

Welcome by Interpret Europe

Thorsten Ludwig, Managing Director

Dear Commissioner Návracsics, dear Mr Báschti,
dear partners, attendees and friends from more than 30 countries,

It is an honour and a pleasure to welcome you in the name of Interpret Europe to our conference 'Heritage and Identity'.

We have now entered the European Year of Cultural Heritage and these are exciting times for heritage interpretation. When Commissioner Navracsics opened the Year in December in Milan, Antonio Tajani, President of the European Parliament said: "Awareness of our own identity is the foundation for a strong and open Europe", and he continued later: "Even more than our economy, culture is the glue which holds Europe together". Many of us felt electrified by these statements. While for some time the question was basically how much income heritage could help to generate, heritage is now seen at the very heart of the European project.

Indeed, heritage is shaping identity and to reflect upon European heritage means to reflect upon European identity. To encourage and to enable citizens to do so is our profession as heritage interpreters – and heritage provides us with an incredible treasure for doing so. It is not so much about the remains of the past but about the ideas behind these remains: the ideas behind such a castle or behind an old piece of music as we enjoyed it just a few minutes ago. Yesterday, at our pre-conference tour, we looked through a window to the past right in the centre of Vienna, where one could see Roman, medieval and Renaissance walls overlaying each other. We all tried to figure out how these remains were connected but we also felt that this visible heritage is not just a treasure in itself. It is also a treasure of metaphors making things meaningful. We get a sense of what the Roman, medieval or Renaissance ideas meant for the development of Europe. Revealing these larger truths behind heritage is the realm of heritage interpretation and this is why heritage interpretation can play such a strong role for the European project.

However, encouraging citizens to reflect upon the meaning of heritage requires that we ourselves think sufficiently about the connection between heritage and identity:

Do we consider how to bring local, regional, national or European identities together?
Are we ready to discuss identity with people who arrived in Europe from a different environment?
Are we able to inspire those who actually feel they are too tired to reflect upon anything?

At this conference you will meet people who deal with communication around heritage at all different levels, natural and cultural, tangible and intangible, site-based and collection-based, academic and practical: use the opportunity to think about these questions.

Besides our four keynote speeches, you will be able to select from more than 70 workshops and presentations. You will be inspired and get into an exchange during one dozen study visits or during our Market of Ideas.

Let Interpret Europe invite you on this journey at the beginning of the European Year of Cultural Heritage.

Before the conference will be officially opened by Commissioner Navracsics, a great and very warm thank you to Árpád Bőczén and his team who have organised this event and have worked hard to make it happen.