

Interpretation as a Soft Approach to Visitors' Management in the Case of Slovenia's Nature Parks

Marko Slapnik, Institute for Pure Experiences, Slovenia, marko.slapnik@posebendan.si

My research in the Slovenian protected areas deals with implementation of principles, methods and means of interpretation for the needs of visitors' management.

The main interpretation themes and means used in Slovenian parks have been analyzed, including all Slovenian parks with management: one national park, three regional parks and seven landscape parks. The analysis showed that the basic principles of interpretation for the needs of visitors' management are at least partly used in Slovenian parks with a park management. However, there is still a wide range of unexploited possibilities. In recent years, the park managers have become more aware of quality interpretation, so the latest infrastructure is better designed and used. There is also a number of personal approaches that include quality interpretation – experienced guided walk, living history role-plays and interactive performances are the fastest developing approaches.

Interpretation has developed a lot in the last decades from the viewpoint of communication. In 1957 Freeman Tilden wrote six basic principles of good quality presentation that are still valid today:

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate with what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
2. Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
4. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
6. Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program.

Interpretation analysis in Slovenian parks was based on following those six basic principles:

1. connection with a personal experience
2. interpretation as a revelation
3. the art of connecting different fields
4. provocation
5. illustrating the whole
6. interpretation for children is different

The following main interpretation topics emerge in the studied Slovenian nature parks:

- NATURA 2000: People with nature – nature for people.
- Triglav National Park: Learning, Experiencing, Understanding.
- High-trunk meadow orchards.
- Periodic lakes and the richness of karst phenomena.
- The richness of the underground world.
- The habitat of rare and endangered species.
- Life of a river.
- Picturesque mosaic cultural landscape.
- Living cultural heritage.
- Landscape- and biodiversity.
- Glacially transformed Alpine valleys.
- A coexistence of man and nature.
- Traditional production of salt.
- Bird watching, observing of other rare animals and plants.
- Flysch steep cliffs, the highest in the Adriatic.

The interpretative resources are more or less adapted to key topics and are in most cases very informative oriented:

- **visitors centres:** there is a great emphasis on informing, certain interpretation skills are also represented to some extent;
- **museums and thematic exhibitions:** they vary greatly, very few of them are well planned in terms of quality interpretations of key topics;
- **audio-visual means:** some thematic films are well planned and present an interpretive topic, such as Secrets of Soča;
- **web presentation:** they are mostly informative and offer many possibilities for upgrades, which should be based on the principles of interpretation ...
- **thematic paths:** they are mostly more learning than experience oriented, but the latest are better adapted to the interpretive principle;
- **workshops and interactive presentations:** e.g. felt-making and knitting workshops, cooking and baking of traditional delicacies workshop, workshops for the blind and visually impaired, workshops for schoolchildren and etc. offer many options of quality experiences;
- **thematic events:** e.g. Alpine Wildflower Festival, Festival of Kozjansko apples ... can show integration of the topic in a broader context;
- **signs, billboards and printed materials** are often primarily of informative in nature;
- **mobile information point TNP:** mainly for information and occasionally to excite the interest of visitors;
- **postcards, souvenirs, thematic monographs:** there is still great potential for the development of interpretative approach.

The main topics and accompanying interpretation means serve the visitors as well as the park management regarding the place and time scheduling and concrete

suggestions. They also include practical suggestions, also on the subconscious level, to prepare useful activities which are nature friendly and also tempting for local inhabitants.

From the above examples we can conclude that the interpretation with clear aims from the perspective of visitors' management can also be used outside the protected areas. As an example I would like to give a tourist destination Logarska dolina - Solčavsko. The area covers 103 km². More than 80 % of the area is protected by two landscape parks and Natura 2000 network.

A multipurpose center for sustainable development - Center Rinka has been established by the municipality of Solčava. It integrates various activities of sustainable development in tourism and brings new development opportunities for the locals in conjunction with the conservation and presentation of the natural and cultural environment. Interpretation infrastructure, guiding of visitors in nature in relation to the cultural heritage of the area allow genuine experience of the key interpretive themes.

Most of the researched cases of interpretation lack systematic planning, answering the question: what do the visitors learn, what should they feel and what should they do.

A well planned interpretation with clear aims can contribute greatly to visitors' management. This means a great benefit of the quality of experiencing as well as the natural environment conservation.



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