple, sometimes conflicting, narratives in a place marked by trauma, memory, and everyday life.

Aleksandra Kumala (PhD) is a cultural studies scholar, Head of Research at the FestivALT Association, Research and Documentation Officer for the European Sites of Holocaust Memory (ESHM) project, and a member of the Research Center for Memory Cultures at the Jagiellonian University. In her research, she focuses on the experiences of Polish political prisoners of Nazi concentration camps. Professionally, she co-creates participatory

projects commemorating the Holocaust and Jewish heritage.

From mining to culture – Heritage interpretation and community voices

Lucia Leca, Iulia Balint & Constantin Zainea (Romania)



From mining to culture – a short conversation on heritage interpretation as a tool for transition in the Roșia Montană post-industrial region of Romania. After years of relocation campaigns, despite the site's Outstanding Universal Value, followed by a legal case won by the Romanian state and strong civil society support, the community is now shifting from mining toward culture-led development and tourism. Heritage interpretation has become a bridge to community narratives, adapting co-creation tools that involve residents alongside NGOs and institutions. Local community memory holds contrasting viewpoints, while key concepts carry layered meanings. The Roșia Montană Mining Landscape Interpretive Strategy is guided by principles of moving beyond polarisation and fostering openness to deeper understanding without ranking perspectives. Partnerships are emerging as generators of responsible shaping of a common future, while serving as platforms

for co-knowledge, mediation, and cultural renewal.

Lucia Leca is an architect at the National Institute of Heritage, Romania. Among her responsibilities in the preservation and enhancement of UNESCO sites, she has developed projects dedicated to community engagement in the revitalisation of cultural sites. Her work includes supporting heritage interpretation initiatives and recently she has focused on co-creative methods to foster deeper understanding of places and communities.

Iulia Balint is a sociologist and a member of the Roșia Montană World Heritage Association, where she serves as Cultural Manager. She works on projects that promote sustainable cultural-tourism development.

Constantin Zainea, the initiator of the 'Trai cu Rost' project, dedicated to sustainable development and responsible tourism in the area, is president of the Roșia Montană Cultural Landscape Association, whose goal is to raise public awareness about protecting mining heritage. He actively participated in organising the Save Roșia Montană campaign.

Peeping Tourist: Revealing hidden narratives of surveillance and tourism under communism in Albania

Brunilda Licaj (Albania)



The presentation focuses on tourism in Albania during the communist period, centred on Albturist, the state monopoly that managed foreign visitors. It brings hidden narratives to life within a historic house in Durrës, where visitors can experience recreated accommodations, archival documents, and audiovisual materials. Through this immersive setting, the exhibition reveals how tourists were guided, monitored, and controlled, inviting audiences to engage directly with the past and reflect on the intersections of travel, memory, and state surveillance.

Brunilda Licaj PhD is a tourism scholar, curator, and lecturer at Aleksandër Moisiu University of Durrës. With a PhD in Tourism Marketing and 25+ years' experience, she focuses on destination marketing, sustainable and maritime tourism, and projects like Peeping Tourist, translating archival research into mobile and permanent exhibitions exploring tourism, surveillance, and collective memory under communism.

Anti-oppression learning for heritage interpreters

Linda Norris (USA)



If our institutions are to achieve their full potential and serve their communities in the most effective ways, then reworking museum, heritage and public history pedagogy to better support the growth of radical, anti-oppression museum professionals is critical. Learning takes a lifetime of building understanding of ourselves, the world around us, and the relationships we are engaged in. Anti-oppression learning confined to just one period will always be incomplete, as the fundamental nature of the work is to be able to grow and adapt in relation to an infinitely diverse, complex and changing world. To sustain individual growth across a museum career, we do need anti-oppression pedagogy – but more importantly, we need anti-oppression learners, creating a continual approach and mindset. This interactive workshop will provide concrete tools and approaches for heritage interpreters to explore and develop their own approaches to continued learning.

Linda Norris helps cultural organisations and communities reimagine how they tell stories—making them more inclusive, relevant, and impactful. She is co-founder of Creative Futures LLC, a collective that develops dynamic interpretations, builds internal capacity, and fosters community-centred approaches to heritage. She has led training courses on dialogic practice, interpretation and other topics around the globe. Linda is the co-author of *Creativity in Museum Practice*.

Narrating the writer's house: Literary mediation as a strategy for linguistic identity and critical literacy

Javier Roig-López (Spain)



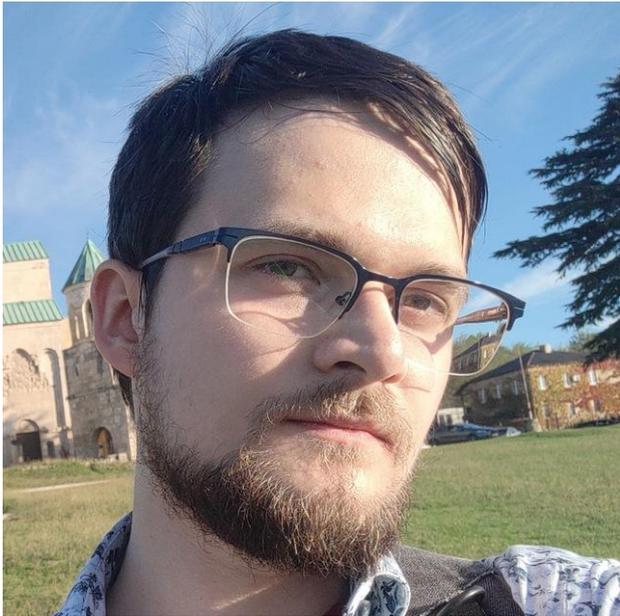
This research explores heritage mediation and linguistic identity at the Joan Fuster House-Museum (Sueca, Spain). Writers' house-museums are understood as material-discursive assemblages where objects, texts and memory construct meaning. Drawing on research based on the educational workshop, *Images and Thoughts*, the study analyses how secondary school teachers and museum professionals

perceive mediation. The findings reveal a shift from the traditional role of the interpreter to that of the mediator as a facilitator of dialogue. The figure of Joan Fuster acts as a catalyst for students' reflection in a context of linguistic substitution and activates "animate literacies". The study identifies three key factors for effective mediation: teacher involvement, the material and sociolinguistic conditions of the space, and narrative frameworks. Thus, writers' houses emerge as spaces for critical literacy, linguistic normalisation and democratic engagement.

Javier Roig is a primary and secondary education teacher, and Professor of Language and Literature Didactics at the University of Valencia. As a PhD candidate in Specific Didactics in literary and linguistic education, his research focuses on the contribution of writers' house-museums to linguistic and literary learning. He is part of the *Geografies Literàries 3.0* project and the GEOLIT research group at the University of Valencia.

Weaponising the past: Mnemonic populism and the erasure of ‘multiple voices’ in Belarusian history education

Nikolai Shpilkov
(Russian Federation, Italy)



This presentation will examine how Belarusian history education functions as a mechanism of mnemonic populism, designed to legitimise authoritarian power. Drawing on a longitudinal analysis of school textbooks (2006–2024) about the 20th century, I will demonstrate the institutionalisation of a hybridised narrative that selectively merges Soviet tropes with state-centric nationalism.

Nikolai Shpilkov is a historian (MA, HSE Moscow) and independent journalist. A former PhD student in Russia, he left in 2022 following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Currently studying Conflict Management at the University of Siena, he is seeking a PhD position to continue his research on mnemonic populism and the mechanisms of authoritarian narrative construction in Belarus.

Asking visitors what makes a ‘good’ idea

Steve Slack (UK)



When curating an exhibit about innovation and invention, which contains a range of complex potential narratives relating to Liverpool, we decided to present visitors with information AND gentle provocation. The exhibit moves beyond the didactic and seeks to engage people in dialogue around nuclear weapons, human/animal medical experimentation and exploitation, tobacco product promotion and legacies of Britain’s empire. Without space to carefully unpack these topics, we introduced each (we hope without judgement) and then handed interpretive agency to visitors. We asked them what makes the difference between a ‘great’ idea and ‘good’ idea; what future generations will make of our current advancements and what positive change can look like. We explored how ‘neutrality’ is presented in an exhibit and explained how we believe museums can never be neutral/apolitical. We hope this creates a space of conversation and that it does more than invite visitors to reflect on the past.

Steve Slack is a heritage interpretation consultant. His current work focusses on including audiences in participative exhibition making processes and in engaging visitors

through interpretive experiences that provoke dialogue and active meaning making. In 2025, Steve was project curator of the 'Lightbulb moments' exhibition at the Victoria Gallery & Museum at the University of Liverpool, UK, which is the subject of this presentation.

Interpretation as mental modelling: A vocabulary

Philipp P. Thapa (Germany)



As the professional conversation about heritage interpretation develops, it embraces concerns, concepts, and terms from various sources. For example, the announcement of this symposium refers variously to 'frames', 'narratives', 'stories', 'themes', and 'brain scripts'. Individual definitions notwithstanding, it remains largely unclear how these terms relate to each other and why we should use them and not others. To help assemble a coherent and user-friendly professional language, and to address the current lack of an organising conception, I propose that we describe interpretation as an intersubjective practice of mental modelling. To speak of interpretation, then, is to talk about mental models, their relationships and

characteristics, and how we shape them. By extension, interpretive themes are the templates for the mental model of a given phenomenon; narratives and stories are dynamic mental models of situations; and brain scripts model how to act in given situations; and so on.

Philipp P. Thapa is an ecologist, philosopher, and writer who is training to become a heritage interpreter. As a researcher with the Sustainable Europe Research Institute SERI, Germany, under the EU project The Big Green (2023–27), he currently focuses on understanding the relationship between arts, culture, and sustainable development. He also teaches environmental ethics at the University for Sustainable Development, Eberswalde.

A place for conversation: Interpreting complex narratives through dialogue

Tamara van Dyk & Aarin Crawford (Canada)



Bellevue House National Historic Site is the former home of Canada's first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald. Located in Kingston, Ontario, traditionally Cataracoui/ Ka'tarohkwi—on the lands of the Wendat, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples, this 1840s site has been reimagined to critically examine whose

stories are told, who determines which narratives are centred, and how visitors engage with legacy. Through renewed exhibits and dialogic programmes, developed in collaboration with Indigenous partners and community members, Bellevue House presents Macdonald's life alongside the lived experiences of those affected by his vision of Canada as a British society. Rather than offering a single authoritative narrative, the site uses facilitated dialogue, role-based activities and a 'many voices' approach to encourage reflection and discussion. This presentation explores how interpretation can redistribute authority, amplify silenced voices, and support visitors in navigating complex histories.

Tamara van Dyk has worked across Canada in interpretation, outdoor education and product development to share Canada's diverse natural and cultural heritage for the past 37 years. She shares this passion as the Site & Visitor Experience Manager at Bellevue House where she builds teams, fosters engagement and provides experiences that incorporate an inclusive approach to interpretation.

Aarin Crawford is of mixed heritage, Algonquin Anishinaabe and European descent connecting deeply to her mother and father's Indigenous communities of Shabot Obaajiwana and Snimikobi, giving a unique perspective on the world and the changing climate of today. Her desire to live in balance with Mother Earth has led to a 24-year career with Parks Canada. Currently, as Indigenous Liaison, Aarin is working to reconnect other Indigenous Peoples to land and bring untold histories of Canada to the forefront; helping to change how Parks Canada shares hidden truths of the past, to learn from and ensure a more inclusive future.

From community action to interpretation: A values-based approach at Bejava Manor House

Ilze Vanaga (Latvia)



Bejava Manor House (Gulbene County, Latvia) is a mid-18th-century Baroque style monument of national importance, housing 11 nationally significant art monuments. The heritage site lost its function in 2019. In response to the lack of involvement of the site owner in the revitalisation of the manor house, in 2024, a group of volunteers launched projects to activate the local heritage community, raise the site's visibility, and connect the municipality (owner) with other stakeholders, following values-based management planning principles. These initiatives resulted in the development of an interpretation plan for the site, based on identified social, historical, economic, aesthetic, and ecological values, as well as helping to spur local political discussions on preservation and development of the site. The case highlights the effectiveness of the values-based heritage interpretation methodologies and the crucial role of heritage leaders.

Ilze Vanaga is a heritage projects coordinator and practitioner. Since 2014, Ilze has gained experience in managing national and international projects (Erasmus+, Interreg, Latvian Culture Capital Foundation, LEADER etc.). For the last two years she has led several

initiatives aimed at activating the heritage community of the abandoned Bejava Manor House, identifying its potential functions, developing an interpretation plan and building a bridge between the local community and the municipality.

Embodied narratives in heritage interpretation: Walking the stories of the mlekarice

Sabina Viezzoli (Italy)



A walking interpretive experience focused on the mlekarice, the milkmaid women who walked daily from the Karst plateau to Trieste to sell milk. The route retraces historical paths from rural villages to the urban market, using walking as a narrative device. Participants are invited to imagine a milkmaid walking with them, reflecting on her daily life, work and seasonal challenges. The experience works with multiple narratives: historical facts, marginalised women's stories and embodied perceptions activated through distance and landscape. Interpretation exposes narrative tensions between invisibility and economic centrality, rural margins and urban identity. The case shows how heritage interpretation can reveal plural narratives without simplifying them, framing interpretation as a dialogic practice that links heritage, identity and place.

Sabina Viezzoli is a heritage interpreter and environmental hiking guide based in Trieste, Italy. She works with walking interpretation, narrative design and embodied learning to explore relationships between heritage, environment, identity and place, with particular attention to everyday histories, marginalised narratives and dialogue-based interpretive practices.

Reading the invisible: The Bora as a narrative framework in urban heritage interpretation

Sabina Viezzoli (Italy)



An urban walking experience that uses the Bora wind as a narrative framework for interpreting the city of Trieste. The city is approached as an open-air museum and archive, where the presence of wind is read through architecture, signs, objects, habits and collective memory. The Bora is not treated only as a meteorological phenomenon, but as a narrative shaping local identity and everyday practices. Interpretation works with multiple narratives: scientific explanations, local stories, visible and invisible traces in the urban landscape, participants'

expectations often shaped by stereotypes. A key element is the frequent absence of the wind itself, which becomes interpretively productive, allowing reflection on how narratives persist without direct experience. Heritage interpretation is a mediating practice that reveals how natural phenomena become cultural narratives and shape relationships with place.

Sabina Viezzoli is a heritage interpreter and environmental hiking guide based in Trieste, Italy. She works with walking interpretation, narrative design and embodied learning to explore relationships between heritage, environment, identity and place, with particular attention to everyday histories, marginalised narratives and dialogue-based interpretive practices.

Narratives in place: From telling stories to inviting relationship

Erica Wheeler (USA)



Understand how to use sense of place narratives in heritage interpretation to better navigate complexity and support visitor meaning-making. Rather than providing sets of predetermining stories, interpreters will be inspired to craft experiences that illuminate different layers of time and story, and invite visitors to see and sense multiple perspectives.

Erica Wheeler is the founder of Sense of Place Consulting. She is a visitor experience specialist and interpretive trainer whose work bridges sense of place, story, and meaning-making. With nearly 20 years of experience training staff across the U.S. National Park Service and for other natural and cultural heritage sites, museums and communities, she helps planners, managers, and interpreters design experiences that connect people more deeply to place. She is based in Massachusetts, USA.

Beyond the plate: Food images, memory, and community cartographies in Malaysia

Kenneth Wong (Malaysia)



This presentation examines how food images and food-based storytelling function as visual and social cartographies in two community-oriented cultural projects in Malaysia: Siamese Reversed and a proposed digital cultural food mapping initiative in Jenjarom New Village. Moving beyond food as an aesthetic display, it argues that food imagery operates as a medium of memory, care, and political imagination in contexts shaped by displacement and cultural loss. Drawing on visual culture, food studies, and curatorial practice, we explore how images of food act as edible memorials, ecological archives, and platforms for collective authorship. Siamese Reversed mobilises communal meals as practices of mourning and remembrance following the demolition of Penang's last Siamese house. The Jenjarom project focuses on the village's 'New Four Treasures'—handmade buns, youtiao, egg sponge cakes, and traditional peanut candy—using photographs and geolocated narratives to document kopitiam culture and everyday food labour as living social infrastructure. Together, these cases propose food imagery as a modest yet powerful tool for negotiating belonging, visibility, and cultural continuity.

Kenneth Wong is an independent curator and cultural researcher based in Malaysia. His work explores heritage interpretation through community narratives, food memory, psychogeography, and participatory mapping. A recipient of the Asian Cultural Council Fellowship, he has worked across Southeast Asia and New York, USA, focusing on living heritage, plural narratives, and practice-based interpretation rooted in lived experience, dialogue and co-creation.

Narratives of vanishing landscapes and collective loss – From mourning to community empowerment

Rigas Zafeiriou & Natalia Roumelioti (Greece)



Narratives of vanishing landscapes, ecological grief and heritage loss can move beyond mourning to empower communities and inspire future-oriented action. Often, stories from local communities convey grief and loss of familiar landscapes abandoned or irreversibly altered. Drawing from six community-based projects on Greek islands, the presentation will explore how local stories attached to cultural landscapes, food heritage, agricultural practices and water management interpret loss while activating

collective imagination and stewardship. Through this work, narratives are co-created, abandoned landscapes are reframed as spaces of regeneration and possibility, while traditional practices are safeguarded for future resilience. The cases demonstrate how place-based narratives can reconcile communities with change and open them up to present and future possibilities, offering transferable insights for community empowerment in times of uncertainty and environmental transformation.

Rigas Zafeiriou is manager of MedINA's Sustainable Food Systems programme, under which more than 20 projects have been implemented across Greece in Lemnos, Kythira, Messinia, Konitsa, and Zagori since 2022. Previously, among other roles, he served as programmes director of the Kytherian Foundation for Culture and Development (KIPA) and as a consultant to UNESCO.

Natalia Roumelioti is project manager for Sustainable Food Systems at MedINA, with a background in marine sciences and experience in environmental and international humanitarian programmes.