

IE Conference 21-24 March 2024 in Koper, Slovenia

Sustainability: Challenging mindsets through heritage interpretation

Call for papers

There is hardly any layer in society that is not concerned by the serious situation that we are currently facing. Most politics still advocate for more, albeit sustainable, growth, assuming that any other solution is unrealistic. Others suspect that an economic mindset, driven by the pursuit of maximal profit and intensified competition, lies at the heart of the crises. They believe that more radical shifts in our way of life are needed. But, at the same time, those policy makers who promise to avoid significant changes appear to gain popularity. Similarly, many people generally agree on the urgency for humanity to abandon unsustainable ways of life – but nevertheless carry on with their own unsustainable activities.

One root cause of this discrepancy between the general appreciation of sustainability and concrete behaviour may be found in the persistence of mindsets: The interrelated, deeply ingrained habits, beliefs, attitudes and implicit value priorities we have acquired in life can exert an often unconscious but powerful influence on our decisions and judgements. As the media shower us with worrying news, it seems we are losing our compass.

Formal education mainly aims to provide people with knowledge and skills to reach employability and build careers; but other abilities are needed to find meaning and direction in a complex world, such as:

- (self-)critical reflection to understand biases, our own and those of others,
- the ability to aptly relate concrete situations to meanings and human values, and
- the ability to deal with multiple points of view, to discover valid aspects in opposing views, to justly balance opportunities and trade-offs of change.

We believe that heritage sites offer an ideal space for provoking such reflection and strengthen key competences for sustainability. Value-based heritage interpretation has been recognised by UNESCO as a critical approach for fostering peace and sustainability, and this approach is already being adopted by dozens of World Heritage properties across Europe.

At our conference, we will strive to find out how museums, monuments, parks and other heritage sites can help people to interpret heritage in a way that challenges mindsets and makes them more mindful towards our common future.

Heritage interpretation can encourage and empower people to:

- explore how past mindsets shaped people's relationships with their social and natural environment, and how these resonate with contemporary issues

- ask questions that challenge one's own mindsets, including deeply ingrained habits, beliefs, attitudes and implicit value priorities
- take meaningful personal development in one's own hands and consider possibilities for transition towards a sustainable lifestyle.

Interpret Europe conferences attract, from as many as 40 countries, up to 200 attendees, all of whom share a dedication to support local people and visitors in their search for meaning in heritage. Besides seminal keynote speeches and study visits to remarkable heritage sites, IE conferences benefit from up to 50 presentations and interactive workshops delivered by their attendees.

We call for papers and workshops that discuss practical examples or theoretical aspects related to the conference theme, such as:

- Examples of how heritage interpretation already tackles sustainability issues (including climate crisis) by stimulating open-ended reflection on values such as care for the environment and social justice
- Examples of local involvement, co-creation of interpretive services and for strengthening the role of people as heritage interpreters
- Examples of heritage sites taking a role in the establishment of learning landscapes as networks for value-based heritage interpretation that include a broader range of stakeholders in their vicinity
- Discussion of the notion of 'mindset' in relation to theory and practice of heritage interpretation and proposals how to address particular mindsets that may inhibit transformation to sustainability
- Thoughts about ethical issues that might arise when considering how to influence people's mindsets, which approaches are acceptable and which are not
- Exchange on the role that interpreting heritage can play at an early age for developing mindsets of curiosity and openness, empathy and caring, and the joy of seeing things from different perspectives.

While we also accept a limited number of papers that generally advance the theory and practice of heritage interpretation beyond the conference theme, we encourage you to focus on the conference theme, e.g. one of the listed topics, helping the conference to address the current challenges.