

# Exploring Heritage Interpretation for Seniors in Germany

**An exploratory study within the HISA Learning Partnership**

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# Introduction

## **Preliminary remarks on the context of this survey**

This survey is part of the activities of the Learning partnership 'Heritage Interpretation for Senior Audiences' which is supported by the EU's Grundtvig programme. With this type of Learning Partnerships the Grundtvig programme intends to foster transnational collaboration between organisations that provide non-formal and informal adult education. It must be emphasised that a 'Grundtvig Learning Partnership' is not a research project, but a rather small project that allows also smaller adult education institutions to gain experience in international collaboration related to a question of common interest and thus enhance the European dimension. A typical EU funded research project budget would be some 30 to 40 times higher, allowing for proper and valid international research. Furthermore within the Learning Partnership this survey is only but one deliverable among others.

'Learning Partnerships' have a rather special role in the Lifelong Learning Programme. They emphasise more the process than result-orientation. For this reason the experiences participants gain during a European collaboration is an important aspect (see also methodology chapter). However, despite only small studies far below the level of academic research are feasible within a Learning Partnership, such an exploratory survey can still provide some helpful qualitative insights as well as hints that help identifying open questions that might be lead to follow-up projects in Erasmus+ or Horizon 2020. The reader just should always keep these limitations in mind.

## **The role of the study within HISA**

The main objective of HISA is to create a common framework for Interpretation for Senior Audiences beyond 55 years. Due to demographic change seniors become increasingly important for many heritage sites and museums. They also play an important role as active citizens and often influence opinions of others.

Heritage interpretation can support seniors to broaden their horizons of interests, encourage reflection and to overcome cliché and stereotypes. At the same time, all partners had the impression that interpretation, as a kind of non-formal heritage education, should better address the special needs of seniors.

Besides the survey the partners develop an assessment tool that can help to evaluate on-site educational facilities in relation to senior visitors e.g. interpretive media and human interpreters. Furthermore the project will develop some guidelines for heritage interpretation for seniors.

The surveys by the partners collected data in their regions and engaged senior learners. One aim was to collect feedback from adult educators and senior learners that might reveal some insights into European cultural diversity. This study here, is Interpret Europe's contribution which focuses on seniors and interpretation staff from Germany, as Interpret Europe is considered as German Partner within the project (the EU funded Grundtvig Learning Partnerships are managed by the National Agencies which causes that international or European organisations are considered as national entities for the country where they have their seat and head office).

# Methodology

## A process which turned out to be more complex than expected

As Grundtvig Learning partnerships are process-oriented here is first a description of the process that lead to the development of the survey tools and methodology.

- Defining target groups

The university of Malta produced a first draft of the questionnaire. Partners provided feedback, and some felt that this draft mixed questions that made only sense for two different groups: a) seniors as potential visitors at places that provide heritage interpretation, b) staff (or volunteers) develop such provision for those site (interpreters = non-formal adult education staff).

The partnership then agreed that two separate questionnaires are needed to adequately address these different target groups.

Every partner is supposed to draw up a list of local partner organisations that would be involved. For Interpret Europe this was a challenge and an opportunity at the same time: As a rather young international organisation Interpret Europe did not yet have strong local and regional links. Thus HISA provided an opportunity to get in touch with institutions in the South of the Black Forest, but also with suitable German members.

For the adult education staff:

- Elztalmuseum Waldkich (regional museum)
- Deutsches Uhrenmuseum, Furtwangen (German national museum of clocks)
- Naturschutzzentrum Feldberg (the biggest nature centre of Baden-Württemberg)
- Nationalpark Harz
- Freunde des Ohlsdorfer Friedhof, Hamburg (a famous cemetery, where an app for visitors is being created)

This mixture represents organisation with a focus on natural heritage and on cultural heritage.

- For senior learners:
  - Freunde des Elztalmuseum (museum friends association)
  - 'Senioren Lernen on-line' (a group of seniors that created an online community)
  - A small sample of not organised seniors (easy to access relatives and neighbours) in order to avoid the exit-poll bias, but ask seniors who do not necessarily visit museums and heritage sites as frequently as those from friends' associations do.
- Developing the questionnaire

Divers feedback from various partners arguing from different backgrounds posed a

challenge for our Maltese partner to draft and redraft the questionnaire. In order to be able to start with the survey, all finally agreed on a kind of compromise version.

We used this English language questionnaire first to interview six seniors with a wide range of educational backgrounds whom we knew personally. Where necessary we translated the questions to German. These interviews turned out to become a kind of pretest for a German target group. Almost all were unhappy or complaining with the logic of the questionnaire, which to them seemed to have unnecessary redundancies, but missed other questions that were considered as relevant. As a consequence Interpret Europe decided not to use this questionnaire in order to approach educational staff at other heritage organisations in Germany..

Other partners had similar problems and worked with focus groups allowing for more flexibility. Finally the Partnership decided at its Kraków meeting to accept that there seem to be different needs regarding the survey for different countries. This allowed Interpret Europe to construct new questionnaires in German language which could be used here. Questions were subdivided and structured more specifically. More and more clear rating scales were introduced in combination with open questions in order to allow for more precise and more to the point answers.

### **Methods employed for the survey**

The questionnaire was distributed either through email or as print outs and answered in writing (especially for staff at adult education organisations) or, where possible individual interviews in person or via telephone were conducted.

The seniors' organisations had planned meetings (a Google Hang-out, and a board meeting) in order to introduce the HISA project. However for time reasons both meetings could not happen before the deadline (end of October) for the survey. This resulted in both cases in very low response (one filled questionnaire from the 'Senior's Learning On-line' group, and three from the Friends of the Elztal Museum).

Altogether we collected 18 completed questionnaires from seniors (including those with no affiliations) and six from the five different adult education organisations. Some respondents who filled in the questionnaire in writing did not provide answers to all questions.

The results were inserted in one questionnaire for seniors and one for the adult educators (see annexed files). In the following chapter the data from each target group is first analysed separately. In the 'discussion' chapter the expectations and estimations on the side of the educational staff are compared with the results from the senior learners. This leads to several interesting questions.

Conclusions for the entire project can only be taken at the transnational level, when the partnership has an overview on the most significant results from all countries.

## **A. Results from senior learners**

### **Question 1: Demographics**

The age groups between 55 and 79 are almost equally represented in the sample. Only one questionnaire comes from a person beyond 80. Some 60 % are women and 40 % men. Only 3

respondents live alone, all the others have a partner or live with a family. All are Germans.

Two are still full time employees, two work part-time, all others are pensioners. In their (former) professional life they worked as house keeper, technician, house-wife, office staff, civil servant, pharmacist, civil engineer, hospital nurse, 3 managers of companies and two university professors.

In terms of health status,

- 8 stated they felt **healthy**
- 9 stated they would have minor **impairments**,
- 1 stated to suffer from **significant impairments**.

### **Question 2: Do you use new media?**

Almost all senior respondents (except 2) **use the internet** on their PC or laptop **at home**.

6 use it seldom, but the majority (10) state they would use the internet often.

On the other hand a majority never uses mobile internet (smart phone tablets). Still 5 say they rarely use mobile internet, and only 2 use it frequently.

Of those 7, only 4 use downloaded smart phone apps (2 of them often), and only 2 rarely use QR-codes.

**Not a single senior respondent ever uses social media** such as Facebook or Twitter.

### **Question 3: What are the main reasons for you to visit heritage sites or museums?**

The following reasons play a role for seniors to visit heritage site, museum or protected area. They are ranked in the sequence of importance. The numbers in brackets indicate the number of respondents for whom this is frequently a main reason. The top three stand out from the rest.

1. To discover new things (14)
2. To learn more about the place of residence or holiday destination (13)
3. To improve general education on nature, culture and history (13)
  
4. Specific visit to learn more about special themes related to nature and environment (7)
5. Joint activities with friends and others of a similar age (6)
6. Specific visit to learn more about special themes related to cultural heritage and history (5)
7. Reminiscence of former times (5)
8. Joint activities with children and grand-children (4)
9. To show others the world in order to arouse their wider interests (4)
10. Religiosity / spirituality (0), but this seldom plays a role for 8 respondents.

There is a clear tendency that the main reasons for seniors to visit heritage sites and museums is

their curiosity to discover new things and to broaden their horizon in terms of general education. This seems to be complemented by a desire to connect with the place where one lives or which has been chosen for holidays.

**Question 4: How far would you travel in order to reach such a site?**

On the other hand again a great **majority uses their own car** (but 3 do not have an own car). Only 3 state the distance by car should be below one hour, but most are ready to drive **up to two hours or even more** in order to reach heritage sites or museums.

Also the result for joining friends or family who have a car point in a similar direction. While many of those who have an own car (6) never join others, still 6 are ready to drive up to two hours or even more in other people's car.

Regarding **public transport** there is again a great variety of answers. 5 never use a public transport, 3 would drive up 30 minutes, 4 up to one hour and 5 even more than two hours. The latter relates to city holidays with a train as one person indicated.

There is no clear picture regarding **bicycle** distances. Some indicate they never use a bike, others (2) would drive even more than two hours in order to reach interesting heritage sites.

**On foot:** the majority would be ready to walk up to half an hour (7) or even longer (7). 4 said they would walk even more than two hours, one of them explained that visiting interesting sites of natural or cultural heritage is part of hiking tours. For 3 persons a walking distance of 30 minutes would already be too far.

The great majority (12) **never uses organised bus trips**.

There is a clear tendency that only a minority of seniors is ready to join organised bus trips, they are fewer than those who are ready to use public transport. Most interviewed seniors are ready to invest a significant amount of time to reach heritage sites and museums by car, but walking distance should not exceed 30 minutes for most seniors.

**Question 5: How decisive was the role of heritage sites normally for the choice of your holiday destination during the past years?**

For almost two thirds of the respondents natural, cultural and historical heritage plays normally an *important* role, for one third it is normally of lesser importance, while only one ticked that heritage was unimportant for the choice of holiday destinations. One said that the heritage assets are of decisive importance. But 4 answered that during the last two years it happened one or several times, that heritage was the main reason to choose a destination, even though it is not necessarily always the case.

2 indicated that they did not travel for holidays during the last years.

There is a tendency in Germany that many seniors travel and for most of them heritage seems to play an important role for the choice of destinations.

**Question 6: How do you find out about interesting offers?**

Again the answers are ranked according to the number of respondents for whom the factor plays a role 'often'.

**a) incidentally finding information**

1. Through **recommendations** from friends or family (11)
2. Through mass media: TV, radio, newspapers (9)
3. Through surfing the internet (8)
4. Through passing by incidentally (5)
5. Through tourist info and local guidance systems (5)
6. Through advertisements (3)

**b) purposefully seeking information**

1. Through seeking information in the **internet** (11)
2. Through TV documentaries (7)
3. Through travel literature (5)
4. Through subscription of magazines and newsletters (1)
5. Through tour operators (1)

Other (open field): Asking friends

This result indicates that the internet is the most important medium for seniors actively seeking for information about heritage sites and their interpretive offerings. It is also rather important in the context of incidentally finding out about heritage sites and museums. However there, recommendations by friends and family still play the most important role.

**Question 7: Do physical impairments influence your choice of places to visit?** Open question

Two answered that difficulties with walking influence their decision, sometimes depended on the amount of pain which can change from day to day. Walking downstairs can be particularly challenging and such situations are avoided.

One person has problems with short breath. This limits the amount of walking. This person needs regular opportunities to sit down for breaks and looks forward to have wheelchair that allows to take some time in front of an exhibit.

Avoiding extreme climate and easy access is important (not too much height difference, avoiding bad trails and too heavy traffic)

**Question 8: The most impressive experiences**

Various places and museums of natural and cultural heritage were mentioned. Answers to the question why this was a special experience often referred to the special features of the site or

collection or it was not clear whether the aesthetic experience or the interpretation was considered as the reason why the visit was most impressive. However, some answers were clearly related to the interpretation:

- 'An interpretive play with costumed actors who involved the audience'
- 'A story line which revealed a greater context leading from the Black Forest cuckoo clock to the special mechanical instruments (organs) and further to computers and today's high tech industries'
- 'The participatory museum approach'
- 'Amazement what man could achieve without modern technology'
- 'Interactive elements. It was fun to watch children and their parents'

These answers demonstrate that good interpretation can contribute to, or even create, an impressive and lasting experience.

#### **Question 9: The worst experiences**

Only few responded to this question. Besides 'deforestation' the reasons mentioned were bad visitor services and poor interpretation:

- 'Monotonous arts historian guided visit'
- 'Audio guides that describe what one sees anyway'
- '2.5 hours queuing at the entrance in the full sun'

#### **Question 10: Do you remember **examples of excellence** regarding guided tours, exhibitions etc?**

9 respondents could remember examples of particularly good interpretation. The reasons given were often rather unspecific, such as 'a good guide'. Others had mentioned interpretation already in their spontaneous answer to question 8 (impressive heritage experience). Additional answers were:

- 'Interactives in the museum and interactive map in the internet'
- 'Guided tour relating to human feelings'
- 'I like short phrases, concise proverbs and statements that make a point about something and are memorable'

#### **Question 11: Do you take home **souvenirs**?**

1. Most frequently: **own photographs** (12)
2. Some often buy post cards or posters (6)
3. Few seniors often buy brochures (4)



Under remarks, several mentioned regionally produced typical products. One mentioned a travel diary to keep memories. Another senior stated that, because of the internet, there was no need any more to buy brochures in order to follow-up a visit.

Souvenirs and books are only rarely taken home by about half of the respondents.

**Question 12: What is especially important for you regarding the presentation of the content (interpretation)?**

The items are ranked in the sequence of importance. The numbers in brackets indicate the number of respondents who ticked either 'important' or 'very important' on a scale of five levels from 'unimportant' to 'very important' (in case of equality a plus is given for those with more 'very important' answers). In case of equality in all rating categories items share the same rank.

1. Discovery of larger relationships / contexts (13)  
Possibility to immerse in a story (13)
2. Stimulations to develop an own opinion (12)
  
3. Diversity of interpretive media (9+)
4. Focus on a central theme, where appropriate from different perspectives (9)
5. Easily comprehensible for everybody (7+)
6. Relation to one's own life experience (7)
7. Lessons to learn / a moral of the story (6)
8. Diversity of topics related to a place (5)
9. Create an emotional connection to the home region / holiday destinations (4)
10. Provision of many data and facts (3)

Others (open field):

'Well structured and not too much' and 'well organised, that one can select easily'

The first three (story, larger contexts and stimulation of own thinking) stand out as being considered most important by the German senior respondents.

In the middle we have 'divers media, or forms of interpretation,' which is appreciated by many as well as 'thematic focus'. 'Easy to understand *for everybody*' might not be seen of importance for some who feel they do not have difficulties. Interestingly, the 'relation to one's life experience' is only in the lower middle field, despite especially seniors have a long life experience. However, one reason might be that many fields of heritage deal with times that are beyond any living person's life. Results could be different for sites dealing history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

On the lower end of the scale appears 'lessons to learn / a moral of the story'. This fit to the high rating of 'stimulating one's own opinion making'. The majority of seniors seems to prefer own

thinking over being told a message. The low rating of the 'creation of an emotional connection' might point in a similar direction.

It should be no big surprise for interpreters that the 'provision of many data and facts' tends to be seen as least important by German seniors.

**Question 13: What is especially important for you regarding service and facilities?**

Again the items are ranked in the sequence of importance. The numbers in brackets indicate the number of respondents who ticked either 'important' or 'very important' on a scale of five levels from 'unimportant' to 'very important' (a plus is given for those with more 'very important' answers).

1. Competent guides (14)
2. Friendly and supportive staff (11)
3. Large and easy to read font at objects and on panels (10)
4. Enough possibilities to sit down (9+)
5. Easy to follow signage (9)
6. Good brochures in mother tongue or at least in English (8+)
7. Several toilets in easy reach (8)
8. Guidance at reception desk or entrance area (8-)
9. Café, restaurant (7)
10. Museum shop, souvenir shop or kiosk (6)
11. Easy to reach, also with public transport (5+)
12. Price reductions for seniors (5)
13. Audio offerings (4)
14. Guest books (0)

Others (open field):

'Cleanness', 'Quietness', 'handrails at stairs'.

Competence and visitor-orientation of guides and other on-site staff are crucial success factors. Not surprisingly, easy to read fonts, enough possibilities to sit down and rest, easy and clear orientation as well as toilets in easy reach are other important aspects which are probably of higher importance for seniors compared to younger generations.

**Question 14: Which form of interpretation do you use on site in order to learn more about nature, cultural heritage and history?**

For each form of interpretation the seniors were asked how often they use it. Answer options were

'never', 'rather seldom', 'often', and '(almost) always'. The ranking starts with the highest numbers of 'often' or 'always'.

1. Panels and exhibit labels (13)
2. Brochures (12)
3. Films (10)
4. Audio guides to rent (9)
5. Interactive models or devices – mechanical, button to press (8)
6. Guided visits (7+)  
Interactive computer displays / touch screens (7)
7. Audio stations (5+)
8. Presentations and live demonstrations (5)
9. Own smart phone or tablet (0)

There is a clear tendency that the traditional interpretive media for self-guided visits, panels and brochures, are the most used forms of interpretation by seniors. They are followed by films and audio guides, and only then interactive exhibits follow. However, it must be taken into consideration that interactive interpretive exhibits are not available at all heritage sites (which was mentioned in a comment). This could be one reason for interactive exhibits ranking only in the middle field. Other comments on this item reveal that respondents use interactives only if they are of a good quality. This comment certainly applies for other forms of interpretation, too.

Interestingly forms of personal interpretation also rank in the middle field or even below. Many sites offer guided visits. However, usually a visitor has to plan the visit ahead in order to take part in a scheduled guided walk. Furthermore the interviews revealed that two respondents did not like guided visits so much as they force them into the pace of the guide. There is not much flexibility to rest when one needs a break, and also one cannot choose at which exhibits one wishes to take more time in order to look into more detail. Presentations such as lectures and talks as well as live demonstration, again, are not so frequently available at heritage sites which might explain the low ranking.

The analysis of this question reveals several different reasons why seniors might actually not use particular forms of interpretation: availability, personal preference and quality of the interpretation.

#### **Question 15: Would you use special interpretive offers for seniors?**

All different kinds of special interpretive offers for seniors would only be appreciated by a small minority of respondents. The ranking reveals that even the most popular one would only be appreciated by around one quarter. All the others answered they would 'hardly ever' or 'never' use such a special offering for seniors.

1. Guided walks / exhibitions which relate the content to the experience of seniors (4)
2. Guided walks with a slower pace and breaks to rest (3)
3. Bus trips for seniors (2)

4. Discussion of the topic with in a seniors' group (1)  
Assistance how to use new media (1)

There seems to be a clear tendency that German seniors do not want to be treated as a special needs group.

**Question 16: Would you like to volunteer in the field of natural or cultural heritage?**

The following figures in brackets sum up the number of respondents who already do volunteer or who plan to do so in the future. The rather small number of maybes are not included.

Help with organising a special event (5)

Join a supporting association of friends (4)

As a guide (2)

As a guard for a museum or protected area (0)

These figures include the three seniors who have been accessed through their membership in a museum friends association. For this reason even these low figures have a systematic bias due to the sampling method. Without these three respondents the figures seem to indicate that only a very small fraction among German seniors would be ready to volunteer at heritage sites.

**Question 17: Can you describe what has changed regarding visits at heritage sites throughout your life and do you think that there is a connection to your age (open question)?**

and **Question 18: Further remarks** (open question)

- 'I deal more consciously with things' (2 respondents)
- 'My interests in history, cultural relations and contexts and in my own roots have significantly grown (beginning from around 50)'
- 'Deeper interest and understanding'
- 'More time to delve deeper in a subject'
- 'More memories to relate to, including memories of previous visits'
- 'Museum design improved and museum pedagogics developed over the time, which has nothing to do with my ageing'
- 'At famous sites and museums things became worse: over-crowded, noisy and hectic. Guiding became a mass commodity following the logic of efficiency in processing of groups.'
- 'As a general rule: One must arouse my interest, i.e. I quickly check whether something is relevant for me and whether the interpretive offer is of high quality (I am demanding in this respect). If my interest is aroused, then I delve into the theme and I stay tuned. If not, then I leave at once. What does 'high quality' mean for me? Difficult to explain, as many factors and impressions play a role: Besides the content, the spatial experience, the dramaturgy

(well designed narrative), the ambience, distracting noise, smells.'

- 'What I do not like at all: boring texts, un-organised structure and bad orientation system, noisy surroundings and bad lighting, broken computers and broken interactive exhibits, not enough opportunities to sit down at the right spot (e.g. in an exhibition).'
- 'Seating is often placed at the wrong spot, one feels set aside.'
- 'Long queues and long waiting at the entrance is bad.'

There seems to be a tendency of an increasing interest in heritage for many seniors as they deal with culture, history and nature more consciously. They can draw from richer experience and memories, and they have more time to seek deeper understanding.

At the same time some voices call for a quality experience. Maybe this might point towards a tendency that seniors in Germany are becoming more demanding as they can build on more travel experience. Mediocre interpretation and bad visitor services, sometimes due to a high demand can lead to frustration. A statement by one of the interviewees that she avoids famous sites and museums due to bad experiences points in a similar direction.

## **B. Results from staff at sites and museums offering heritage interpretation**

### **Question 1: Demographics and professional backgrounds**

6 people working at heritage sites or in the heritage sector filled in the questionnaire.

3 of them work full time, 2 of them part time and 1 work on an honorary basis.

3 are working as curators or on management level.

2 are active as museum or nature educator, 1 as a guide and 1 also as consultant.

3 have a focus on cultural heritage and 2 on natural heritage.

4 work at museums, 1 at a historic site and 1 at a protect area.

The majority is more than 50 years old, 2 are already in their 60s.

### **Question 2: Age groups of the visiting audiences**

'**Young seniors**' in the age of 55 to 67 are the **most frequent** target audience for the sites. For four sites this age group exceeds 30% of all visitors.

The next important age groups are more or less equally relevant: adults between 40 and 55, seniors above 68, and children below 12. Young between 12 and 20 are a rather rare age group.

### **Question 3: Special interpretive offers for special target audiences**

- **Seniors:** all but one frequently offer special guided visits for seniors. One site also offers

special presentations for seniors.

- **Special themes:** all offer special guided visits related to special themes, most of them frequently.
- **Children:** all but one frequently offer special interpretive and educational programmes for children, such as workshops, rallies, guided visits and creative work, children birthday parties.
- **Young:** Two sites have frequent offerings for this age group, such as educational programmes and guided visits and creative works.
- **Families:** Two sites offer frequent special guided visits and presentations for families

Considering the significance of seniors among the visitors it is no surprise that almost all offer special guided visits for this age group. It seems as if children are considered as another important target group that deserves a variety of different and more complex educational and interpretive approaches.

#### **Question 4: Estimated main reasons for seniors to visit the site**

For all proposed reasons (items) the respondents could choose among 'never', rather seldom', or 'often'

The numbers in brackets refer to the number of respondents who answered that an item was often a major reason for the visit at their site or museum. For those items with a similar number a '+' is given if the next category (seldom) is ticked more often.

1. Specific visit to learn more about special themes related to cultural heritage and history (6)
2. To learn more about the place of residence or holiday destination (6)
3. Joint trip together with people of similar age (5)
  
4. To improve general education on nature, culture and history (4)
5. To discover new things (3+)
6. Joint trip together with children or grand-children (3+)
7. Reminiscence of former times (3+)
8. To show others the world in order to arouse their wider interests (3+)
9. Specific visit to learn more about special themes related to nature and environment (3)
10. Religiosity / spirituality (1)

A remark was made that the answers to this question as well as to most other questions were only presumptions because solid data are not available.

There is a consensus among all staff who responded to the questionnaire that seniors are often motivated by a specific interest in a special theme related to cultural and natural heritage as well as to learn more about their home area or holiday destination.

**Question 5: What do staff think how seniors get to know about their site's interpretive offers**

Again, for all proposed reasons (items) the respondents could choose among 'never', rather seldom', or 'often'. The numbers in brackets refer to the number of respondents who answered that an item was often a reason to get information about their site or museum.

1. Through **recommendations** from friends or family (6)  
Through **tourist info** and local guidance systems (6)
2. They know the site from previous visits (5)
3. Through advertisements (4)  
Through travel literature (4)
4. Through tour operators (3)  
Through passing by incidentally (3)
5. Through seeking information in the internet (2)  
Through mass media: TV, radio, newspapers (2)
6. Through subscription of magazines and newsletters (1)  
Through TV documentaries (1)

All staff interviewees consider 'recommendations by friends or others' as well as information from the tourist info are considered as information channels frequently used by seniors.

The role of the internet, of mass media, magazines and TV documentaries is considered only by a minority of the heritage staff respondents as media that are often used by seniors in order to find their offering.

**Question 6: What do staff think is especially important for seniors regarding the content and its presentation (interpretation)?**

The items are ranked in the sequence of importance. The numbers in brackets indicate the number of respondents who ticked either 'important' or 'very important' on a scale of five levels from 'unimportant' to 'very important' (in case of equality a plus is given for those with more 'very important' or a minus for those with comparatively few 'very important' answers). In case of equality in all rating categories items share the same rank.

1. Easily comprehensible for everybody (5)  
Focus on a central theme, where appropriate from different perspectives (5)
2. Possibility to immerse in a story (4)
3. Create an emotional connection to the home region / holiday destinations (4-)
4. Discovery of larger relationships / contexts (3)  
Stimulations to develop an own opinion (3)  
Relation to the seniors' own life experience (3)
5. Lessons to learn / a moral of the story (2)  
Diversity of topics related to a place (2)

6. Diversity of interpretive media (2-)
7. Provision of many data and facts (1)

The majority thinks that for senior audiences easy comprehensibility and a focus on a central theme are important or even very important. At the lower end of perceived importance by the staff seem to be 'diversity of interpretive media' and 'many data and facts'. Only one respondent considered the latter as important when dealing with seniors.

**Question 7: What do staff think, what is especially important for seniors regarding service and facilities?**

Again the items are ranked in the sequence of importance. The numbers in brackets indicate the number of respondents who ticked either 'important' or 'very important' on a scale of five levels from 'unimportant' to 'very important' (in case of equality a plus is given for those with more 'very important' or a minus for those with comparatively few 'very important' answers). In case of equality in all rating categories items share the same rank.

1. Friendly and supportive staff (6)
2. Several toilets in easy reach (6-)
3. Enough possibilities to sit down (5+)
4. Competent guides (5)  
Large and easy to read font at objects and on panels (5)
5. Easy to follow signage (5-)
6. Café, restaurant (4+)
7. Good brochures in mother tongue or at least in English (4)
8. Guidance at reception desk or entrance area (3+)  
Museum shop, souvenir shop or kiosk (3+)
9. Easy to reach, also with public transport (3)  
Price reductions for seniors (3)
10. Audio offerings (1)
11. Guest books (1-)

Others (open field): elevator (very important)

All staff agree that friendly and supportive staff is either important or very important. Toilets in easy reach are deemed important for seniors by five and very important by one. Audio devices and guest books are rarely considered as important among our six staff respondents.

**Question 8: What does staff think, which forms of interpretation are used on site by seniors in order to learn more about nature, cultural heritage and history?**

For each form of interpretation the seniors were asked how often they use it. Answer option were



'never', 'rather seldom', 'often', and '(almost) always'. The ranking starts with the highest numbers of 'often' or 'always'.

1. Panels and exhibit labels (6)  
Guided visits (6)  
Presentations and live demonstrations (6)
2. Brochures (4)
3. Films (4-)
4. Interactive models or devices – mechanical, button to press (3+)
5. Audio stations (3)
6. Interactive computer displays / touch screens (2)
7. Audio guides to rent (1)
8. Own smart phone or tablet (0)

The majority (five) thinks that for seniors panels, guided visits and presentations or live demonstrations are important, and every of these forms of interpretation is rated as 'very important' by one heritage site or museum staff member. Thus, besides panels, personal interpretation seems to play a key role from the perspective of educational staff and management.

Then there is a significant gap to the other media. Audio guides are considered important only by one respondent. However, two others answered that audio guides never play a role because they are not available at their site.

**Question 9: Do seniors often to take home **souvenirs** from their visit?**

1. Post cards or posters (5+)
2. Own photographs (5)
3. Brochures (4)
4. Souvenirs typical of the place or site (3)
5. Souvenirs of the region (2)  
Books (2)

Other: the museum flyer

**Question 10: Do you offer **special interpretation for seniors**?**

1. Guided walks with a slower pace and breaks to rest (5)  
Bus trips for seniors (5)  
Discussion of the topic with a seniors' group (5)
2. Events for families including grand parents with grand children (4)
3. Guided walks / exhibitions which relate the content to the experience of seniors (3)

#### 4. Assistance how to use new media (0)

Almost all offer several interpretive programmes specifically for seniors. However only some specifically relate the content of the interpretation to seniors experiences, but this might not be appropriate for all sites or museum collections

#### **Question 11: What is particularly well / badly accepted by seniors at your site?**

- 'Seniors prefer guided visits'
- 'One must speak clearly, involve visitors, ask them questions, and create a vivid atmosphere'
- 'My region is generally very popular with seniors'
- 'It is bad, if presenters or guides do not speak up'

#### **Question 12: Plans wishes or visions for the future work with and for seniors**

- 'We want to observe changing patterns in the use of media (internet, smart phones etc.) and we plan to react then'
- 'Panels with larger fonts. More specific offerings and promotion'
- 'Extension of our offerings, including multi-lingual offers'

## **Discussion of results from the German survey**

It needs to be re-iterated here, that the results are far from being in any way representative due to sampling method and small number of responses. For the transnational discussion it is also relevant that this refers to Germans, and, due to inter-cultural differences some of these results might not apply to other cultures.

Despite these limitations, this explorative study reveals several points that might be worth further discussion and maybe further research. Most of them could also be relevant for the guidelines document which will rather aim to raise awareness for issues to think about, than presenting final truths.

It would not be appropriate to draw conclusions from the slim data base, but a number of questions can be raised.

### **Not surprisingly: physical constraints play a role, but do they rank below interpretive quality?**

Within the range of importance ratings most items addressing physical constraints were ranked more in the middle field than in the top level. At the same time aspects that are at the core of interpretation quality are ranked on the top, such as facilitation of the the discovery of larger relationships and context, possibilities to immerse in a story and stimulating visitors to develop their own opinion.

This does not surprise when one takes into account that almost half of the interviewees feel that they are in good health conditions and to not suffer from physical impairments, while the other, except one, have 'minor impairments'. Still, physical impairments must be addressed as they play a role for many seniors, but, of course, also for younger generations.

### **Do seniors dislike special treatment?**

Five out of six staff from interpretative sites offer special programmes for seniors, but also for other groups. Taking into account the responses from seniors that they do not like the fast pace in guided tours, one could imagine that this is highly appreciated by many seniors. However, rather surprisingly, only a small fraction of seniors seem to appreciate such special offers: only some only by 16% of our sample welcomes special guided walks at a slower pace.

A possible explanation might be that seniors are very sensitive against any kind of being patronised. A special treatment could be felt in such a way, questioning the full interdependency. But such a presumption cannot be proven by the data.

### **Do seniors prefer interpretation by media over personal interpretation?**

The 'good old' panels and exhibit labels, often talked down upon by educational experts as old fashioned and seemingly not very effective, are considered as the most important medium for interpretation by both, senior visitors and staff.

However, then a discrepancy appears between the ratings by the experts and the users. The staff estimates that for seniors personal interpretation is of similar importance. Guided visits and presentations / live demonstrations are also ranked on the top level, while seniors themselves rank guided visits only in the middle field and 'presentations / live demonstrations' very low.

On the other hand, do seniors place 'diversity of media' in the upper middle of the ranking: half of the respondents deem media diversity important or very important, while the personnel ranks media diversity at the second lowest level.

All this seems to indicate that the importance of interpretation through media might be highly underestimated by professionals when they think about seniors.

A similar picture appears regarding audio guides. For many seniors they seem to play a rather important role: rank 4 in the question of interpretation forms used, i.e. two above guided visits. The interviews also revealed some reasons for this preference. In the corresponding question for staff, audio guides only reach the second last rank (out of ten).

But at the same time competent guides and supportive staff are also highly regarded by seniors. It seems that personal interpretation has some disadvantages; nevertheless it can be most powerful, e.g. costumed first-person interpretive play, and the friendliness of supportive staff can also have a strong impact on the experience of non-personal interpretation...

### **Do seniors prefer opportunities to learn and to develop their own opinion over socialising?**

As already mentioned, the curiosity to discover new things (top rank of 10), the desire for general, place-related learning (ranks 2 and 3 of 10) and the wish to have opportunities to develop an own opinion, have been ranked on top of the motivations to visit a heritage site or museum. Staff ratings what they expect is important for seniors differs considerably from this result.

Social reasons play a significantly lesser role for our sample seniors. Joint activities were ranked significantly lower: activities with people of similar age (5 of 10), with children/grandchildren (rank 8 of 10). Here, the staff respondents rate these social dimensions higher than the seniors (ranks 3 and 6).

At the same time regarding the content and its presentation, 'lessons to learn / a moral of the story' as well as 'create an emotional connection to the home region / holiday area' rank at the lower end for seniors, while the emotional connection to the place ranks rather high on corresponding question for staff. This might again be explained by a scepticism against anything which might feel like being patronized.

### **Does the internet at home play a more important role for German seniors than expected?**

Management and educational staff seems to underestimate the importance of the internet among the promotional media. It ranks rather far down at the lower end.

However, almost all interviewed seniors use the internet at home, and it is the by far most important medium when they deliberately seek information about potentially interesting offerings. Even after the visit the internet seems to become very important, as one senior (who possesses an own laptop only since 2010) spontaneously mentioned that brochures as a souvenir are not

important any more. An inspiring visit is followed-up via internet.

Furthermore, the results regarding other information channels before a visit seem to indicate that seniors use different media for pre-visit information than professionals expect. A more substantial research could be very valuable in order to improve marketing activities addressing seniors.

### **Are current seniors much more independent and individualistic than previous generations?**

It seems that – compared to previous generations, today's seniors are more independent, more individualistic and more self-confident. It looks as if they tend to prefer individual media based interpretation at their own pace and focussing on their own interests, instead of integrating into a guided group. Many are very mobile and drive their own car, organised bus tours are less attractive. They seem to be willing to invest substantial time – if the content and the learning experience are promising to them. They are curious to learn new things, which seems to be more important than socialising.

Many demand quality experience and professional interpretation, they know what they want, and what they dislike. At the same time many seem to be sensitive against any patronizing or special senior treatment.

But there is also a downside: there seems to be little readiness for voluntary engagement.

However, again, one must not forget, that this was probably not a representative sample, even though the sample covers various educational and vocational backgrounds.