The role of narratives
for 21st century heritage interpretation

IE Online Symposium 2026

Questions for the call for proposals

1. The evolving role of interpretation and interpreters

How is the profession adapting to new contexts, expectations, and meanings?

- How does the intention to integrate multiple narratives influence the identity and scope of the interpretive profession in the 21st century?
- Can heritage interpretation itself be understood as a meta-narrative practice – one that both creates and critiques narratives and stories?
- What is the relationship between interpretation and mediation – are we moving from interpreters to mediators/ facilitators/ curators of meaning?
- Can anybody be an interpreter – and if so, what does it take?
- Is the term interpreter still justifiable for our profession, given that we now do many more things besides interpreting?
- Is a professional who is interpreting for others always necessary, when dealing with narratives?

2. Power, ethics, and agency

Whose stories are told – and who decides what is legitimate, acceptable, or excluded?

- What issues come up if we want to deal with multiple and even contradictory narratives?
- What rank do 'prescribed narratives' have (e.g., the OUV in a WHS)?
- How should we deal with narratives that are factually or ethically questionable?
- Are there narratives that shouldn't be accepted as part of the exchange? If yes, for what reasons and who decides?
- What should we do if narratives are silenced because they challenge institutional or political comfort zones ('cancel culture', 'political correctness',…)?
- How can heritage interpretation contribute to healing or reconciliation when narratives are contested or painful?
- Who should have how much power and means to foster their narratives and share their stories?
- How do we manage power imbalances when co-creating interpretive strategies and plans (between institutions and communities, experts and locals, dominant and marginal voices,…)?

3. Narratives, identity, and collective meaning

What is the role of narratives in shaping how people relate to heritage, identity, and place?

- What is the relation between narratives, brainscripts and stories?
- Are narratives, brainscripts and stories the 'human way' of bringing order to things?
- How can narratives shape collective memory, identity, and belonging?
- How do narratives contribute to community cohesion, or conversely, to division?
- How can narratives contribute to a conscious and responsible shaping of our common future?
- How can working with narratives foster civic dialogue and democratic engagement?

4. Narratives, themes, and meaning-making

How do narratives interact with the interpretive tools and principles we already use?

- How are narratives defined (in general? in HI? within Interpret Europe?)
- How can we design interpretive experiences that reveal, rather than hide, the existence of multiple narratives?
- To what extent do current discussions about narratives influence how we deal with interpretive themes?
- What formats (digital, performative, participatory) best allow multiple voices to coexist without confusion?
- How can we use 'narrative tension' (contradictions, paradoxes,...) as a creative and reflective device?
- What does an interpretive strategy or plan based on narrative pluralism look like in practice?

5. Facts, truth, and epistemic boundaries

How do we balance factual accuracy with narrative richness?

- What role do facts play when dealing with multiple narratives, especially contradicting ones?
- How do we deal with narratives that are not based on proven facts (e.g. local legends)?
- How do we deal with narratives if scientists or experts prove them wrong?
- If narratives are part of the perceptual memory, how can we use this in our interpretive work?
- Can interpretation be a way of contextualising rather than correcting non-factual stories?
- Should we aim to (and can we) separate factual explanation and interpretation?
- How can we teach critical thinking within interpretive experiences without diminishing emotional engagement?

6. Skills, learning, and interpretive literacy

What values and what competences do we need to work with multiple narratives?

- What does interpretive literacy require from interpreters/ enablers/ facilitators – and what from the 'wider public'?
- Which tools do we need – as professionals or facilitators – to work with multiple narratives?
- How can we teach skills that help interpreters/ enablers/ facilitators to foster/ invite/ manage multiple narratives.
- How can we teach skills that help participants/ users to accept/ stand/ embrace multiplicity.
- Can LLs become spaces for co-creating new shared narratives, not only preserving existing ones?
- How can we strengthen trainers as mentors to encourage and enable interpretive agents to work with ambiguity and uncertainty?
- What methodological approaches (story circles, reflective practice, dialogic learning,…) can cultivate those skills?

7. Digital narratives and AI

How do emerging technologies reshape narrative authority and diversity?

- What ethical frameworks should guide the use of AI in heritage interpretation?
- Can AI help us collect neglected narratives, or does it mainly reproduce dominant ones?
- Can AI's ability to collect multiple perspectives from the internet lead to false or fake pluralism?
- Who is setting or controlling the algorithms, and what happens once AI starts controlling the algorithms itself?
- How do digital storytelling and AI-generated content affect authenticity and authorship?
- Can interpretive literacy become a safeguard against misinformation and algorithmic bias?