

# Interpret Europe – for all who use first-hand experiences to give natural or cultural heritage a deeper meaning

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Interpret Europe (“IE”) is dedicated to heritage interpretation. It is the most prominent task of heritage interpretation to support people in experiencing deeper meaning in heritage. In Yosemite Valley, nature conservationist John Muir reflected on wild nature. In 1871, he first coined the term ‘interpretation’ for becoming acquainted with natural heritage (Wolfe, 1978). To explain professional heritage interpretation, the interpretive triangle is used and the combination of four qualities is highlighted. The four key parameters: meaning, experience, participation and stewardship, describe what heritage interpretation is aiming for.

IE was founded as a network in 2000 and as an association in 2010. In 2018, IE has more than 500 members in 47 countries. IE intends to serve the many European stakeholder organisations in the field that are mainly dealing with natural or cultural heritage and with non-formal learning. IE does not intend to compete with them. Two key strategic goals have been agreed for the years 2016-2020: to embed heritage interpretation at European and national levels, and to foster a growing membership that supports and is supported by the association. IE works on three levels and also has three coordinator groups: 1/ Managing coordinators and their teams are directly supporting the Directors; 2/ Country coordinators and their teams care for the development of heritage interpretation and of Interpret Europe in their countries; 3/ Subject coordinators and their teams take responsibility for the development of their subject areas within IE.

Communication is at the heart of IE’s activities, not only with European stakeholder organisations but also within the association. IE has its own closed Facebook group for its members to allow more intense and/or more casual exchange. IE runs its own training and certification programme. Certified IE trainers have the possibility to run IE courses under their own conditions in their own countries where all IE members can participate. IE has developed following courses: Certified Interpretive Guide, Certified Interpretive Host, Certified Interpretive Writer, Certified Live Interpreter, Certified Interpretive Planner. IE offers also trainer courses enabling trainers to teach these courses. Certified attendees of those courses can significantly improve the quality of interpretation of natural and cultural heritage all around Europe. National Park guides and PR professionals, infocenter staff, freelance guides and other professions could be found among already certified interpreters.

IE has its own Research Team. Within the EU Lifelong Learning Programme, IE was involved in several European projects, such as Interpreting Our European Heritage, InHerit, HeriQ – Quality in Heritage Interpretation, HISA – Heritage Interpretation for Senior Audiences. Since Interpret Europe was founded, it has run 8 annual conferences in different European cities and towns (2018 in Kőszeg, Hungary, is dedicated to the European Year of Cultural Heritage). IE intends to advocate for heritage interpretation at a European level. It is a member of the European Heritage Alliance and of the Stakeholder Committee for the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage. Furthermore IE is involved in the Voices of Culture talks at the European Commission and recently produced award-winning recommendations on “Engaging citizens with Europe’s cultural heritage”.

## Reference

Wolfe, L. (1978): The Life of John Muir. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, p. 144.