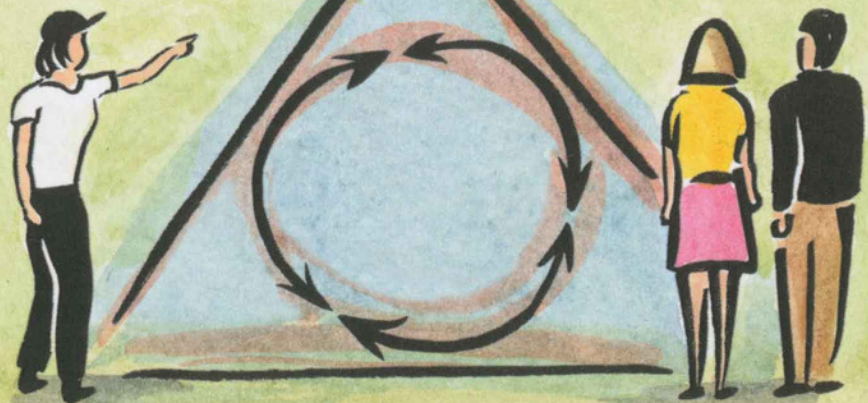
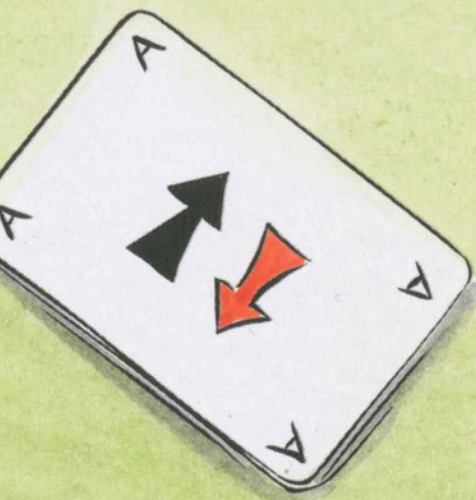


The Interpretive Guide

Sharing Heritage with People



Thorsten Ludwig



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Sharing Heritage with People

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Dedicated to the guides – in parks, at museums and at other heritage sites –
who progressively inspired this manual through their ideas, testing and feedback.
Their recognition and their success are the infallible touchstones of our efforts.

Introduction

Our European heritage is immense: from southern temples to northern fjords, and from the bird sanctuaries of the Danube to the mysterious stone circles overlooking the Atlantic. This is our legacy. It assures us where we are coming from and it helps us to discover where we are heading.

Day by day, many Europeans, working as staff or as volunteers in protected areas and forests, historic sites and museums or in zoos and botanical gardens, are dedicated to bringing our natural and cultural heritage to the fore and to looking for better ways of managing our future. Heritage interpretation sets out to support them. As a worldwide approach, it empowers people to take ownership of their shared heritage, and to discover the 'sense of place' of the many precious sites on our European continent.

Heritage interpretation is deeply linked to the history of national parks. In 1957, the journalist Freeman Tilden wrote his seminal book *Interpreting Our Heritage* for the US National Park Service. In it he first defined heritage interpretation and laid down its principles. In Europe, since 2010, we have built up our own organisation, the European Association for Heritage Interpretation, called Interpret Europe, in which more and more professional interpreters share and develop their work.

Heritage interpretation uses a range of media but it is at its best when there is direct person-to-person contact. For that reason, interpretive guiding plays a prominent role. This manual is written for interpretive guides to use all over Europe. By employing tried and tested exercises to be completed by guides on their own, and with suggestions for self-evaluation and peer coaching, it supports guides in improving their skills and in growing their competences.

We hope that the manual will be widely used in parks, in museums and in the many other facilities that take care of our heritage. We are always grateful to receive any advice on how our approaches might be improved.

Thorsten Ludwig
May 2015



About HeriQ

This manual has been written as part of the EU Leonardo project HeriQ, a transfer-of-innovation project initiated by its Bulgarian partners and supervised by the Human Resource Development Centre in Sofia.

HeriQ's partner organisations are:

- ⇒ APARE – Association pour la Participation et l'Action Régionale, France
- ⇒ Bildungswerk interpretation, Germany
- ⇒ Heritage Interpretation Center, Bulgaria
- ⇒ Istituto Pangea Onlus, Italy
- ⇒ Mediterranean Centre of Environment, Greece
- ⇒ National Association for Small and Medium Business, Bulgaria

HeriQ is rooted in the earlier Leonardo project TOPAS (Training of Protected Area Staff), in which the HeriQ partner organisations from Italy and Germany were involved and which aimed to define quality standards for heritage interpretation in Europe. Within TOPAS, the pilot course Basic Interpretive Skills was developed in 2003, based on ideas of the US National Park Service's Interpretive Development Program (IDP). One of the challenges of the TOPAS course was to find out, which experiences out of more than 50 years of interpretive work in the USA could be transferred to Europe, and where European heritage interpreters should develop own approaches. Building on the TOPAS project, several other courses to train and to certify heritage interpreters in personal interpretation, non-personal interpretation and interpretive planning were run in different European countries.

In Germany, three national organisations joined in 2008 to perform the training project ParInterp. After running several test courses, they agreed on standards, criteria and competences based on the TOPAS results to connect interpretation with learning for sustainability. For achieving that, ParInterp has been recognised as a model project by UNESCO.

In 2013, HeriQ finally started in order to transfer experiences from TOPAS and from ParInterp to other European countries, focussing on two aims:

- ⇒ to inspire interpreters to act as interpretive agents, setting up supportive networks for heritage interpretation for sustainability
- ⇒ to train and to certify interpretive guides who intend to share their heritage mainly with visitors from abroad.

This manual is intended to support the second aim. It is part of a training and certification package related to the HeriQ 40-hour certification course for interpretive guides. The course includes homework as well as written and practical exams. It can be adapted to different situations, for example, dividing it into up to five parts, or using it as a module within a broader training course. It has been tested successfully in Bulgaria, France, Greece and Spain.

After the first English edition of *The Interpretive Guide* had been printed in 2014, it was produced in eleven other languages. All versions and much more information can be downloaded for free from www.heriq.org.

The interpretive triangle

What is really important for any interpretive experience? We could assume that this question has been asked for decades – but it actually has been asked for millennia. At all times people tried to get mental access to places and objects in whose development they themselves had no part; and at all times they took advantage of individuals, supporting them in their search for answers, even if these people had not been called ‘heritage interpreters’.

When people have an encounter with a heritage site or object, and when they then return to their day-to-day business, does this heritage site or object become more meaningful to them? Do they feel more connected to it and do they realise it has to do with their own lives and with their decisions for the future? What defines that ‘magic field’ within which heritage interpretation is taking place?

*I'll interpret the rocks,
learn the language of flood,
storm and the avalanche.*

*I'll acquaint myself with the
glaciers and wild gardens and
get as near to the heart
of the world as I can.*

John Muir



We suggest that three cornerstones are important for every interpretive process which is not undertaken by a person on her/his own:

- ⇒ the site or object to be experienced
- ⇒ the people experiencing it
- ⇒ the media facilitating its interpretation

Those three cornerstones form the so-called interpretive triangle.

However, the most critical question remains: What ties this threesome together? What achieves the result that participants, after an interpretive experience, feel that it is part of their own life?

Before we start talking about interpretive principles and skills, it might make sense to pause and to think about that question for a while.

Exercise: Sensing the indispensable

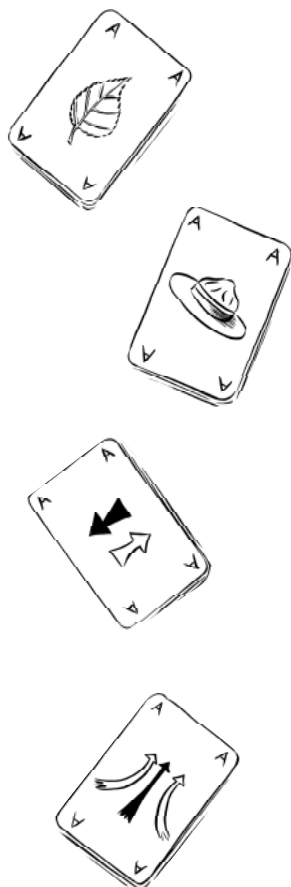
We split up in pairs who independently from each other go for a ten-minute walk. During that walk, the participants within these pairs get into an exchange about two questions:

1. What do I really value in my life?
2. How does it come that I value it?

After we have all returned, we group in a circle around a poster which shows the interpretive triangle. Then we start to discuss, what could help us to bring the three cornerstones together.



The four aces



The idea of the triangle is neither new nor unique. The reason why it is used so frequently in heritage interpretation as in many other professions is that it offers a suitable illustration for various processes of communication.

However, one essential part of the interpretive triangle lies at the centre of the diagram. A fourth element should get our attention and we asked ourselves what this fourth element could be. What is so important that people start to value something with which they didn't have any close relationship before?

The larger truth

Freeman Tilden, whom we mentioned before, once wrote: "Interpretation is the revelation of a larger truth that lies behind any statement of fact". The 'larger truth' was one way to describe the significance which adds meaning to the natural or cultural phenomenon at the top of the triangle.

Please note that it is 'a' truth and not 'the' truth, for every phenomenon can be interpreted in different ways. It can have different meanings for different people.

There are several terms to outline and to designate what Tilden's larger truth implies. No matter what you came up with in our exercise on page 9, what you probably might realise is that in most cases more than facts are needed to connect people to a place or an object. For that reason, Tilden described heritage interpretation in 1957, in the most quoted definition that has been used since then, as:

"an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information".

The principles of good heritage interpretation which follow from that and which Tilden mainly derived from the practice of experienced guides whom he studied, are integral to our course and to this manual.

The power of love

In our context, it makes sense, also, to look at the centre of the triangle from another point of view. We could ask: What does an interpretive guide really need to knit the different pieces together?

A short, simple and good word to describe this might be: love. At least this has been suggested by very different authors from very different times.

A heritage interpreter should definitely have

- ⇒ dedication to her/his sites or objects
- ⇒ dedication to her/his participants
- ⇒ dedication to her/his own mission

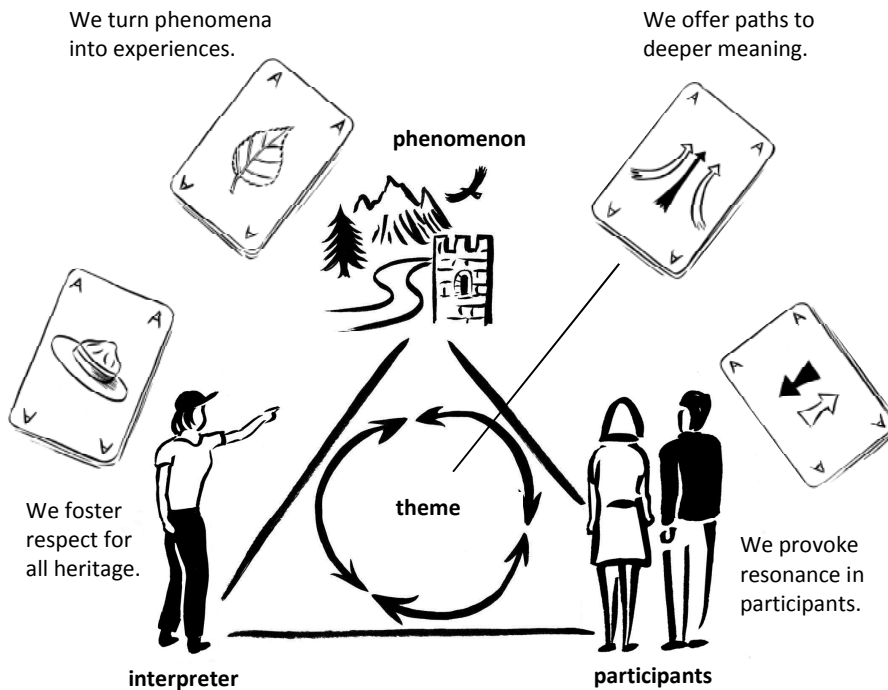
If someone is really in love with these three elements, s/he might be inspired enough to achieve the skills that are needed to become a good heritage interpreter.

So, four elements are connected to the interpretive triangle. We call these four elements the four aces of interpretation, and as we will see in the further course of this manual, four claims can be linked to these four aces:

- ⇒ to turn phenomena into experiences
- ⇒ to provoke resonance in participants
- ⇒ to offer paths to deeper meaning
- ⇒ to foster respect for all heritage

*I suppose it sums up this way:
You must be in love
with your material,
and you must be in tune
with your fellow man.*

Freeman Tilden



To wrap it up, working with the interpretive triangle means searching for deeper meanings, which we phrase in theme statements, and which are situated in the centre of the diagram – but also giving the same dedication to each of its three cornerstones. Otherwise the high potential which heritage offers for non-formal learning might get lost.

A curator solely dedicated to her/his conservation task might not find the right connection to the museum visitors' own world. A professional tour manager simply focusing on people having happy holidays might not realise that their experiences could really inspire the participants. A local mayor delighted by the presentation of her/his little town might tend to lose the bigger picture. Different professionals approach heritage interpretation from different directions and therefore they can face different challenges. There is nothing strange about that: we all know fields where we feel at home and others which we first need to make comprehensible to ourselves. Our most interesting courses are the ones where people from different professional backgrounds take part; courses where all of us can learn from each other.

These were some of the first considerations about the interpretive triangle, the model upon which the HeriQ course for interpretive guides is based. On the next pages, the four aces will be explained in more detail, and exercises will be suggested to make them more applicable to your own work.

Interpreters foster respect for all heritage



*... protection through appreciation,
appreciation through understanding,
and understanding through
interpretation.*

Conrad Wirth

Becoming ambassadors

As interpretive guides, working in a protected landscape, a historic or cultural site, a museum or a zoo, we are heritage stewards. Stewardship is a key term in heritage interpretation. The park ranger's hat on the playing card to the left symbolises our care for all that we should respect and protect as heritage, be it as tangible as an Alpine meadow or a Gothic cathedral, or as intangible as the scent of the mountain flowers after a rainfall or the Gregorian chant echoing from the cathedral's vaults.

What is our heritage?


Obviously heritage has to do with what people want to save, what they want to inherit from past generations – and therefore with what they value. Different people can attach different values to heritage, according, for example, to their age or their cultural and social background; and the value of heritage can change through time. Heritage can be defined as such by a single person, by a family, by a local community, by a state or even by a community of states. World Heritage means that the United Nations have agreed that it is in the interest of the whole of humankind that a specific feature should be preserved for future generations.

Getting to the heart of the matter

Interpretive guides all around the world share their dedication to inspire participants through their heritage. Interpreting heritage can mean understanding how single features work; for example, how an old fishing net has been used and what it was made of. However, real heritage interpretation starts where these features embrace a deeper meaning, where the experience is touching a 'deep frame' – for example, how the whole life of the fisherman's family has been connected to that single net. Working with frames as part of interpretive themes (p. 18) is critical for the value of heritage interpretation – but touching values also adds to the responsibility of the interpretive guide. The international Common Cause Network offers a lot of useful material on how to use values and frames in a responsible way.

Sensitive interpretation

This is the last serious item before we come to the more engaging sides of our profession. To decide, consciously, what is heritage, is an intellectual process; but as we may see, heritage and heritage interpretation also stir a lot of emotions. Heritage sites range from places that are attractive, such as a scenic river valley, through places where there has been an impact on one's own culture, like a church built on the foundations of an old mosque – to places that are full of tragedy, such as a landscape that appears to be destroyed forever or the remains of a concentration camp. It is an indicator of open mindedness if controversial sites or objects become protected as heritage. And although some of these places can put a heavy challenge to us as interpretive guides, it underlines the critical role heritage interpretation can play in terms of learning from the past for the future.

 Public Interest Research Centre
The Common Cause Handbook
Machynlleth (2011)

Download for free at:
www.valuesandframes.org

Being personal

Our own personality is of some importance in interpretive guiding – especially for guides, who have grown up in the area where they work and whose lives are interwoven with their natural or cultural surroundings. Personal experiences and memories are often more exciting than factual information for participants. And the personal impression we as guides leave with our participants contributes significantly to the success of an interpretive talk or walk.

People don't change their lives based on data. They change it based on an experience, an intimate contact they have with somebody that they trust.

Alan AtKisson

Inspiration rather than instruction

As interpretive guides, our task is not to be an instructor or to state fact after fact. Instead we are facilitators, providing explanations, offering our participants new perspectives, being ready to share experiences and to encourage them to discover more for themselves. This includes putting our own perspectives in question, on the one hand to provoke our participants to think – and on the other hand also to learn more for ourselves. As interpretive guides we are also learners.

Being familiar with different roles

To create a pleasant atmosphere for learning, we should be able to play different roles. Interpretive guides argue, listen and mediate, they explain, inspire and encourage, they can raise tension or care for relaxation, and they always support their participants in their wonderment at new revelations. As interpretive guides, we create a little piece of theatre, a memorable drama that reinforces messages and memories.

Exercise: Playing different roles

We write one topic heading on each of about ten facilitation cards; terms could be 'journey', 'light', 'noise', 'boredom', 'start' etc. Then we prepare several paper hats by writing one role on each, for example, 'teacher', 'mediator', 'narrator', 'lawyer', 'animator' etc. One of us draws a 'topic card', chooses a 'role hat' and presents the topic involving the others in the role relating to that hat. After a while, someone else takes another hat, playing a new role until all the hats have been used.

Another version of this exercise is placing the hats in single 'islands' marked by loops that are made of string. This gives the opportunity to jump from one island to the other while presenting the topics.

Finally the exercise can be done by splitting up participants into groups of two or three. One group takes a role hat (or just a role card) without letting the others know what role the group represents. The group then searches for an object and after a while starts to present that object according to its role (but without the hat) while the others guess what role the group plays.



Overcoming weaknesses

A hallmark of success, a requirement for any successful work, is to be aware of one's own weaknesses, to deal openly with them, but also to understand them as challenges for learning. This is also true for interpretive guiding. On every interpretive walk, we should seek to achieve one single objective – and to do a self-assessment, immediately after the walk, of how well we achieved this objective.

Interpreters turn phenomena into experiences



*Do not try to satisfy your vanity
by teaching a great many things.
Awaken people's curiosity.
It is enough to open minds;
do not overload them.
Put there just a spark.
If there is some good
inflammable stuff,
it will catch fire.*

Anatole France

Helping objects and incidents come to life

At the core of any interpretive activity are enjoyable first-hand experiences with authentic heritage elements. To underline their value, we call these elements phenomena. We can perceive all phenomena with our senses whether they are tangible objects such as trees, paintings or houses or intangible sensations such as dances, songs or sunrises. As interpretive guides, we try to raise topics only where and when they can be seen or perceived, and we point them out as individual items. For instance, we don't deal with Gothic churches in a generic way by looking at one of them as a single representative of a period of architecture, we always relate to the particular example that we can see, to its specific history and specific qualities.

Therefore the interpretation of a phenomenon in, for example, a nature reserve will be different in spring and in autumn, and it will be different in the sunshine and in the rain. Experiencing a site or object first-hand is the ace of spades in the pack of any interpretive activity. Even a damaged artefact which is found by chance during an interpretive walk is usually a more powerful experience than a perfect counterpart or image in your pocket. The more a guide is familiar with coming upon unexpected (but with experience perhaps predictable) objects or events, the better s/he will be.



Exercise: Highlighting the uniqueness of a phenomenon

We split into four groups, each approaching one of four phenomena that look much the same at first glance, for example, four roadside trees of similar age and growth. Each group investigates the characteristics of its chosen phenomenon in comparison with the others. At the end, each group presents its phenomenon, clearly expressing its own 'personality'.

Hidden excitements

A flash of lightning splits a pine tree and a fungus spreads along the crack on one side. The group, led towards the other side of the tree, cannot see anything special about it. However, they soon discover the damaged area with surprise. Such revelations can also be created by using surprising sounds or odours. They make an interpretive walk appealing.



Exercise: Revealing secrets

At a heritage site, for example, in an open-air museum, each of us looks for phenomena that embrace 'secrets'. Then one of us guides the others to such a phenomenon, building up expectation and suddenly revealing the hidden feature as dramatically as possible.

Selecting from a variety of stepping stones

With the interpretive triangle in mind, we speak figuratively of stepping stones when it comes to communicative elements that help to give our participants access to the phenomena. Any explanation can be such a stepping stone, and on a field trip or a museum visit with experts, explanations may be sufficient. But for an activity that is aimed at a general audience, detailed explanations are generally not suitable. For that reason, interpretive guides equip themselves with a broad variety of stepping stones, each suited to the group as well as to the phenomenon.

Ways of telling your story: methodological stepping stones to the phenomena

- ⇒ explanation
- ⇒ description (observation)
- ⇒ narrative (adventure yarn, fairy tale, legend, joke)
- ⇒ expression in a performing art (poetry, rhyme, song, tune)
- ⇒ stimulating sensory perception
- ⇒ exciting imagination (for example, from rock or tree shapes)
- ⇒ demonstration
- ⇒ illustration (photo, drawing, statistics)
- ⇒ investigation (experiment)
- ⇒ game (also role play)



At this point, it becomes clear that different stepping stones appeal more to some participants than to others. This important factor, which we will underpin later, is also influenced by the choice of words.

Anchoring phenomena in our participants' world

Ways of engaging your audience: rhetorical stepping stones to phenomena

comparison	This pottery is as thin as parchment.
example	On this route, glass was one of the goods transported.
word picture	These ancient pots have big ears.
shift in perspective	If we were the charcoal-burners ...
humanisation	... and then the bark beetle thinks ...
contrast	Some worked at home, others spent all day in this factory.
apparent contradiction	Dead wood is alive!
quotation	Poverty is the parent of crime, as Aristotle supposedly said.

Exercise: Approaching a phenomenon via stepping stones

We write the stepping stones listed in the previous two boxes on single facilitation cards, look for an attractive heritage object and set up the cards between us and this object. After a while, everyone chooses one card and, as soon as all cards have been taken, each in turn explains the example of a stepping stone s/he chose; for example, gully in the rock ⇒ quotation ⇒ Constant dripping wears away the stone (Choerilus of Samos).



Looking at the whole picture

Experiencing original objects or sites as unique doesn't mean failing to put them in a wider context. Sometimes even global references make sense (pp. 20-21). And using these as an example of stewardship of our heritage is acceptable as long as the interpretation stays focused on the phenomenon.



Talks and walks

When we reveal some of the secrets of a phenomenon, staying at the same spot for five to ten minutes, e.g. at the entrance to an old fortress, we call this an interpretive talk. Interpretive talks are at the core of guiding. Well-attended exhibitions and popular sites where new visitors continuously arrive provide good chances to become familiar with this approach; e.g. by giving a similar interpretive talk at the same place at each hour. Interpretive walks consist of several interpretive talks. All approaches to personal interpretation should never be a monologue; they should always involve the participants.

Interpreters provoke resonance in participants



*As long as I am speaking,
I will not experience anything new.*

Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach

Being aware of the advantages of guiding

The first principle of interpretation says that we need to relate phenomena to the personality of our participants. For this purpose, it is helpful to know something about them and their background and previous experiences. To be able to find this out and respond to it is one of the great advantages a guide has over an interpretive panel or a multimedia installation.

Reaching participants

To provoke resonance and to achieve dialogue, we first need to 'get in touch' with our participants. Remembering the interpretive triangle, we can use the idea of the stepping stones again – but now we are talking about stepping stones between guides and participants.

Ways to connect with each other: stepping stones from guides to participants

- ⇒ comprehensibility (language and content)
- ⇒ eye contact (also examining reactions)
- ⇒ facing participants and using appropriate body language
- ⇒ humour (with care!)
- ⇒ open-mindedness (for example, willingness to deviate from personal ideas)
- ⇒ introducing each other and using the names of participants
- ⇒ listening to learn more (So – you're here quite often?)
- ⇒ detecting and picking up similar interests and views
- ⇒ making reference to friends or groups linked to participants
- ⇒ making reference to the participants' own world (work, family, hobbies etc.)

Interpretive guides have an impact through what they say and how they say it. Guiding is about communication and speaking in public. Both can be trained in general public-speaking courses in some countries, for example, at a community college. Two exercises are shown as examples.



Exercise: Expressing one's mood

We take a neutral statement (for example, In autumn many birds go south) and prepare small cards, each with an adjective describing a mood (for example, depressed, shy, arrogant). Then, each participant draws a card and speaks that same statement expressing the respective mood, while all others try to work out which term is meant.

Exercise: Portraying a scene without words

We develop a simple story (for example, walking through a landscape) by actions (for example, packing a backpack or looking for directions) and write the single scenes on numbered cards. All participants will receive one of these cards. In turns, they present their scene by body language; no sounds are allowed. In the end, the story is reconstructed and the group considers which scene had been expressed best and how.

Starting a conversation

Some attention has now been paid to how a presentation can be made more appealing. However, the ace in the pack shown at this page has two arrows, symbolising conversation. The guide needs to get quickly from 'giving a lecture' to a real exchange with participants. A group that has settled into the role of being only receivers is difficult to 'bring back to life'.

Immersing in the world of our participants

An exchange can result from common experiences that raise issues or from questions posed by the guide. Open-ended questions are particularly helpful. Open-ended questions are those that provoke different answers depending on the participants' own experience, rather than just yes or no, for example, "Of which other regions of Europe does this landscape remind you?" The various answers often provide good opportunities for a conversation.



Exercise: Asking open-ended questions

We split into groups, each choosing one phenomenon and preparing to address this phenomenon:

- ⇒ one focus question (answer requires direct contact with the phenomenon); e.g. "What does the shard of this pot sound like if you tap it?"
- ⇒ one transfer question (which asks for connections into the participants' world); e.g. "Where did you see such pottery before?"
- ⇒ one process question (seeking to find out how something could happen); e.g. "Under what conditions can such pots endure for a long time?"
- ⇒ one evaluation question (which needs to elicit an opinion); e.g. "Should buried pottery be dug up, or should it stay where it is?"

After that, one of each group starts a dialogue with everyone, discreetly incorporating the four questions. After this has been done, we compare what we found out.



Closed questions have only one pre-determined answer (for example, "What is the name of this architectural style? Does anyone know?"). Although the answers could be used to provide explanation, such questions should be asked only rarely because they tend to result in formal teaching.

Involving the whole person

Interpretive guides always address head, heart and hand. What people can empathise with, and what they say and do by themselves, helps them to absorb the experience more deeply than when they just hear or see.

The first stage of activation can be a demonstration where individual participants are involved ("Could you please grab this branch?"). To be needed is something appealing to most people. Another incentive is to search for something, for example, an endangered plant or an architectural style element.

The second stage, real participation, is going one step further. It provides the opportunity to determine the progress of an activity. This notion of participation, which plays a very important role in contemporary learning, has been emphasised as essential for heritage interpretation for more than 50 years. If people participate, they are more wholly involved. For instance: visitors to the ruins of a Roman villa show their interest in a particular aspect of the life of a family, and the guide immediately introduces them to the facilities related to it.

Participation provokes resonance. However, one challenge of participation can be that the course of an interpretive activity cannot be predicted in detail. On the next pages we explain how to deal with this uncertainty.

*It is only with the heart
that you can see rightly;
what is essential
is invisible to the eye.*

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Interpreters offer paths to deeper meaning



Scientific facts need delightful stories to win people's affection.

In this case, the myth is not there to compete with the truth but to make connections with what matters to people and what makes them dream.

Denis Guedj

A theme

- ⇒ is a short sentence
- ⇒ gets under the skin
- ⇒ follows a single idea
- ⇒ identifies the point
- ⇒ can be experienced on site
- ⇒ relates to the participants' world
- ⇒ can serve as a lighthouse

The interpretive theme

If we watch experienced interpreters doing their job, we are impressed by their ease and the conciseness of their interpretive talks and walks. The secret lies in the skill of condensing long stories into compelling themes. Themes are one of the most important elements of interpretation. They connect the three cornerstones of the interpretive triangle, they arouse inner images and they give the event a clear direction in a stimulating way. But they also turn upside down some traditional processes known from formal education.

Searching for meaningful theme statements

When preparing a walk, some guides tend to focus on topics and facts. In interpretation, this focus is shifted to themes and meanings. This doesn't mean that facts are not important – they are. But they are organised in a different way – around a theme. That way they can be remembered much better. A theme represents a deeper meaning that relates to the nature of the phenomenon as well as to the background and experience of the participants.

Examples for theme statements

- ⇒ This tiny seed contains a huge tree. (Pine seed)
- ⇒ The farmer's wife never hung this dress in a wardrobe. (Tattered dress)
- ⇒ This basket needed little material – but a lot of skill. (Old woven basket)
- ⇒ Here we are standing at the bottom of an ancient sea. (Sandstone slab)
- ⇒ This marginal land makes survival a challenge. (Barren wasteland)

Themes are one-sentence stories that can resonate in the experiences of our participants. As in the examples above, they relate directly to the phenomena (if they don't form the basis of an interpretive walk as a main theme; see p. 22).

How themes work

Let us take the tiny seed – which contains what will be a huge tree – as an example. A tree is a phenomenon: we can see, hear, touch, smell or taste it. What we can't experience is the process of growth; we assume that this is a fact. However, to know that a tree might grow doesn't affect us very deeply. But as soon as we realise that something inconspicuous grows to something impressive, this can have a deeper meaning for us. We are familiar with this pattern from our own lives, and it triggers emotions and values – in this case perhaps admiration and the idea of self-development. As a result, that simple seed suddenly becomes meaningful to us, and we feel connected to it.

Phenomenon	Fact	Meaning
This pine seed	will grow	from something inconspicuous to something impressive.

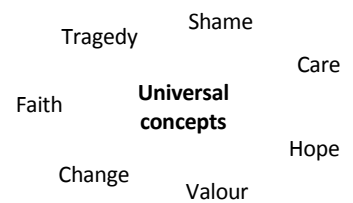


Exercise: Distinguish facts from meanings

We spread out in an area, each of us looking for a small object which arouses some reaction in us. We collect our objects on a piece of cloth and look at them, considering the question: "What is that?" Then one after another passes her/his object around, explaining its meaning to herself/himself (for example, a chewed feather from a bird which aroused compassion). Together we point out the difference between the fact ("What is that?") and the meaning ("What does it arouse in me?").

Detecting universals

Meanings are individual in the first place, but some of them are shared by almost all people. Those are called universal concepts – like birth and death, or like freedom and captivity. Themes, including deep frames (p. 12), that are universals almost always work. They trigger something in everybody, even if it might not be the same meaning for each person. But universals are also somehow interchangeable and therefore tend to be superficial, if we use the same universals too often, and if we don't make sure that their significance, their specific meaning for the original site or object, is obvious.



Animating the inanimate

For many of our participants, plants (especially flowering plants) are more attractive than stones, and animals (especially the young) are more appealing than plants – while people (especially children) are most engaging for the majority of us. Less attractive phenomena get more attention if they are connected to something more appealing. For example, a pottery shard tends to become much more interesting if there is an exciting story about how it has been discovered or what the pot represented in an ancient culture.

Exercise: Connecting objects with stories

In one bag, we collect as many everyday objects as our group has members. We sit down in a circle, and someone takes the bag. S/he takes out one of the objects at random, telling a story that makes it appealing to the group. In this way, the bag is passed from one to the other. If someone can't come up with a story s/he puts the object in the centre and takes another one. The objects in the centre will be animated last. Attention: In interpretation we never invent stories that aren't supported by facts unless we explicitly emphasize that.



Understanding themes as lighthouses

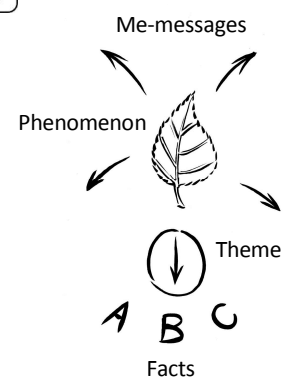
The theme doesn't only support us by facilitating the relationship between our participants and our phenomena, it is also an organisation tool. Like a lighthouse that guides a ship's course, the theme is the only element which should not change during an interpretive talk. This allows participants to experience the phenomenon, expressing its meaning to them without the risk of losing the focus. Using the metaphor of the lighthouse again: Due to winds and currents we rarely approach a lighthouse in a direct line, but we always keep it in sight.

Exercise: Meanings in a nutshell

In our surroundings, each of us looks for a phenomenon which particularly impresses her/him and takes about ten minutes to draw it on a facilitation card. After that, two participants join, exchange their cards, visit each other at their phenomena and describe what it was that they have been impressed by. Then they separate for another ten minutes, sitting down and summing up what they have heard in one single short, snappy and expressive sentence. After that, all of us meet again, guiding each other from phenomenon to phenomenon without talking, just saying these single sentences. Finally we consider which sentence could be best used as a theme for an interpretive talk.

Exercise: Discovering themes through me-messages

All of us face one phenomenon and consider what it might tell us about itself. We write down these 'me-messages' (for example, from a huge rock: "A glacier brought me here") on slips of paper and place them at the appropriate site around the phenomenon. Then we consider what me-message can most suitably be turned into a theme, which compelling story could be told by that means and which facts could support that story.



Changing formations

Forming the triangle on site

In interpretation, the arrangement of the group at authentic sites and objects is called 'formation', and there are about half-a-dozen such formations. The most important principle is: The interpreter should not stand between the phenomenon and the participants – unless s/he deliberately conceals the phenomenon in order to reveal it later. In most cases, it is best if phenomenon, interpreter and participants physically form the interpretive triangle which is explained on page 9.

Offering an appropriate formation to the group

Participants need time and space to arrive at the respective phenomenon and to find their place. On the walk, the interpreter usually walks a few steps ahead, waits until the group has taken up its position and then searches for the best location for herself/himself. This is a process the group would usually not notice. Just rarely – if the group is at risk or if the formation is not achieved, although it is very important for the interpretation – the interpreter needs to direct her/his participants, for example, to step back, to line up or to form a circle. An appropriate formation is an important criterion for the selection of a phenomenon.

Using different formations

All formations have advantages and disadvantages. The linear formation (Fig. 1) has a lot of disadvantages, but it may be inevitable – for example on a path crossing a hillside with a stunning view, on a balcony looking over a town, on a jetty from which crabs can be seen below the water surface, or at the foot of a cliff where fossils in a rock wall can be detected. If possible, in such cases the group should be briefed in advance at a more suitable location.

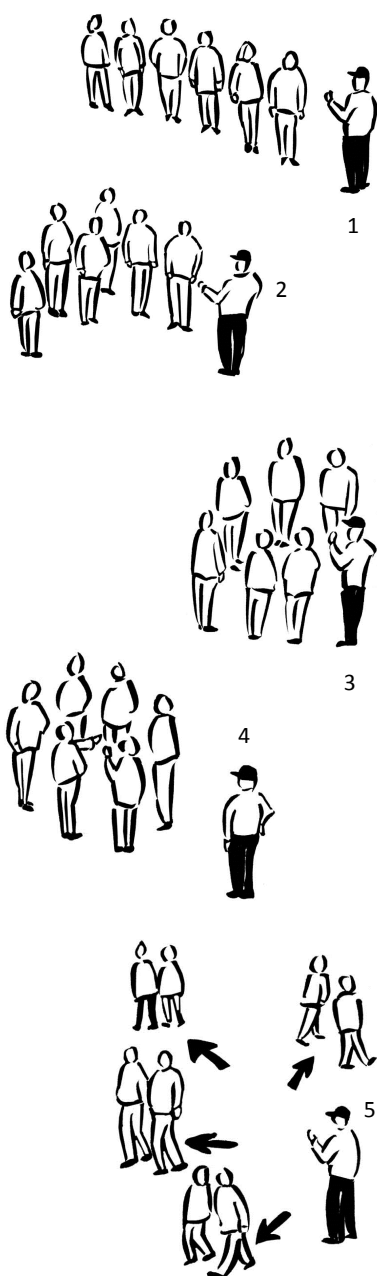
No formation should dominate an interpretive walk. However, the so-called didactic formation (Fig. 2) often does. Here, the group is focused on the interpreter which simply results from the fact that the interpreter is talking. If s/he steps beside the clearly seen phenomenon, the group will form the third corner of the triangle by itself.

One way of changing the focus from the interpreter to other group members is to use the conference formation (Fig. 3). This results from a conversation in which the phenomenon is part of or, where possible, is the focus. This formation will automatically evolve from bringing a small object, for example, a prehistoric arrowhead, to the front.

If the interpreter is pulling back from the circle, facilitating a conversation from the back, the tutorial formation (Fig. 4) will be the result.

Finally, it is possible to divide the group by giving the participants different tasks (for example, searching or monitoring), asking them to report afterwards: the individual task formation (Fig. 5).

Formations are influenced by the space available and by the situation on site (stream, clearing etc.). The larger the group, the fewer opportunities the interpreter has. As we said, during each talk, it is good to change the formation at least once. With the exercise Revealing secrets (p. 14) this can be achieved.



Consciously selecting props

There are countless ways of 'conjuring' required objects from bags and backpacks during an interpretive walk. The most important selection criterion is that they support the phenomenon and its theme – and not just come to the fore for their own sake.

Because props can be more reliable than the phenomenon on site, this is a constant hazard. For instance, panels set up in front of sites or objects can provide orientation (for example, if they contain maps), but they can also distract from the immediate encounter with places and their phenomena.

Props can create nice effects, but they should be used with caution. Not everything that is packed in case of an emergency needs to be pulled out, and not every entertaining effect on the group really supports the phenomenon.



Props

- ⇒ make something more visible (for example, binoculars, magnifying glasses)
- ⇒ frame the field of view (for example, small photo frames)
- ⇒ focus the view (for example, pipes to look through)
- ⇒ enable new perspectives (for example, mirrors)
- ⇒ confuse the senses (for example, blindfolds, ear plugs)
- ⇒ mark or connect (for example, flags, strings)
- ⇒ offer insights (for example, knives for cutting or lifting bark)
- ⇒ explain features (for example, functional model charts)
- ⇒ make processes more noticeable (for example, models, historical images)
- ⇒ expand experiences (for example, products such as resin, cider, flour)
- ⇒ stimulate the imagination (for example, watercolours on panels)

Digression: Live interpretation as a special form of guiding

Of particular importance are props in costumed live interpretation which is often used on historical walks. By playing characters dressed in a period costume, participants see things through the eyes of these characters, immerse themselves in another era and establish deeper connections.

We distinguish live interpretation in the first person (where the actor is the character) from that in the third person which is descriptive and more usual on an interpretive walk, where the interpreter is wearing a costume for effect. The character is not really played, but merely explained by the use of the props.

In live interpretation – in the first person – the interpreter behaves consistently as the character would have in her/his time period. This means that s/he needs to construct that character in advance; either by studying the biographies of a well-known person to be the character or by setting up a fictitious character from that time; thinking about where this person might have lived, how many children s/he might have had, what were her/his main concerns, friends and enemies etc. To respond to questions from participants means involving them in the drama and requires theatrical and improvisational skills. For that reason, first-person live interpretation is often used only briefly during a conventional interpretive walk, for example, if a medieval charcoal burner is demonstrating his work during a walk through an open-air museum.

To allow different perspectives (and because it makes live interpretation much easier), sometimes several interpreters are involved in one event. They then enter the scene unexpectedly, represent different characters and inspire and involve the participants through themselves and their themes.

Because live interpretation can be much more demanding than an interpretive walk, it is not examined in our basic training course on interpretive guiding.

Accepting interferences

Disturbances take precedence.

Ruth Cohn

Comprehending incidents as opportunities

The attention of participants is often at its greatest when something happens that was obviously not planned. Such surprises remain permanently in the memory and are therefore an effective way of learning – if opportunities are seized. It is important, therefore, to understand intrusions as opportunities for deeper involvement. Of course, this doesn't mean that there is no need for planning an interpretive walk. While participants appreciate it if an interpreter is able to deal with incidents, the mood changes quickly if it becomes apparent that these incidents resulted from lack of preparation.

Involving the unexpected

Interferences often arise from the phenomena; either something is not in place (for example, an object has been removed from an exhibition), or something is added (for example, a rare bird suddenly appears during a walk). The weather is also always good for surprises. Here again, themes can expand their effect: the challenge is to combine the unforeseen event with the prevailing theme which, with some practice, can be achieved more often than expected.

However, it is critical to remember that our ace of spades in the pack is the immediate experience of the heritage element. If something has been removed, the interpretive guide should not talk about it as if it would be there but recall her/his theme and either interpret the new situation or switch to another phenomena to be supported by that theme.



Exercise: Responding to surprises

All except three of the group move to a place where they cannot hear and see the others. Two of those who remain start role-playing with words and gestures appropriate to a chosen scene (e.g. cutting a tree trunk with a huge crosscut saw). The third acts as the stage director, clapping hands as soon as the scene looks exciting. At this moment the actors 'freeze'. Another group member enters the scene, replacing one player by taking exactly her/his position while this player becomes the audience. The 'director' claps hands again and the new pair starts playing. The most important rule is that the one who joins takes the initiative, while the one who was already there reacts. If the new player understands the scene in another way (e.g. pumping up a bicycle tyre instead of cutting a tree), the play takes a different course. When all participants had taken part, we recall all the scenes.

Accepting interferences from the group

Interferences can result from debates with participants who are (or pretend to be) more knowledgeable than the interpreter or who disagree with what was said. While we should generally invite participants to contribute for the reasons mentioned above, it starts to become difficult if the same people need to add to or to contradict almost everything we say. One way to deal with that is by giving them some space, welcoming them as partners without losing the guiding role. If this doesn't help, the group could be asked whether they intend to get deeper into the debate or to continue the walk.

Dealing with conflicts is not part of the course but, again, in some countries conflict management is taught for example, at community colleges and this opportunity should be taken if possible.

Recognising obstacles

In the most familiar use of the word, interpretation means translating the language of the phenomenon, the sender, into the language of the listener, the receiver. This can be complicated by several factors:

- ⇒ inner barriers:
negative attitude, lack of information, intellectual limitation
- ⇒ outer barriers:
unsuitable or missing aids or devices
- ⇒ communication barriers:
language problems, misunderstandings

According to this understanding, the idea of looking for barrier-free access between participants, phenomena and interpreters and of overcoming existing barriers is not limited to people commonly described as those with impairments. For instance, the most obvious example of limited access is shared by people using wheelchairs as well as by people pushing buggies /strollers. In Central Europe, an estimated 40% of all visitors of heritage sites are impaired physically in one way or another (for example, seeing, hearing, walking challenges), and with the increasing average age of our society, this number is growing. In the countryside, elderly people often cannot walk comfortably at all because there is no seating or no toilet other than some distance away. People who are new citizens to a country can have linguistic and cultural difficulties. Although many people are obviously visually impaired, people with hearing impairment form an even larger group – and often remain unnoticed.



Exercise: Making unusual sensory experiences

We split into two groups. Both groups prepare an interpretive talk about the same phenomenon. In one case, participants wear blindfolds; in the other case, ear plugs. Each group acts in turn as a visitor group for the other. This exercise works better if the visitor group doesn't know the phenomenon at all. It's at its best if the members of this group are really impaired. Associations for people with impairments are good and often cooperative partners in that concern.



Providing accessibility

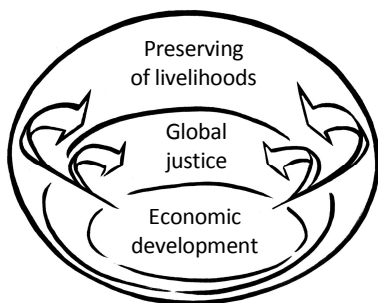
Accessibility means that the circumstances allow all people to do things without help from someone else (other than pushing a wheel-chair or lightly guiding a blind person). Planning an accessible all-abilities interpretive walk could include providing opportunities for taking a rest and creating an obstacle-free trail instead of offering a special route for disabled people. The same applies to participants with impaired hearing (for example, speaking slowly and clearly) or with visual impairments (for example, paying attention to distance and contrast). It is helpful always to describe more rather than less, to ask for feedback and to encourage the use of at least two senses when planning any activity (for example, looking at and touching an artefact).

It should be an aim of every interpreter to ensure frequent exchanges with people with impairments so that s/he can deal with them as with all others.

Broadening the horizon

Our biggest challenge in this new century is to take an idea that seems abstract – sustainable development – and turn it into a reality for all the world's people.

Kofi Annan



Understanding sustainability

Since the United Nations' Earth Summit took place in 1992 in Rio, sustainability has become a world-wide principle. Sustainable development means, especially for the industrialised nations, to retrench into the limits set by our natural environment. This is essential to ensure future generations can live their lives in dignity. But sustainable development also means to take action where global justice is an issue within our present generation – for example, by not exploiting cheap labour in other parts of the world. Learning for sustainability is a precondition for meeting the challenges of transition into a society respecting both of these crucial aims. As stewards of our heritage, we should intend to contribute to that.

Recognising patterns of unsustainable development

One way to integrate the principles of sustainable development into an interpretive walk is – in addition to positive examples – to identify phenomena that represent patterns of unsustainable development which are globally valid and which have a high recognition value. The German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU) has defined 16 such patterns.

Three patterns of unsustainable development

Over-exploitation Syndrome

A landscape's natural ecosystems are over-exploited.

- ⇒ example in South America: deforestation of the Amazon rainforest
- ⇒ example in Europe: over-fishing of the Mediterranean Sea

Katanga Syndrome

A landscape is depleted from rich resources to a barren expanse.

- ⇒ example in Africa: copper, cobalt and uranium mining in the Congo
- ⇒ example in Europe: lignite mining in Brandenburg (Germany)


Mass Tourism Syndrome

A landscape is destroyed for recreational purposes.

- ⇒ example in South America: foreign species are introduced to the Galapagos Islands
- ⇒ examples in Europe: heritage in danger at Nessebar and at Mont Saint Michel

The patterns always connect nature and culture as well as the ecological, social and economic dimensions. Through images, stories and parables, cross-linked structures become memorable. Strong images are for example, the ships lying in the desert that were, until 1960, on the Aral Sea which used to be one of the four largest lakes on Earth (Aral Sea Syndrome). Strong images are also the countless skeletons around dried-up wells in the Sahel zone where people had been encouraged to raise bigger herds by digging deeper wells which turned huge areas to dust through overgrazing and at the same time dwindling the supply of ground water (Sahel Syndrome).

However, if our participants are to be inspired to engage with these topics and widen their horizons from local to global concerns, it is an important requirement that there is a strong connection between such patterns and the selected phenomena on site.

 German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU)

**World in Transition:
The Research Challenge**

Berlin (1996)

Download for free at:
www.wbgu.de

Elaborating key phenomena of sustainability

In order to make sustainability accessible on an interpretive walk, it is important to find at least one phenomenon along the planned route that includes all different aspects of sustainability.

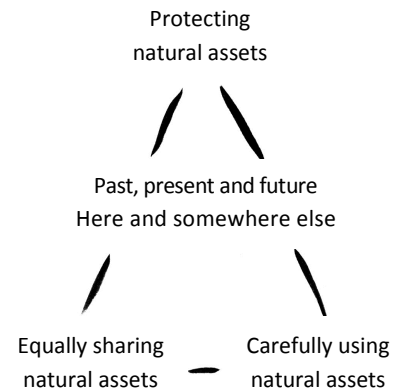
Making sustainability relevant

Exercise: Detecting a key phenomenon of sustainability

1. How significant is the phenomenon as a key phenomenon?

To what extent does it cover	0	+	++	+++
the protection of natural assets?				
the equal sharing of natural assets?				
the careful use of natural assets?				
future action?				
the situation in other countries?				

2. Does it reveal surprising insights into hidden relationships?
3. Can it be supported by universal values and memorable images?
4. Is there a theme which makes the complexity of the image memorable?
5. Is this theme meaningful to the participants in their own world?
6. Is this theme exciting for the participants, even if it is related to other continents?
7. Does this theme challenge the participants to rethink their own behaviour?



Examples of key phenomena for sustainability (see also p. 35)

Sustainability: A medieval granary in a village

The granary represents the idea of storing and sharing a basic foodstuff, and of saving the seeds for sowing the next year; this can still be observed in many countries.

Theme: For centuries this granary represented the spirit of sustainability.

Non-sustainability: The site of a historical charcoal kiln in the forest

Charcoal burners, working in atrocious conditions, often exhausted the timber of the forest while the profits from the sale of charcoal were achieved in places far away. Today, many people in Africa and Asia work in similar situations.

Theme: At that site, people and nature suffered for the benefit of distant markets.

There is also a sustainable way of learning

Because learning for sustainability is much about values, the way of dealing with participants and phenomena plays a major role. Heritage interpretation supports this value-oriented way of learning. The following aspects have already been explained in this manual:

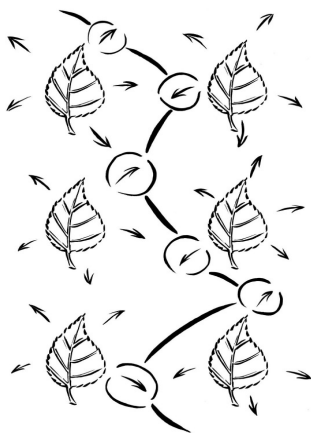
- ⇒ to accompany participants instead of instructing them (p. 13)
- ⇒ to delve into the participant's own world (p. 16)
- ⇒ to involve the whole person (p. 17)
- ⇒ to give phenomena a meaning from the participant's perspective (p. 18)
- ⇒ to build up on universal concepts (p. 19)
- ⇒ to understand incidents as opportunities (p. 22)
- ⇒ to pick up interferences from the group (p. 22)
- ⇒ to empower participants to find their own access (p. 23).

Although sustainability is a serious topic, please keep in mind that any interpretation is at its best when it is an enjoyable process.

Connecting phenomena

... a red thread runs through which cannot be extracted without undoing the whole.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe



Interpretive talk

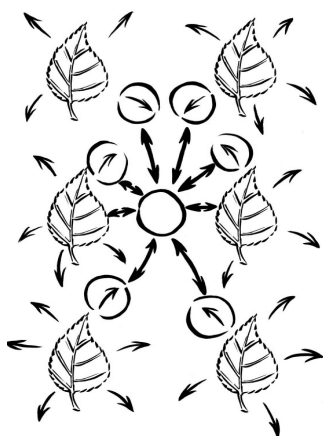
- ⇒ takes place at one single site
- ⇒ deals with just one phenomenon
- ⇒ uses just one theme

Interpretive walk

- ⇒ connects several phenomena
- ⇒ has one main theme and at each phenomenon one theme
- ⇒ follows one theme line

Roving interpretation

- ⇒ has several phenomena and themes in store
- ⇒ selects according to opportunities
- ⇒ evolves under one main theme within a theme circle



Introducing the main theme

Until now, this manual has been about interpretive talks: the connection of one single phenomenon and its theme to the participants' world. To plan an interpretive walk means to link several phenomena to each other; and this requires a main theme. While a theme always refers to a phenomenon that can be experienced at one specific site, the main theme is more general. A main theme related to the topic 'Spring in the floodplain' could be for example, After a long rest, life in the floodplain pushes back into the light – if this can really be experienced by significant phenomena on site.

Creating a theme line

A theme line represents a linear structure. It lists all themes related to single phenomena in a fixed order under the heading of one main theme, e.g.:

Main theme: For centuries, cherry production shaped the face of this valley.

1. The lifeline of the village was this avenue of cherry trees.
 2. This orchard has created its own climate.
 3. Without a rough rootstock there could be no noble fruits.
 4. Under the cherry trees, the bees start new production lines.
 5. The fruit barn includes everything that will bring the harvest safe through the winter.
 6. Time left this cherry tree behind.
-

All themes attached to the underlined phenomena are underpinned by few facts which are supported e.g. by stepping stones or open-ended questions. An example for the systematic elaboration of theme 6 can be found on page 35.

Within the theme line, the themes build up on each other and the highlights are arranged in a dramaturgical way. Because nature doesn't always behave as desired, this is often easier in cultural settings. In natural surroundings, sometimes phenomena need to be skipped if they distract from the theme line.

Creating a theme circle

One way to get away from the linear structure of a theme line is to stay with one's participants in a very limited area, surrounded by numerous phenomena supporting the main theme. This is called a theme circle. Within a theme circle there is no set order in which the phenomena have to be visited. The order arises from phenomena (for example, birds) suddenly showing up or from the conversation with the participants. To prepare for such a scattered experience, the interpreter acquaints herself/himself with all the phenomena around and bears the appropriate themes in mind.

Moving within a theme circle is also called roving interpretation. It is considered to be the high art of interpretive guiding. It cannot be taught within one single course but results mainly from the knowledge and experience of the interpreter. It is used at outstanding sites with a constantly changing audience rather than on regular interpretive walks.

It is alluring to avoid the challenge of following a linear structure, preferring the more liberal approach of roving interpretation. Nevertheless, we encourage all interpretive guides to go through the linear and constructed process first to get used to all the tools of personal interpretation.

Planning and remembering sequences

Creating theme-card scripts

A good way to develop and to rearrange interpretive walks appropriately is to create a flashcard for each phenomenon; for example, a flashcard to theme 6 (p. 26) might look like this:

	Threatened fruit tree
Topic:	Changing land use
Fact 1:	Once upon a time, the orchard reached far up the hill. <ul style="list-style-type: none">⇒ respect for the work of others⇒ description, historic photograph⇒ Where does the orchard end? How easy was it to get the fruit?⇒ didactic formation, using photograph
Fact 2:	The maple tree is wiping out the cherry tree. <ul style="list-style-type: none">⇒ regret for the cherry tree, awe of nature⇒ change of perspectives, analysis⇒ In what way do the trees differ from each other?⇒ individual task formation
Fact 3:	Fruit that grew here, was also used here. <ul style="list-style-type: none">⇒ understanding of context⇒ narration (childhood memory)⇒ Where does our fruit come from? What are the (dis)advantages?⇒ conference formation
Time left this cherry tree behind.	

Genius is the ability to reduce the complicated to the simple.

Curt Wilhelm Ceram

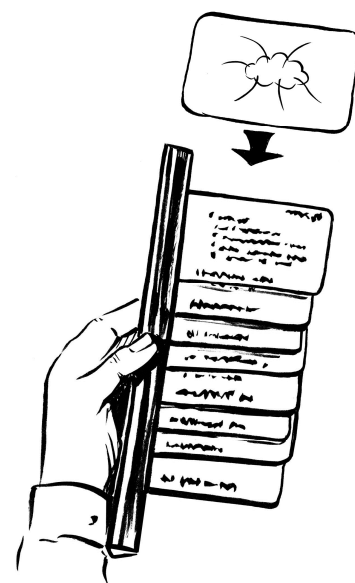
In the lines beyond each of the facts in the central part of the flashcard, possible meanings, stepping stones, questions and formations are listed. The phenomenon is mentioned at the head, the theme at the bottom.

To the left a broader margin remains. If we now put the theme-cards which we selected for our interpretive walk in a clip in a way that only the theme at the bottom stays visible, one can recognise and follow the theme line at a glance.

Remembering activities connected to single phenomena

During an interpretive walk, of course, no interpreter would look at notes in a script. And as mentioned before, within the single interpretive talks it is a top priority not to follow a fixed order of activities. So how can we remember all these different points?

Most of us usually remember images and colours much better than words and numbers. It therefore helps to draw all elements into a mind map (see p. 37). A miniature of that map can serve as the front cover for the script.



Exercise: Developing a mind map

We write the main theme into a cloud in the centre of a large sheet of paper. The single themes are arranged so that they can go in any direction from the cloud. Nothing else is written on the paper. We start to draw the phenomena and everything we like to use or do related to them in bright colours around the corresponding themes (for example, smelling herbs, using a tool, characters of a legend we like to tell). A few days before our interpretive walk, we put this sheet somewhere where we can look at it in quiet moments but quite frequently. Through doing so, the images and their relationship to each other come more easily into our mind during our walk and we are not urged to follow them in a fixed order – which gives us the possibility to get into conversation with our participants.



Practical remarks

This manual focuses on the methodology of interpretive talks and walks. However, all learning aspects also have an organisational context and some of this context should at least be touched on the following pages.

In advance of an interpretive walk, where and when the walk will take place, should be checked. It is not advisable to have interpretive walks immediately after lunch for around that time concentration is usually very low. If facilities that are supposed to be visited are not always open to the public, opening hours must be ascertained and if necessary arrangements need to be made. Within buildings, safety regulations need to be checked, where the toilets are and who should be contacted for support, for example, in the case of an accident. In general, all approvals should be obtained and all routes should be walked before the walk is announced.

The announcement of the interpretive walk via press, leaflets, internet etc. should use an appealing headline or slogan and a brief, inspiring description with some remarks about the site. It should explain the assembly point as well as the date, and the times for start and finish. Out of doors, the assembly point is usually a parking lot near public transport. Dates and times should be coordinated with the latter, and additional hints relating to the level of difficulty and any necessary clothing or equipment should be given. It should be clear whether the walk will take place at any weather or not and what equipment is required. When for example, gorges, caves or cathedrals are going to be visited, even in summer warm clothing may be necessary. Where a walk is always guided by the same person, her/his name and a phone number could be added to the announcement.

The extent and duration of the interpretive walk should be chosen in a way that the walk doesn't become a hike. This is usually no problem in an indoor environment, but it can become a problem at outdoor sites. An outdoor circuit should take no more than two hours to complete, and the distance to be covered from one phenomenon to the next should be less than ten minutes to hold participants' attention. Where possible, shortcuts should be considered in advance. The guide needs to assemble the participants at frequent intervals in order to check that everybody is still there.

A group size of up to about 15 participants (depending on the facility) is best for personal interpretation, because personal connections based on dialogue can then be established. The larger the group the less real participation will be possible. If a larger group is announced, it makes sense to involve more than one guide to keep the quality on an acceptable level.

Before the start, the interpreter should be visible at the starting point. This is especially important at crowded places in towns or in some museums. It allows a gentle warm-up of proceedings and gives the participants a feeling of security. The same applies to an overview of the tour and to the agreement of a simple-to-find meeting point (or end point) in case someone loses the group. In addition to any emergency equipment (especially out of doors), a cell phone should be carried if network access is available during the walk. The number of participants and – when walking in demanding terrain – their equipment, as well as possible handicaps, should be checked.

At the start and after the guide has introduced her/himself to the group in a friendly and welcoming way, a brief round of introductions can also provide an overview of the participants and their interests. At that point, expectations can be kept in mind and later references can be made. The start should make participants curious. It should not reveal too much but it should make clear what the interpretive walk will be about. Before the group actually starts moving, the route should be described and necessary health and safety issues as well as special challenges and rules should be pointed out; for example, where objects could be touched or where tracks could be left. All necessary announcements should be made in a serious but also positive and light-hearted way, and they should not take too much time.



During the walk, the pace should be adapted to that of the slower group members. Single interpretive talks should not take more than ten minutes and the time frame should not be extended unless agreed with the group. If critical topics were touched on with just some of the participants between the actual interpretive talks, the guide should relate to them (or ask these participants to do so) at the next stop to make sure participants don't get the feeling they missed something important. During walks, participants frequently like to take pictures and are grateful when made aware of special objects or of the best spots for photographs. To act as a photographer is one of the common additional roles of any guide.

The end of the walk should provide a special experience with a clear conclusion in terms of the main theme, pulling all strings together. Events and incidents can be brought back into mind and thanks should be expressed for the attention and for the contributions of the participants. All of this should be done in a relatively quiet place where all participants can focus on each other and on the guide before the group begins to disperse.

Using amplifying audio systems during interpretive activities

Originally audio systems were just used where guide and group were seated and moved together, for example, on buses, trains or boats. While it is challenging for a tour guide on a bus to embrace all qualities of an interpreter, some tours with boats along rivers or with glass-bottomed boats above reefs provide really good opportunities for interpretive talks; and to 'lose' the background noise of an engine by a loudspeaker can make much sense.

At some facilities it became common to use permanently installed or portable speakers for interpretive talks. However, cases where conditions require the use of a loudspeaker for about 15 people are rare – and if many more people are addressed (as in the amphitheatres of some national parks) neither first-hand experiences nor dialogues might be possible. While increasing the number of the participants, the interpretive opportunities are reduced.

As technical development progresses, solutions become possible where the guide uses a microphone while all participants are carrying receivers and earphones. This gives much more flexibility to group members and it can make sense where many guides operate at the same spot (e.g. at outstanding sights with limited space), where it is very loud (e.g. at some industrial heritage sites), or where guides are supposed to speak silent (e.g. in churches). However, when using such a wireless system, for example, during a walk through an old town, it can become difficult to arrange groups because participants stroll around individually within 50 metres – where they are surrounded by lots of other attractions.

As with all technical devices, the interpretive guide should check carefully where they are really supportive, and at what point the prize in terms of quality loss becomes too high.

Evaluating an interpretive walk



Ask a colleague to critique your walk

To improve the methodology of interpretive walks even if there are no training structures, we recommend a way of peer coaching, including subsequent evaluative talks. Interpretive critiquing, where colleagues accompany each other, offers an excellent win-win situation because both parties learn from the interpretive, as well as from the evaluative, process. A coach can also act as the interpreter's ears, listening to participants' comments during the walk. However, to be successful, interpreter and coach need to be familiar with the criteria of evaluation (see p. 36).

Announcing the monitoring

Even if only one interpretive talk is to be evaluated, it makes sense to join the entire walk. One reason is to understand the context better, the other is that participants usually are more distracted by an observer at the beginning. Therefore the first part of the walk is often not really representative. Your joining the walk should be announced at the beginning because professional feedback is hardly possible without taking notes. Apart from this, a coach should behave as if s/he were a participant. Interpreter and coach should not talk to each other during the walk.

Using cameras wisely

In training, camcorders can be helpful – even if video evaluation takes some time. For evaluating an interpretive walk, however, they should generally not be used because many participants find it hard to ignore them. High-quality voice recorders might enhance the perception and help to remember scenes afterwards. In all cases, participants have to agree to all recordings in advance.

Documenting evaluation results

An evaluation session after the walk aims to agree upon just one slight improvement the interpreter should fulfil during the next interpretive walk. For reasons of liability, this agreement might be written down and signed by both parties on the back of the evaluation sheet which stays with the interpreter. Otherwise, if this is not agreed, the evaluative talk is confidential. It should take place in a quiet space, where the guide will be asked first for her/his own perceptions. Feedback should be given mainly in the I-form (avoiding 'You did ...'), describing rather than assessing and pointing out some positive aspects first. Criticism should always be made friendly, appreciative and constructive, empowering the interpreter to improve her/his skills. Because interpretation is a kind of art, things can often be seen differently.

Phases of interpretive critiquing

1. How did you perceive your interpretation?
What do you think went really well?
Where do you see opportunities to improve something?
2. I thought it was good that ...
I still see the possibility to improve ...
3. Which clear objective do you have for your next walk?

How to proceed?

The training course or module for interpretive guides provides a good basis for strengthening the connection between a general non-formal audience and a heritage site, or a collection of heritage objects including a zoo or a museum. However, a 40-hour course or module is too short to allow a complete experience, and many issues can only be touched upon. We therefore recommend attending additional training sessions. In different countries there are different providers and different directions in which such training sessions take place. This page will give some hints about what you might look for.

Interpretation

- ⇒ roving interpretation
- ⇒ live interpretation
- ⇒ monitoring and evaluation

Communication

- ⇒ rhetoric and communication skills
- ⇒ resolving conflicts
- ⇒ improvised theatre

Target groups

- ⇒ children
- ⇒ young people
- ⇒ local people
- ⇒ people with impairments

Depending on the field of work, there are other target groups which can be significant in your country. In addition, special attention needs to be given to the demands of learning for sustainability. Appropriate courses are offered by community colleges or several non-governmental organisations. You need to find out what supports the four qualities mentioned on page 10 of this manual.

Although the areas in which interpretive guides work are generally teachable, a large part of our success is based on the question of how open we are to meeting our participants, and how familiar we are with the site or facility for which we act as ambassadors. Becoming more familiar doesn't mean just knowing more facts but also continuously experiencing the place. We don't feel at home in our living room only because we know a lot about the material our furniture is made of. 'Home' is an idea that cannot be described solely by facts. To make our site or facility our 'home', we must 'live' there. In terms of interpretive guiding, this is why exercises on site are the best key to success.

For several decades, the concept of heritage interpretation has proven itself many times. However, even in the great outdoors, in towns, cultural landscapes or the last European wilderness areas, there is no guarantee of success. As with fishing, hunting or gathering mushrooms, the unpredictable makes an essential part of the appeal.

In the end, it is the result of all small successes and failures that comprise what we call experience. This is what makes us rich.



*Interpretation is
a voyage of discovery
in the field of human emotions
and intellectual growth,
and it is hard to foresee
that time when the interpreter
can confidently say,
"Now we are wholly
adequate to our task."*

Freeman Tilden

Developing and improving an interpretive talk

For an interpretive talk of about ten minutes, the Appendix includes

- ⇒ a work sheet
- ⇒ an example sheet
- ⇒ an evaluation sheet

The completion of the work sheet can be done in the steps listed below; the numbers in brackets indicate on which page in the manual each underlined term is explained:

1. Search for an appealing phenomenon (pp. 14 and 15) to a particular topic (p. 26).
2. Develop an appropriate theme for this phenomenon (pp. 18 and 19).
3. Select three facts (p. 18) related to the phenomenon that support the theme and include a deeper meaning for your participants (p. 18).
4. Consider which stepping stones (pp. 14 to 16) could be used to bring the facts to life.
5. Consider how participants can be involved through open-ended questions (p. 17) and props (p. 21).
6. Think about appropriate formations (p. 20) and where the phenomenon offers an exciting revelation (p. 17).

If the interpretive talk is part of a guided tour, the evaluation sheet can be used in conjunction with peer coaching as basis for the evaluation session. You will find information about that on page 29.

The practical exam of the certification course is based on the evaluation sheet. Filling up the work sheet can be very useful for exploring the different elements and for coming up with ideas. However, the dialogue with participants is essential, the list of facts on the sheet doesn't matter, and as long as the theme is obvious, not all ideas need to be put in place.

Many interpreters have found it useful to develop the work sheet for practising. Interpreters who tend to act in a more creative way should force themselves to fill in the boxes at least once. Interpreters who tend to be very organised should not stick too much to a routine. An interpretive talk is a piece of art. Becoming too structured and adding too many bits might spoil it.

A word considering mind maps

On page 37, the Appendix includes one example for a mind map in order to develop a visualised table of contents for an interpretive walk (see p. 27). Please note that this mind map has more to do with images than with words; and actually the original is a very colourful version. Try to avoid mind maps that consist mainly of words. Besides the organisation of information, the basic idea of a mind map is that the constellation of images can be remembered much better than the constellation of words. To reduce your mind map to key words would mean to miss a lot of its value.

Work sheet interpretive talk

The order of facts is not fixed, and the stepping stones and open-ended questions need not all to be used in the end. But it is important that the theme remains in view.

phenomenon	topic	theme (a complete sentence, which in this case contains a universal)

The theme is the 'lighthouse' you are heading for. Your facts support your theme and can be experienced on site.

1. fact (as one sentence)	meaning (it arouses ...)	stepping stones	open-ended questions	formation / props

2. fact (as one sentence)	meaning (it arouses ...)	stepping stones	open-ended questions	formation / props

3. fact (as one sentence)	meaning (it arouses ...)	stepping stones	open-ended questions	formation / props

The phenomenon in this example sheet is an old cherry tree that is undermined by a tall maple tree, because a former orchard is being overwhelmed by a self-seeded forest.

Example sheet interpretive talk

phenomenon	topic	theme (a complete sentence, which in this case contains a universal)
<i>threatened fruit tree</i>	<i>changing land use</i>	<i>Time left this cherry tree behind. (universals: change, isolation)</i>

The theme is the 'lighthouse' you are heading for. Your facts support your theme and can be experienced on site.

1. fact (as one sentence)	meaning (It arouses ...)	stepping stones	open-ended questions	formation / props
<i>At one time, the orchard reached far up the hill.</i>	<i>respect for the work of others</i>	<i>description, historic photograph</i>	<i>Where does the orchard end? How easy was it to gather the fruit?</i>	<i>didactic formation, using photograph</i>
2. fact (as one sentence)	meaning (It arouses ...)	stepping stones	open-ended questions	formation / props
<i>The maple tree is wiping out the cherry tree.</i>	<i>regret for the cherry tree, awe of nature</i>	<i>change of perspectives, analysis</i>	<i>In what way do the trees differ from each other?</i>	<i>individual task formation</i>
3. fact (as one sentence)	meaning (It arouses ...)	stepping stones	open-ended questions	formation / props
<i>Fruit that grew here was also used here.</i>	<i>understanding of context</i>	<i>narration (childhood memory)</i>	<i>Where does our fruit come from? What are the (dis)advantages?</i>	<i>conference formation</i>

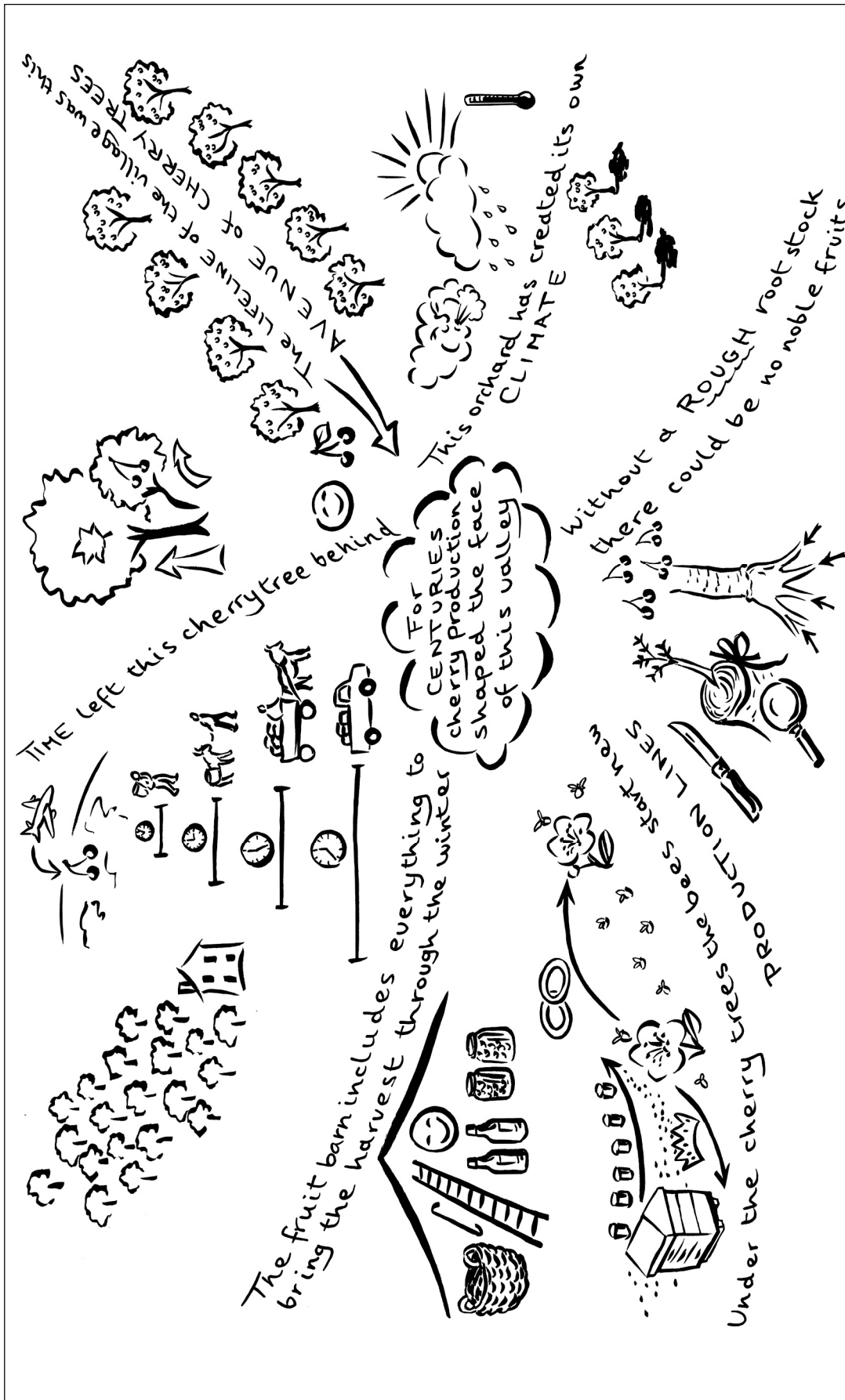
Evaluation sheet interpretive talk

The evaluation sheet is intended to support the peer coaching process. It is not about marking. The proposals for rating should be transparent; the comments should be thoughtful and unambiguous.

	0	+	++	+++	Comments
1. Performance of the interpreter					
Did the interpreter show enthusiasm?					
Were all her/his remarks understandable?					
Was the interpreter credible and was all her/his information correct?					
Did the interpreter get her/his messages across convincingly?					
Did the interpreter consistently use appropriate spoken and body language?					
2. Appreciation of the phenomenon					
Was the interpretive talk generally focused on the phenomenon?	0	+	++	+++	Comments
Were unique qualities of the phenomenon emphasised?					
Could all the facts be verified on site?					
Was the group formed up well in relation to the phenomenon?					
Was there an interesting revelation?					
3. Integration of the participants					
Were all participants focused on the action all the time?	0	+	++	+++	Comments
Did the talk include first-hand experiences with the phenomenon?					
Were participants' reactions encouraged, for example by open-ended questions?					
Did participants have the chance to tell about something from their daily lives?					
Was the interpreter able to pick up contributions coming from the group?					
4. Tracing the theme					
Was there a clear theme? If 'yes', say so, and how it might have been worded.	0	+	++	+++	Comments
Did it get to the heart of the matter?					
Were facts and meanings considered in a similar way?					
Were different stepping stones used?					
Did the interpretive talk encourage appreciation of heritage directly or indirectly?					

This mind map illustrates the theme line described on page 26. The original uses many colours. To keep the image in mind, try to avoid words and keep your mind map as illustrative and as colourful as possible. It is just for you.

Mind map for an interpretive walk



Key terms of interpretive guiding

Interpretive triangle (p. 9 and 11)

A conceptual model of interpretation consisting of (1) phenomenon, (2) participants and (3) interpreter (or interpretive media) centred on a theme.

Phenomenon (p. 14 and 15)

Something that is sensorily comprehensible on site. It is important to emphasise its single character – for example, the ‘personality’ of a tree or a building rather than its affiliation to a species or building style.

Topic (p. 26)

It classifies the phenomenon, for example, as ‘a conifer’ or as ‘a Renaissance building’. It does neither contain a descriptive statement nor does it give a meaning (see below) to the single phenomenon.

Theme (p. 18 and 19)

This is the ‘lighthouse’ you are heading for. A theme is connected to a meaning (see below). It is expressed as a complete sentence, getting to the very heart of the matter; often because it comprises a universal (see below).

Fact (p. 18)

A factual statement; e.g. ‘Otters can travel far at night’. Facts should always support the significance of the authentic phenomenon as well as the theme.

Meaning (p. 18)

This is how a phenomenon might evoke an emotional reaction in participants – such as awe, wonder, curiosity, amazement, grief, anger. (It’s not so much the intellectual context here.)

Universal (p. 19)

A meaningful concept touching the values and concerns of almost every person around the world, such as family, friendship, tragedy, pain, change, care, freedom and captivity, love and hate, life and death.

Stepping stone (p. 14 to 16)

A methodical or rhetorical tool that facilitates the access to one of the corners of the interpretive triangle (see above). An experiment could be a methodical stepping stone while a comparison could be a rhetorical stepping stone.

Open-ended question (p. 17)

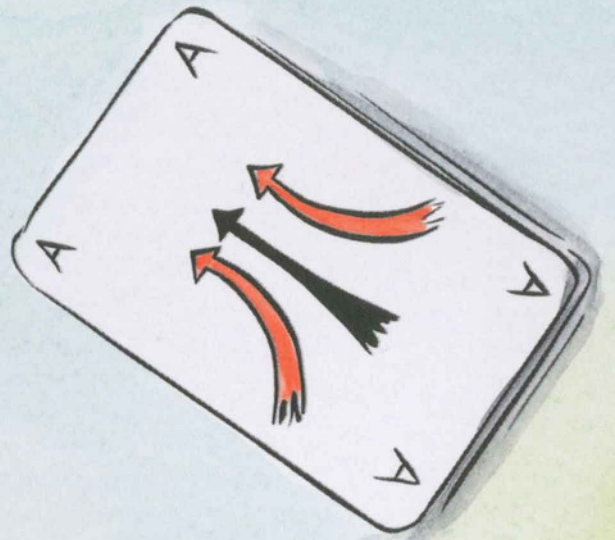
This is a question with an unpredictable answer, for example, “What place does that smell remind you?” or “How might this valley look in 50 years?”

Prop (p. 21)

Props can support interpretive activities. They include, for example, costumes, magnifying glasses, binoculars, bat detectors.

Formation (p. 20)

This is how your participants are arranged on site, for example, opposite you or in a circle. It is usually best that you, your participants and your phenomenon form a triangle. Changing the formation often produces unexpected revelations, an important element in interpretation.



Guides work at different heritage sites: in protected areas and historic buildings, in museums, zoos and botanical gardens. They are dedicated to bringing our heritage to the fore and to looking for better ways to manage our future.

This manual is based on the experience of guides from all over Europe. It contains preparation material for exams leading to becoming certified interpretive guides. The 40 hours of training can be delivered either within a self-contained seminar or as one module of another training course. Within the HeriQ project, we tested the training in several countries and produced this manual in twelve different languages. To raise the quality of interpretive guiding further, we encourage staff of all natural and cultural heritage sites to try out the material and to come back to us with their own suggestions for further development.

