



# Newsletter

Summer 2013

## Good bye Sweden...



International Conference  
on Heritage Interpretation  
Sigtuna, Sweden 2013

## Sigtuna and beyond – a personal reflection

Many folk have kindly said that our recent conference in Sweden was one of the best they had been to. It was certainly one of the most enjoyable and relaxed that I can remember. We gathered to debate and discuss sharing our natural and cultural heritage – interpretation can make us citizens of the world which was both a worthy and a ‘worldly’ aim. I hope others felt, as I did, that we came away satisfied that we had indeed shared our collective heritage as global citizens.

At the Nordic-Baltic seminar in Uppsala, which preceded our conference, and in Sigtuna, I heard many speakers referring to the father of interpretation, Freeman Tilden, whose approach, and principles, I suggest, are as valid today as they were nearly 60 years ago. I must admit, though, I used to be a bit uncomfortable with his definition of interpretation as an educational activity – it flashed up mental pictures of classrooms, discipline and some discomfort in learning within a formal framework dictated by others.



However – and perhaps this is a function of increasing age if not of maturity – I have replaced these images with those of people in locations they have chosen to visit, listening and exchanging ideas in a leisure setting, and benefitting from informal, or non-formal, education – leading out rather than stuffing in, encouraging learning not imposing teaching. I know for some this is ‘old hat’, but in the context of Sigtuna, I think it is worth repeating.



We were invited by our keynote speakers, by presenter after presenter, to share their perceptions and experience of our branch of non-formal education, what we call interpretation, helping people to learn about and understand their own heritage – and most importantly – the heritage of others. This encompassed even considering how we interpret conflict and combat, how we

explain disparity between various interests and distaste for what others hold dear. It embraced – in every sense – how we learn to share heritage as citizens of the world rather than how we guard our heritage against all-comers, how we can care for everyone’s inheritance rather than simply parading our own as implicitly ‘superior’ to that of others.



If one word sticks in my mind, it is one used by my old friend, the highly regarded and much-quoted Sam Ham, and by several others: engagement. We were encouraged by him, and by many other speakers to help people – both local to a site and visitors – to engage not simply with the place but also with other people, particularly those to whom the site was precious, to develop a mutual regard for everyone's heritage.



When I spoke briefly at the Uppsala event, I remarked upon the excitement and emotion I felt, as a 'war baby' in seeing, nearly seven decades later, a roomful of people from what we call in Scotland aw the airts, from all directions. The venerable Danish interpretation guru, Arne Bondo Andersen, was able to nod in full understanding; many

others in the audience could relate to later, more regional, conflicts.

You really did an extraordinary job with this conference. Nice work. I enjoyed every minute of it.

*Tim Merriman, USA*

Boringly, I repeated this sentiment in my vote of thanks at Sigtuna. What I saw gathered in happy communion were the citizens of the world, signed up to interpretation, this non-formal education, to encourage folk from far and near to respect each other's heritage, not to reject it; to engage with a shared inheritance and to appreciate its universal value. Through engagement, respect, through respect, understanding, if I may adapt a well-known mantra. I hope Mr Tilden would approve.

Thanks to the efforts of all who helped organise and manage the event, and all those who participated in one way or another, the Sigtuna conference was truly a United Nations of Interpretation. It set a benchmark for our future gatherings.

*Michael H Glen,*

*Chair of the Supervisory Committee, Interpret Europe*



BIG thanks to the whole conference steering group for putting together such an interesting program. Special thanks for giving us a chance to visit Järvsö – it was an absolutely unforgettable and inspiring experience.

*Tina Trampus, Slovenia*



We are very grateful that our Swedish partners from SCNI recorded ten of the lectures.  
They can be viewed [here](#).



## My Sigtuna Experience

Dear colleagues and friends:

Some weeks after coming back from Sigtuna, after time to settle all my feelings, I want to share with you that the experience of mixing such a large and diverse group of people, as an incredible melting pot, has been personally extremely enriching.

It has been an occasion to feel the passion for a profession, the passion for the knowledge, the passion for the communication with all the heart on it.

A meeting like this shows how the passion for the heritage, as to the passion to interpret it, can make us not just citizens of the world, but also better citizens of our own countries. In my working field, where every day I link heritage interpretation, destination planning and responsible tourism, I have experienced how heritage interpretation creates more responsible and sensitive tourists who respect the environment.

This ensemble of sensations allows me to imagine a world where the borders serve not to separate people, but to enlarge the knowledge and the spirit with new languages, new visions, new flavours.

With this spirit, even the party in the last night at Sigtuna can be taken as an example of heritage interpretation. The songs, the jokes, the flavour of the Swedish beer and the Canadian whiskey and the Italian grappa... show that even just the simple fact of warmly sharing a glass can lead us to the real taste of the world.

I hope we can keep this spirit every day in our jobs and within our much-loved association. Our only limit is the passion, our only border is the creativity.

My best wishes to all. Be agents for change. Keep in close touch.

*José María de Juan*

*Co-Founder and Co-Director, Spanish Center for Responsible Tourism*

*Vice-President of EARTH-European Alliance for Responsible Tourism and Hospitality*

Excellent organization from all involved parties! Great idea to join forces - NAI & IE with local partner.

*Sven Hultman, Sweden*

It was a brilliant conference. Just do the same again every year please.

*Susan Cross, UK*

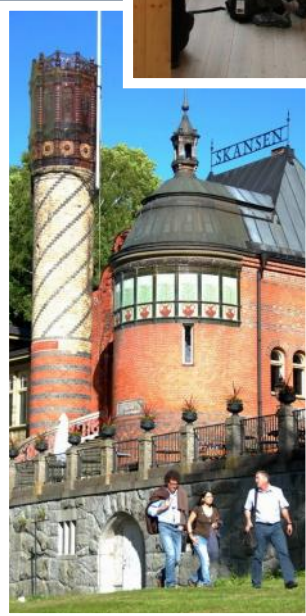
Inspiring conference in a great place!!

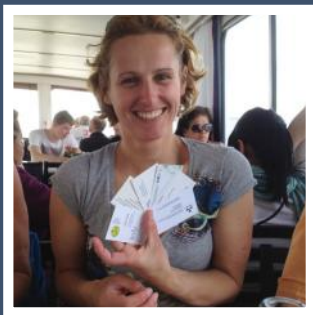
Thanks to everyone who helped to make this happen!

*Lars Wohlers, Germany*

If you possibly can attend an IE conference, do it! Time and money is well invested in an inspiring few days with like-minded interpreters. No-one is ever too experienced to learn from others in our profession. And there's always a balanced mix of fun and thought provoking activities.

*Marie Banks, UK*





One of the main reasons to attend a conference: Networking and making contacts

Our Swedish hosts were wonderful and the planning team had planned a diverse, balanced program of presentations, special events, and site visits. The special effort to maintain a focus on the conference theme helped link many of the conference elements. But, as always, the strength of the conference was the sharing of ideas, perspectives, approaches, issues, and innovative programs among diverse international participants. We are truly growing an "international family of colleagues and friends." Thanks to everyone for their openness, enthusiasm, mutual support, and ideas.

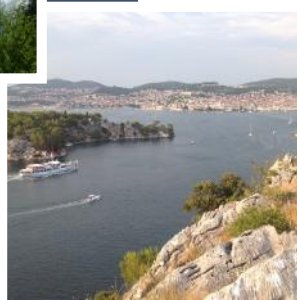
*Gail Vanderstoep, USA*

Thank you so much for an excellent coordination and logistics. Given the expenses of Sweden, the school in Sigtuna was a wise choice and SLU was a great local partner.

*Jon Kohl, Costa Rica*

More impressions of a lively, inspiring and exciting conference

...welcome to Croatia in 2014



As we welcome Croatia into membership of the EU, we now invite heritage interpreters from Europe and beyond to join us on the spectacular Croatian coast for Interpret Europe's 2014 Annual Conference.

It will take place in late May which is a marvellous time to experience the South. The area around Šibenik and the Krka National Park will provide an excellent background for our next conference on heritage interpretation.

We will circulate more information about dates and places after our preparatory visit in September.



*Darko Babić and Bettina Lehnies*

Our annual General Assembly in Sigtuna  
15 June 2013

The charming former chapel at Sigtuna Folkhögskola hosted Interpret Europe's third General Assembly and 41 members attended. Patrick and Bettina, our Directors, were able to present a very positive report on last year's activities (a report circulated to all members) and to let everyone know what is planned for the current year. We look forward to welcoming more new members and to taking part in exciting projects with other organisations (see the news item about the Grundtvig Lifelong Learning).

For the first time since our Founding Assembly, we held a ballot to elect members to the eight vacant places on the Supervisory Committee.



### Three new members joined the committee:

Willem Derde (Belgium), Rita de Stefano (Italy) and Bill Taylor (UK / Scotland).

### The following members were re-elected:

Darko Babić (Croatia), Michael Glen (UK / Scotland), Marjeta Keršič-Svetel (Slovenia), Peter Seccombe (UK / England) and Iryna Shalaginova (Germany). Steven Richards-Price (UK / Wales) was elected last year.

At its first meeting after the General Assembly, the Supervisory Committee elected Michael Glen as Chair and Peter Seccombe as Vice-Chair

### Our advisors

Some time ago, the Supervisory Committee invited a number of people with experience in interpretation to act as advisors – not committee members but available to assist us when we needed wider opinion and wise counsel. The committee recognises that, so far, it has not made as much use of the advisors' kind offer to help and will seek to remedy that situation in coming years with invitations to contribute to committee debates and task-groups where appropriate.



### Our current advisors are:

George Cassar (Malta), Maurilio Cipparone (Italy), Sarah Douglas (England), José-Maria de Juan Alonso (Spain), Adriaan Linters (Belgium), Maija Malnača (Latvia), Dorothea Papathanassiou (Greece), Evgenia Stavraki (Greece), Libby Urquhart (Scotland)

## News from Interpret Europe

Raising the profile of  
interpretation:  
we need your help

In its first three years, Interpret Europe has successfully begun to networking with leading interpreters all over the continent. Our most significant achievements so far are our website, the newsletter and, most importantly, our annual conferences. Now it's time to reach out beyond the inner circle of dedicated interpreters and to raise the profile of the profession among a wider audience.

We want Interpret Europe to be recognised and acknowledged as 'the' arena for specialists in non-formal and informal place-based learning – what we call interpretation – at heritage sites and protected areas in Europe. Why is this important? Well, here are some ideas and a brief outline of the first steps we can take within Interpret Europe.

### The challenge for interpretation in Europe

Though heritage is considered to be important, many of those involved in heritage have a vague and inadequate understanding of heritage interpretation. Indeed, in most European countries, the majority have never heard about 'heritage interpretation' at all. However, many are in a position to set the framework conditions for our work as interpreters.

They include:

### **The content specialists**

They manage protected areas, sites and museums. Conservation and research is very close to their background which is usually an academic subject such as history, archaeology or biology. But frequently these experts make the decisions on what should be communicated to visitors based on their specific scholarly background: what is to be displayed, in which sequence and using which media.

The interpreter's task – if it exists at all – then is to transform this content into presentations directed at the lay, generally uninformed, public – a task that is perceived by the content experts as straightforward and much less significant than the 'serious' research and conservation work.

### **The funders**

At the same time, there are those who work who govern public funding schemes and create rules for project support. They rarely understand either the full range of opportunities that come with professional heritage interpretation or the factors which make it successful.

Individual interpreters cannot normally influence the terms and conditions – or even the attitudes – of funding bodies. They have to cope with the situation and do their best within the strictures of others' decisions.

Consequently, professional interpretation is often in a weak position. Often there are no adequate resources provided for a sound interpretive planning process or for professional interpretive writing of explanatory text.

And this is worse when there are cuts in funding for museums, heritage sites etc. or funds are limited for projects.

The lack of understanding by decision makers, both at senior management and at funding levels can result in presentations and projects that are far from their best in terms of interpretation:

- they are not as attractive or effective in meeting the needs and arousing the interest of visitors,
- they are not as effective as they could be in achieving the sites' missions,
- they are not the best value for money in relation to the funders' goals,
- they fail to satisfy professional interpreters.

### **Enhancing the image of our profession...**

We must overcome the wide-spread misconception that the specialist historian, archaeologist, biologist or geologist is the best person to explain the respective cultural or natural heritage to 'the general public'. Frequently they are not. However much they know, they are frequently not the best at explaining things in a way that relates to the visitor. Heritage interpretation must become acknowledged much more widely as a professional expertise in its own right – as graphic design or architecture is. This is not because the specialist gets explanations technically wrong, but because, as interpreters, we take a different approach based on sophisticated communication competence.



Whatever the story of a site or a topic, professional interpreters have the skills to make it relevant to ordinary people.

Exposing them to a specialist's knowledge, even in a simplified form, is seldom an acceptable option.

For optimal results, interpreters must be involved as the expert for on-site communication in early strategic decisions about visitor services at heritage sites. Only then can professional interpreters' expertise for non-formal learning and communication be fully integrated in the presentation and visitors' experience of a site.

As the only pan-European association of experts in interpretation, Interpret Europe has a key role to play in giving the profession a strong voice and making it much more visible.

## We will need your help for the next steps

### **Website**

We must develop our website in the coming months to reach people who are unfamiliar with the role, special expertise and impact of interpretation. You as members will then be in a much better position to refer to the website when explaining 'heritage interpretation' to clients, colleagues and contacts whether in your own and other organisations.

### **Best practice examples**

As part of developing the website, we are asking you, as members, to tell us what you think are best practice examples of interpretation anywhere in Europe.

You can select an aspect of a site's interpretation where it is outstanding even where other aspects may be less satisfactory. We need good photographs, or short videos, and you need to make it clear why the example illustrates great interpretation. We will send you more information and clear instructions about this in September.

### **Quality criteria**

To raise the profile of interpretation – and to provide guidance for sites – we must make clear what we consider as quality in interpretive practice. This will also help to distinguish our discipline from the work of other communicators in the heritage field. At the conference in Sweden, the Quality Group agreed on a framework that will be used to propose a set of generic quality criteria. By October / November we hope to have drafts that can be discussed with you, our members.

### **Advocacy campaign**

Numbers count. For heritage interpretation to be taken more seriously as a profession we need a strong European professional body. Thus we must increase the number of our members significantly. By the end of this year, we plan to start an advocacy campaign. We will ask all of you to approach others in your countries who are involved in some way with interpretation, and to encourage them to join Interpret Europe. This will, at the same time, promote the understanding of heritage interpretation and its benefits.

## So what can you do now?

Please take pictures or short video clips that showcase concrete aspects of great interpretation. We know many of you have good skills as photographers, as interpreters often need to select photos that communicate well.

You might also think about success stories or research data that provide evidence of the added value that comes with professional interpretation. We are confident that if you start reflecting on this now you will be able to respond when we circulate our inquiry in a few weeks.

Please let us have your comments on this initiative – send them to [mail@interpret-europe.net](mailto:mail@interpret-europe.net)

*Patrick Lehnies*

## Networking through projects

### Two successes with EU project applications

We are very happy that two of our project proposals have been selected by EU despite the considerable competition.

This year's round for Grundtvig multi-lateral projects was very tough. Only 14% of applications could be selected. We are particularly proud that InHerit – which was initiated by Interpret Europe – has been successful. Our warm thanks go to Alden Biesen (Belgium) who acted as lead applicant. [[www.alden-biesen.be](http://www.alden-biesen.be)]

#### **What is the project?**

InHerit aims to build staff capacity for heritage interpretation at heritage sites, museums and protected areas. In the context of the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme, heritage interpretation is a form of non-formal place-based education. Using the inspiring qualities of heritage sites, it can improve the adult learning potential at them. InHerit aims to contribute to the professional development of managers and educators at these sites. In-service training courses at European and national level will develop their competence in realising the full potential of heritage interpretation to be successful as a form of non-formal education and informal learning.

#### **The planned outcomes are:**

- a Grundtvig in-service training course for site managers and adult educators to facilitate competence-oriented learning experiences that reveal
- the European dimension of heritage to visitors
- course materials in different languages
- an integral validation system
- pilot schemes and recommendations to exploit this training course in national contexts
- a strategy for advanced European level training courses
- policy recommendations outlining improved framework conditions for more
- professional heritage interpretation thus enhancing learning through Europe's rich and diverse heritage.



Using more professional heritage interpretation, museums and heritage sites can serve as low-threshold gateways to lifelong learning in non-vocational contexts – which is why this project is of interest for the Grundtvig programme. People with negative feelings towards education will gradually appreciate the benefits of learning and overcome stereotype views by broadening their horizons.

**The partners are:**

- Landcommanderj Alden Biesen (lead partner), Belgium
- Interpret Europe (initiator)
- University of Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sub-department of Museology, Croatia
- Istituto Pangea Onlus, Italy
- University of Malta, Institute for Tourism, Travel and Culture, Malta
- PLATO - Platform Popleiding, Onderwijs en Organisatie B.V, University of Leiden, The Netherlands
- Association for Heritage Interpretation, UK
- English Heritage, UK
- Swedish Centre for Nature Interpretation, Sweden

*Patrick Lehnés*

This Grundtvig Learning Partnership complements the InHerit initiative. Learning Partnerships are smaller projects that are mainly supported through travel allowances.

**The project description in summary:**

Heritage interpretation is a structured approach to non-formal education that is specialized in place-based learning for people on leisure. It enhances the authentic on-site experience at historic sites, protected areas or museums by a visitor-oriented approach: At first it provokes curiosity in what may be an unfamiliar theme; it then relates the heritage to visitors' own knowledge, experience and values; interpretation organises the content to a meaningful story-line that provides an enriching learning experience and aha-effects.

The main objective of HISA is to create a common framework for interpretation for senior audiences over 55 years of age. Due to demographic changes, these audiences 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 senior people to broaden their horizons of interest, encourage reflection and overcome clichés and stereotypes. All partners agree that non-formal heritage education should better address the special needs of seniors.

We intend to evaluate on-site educational facilities in relation to senior visitors, e.g. interpretive media and human interpreters.  
We will share previously developed standards and good practice. In order to

get a broader overview, the partners will collect data in their regions and engage senior people's associations. In this way, the partnership will collect feedback from adult educators and senior learners that reflects European cultural diversity. Based on these results we will write a manual and develop tools to be disseminated within and beyond the partnership.

The partnership ensures a multidisciplinary and multi-cultural approach, making its results accessible and attractive to a wide range of users.

The partners are:

- Interpret Europe (lead applicant)
- Association of the Friends of the Polish National Museum, Poland (initiator)
- University of Malta, Institute for Tourism, Travel and Culture, Malta (co-initiator)
- Centro Studi Formazione Orientamento, Italy
- Red Kite Environment Ltd., UK

We are sorry to learn that the two other potential partners, from Slovenia and Bulgaria, were not approved by their National Agencies.

*Patrick Lehnies*

## Interpreters at work

Real World Learning –  
releasing children from  
the classroom



Children and young people of today are challenged to build a more green and a more just world. Against this background, a network for Real World Learning (RWL) had been started as a Comenius project within the EU Lifelong Learning Programme in 2011. Until the end of 2014, RWL is exploring new ways of learning for sustainability with a focus on natural science.

Although the project is targeted on students and therefore at the intersection of interpretation and formal education, it might be interesting for some IE members, because it aims to bring young people in touch especially with European natural heritage sites. Outside the classroom they will be able to experience what the world behind the facade of consumption and virtuality is really based on.

To share different approaches, four working groups were set up:

1. Quality criteria,
2. Outdoor science and sustainability,
3. Pedagogical approaches to outdoor learning,
4. Competences for green careers.

Seven partner associations from the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Slovenia and the United Kingdom (leading partner) are steering the network and inviting people to join working group meetings and conferences. The next conference will take place from 27 to 30 November 2013 in Planica (Slovenia).

Currently, the network has 22 partner organisations and centres all over Europe. More members are welcome.

If you are interested, you can contact the network through its homepage [www.rwlnetwork.org](http://www.rwlnetwork.org) or address specific questions to me as one of the country coordinators ([Th.Ludwig@interp.de](mailto:Th.Ludwig@interp.de)).

*Thorsten Ludwig*

## Book review

### “Words for places – and other stowaways” by Michael H. Glen

“Words for places” is the essence of decades of interpretative writing distilled by Michael H. Glen – on a never-ending quest to capture the spirit of a place and find the right words which resonate with their audience. To say it in his own words – to find words which “sing and dance”.

As a member of the Scottish people, Michael often places Scottish Gaelic and an English translation side by side to address both the local population and visitors. Although Michael’s writing style strives to be self-explanatory and uses as few words as possible – it is sometimes reserved to knowledgeable people to find the hidden stowaways in his work. At the same time it is an example to interpretative writers how to use languages on an equal footing with each other – sometimes ironically referring to their idiosyncrasies.

To make a long story short – “Words for places” challenges interpretative writers to make to most of their mother tongue – using as little words as possible.

*Steffen Müller, Kultur-Interpretation Deutschland*

## Events

AHI conference  
9-11 October 2013  
Edinburgh

### Interpretation - gaining inspiration from other fields

The theme will look at what interpretation can learn from other professions, and what interpretation can give to them, especially in relation to the tourism, marketing and architectural industries.

Highlights include visits to the newly revamped National Museum and the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, a themed interpretative tour of the Scottish Whisky Experience and a themed costumed tour of the city’s World Heritage Centre delivered by Jackie Lee of Artemis Scotland.

Award-winning Bright 3D design company is running our pre-conference workshop: a master class in blurring the lines between branding, retail and interpretation to create seamless and holistic visitor experiences.

[More information](#)

7 - 11 October 2013  
Grand Canyon  
National Park

## Effective Interpretation of archeological and cultural heritage resources

This 5-day course will enhance interdisciplinary communication skills for using a team approach to developing and carrying out effective public interpretation and education programs and products.

Interpreters and educators will gain knowledge of archeological and cultural heritage sites for developing presentations and media about cultural heritage resources. Cultural resource specialists and archeologists will gain knowledge and skills in interpretation for developing interpretive presentations and media about cultural resources.

All groups gain knowledge and skills through increased dialogue and interactions between cultural resource specialists and interpreters for joint development of effective interpretation of cultural heritage products.

With multi-agency instructors and students, the program augments the mission of federal agencies to provide interagency technical assistance and information exchange.

[More information](#)

Do you want to share your projects, experiences, thoughts or adventures with other interpreters? Send us a short report and some photos to [newsletter@interpret-europe.net](mailto:newsletter@interpret-europe.net) and we'll put it in the next newsletter.

Deadline for contributions for our next newsletter:  
7 October 2013



Culture

With the support of the Culture  
programme of the European Union

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Interpret Europe -  
European Association for Heritage Interpretation e.V.

In der Auwiese 1  
79183 Waldkirch  
Germany  
+49-7681 4979034  
[mail@interpret-europe.net](mailto:mail@interpret-europe.net)  
[www.interpret-europe.net](http://www.interpret-europe.net)